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CHAPTER 9. Re-membering Ancestors in Caves

Caverns are a crucial part of contemporary Caribbean healing landscapes. Caverns have been inscribed into Caribbean landscape biography as healing places, loci of (sacred) history as well as enigmatic places in oral traditions. Caverns have been a focus of, and curiosity for, narrators with divergent motives, adherents of different worldviews, archaeologists, but also looters searching for imagined treasures in these enchanted places.

Rich archeological record suggests that caverns have been loci of various human activities that in the case of Puerto Rican dates more than four millennia back (Rodríguez Ramos et al. 2018). These places served various purposes in pre-colonial era, throughout the colonial times, and during the period of the Independence War (further readings: Barnet 1987; La Rosa Corzo 1991; Ulloa Hung 2015; Pereira 2008). In oral history caverns figures as ancestral sites, places where indigenous peoples lived, as hiding places for escaped Maroons during the colonial period (see below: the caves of Gibara) and as shelters supposedly used during the Cuban revolution (e.g. the Santa Barbara/Chango cave known in Jiguani but also in Niquero). Inhabitants sought refuge here during hurricanes: during David (1979) in Boca Yuma, during George (1998) in Mana, during Irma (2017) in Gibara and during Mathew (2016) in Punta de Maisí in Holguín province.367

Caverns on these islands have multiple meanings. Often caverns are mysterious, feared, and therefore avoided. On the other hand Cuban and Dominican devotees consider caves as places of manifestation or agency of divine beings, Saints, and remote predecessors, which can all potentially intervene in matters of human wellbeing. Adherents of Spiritism, Dominican 21 Division, Regla de Ocha, and Roman Catholicism, seek to contact and communicate with those beings, looking for improvement of their health and wellbeing in various caverns. On both islands, caverns are associated frequently with Indigenous Peoples and their past.

The following paragraphs discuss how contemporary inhabitants reinterpret and connect to their ancestral history by means of narratives and rituals. Patronal celebrations and other rituals will be a point of reflection about how the indigenous ancestors are incorporated into the cultural memory. The healing function of patronal celebrations will be highlighted.

The next examples will show how ancestral commemoration is integrated within activities aimed at improvement of individual and communal wellbeing. During patronal celebrations people express their commitment and respect to Saints or Iwas but also to indigenous ancestors, thanking them for their guidance and benefits. Like in the earlier mentioned case of La Iglesia close to La Jaiba (between Playa Ensenada and Estero Hondo), different caverns were used for ceremonial activities. During the period of fieldwork Dominican caverns that were actively used were: Cueva de La Mancha (in Boca de Mana), Cueva de San Francisco (in Bánica), Cueva del Indio (in La Hoya Grande), Cueva de Bernard, Cueva del Misterio (in Boca de Yuma)368, and the caves of Pommier. In addition, some caverns located in the Dominican province of Mao (municipality Marmolejos, Navas) were reported as places of ritual activity in the past.

367 For more information about how people have saved their live by hiding in caves read the news articles by Azam, A. (2016, October 17) or Romero Rodríguez (2016, October 14) or Nacher (no date). According to interview no. 152957 the Cave of Santa Bárbara was sacred and used for pilgrimages in the past.

368 Juan Julio Castillo, guardian from the National park, who is attending Cueva Bernard, explained that occasionally traditional healers bring their patients to this cave (province La Altagracia). At one occasion he witnessed one of the ceremonies: “they brought here a crazy women and the man said ‘carry her up here’ (the cave), and they carried her up, and her family together with her, and the man says ‘untie her untie her’ and he dressed her in black dress and when I saw her the dress disappeared and she was there naked! She was a young lady and they dressed her in white dress and she cured. And she went down and say to her mother ‘I am hungry’, and the black dress nobody saw it, and nobody carried it away, it just disappeared.” (interview with Juan Julio).
Similarly, rituals are performed in different Cuban caverns: a cavern in Gibara, a cavern near Managuaco, Cueva De Los Muertos in Guara, and in El Guafe, while in the past Cave Samuel (in Niquero) and the cavern of El Júcaro (in Antilla) were used for ceremonies of Spiritism.\(^{369}\)

**Mana Landscape**

The Cave at La Mancha and El Hombre Parado are among the few healing places in the Mana region in the Máximo Gómez National Park. These places are related to the biography of Mrs. Viviana de La Rosa (1850?-1925), who was a healer, prophet, and founder of the Hatillo Mana community (Tejeda Ortiz in 1978). Together with Liborio Mateo she is considered the Saint and Messiah of the Dominican South. She raised the first church of the Virgen de las Mercedes and performed healings at different places in the Mana landscape.

The fame of Mrs. De La Rosa is owed to her power to divine the future and heal people. Her great-great-grandson, Mr. Julián De La Rosa, describes her as: “an evangelizer spreading the Word of the Lord, many people were visiting her. Afterwards many ill people visited her, she prayed and cured them by the Lord’s Word. Those who felt something supernatural she gave a glass of water from the jar and they were cured by faith and prayer.”\(^{370}\) Being both an evangelizer and a healer, she cured through prayers, and also through medicinal plants. Her memory is still alive as her gift to heal and communicate with the invisible divine powers was inherited by some family members including her great-great-grandson. On special occasions, Viviana de La Rosa incarnated into the bodies of *caballos del misterio* to help people in matters of health and wellbeing.

Among places which are connected to the biography of Mrs. De La Rosa are: the church, which is also her final resting place, and the house-temples administrated by family relatives of Mrs. Viviana, a water stream at the foot of the hill of the church, the cavern of El Conde in Monte Bonito and crosses erected by Viviana, La Mancha cavern and cavern in El Conde.

\(^{369}\) For the details on the cavern of El Júcaro (in Antilla) see the study of Rodriguez Culliel & Peña Obregon (2000). The first studies registering ritual activities in caves are: Gleniz Tavarez (2013) on Bánica, Lopez Belando (2011) on Boca de Mana and also a brief reference by Tejeda Ortiz (1978) on Cave de La Mancha. When I use any information provided by these authors I refer to them explicitly.

\(^{370}\) Interview with Julián De La Rosa.
Until now, the church erected by Mrs. De La Rosa is dedicated to the Virgen de las Mercedes and is administered by her great-granddaughter Mrs. Estefanía De La Rosa and her son Mr. Julián De La Rosa. The church is visited by many pilgrims, who come especially on the day of patronal celebration. At the foot of the hill where the Church is situated some of the pilgrims purify themselves from their sins in a small water pool whose holy water is appreciated for its healing and protective powers.

Another site associated with the life of Mrs. Viviana de La Rosa is El Conde (abbreviation of El Escondito), with a nearby cave from which she was transporting herself to the cave of La Mancha (spiritually, in her state of grace). The path to the cave is marked by a massive natural rock arch, which forms a physical transit zone from the profane to the sacred. Here, first offerings are brought in the form of candles, and also ritual bathing takes place as one can see from the remains of plants and tobacco. The path to the cave is further delimited by one calvario, dressed in yellow, red, and blue colored papers. Near this calvario visitors make their first prayers and light candles. Inside the cave there are small altars with images of Virgins (Altagracia/ Mercedes), Belie Becán/San Miguel (the popular patron of Dominican healers), Sacred Heart of Jesus, the All-Powerful Hand. In front of some small altars there were still Véves visible, secret symbols that serve as signs for lwas to descend on this specific site. Also, on one altar, a candle was burning with some fresh food offerings of calabash, deposited with older empty bottles of alcohol and flowers in water. Although it was not possible to interview a healer about the practices in this particular cavern, the material evidence encountered here suggests that the place is of profound religious significance. Unfortunately, this cavern has been affected by the excavation of guano that is used as a

371 All colors have meaning in Dominican 21 Division. The blue can symbolize Ogún Balenyó/ Santiago, or in this case maybe Saint John, Yellow Anaisa Pía/Santa Ana. Red stands normally for Papa Candeló/San Carlos Borromeo but if it is in combination with green it symbolizes Belié Belcán/San Miguel.
fertilizer for agriculture: one of the altars has been demolished together with possible archaeological evidence.

Figure 55 One of the altars in the Cave near El Conde.
Cave of La Mancha: Healing with Indigenous Lwas

A cave situated in the community La Mancha is one of the places used for healing in the Mana landscape. La Mancha is an abandoned settlement, which is accessible only by foot - it takes approximately forty minutes from Boca de Mana in the municipality El Yaguate in the southern Dominican province San Cristóbal. The oral history of this cavern is closely related to the biography of a specific traditional healer: Mrs. Viviana de la Rosa.

One of the places utilized in the past by Mrs. De La Rosa for healing is the cave at La Mancha. Juan Pablo Rosario Araujó described Mrs. De La Rosa’s first encounter with this cavern: “According to the predecessors, Viviana discovered this cave, being a daughter of Indians, and those living in the cave were Indians and she fought with Indians under the (influence of) rum, with a cavalry of people, she discovered the entrance of the cave and under the (influence of) rum she drove them out, and separated them, to take her place in the cave (while) giving rum to people of the group in the cavalry with a lot of rum, food and things.” In brief, this fragment could be interpreted as: Viviana de La Rosa, a person with a gift to heal and to communicate with indigenous misterios, discovered this cavern wherein she performed rituals (including a trance, or a dream) that enabled her to gain her own space at this cavern, which was previously governed by indigenous ancestors. Afterwards Viviana de La Rosa performed some of her healing in this cavern as well as in other places of the Mana landscape.

Mrs. De La Rosa was considered by various inhabitants “a daughter of an Indian man”. Also one of the evangelist neighbors, who condemned the healing rituals in caverns as witchcraft, confirmed the well-known narrative about how Mrs. Viviana’s mother was lost in the water pool. This family history should be seen in the broader cultural context in which healers are said to be taken away by “Indians” (i.e. misterios) and so develop an ability to communicate with the invisible and to cure. In my view, this narrative illustrates a deep spiritual identification of this healer with indigenous ancestors, which gave her more social recognition as a powerful healer.

Until today the cave of La Mancha is a spiritual and sacred place where different misterios can manifest themselves and provide advice in matters of wellbeing and health. Devotees have been coming here from Bani, Hatillo Mana, Bajo de Haina, Yaguate, Altagracia, and in the past also from Banica (on the Dominican-Haitian border). Some 11 traditional healers visit this cavern regularly as part of initiations, healing rituals, peregrination, and during the feast of Saint John. One of them is Giovanni Guzmán, caballo del misterio of 21 Division. Mr. Guzmán has been going to pilgrimages to this place for approximately 30 years already. As a child he used to walk to this cavern from Bajos de Haina (30-35 km) together with his mother, grandmother and groups of pilgrims. The first stop of his pilgrimage in the Mana landscape is a part of the Mana river called El Hombre Parado (The Standing Man): “Every time they were first bathing in the river and then they went up to the cave [...] A lot of people were lighting candles, many went to bath to ward off the negative” (interview with Mr. Guzmán 2014).

Following this tradition Mr. Guzmán brought me to El Hombre Parado, which is a water pool roofed by an extraordinary rock positioned at the upper part of the Mana River, about a thirty minutes’ walk from the community Boca de Mana. El Hombre Parado represents an important site in the local healing

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372 The information from this case study is based on personal participation in the rituals and interviews with different contributors including the family of Viviana De La Rosa, inhabitants of Hatillo Mana, Boca de Mana, Mancha, as well as traditional healer Giovanni Guzmán, who is still coming regularly to the cave. For specific details see my interviews in the Leiden depository. The contact with Giovanni Guzmán was kindly facilitated by José Antonio (Toño) Arias Peláez, a student of Anthropology at the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, who is planning to publish a thesis on the community of Hatillo Mana. He has visually documented many of the ceremonies that take place in the cavern and also interviewed many members of the Mana community throughout the years. In his presentation in Museo del Hombre Dominicano in 2016, called 'Cueva Mana, entre la memoria exigua y el olvido’, he referred to the rapid changes of altars taking place in this cavern.

373 Interview with Rosario Araujó.
landscape. Mr. Julián De La Rosa confirmed that this place is very spiritual; it is a popular place where people with certain health problems come to ask for favors and health. Together with the Cueva de La Mancha it is an important place in the initiation of healers who are being prepared to work with indigenous lwas. This site is also a place where the indigenous past is remembered through ritual engagement with indigenous misterios.

During the first visit with Mr. Guzmán in 2014 bathing started with a prayer to the Indigenous Division, followed by smoking tobacco and offering a candle; the subsequent submersion into the pool should ward off all negative energies. On occasions, more elaborate baths are organized here. During these activities the indigenous misterios and Saint John are asked to attract the positive (like health, good luck in love or business) while taking sweet baths or to ward off the negative (e.g. harmful spells) while taking bitter baths. For the cure to be effective the belief in the misterios of the stream is essential. Depending on the exact problem of the person various ingredients may be used. Mr. Guzmán uses frequently: flowery waters (one can buy these in botanic shops), water from coconuts, red wine, beer, teas of manzanilla, canelilla and mejorana. Also fruits (watermelon, papaya, guineo) and flowers of different colors are dedicated to the Indian Division in order to receive good luck.374

After the spiritual cleansing at El Hombre Parado, pilgrims continue their journey to the cavern La Mancha. Mr. Guzmán narrated: “I have started to bring pilgrims there since I am 14 years old. I started to bring people there for a bath to ward off the negative, in quest for a blessing, we were going to the cave and to the spring so that people receive force, the Light, spiritual cleaning of their body, because the cave is a place of healing, a place of spiritual material healing, of inner and outer corporal healing.” Cueva De La Mancha is a site of therapeutic consult with misterios throughout the whole year. Healers and their followers come from different locations for individual healing rituals and also to express their gratitude after successful renewal during the celebration of Saint John, the patronal saint of this cavern.

The feast of Saint John is celebrated on June 23rd, around the time of the summer solstice, for which healers, their followers and pilgrims from different communities (including Mana, Bani, San Cristobal, Bajo de Haina) come together in Cueva de Mana in La Mancha. The participants state explicitly that for them the main goal of this celebration is to fulfill their vows to St. John and other Saints, lwas and spirits that enable them to cure illnesses and overcome other obstacles in their lives.

I have participated in the St. John celebration in the Cueva de Mana in 2015. This celebration was marked by extraordinary circumstances because a close friend of the administrator of St. John’s house-temple (a small chapel which was not consecrated by The Church) had suddenly died. This death and also her own health condition impeded the organizer, Mrs. Candelaria Bautista De La Rosas, who is Mrs. Viviana’s great-granddaughter, to attend the traditional mass at her house-temple. In addition, due to the severe droughts of that year pilgrims did not perform the ritual cleansing at El Hombre Parado before continuing their peregrination to the cave, as is the custom, because the stream had nearly dried up. Both events downsized the number of participants of the feast of that year. The droughts clearly formed also an economic obstacle for those living from agriculture.

Many days before the feast begins, the participants prepare themselves individually. This preparation starts with a personal sacrifice, i.e. saving enough money to be able to afford the journey. For the organizing healer this means that she must arrive earlier with her family, friends, and followers to prepare the ceremonial meal and organize the drummers to make offerings to the misterios. This self-sacrifice is to a certain extent also physical. Some pilgrims carry a lot of belongings, following a steep path to the cave

374 Interview no. 95 and 96.
where they have to circumnavigate crosses. There candles are lit and stones deposited. The last stop is made at a third cross where devotees ask permission of El Dueño de la Cueva (The Owner/Master of the Cave) to enter the cave, by ringing an iron object (in the past a bell) to make the misterios aware that people are coming.

![Figure 56 The entrance to the Cueva de la Mancha with the stalagmite that represents Saint John, Dominican Republic.](image-url)
Figure 57 The main altar during the feast of Saint John.

From this point, visitors proceed to an altar of Saint John, carved in a large stalagmite in front of which devotees wait until holy water drops on their head from the ceiling of the cave. Then they light a candle and proceed to chambers with smaller energy points of Papa Legba, Belié Belcán, and Iwas of the Ogún division, such as Ogún Balenyó and his spouse Ofelia Balenyó (Virgen de las Mercedes). Further in the cave are Los Petroses (earth Iwas) of Santa Marta La Dominadora, Barón del Cementerio (San Elías), Yemayá, Alailá (Virgen de Altagracia, the Dominican patron), and the chamber of indigenous ancestors. The pilgrims encircle the main altar of 21 divisions with Saint John. Mr. José De Los Santos one of the last inhabitants of the small settlement La Mancha, brings the small statue of Saint John from De La Rosas’ the house-temple. The statue of St. John stays at the main altar for the day and the whole night; later it is returned to his house-temple.

Participants of the celebration deposit at the main altar their votive offerings symbolizing their prayers, gratitude, and commitments to the Saint(s) and/or Iwa(s). At the main altars as well as at small points for specific Iwas we find candles, cigars, flowers, food (fruits, peanuts, corn, bread) and beverages (coffee and/or alcohol). Yenni, a traditional healer originally from La Mancha, offers to the misterios and participants a dish of Chicken with Moro (rice & black beans), and arrange the music as part of her vow. Musicians invoke misterios by singing, playing of drums and güiras (metal scraper instruments). The prayers are sung and are dedicated to different misterios starting with Papa Legba, Bon Dieus/Gran Dios, Santa Marta, Barón del cementerio/San Elías and the indigenous misterios. Together with the music (while the drums crucial), tobacco, and alcohol are important means to make misterio arrive. Following the drums, echoing powerfully throughout the cavern, the misterios manifest themselves through the bodies of Caballos del Misterio.

The celebration culminates with the arrival of the misterios, when these descend into the heads of those initiated or gifted and through them participate in the celebration by dancing, drinking, and eating. The
representations of the incorporeal mysterious agency become substantial in clothes and behavior, which are characteristic of the personage of the misterio.

Figure 58 The entrance of Cueva de La Mancha at the night of Saint John.

Engaging with Misterios of Indigenous Peoples at La Mancha
The Saint John cavern is a place where different misterios including indigenous ancestors can be consulted with regard to matters of health and wellbeing. Like other misterios indigenous ancestors are called upon with offerings and music to descend. The lyrics dedicated to the indigenous lwas could be translated as: “The Indian woman is, the Indian woman goes, the Indian woman lives under the water, the Indian woman arrived from under the water”. This song was played at the beginning of the feast. During my presence, indigenous misterios did not enter into the head of (initiated) healers, ritual specialist or of other believers. This could be explained by the circumstance that at the moment there were no healers present who had an indigenous misterio as their main protector. There were other healers, however, e.g. Mr. Guzmán, who had been initiated to work also with indigenous misterios. This indicates that indigenous ancestors were part of the celebration and were honored though offerings and prayers but not the most important force to be recognized that night.

Among the offerings dedicated to indigenous ancestors were: tobacco, candles, fruits (e.g. watermelon, mango), flowers, maní, and maize. These offering were placed under the main altar at the man-made pool, at the personal altars of the healers, at places where the water from stalactites concentrate and at a specific section of the cave called the “Indian chamber”. According to Mr. José Isabel Jiménez de los Santos this part distinguishes itself from the rest of the cave by its hollow bottom, which is indicative that underneath there could be water, a small pool where “Indians” live. In the altar setting they are represented by icons of indigenous national heroes and historical personages, such as Enriquillo, Caonabo, Anacaona or similar figures from abroad, such as the Venezuelan Trinity (Maria Lionza, Guaicaipuro, Negro Felipe) and by manmade small pools of water.
As in the case of other altars of 21 Division specialists, these images of indigenous heroes were accompanied by Yemayá, the sea goddess. Her blue color and water symbolism link her to the “Indian division”. The Indigenous division is not considered to be one of the many representations of Yemayá. There seem to be generally related through water element and through landscape as Yemayá guards the mouth of the river and the sea. Similarly, there is a close relationship (parallel) between the Indigenous lwas and Saint John. More specifically, they share the blue color and elements (sweet water), as well as particular places of worship such as this cavern or El Hombre Parado and both share the aspect of having purifying powers to ward off all sins and spells. Mr. Guzmán clarified that although both share the water symbolism, according to him Saint John is not a patron of the “Indigenous division”. He assumed that Saint John has been chosen as patron of this particular cave because Mrs. Viviana came from Bani where he is patronal saint of the city. According to the literature (Lundahl & Lundius 2012) several devotees of Indigenous Division from Bani do consider that this division can be represented by the image of Saint John.

Mr. Guzmán considered Tindjo to belong to the Indigenous division. Tindjo is associated with the Catholic Saint San Rafael, considered to be a divine healer, who has water and fish as his attributes. Mr Guzmán described in general terms his consults with Tindjo, which took place throughout the year in the cavern La Mancha: “Tindjo emerged, went and took the water, purified and blessed the whole world [...] This was inside of the cave because the cave contained a lot of water pools and before there were water and lagoons everywhere. Now not anymore because of [the lack of] the rain, because people made a lot of stuff. So there the misterio was manifesting and bringing devotees, cleansing, healing them and giving them the water to drink and you could feel that you were healing from inside because you got diarrhea and this was cleansing you from inside.”

Also initiations of caballo del misterio take place at this cavern throughout the year. For these the initiates come from remote places. One of the healers from Monte Plata declared that approximately 30 years ago she came to this cavern as part of her initiation, which now enables her to work with indigenous lwas. The indigenous past is not only remembered in the cavern at La Mancha but also in other sites of the Mana landscape.

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375 In Cuban Palo Monte she is often not the Mother of the Sea but Mother of the Waters including sweet water.
376 Interview no. 130615.
In recalling childhood memories Mr. Guzmán associates this cavern further with indigenous predecessors: “We were climbing there with a candle, food, and all people were very organized. If it was said you leave there, fruits, mapuey, ñame, yautía, cassave, big dishes in higüero they went and left it there. And there were not so many altars as now, there were crosses, neither Saint John, there was nothing. Up there was an altar and a hermitage, where people were resting and were going down to the cave and were communicating with the Indian Division. They were every time bathing there. There was some water that was used to cure you from inside, from everything, if you got diarrhea even better because this was a sign that you were cleaning. And the objective was to collect water here, there existed seven spaces of cavern to search seven drops of water. Similarly, you had to make seven circles before entering the cavern.” He elaborated on the changes within the Saint John cavern: “Before, it was not the same as it is now. Before, one did not find Saints there as quickly as it is now. The Saints were from the Catholic Church, there were not so many botanic shops. Before, in the cave there was no altar. There was the Virgen de Altagracia, small images, and a wooden cross...The first Saints that were there belonged to persons who did not want to have an altar any more so they were depositing their Saints in the cave, to not throw it away (because this could have negative consequences). Since then it is that all these things were constructed. Without this it would remain with the belief in Indians because this was what was there in the past. People were coming
to the cave because it was a sacred indigenous Taino point where you make contact with Taino gods of nature. Now all Caballos de los Misterios who went there put their candle and all other divisions but in reality this cave is a sacred space and point of the Indian Division.”

Also in another part of his reflection about past pilgrimages Mr. Guzmán linked this place to the indigenous past. When asking permission of the Owner of the Cave before entering the cavern, he recalled that his grandmother used to hit the rock in front of the cave with a stone, and continued: “I think she was doing it because of having fear of the Indians so it was a sign for them to hide, I am thinking it could be this because I have kept the tradition. Before, they were doing it with a stone, you know it was a signal that they arrived. Because every time it was said there was an Indian, if you have left there something, some rubbish, in the morning it was cleaned, it were the Indians who were cleaning it”.

Multiple sites of the Mana landscape, narratives and practices have explicit connections to the indigenous ancestors. The memory of the indigenous past is interlinked with the cavern, particularly through the feast of Saint John, which includes explicit indices to their commemoration. This memory is also integrated in therapeutic sessions wherein the ancestral forces are invoked, with testimonies of their agency and initiations. Specific sites such as Hombre Parado, Cueva de La Mancha are not only places of healing but also ancestral places where that memory is kept alive.

Conflicts in Mana landscapes
As in other regions, also in Mana there seem to exist religious tensions about the value of ritual activities at diverse healing places including the La Mancha and El Conde caverns. These were also displayed during the feast: the celebration was briefly interrupted by members of the evangelical church, who started to offend participants and play loud music to drown out the drums. This incident was preceded already by other examples of tension, which resulted in the destruction of calvarios or painted rocks. During illegal road construction in 2018 the path towards the cave of la Mancha including calvarios have been destroyed (Arias Peláez, personal communication). The damage of the archaeological sites in the surroundings of this cavern is yet to be assessed.

These incidents raise concerns about the protection of sacred sites like this place in the Dominican context wherein devotees of 21 Division are attacked for their beliefs. In the case of La Mancha local authorities were mobilized to stop the destruction of the path of the pilgrimage, not because it was recognized as sacred place but because the cavern is situated in a nationally protected area. In other cases like the pool of Tamare in La Jaiba the destruction of this places is difficult to prevent legally. According to the law no. 391 devotees of Vudú can be sentenced to a fine, even to days in prison for organizing their festivities. Likewise those who provide their houses for these ceremonies can be officially persecuted. This law was criticized for being against the own Dominican constitution, and as openly discriminative and racist (Tejeda Ortiz 2013).

The Cave of Saint Francis as a Healing and Memory Place of Bánica
Cueva de San Francisco in Bánica (province Elías Piña) is located at the top of Saint Francis Hill, a walk of approximately half an hour from the municipality. The Sacred Mountain is a protected natural monument because of an endemic cactus, Rosa de Bánica, and the presence of petroglyphs with stylistic features of the pre-colonial period (Puello Nina & Tavarez 2014). The Saint Francis cavern is one of two caverns in this mountain. The second cave is situated at the northern side of the mountain facing Pedro Santana, well

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377 Interview with Juan Abraham Rosario Jiménez (no. 112615).
known for the La Zurza sulfur spring. The Cavern of Saint Francis is a sanctuary of regional importance. Each year, this sanctuary is visited by thousands of pilgrims (approximately 25,000) from different regions including the provinces of San Juan, Azua, even San Cristóbal. The Cavern of Saint Francis is a focal point of the patronal celebration during which people come from far and wide to pray for their health and wellbeing. The subsequent paragraphs will address its relation with healing during the time of the patronal celebration, which is intertwined with the commemoration of the spirits of indigenous peoples.

The cave and hill of Saint Francis are sacred locations because Saint Francis has manifested himself there. Different accounts of his appearance have been preserved in oral history. Mr. Lionicio De La Rosa Alcántara, told how this event was described to him. A man named Godo was searching for bees on the hill when he suddenly heard hammering sounds; following the noise he arrived at a huge cave where he did not find anyone, only an image, so he went and announced his discovery to the church whose administrators returned to the cave and saw that the image was that of Saint Francis. They brought the image to the church where it was hung but later the image disappeared. Saint Francis returned back to the cave. After being forcibly displaced a third time he never appeared again. In another version by Xavier De Los Santos Saint Francis first manifested himself as a person in the church of Bánica and afterwards he disappeared. People were searching for him everywhere and found him in the cave. They brought him back to the church down town. But he escaped back to the cave because that was his home. This sequence of events repeated itself several times until Saint Francis disappeared forever.

There is no consensus as to when exactly the celebration of Saint Francis started to be celebrated in the cavern. For some this should be the date of the foundation of the city, for others it goes further back. Mr. Xavier de Los Santos asserted that since the time when God created the world the cavern was visited. According to him, it was visited by the predecessors, “the first people that were here in the world”, from those days onwards people have been visiting the hill, but then, after Trujillo, people started to make vows. Other statements that this celebration has always existed show that it goes further back than the collective memory. Another spiritual leader of Bánica, Mr. Hecefredes Gómez, described the cavern of Saint Francis as a holy place, comparable to a church, which in his words is a center of indigenous peregrinations since the time that indigenous people lived here. Another Baniquera, Ms. Flor Celeste, from the Oviedo family (according to oral tradition one of the founding families of the town), proposed that the feast started after the villa Bánica was founded in 1506 because the cave in her view belongs to the church, and the church dominates it.

A Journey for Spiritual and Physical Wellbeing during the Celebration of Saint Francis
As a usual patronal feast, the Saint Francis celebration lasts nine days (a Catholic novena). A mass for Saint Francis is organized each night in the church, while on the last day, the 4th October, there is also an official Catholic mass in the cavern. The major flux of pilgrims towards the sacred shrines dedicated to Saint Francis, the local church and the cavern, starts on the 2nd of October and intensifies during the following two days. The actual celebration in the cave is on the third night when many pilgrims stay overnight and

378 All further discussed contributors of this section are inhabitants of Bánica who regularly participate in the celebration of Saint Francis.
379 Interview no. 073947.
380 Interview no. 170.
381 Interview with Mr. Manuel María Moreta De Los Santos (no. 160957).
382 Mr. Hecefredes Gómez’s view of this cavern as an indigenous pilgrimage site is rather unique but he is an important spiritual and influential leader so it has to be considered. His interpretation can be explained by his own deep spiritual link to this place as well as his contacts with an archaeologist from the Museo del Hombre.
383 Interview no. 160957.
attend a morning mass in the cave. The last day pilgrims arrive predominantly from further away, from the province of Elías Piña but also from other provinces, such as Dajabón, San Juan, Azua, or Bahoruco.

During these days thousands of pilgrims of different social classes climb the steep mountain in order to express their faith and devotion, and to fulfill their vows or show their gratitude. On their way the pilgrims encircle crosses (four in total but three of these are the more frequently used) and light candles, deposit stones (representing wishes, sacrifices or sins), and pray. According to the nature of their vows the pilgrims are dressed in brown henequen clothes, sing liturgical chants (*plegarias, salves*) climbing the steep hill individually or in a group. Their journey is physically demanding due to its length, the steep elevation to overcome, and the necessity to carry heavy equipment for the nightly feast. The commitment to maintain a good relationship with this Saint and his sanctuary is expressed in the invested time and effort as well as in the offerings.

![Figure 60 The view of the cave on the 4th October, a beam of sunlight hits the Saint’s altar, Saint Francis cave, Bánica, Dominican Republic.](image)

From the last stop at the cross at the entrance of the cave, pilgrims continue to the altar in order to deposit offerings and to receive the blessing from Saint Francis. Many people before approaching the altar sanctify themselves with the holy water from stalactites and calcic powder from the cave walls. Sometimes they collect water and powder to take them back home and use them as remedies. Afterwards, the pilgrims approach the main altar, where a church assistant receives their offerings and places the image of Saint Francis for a short moment on their head, so that it may communicate his blessing to them. When going around the last cross, pilgrims touch the surrounding walls of the cave.384

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384 Note that people experience the physical link with this sacred places also through direct contact with the earth by being without footwear: this feeling to communicate with the invisible contributes to the state of grace of the participants.
Offerings brought during this event should be seen as fulfillment of a vow after having been cured or as an invocation and appeal in order to be alleviated from illness or economic problems. The typical offerings brought to Saint Francis are candles, animals, objects made of wax, food, and money. The animals (cattle, goat, and chicken) are received by the church officials who are in charge of the event and are deposited somewhere else until they are sold. According to Mr. León Alcántara, a church assistant during the celebration, the ex-votos of wax that represent requests to the Saint for healing specific illnesses take the material form of affected body parts. Other offerings in the form of small houses, animals, and other things are materialized requests for economic wealth.

Some participants of the feast also offer peanuts and bread crumbs to the “Indios”, the spirits, or, as one of the contributors said, to the marasás (the divine twins). These are deposited in the area of the petroglyphs (possibly pre-colonial because of their Indigenous style, see Fig. 61), which are mostly located on the left wall in front of an altar, while some are just put on the ground near the cross and altar. Moreover, a huge rock near the altar is considered by some to be an indigenous altar.

![Figure 61 One of the petroglyphs in the cavern of Saint Francis.](image)

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385 León Alcantara explained: “When you are sick you make a vow to Saint Francis asking him to cure you. And you told him: Saint Francis I would like to that you cure me from this illness I will give you as a present a cow. And at the Saint’s Day you will bring it. And it is like this. When you cure yourself, the day of the feast, you will take and bring this cow to the mountain, and there you will give it to one young man, called Hecfredes, and after you have carried out this vow your body starts to feel well and you recover.”

386 Interview no. 158.

387 Interview no. 170.
As a sacred place the Cave of Saint Francis is often referred to as a church and it is, obviously, consecrated to Saint Francis. Unlike in the case of La Mancha there were nearly no images of any other Saint. In person, I have seen only two images of Ogún Balenyó (San Santiago), which were carried as personal protecting lwas at the night celebration.
The night of 3 October is an important part of Saint Francis’ feast. Prayers accompanied by the music of *palos* intensify through the night. The *palo* is a type of a long drum, seen as the main sacred instrument. The *palo* musical groups are comprised of a person playing *güira* (a local metallic percussion instrument) and three drummers. Devotees are celebrating by dancing, eating, and waiting for the sacred to manifest itself through the bodies of the *Caballos del Misterio*. Like in other patronal celebrations the *güira* and *palo* are indispensable to invoke *misterios* and to bring them to incarnate into the bodies of those with “the grace”. One drummer is typically a leading singer who directs his verses towards the Saint and the *misterios*, while a chorus of other *paleros* and attendees repeat the refrains. In this case the music was also accompanied by the ringing of a small iron bell.

During the feast of 2014, an Indigenous *Misterio* materialized through a young man “with grace” from San Juan de Maguana, who reached a state of trance by dancing to the rhythm of the *palos* in front of the altar. As their identities merged, the young man in a state of grace fell on the ground without any movement, remaining in this state for about ten minutes, protected by his company from the crowd that continued to dance and sing. During this time the music intensified. After the trance, the young healer did not remember anything of what just had happened. Like Mrs. Viviana De La Rosa he seemed to communicate with the spirit world through the earth. The feast continued into the late hours, many of the participants slept overnight there to attend the next day’s mass.

On the day of the Saint, the 4th of October, an early morning mass was organized by the priest and other representatives of the church. At this point, the only image present was the one of Saint Francis and the music was played only by the priest’s assistants. While pilgrims continued to attend this sacred place throughout the entire day, those who had come the day before descended towards the church to participate in the mass that was held there. Again, many repeated the circle to greet and touch all Saints of the walls in order to receive blessings at the major altar of the Bánica church. Mass started with singing *salves* and after that was finished, the attendants received hot chocolate and bread. Then a procession followed in which selected men carried the Saint on their shoulder through the village, accompanied by singing and bell ringing, and finally returned with the Saint to the church.388

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388 The images are not identical. The smaller is used for ceremonies in the cavern and the original is kept in the church and only taken out during the procession in the village.
Figure 64 Devotees making their vows.

Figure 65 Celebration of Saint Francis at night of 3rd October.
Figure 66 The image of Ogún Balenyó/San Santiago at night on the 3rd of October.

Figure 67 The Mass in the Saint Francis cavern at morning 4th October.
Forgetting and Remembering Indigenous Past in the Bánica Landscape

At present people are generally not aware of the fact that Bánica once had indigenous inhabitants. Many agreed that the above-described feast was certainly celebrated by their great-grandfathers, who are considered to have been of Spanish origin. According to the contributors there are some people who might be considered descendants of the indigenous population, but this is because of their appearance rather than self-identification or genetic evidence. There is, however, a strong spiritual connection to the spirits of the Indigenous People. The Indigenous Iwas are often called Saints.

In Bánica there are various narratives about indigenous misterios. These were related to people “with grace”, who were said to have been taken away but who returned with the grace or gift to heal. In the past, there were more healers who had gained their grace as a consequence of having been taken away by indigenous misterios. One of the local examples was a healer, Kusha, who went to their place and when she returned she told that she was another person. In her house there was even a stone from which water was streaming. Mrs. Carmela Alcántara (78 years old) told us about her grandfather who gained his healing grace by living under water for seven years, after which he re-emerged with Misterio and the power to cure. At present there is one person who has developed this grace to heal. As part of another Saint’s celebration this person and his followers, but also Baniqueros in general, bring offerings to the river for Indigenous Iwas.

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389 See also the historical overview. Although it is not clear when patronal feast was for first time celebrated in the cavern, it is at least since the 18th century that Saint Francis de Paula is the patron Saint of Bánica; the first references to the church we have are from the 17th century.
390 One of them was the aunt of Manuel Maria Morela de Los Santos, Ms. Binda de Los Santos Valenzuela.
391 Se lo/la llevaron, they took him/her away, was understood as soul loss because the body could be present but without consciousness.
392 Among Baniqueros Saint Francis is not a patron of any Iwa. In Haitian Vudu he is the patron of Loko. According to Tejeda Ortiz (2013) Virgen del Carmen stands for “Indio Carmelo” but this author does not elaborate further on the symbolism of these figures. In Haiti Our Lady of Mount Carmel is associated with Ezili Dantó and has dedicated a popular pilgrimage place at Sodo (Saut d’Eau) (Ramsey 2011).
Mr. Alcántara distinguished between two categories of indigenous *misterios*. The first had positive effects and was playful, but the second consisted of “Caribs”, which if they arrive to the mind of persons in trance, are very violent: they “throw them to the ground”, “harm them”, and “massacred them”. When one receives “a Carib Indian”, it is always hurtful, because these can even “eat people from inside”. And he explained further “a Misterio that throws you on the ground is good but only if you have one that speaks normally peacefully to you, like a good Misterio, he knows the reason of your visit. And if you think of lighting a candle for him, it is not your own idea, it comes from the mind of the Misterio.”

These two witness accounts are illustrative examples of how oral traditions keep the spiritual link with indigenous *misterios* alive from one generation to the next. This confirms the existence of an encompassing structure of participating in cultural memory, which is refreshed on various occasions. The memory of the indigenous ancestors is embedded in the landscape. Different places in the Bánica landscape, like the Cave of Saint Francis, the springs La Zurza, La Descubierta, Las Tres Piedras and La Chorrera, at Rio Artibonito, in the cavern at Sabana Mula and in the church of Saint Francis are associated with ancestral agency. Baníqueros refer to the Cave of Saint Francis as a church, just like the church in the town. Both places are connected by the pilgrimage but also by associations with the indigenous *misterios*. Similar to the cavern, the church is said to have an Indigenous Misterio. As Mr. Benjamin Alcántara explained, in the past people could hear Indigenous People hammering and making other sounds of construction in the church at night. When asked why he thought that the sound was made by indigenous workers, he answered: “because they make marvelous things”. The sound of hammering is also associated with the manifestation of Saint Francis. The cavern connects to the indigenous ancestors through the elements of sweet water (from the stalactites) and earth. These elements also play a role when people share with the Indigenous Misterio the first crops or ceremonial meals after the patronal feast, as they bring these offerings to a specific part of the river, e.g. the whirlpools Las Tres Piedras and La Chorrera or springs such as La Descubierta. According to Mrs. María García Alcántara, Saint Francis lives in the La Cidra Cave, which is connected by a subterranean river to the cavern in Bánica. Saint Francis was not even once associated with another *lwa* or indigenous *misterio*.

The Saint Francis cavern is not the only cavern were ceremonies are organized in the Bánica landscape. Next to the afore-mentioned springs and part of rivers, ceremonies were in the past also organized in another cavern consecrated to the Virgen de Altagracia at Sabana La Mula (approx. 10 km from Bánica). Some details about how this place was consecrated are considered complementary to the changing meaning of the Bánica landscape. Mrs. Carmelita de La Rosa Oro, one of the traditional healers from Bánica, devotee of God and Saints (*lwas*), explained how she started to celebrate Altagracia in this cavern. It was because the Lord had sent her to this place to organize the celebration requested by the Saints. Next to the cavern she built a small altar, dedicated to the Virgen de Altagracia and a small wooden house next to it. She offered these as an expression of her penance. After the death of her husband she did not continue the celebration. This healer asserted: it does not matter what you pray for, as long as your request is made “with a clean hearth”. She explained also that, because the cavern is a sacred place, different Saints can manifest themselves there – in her words “where there is one, there are many Saints” – and therefore one should also pray to the Indigenous Saints.

393 See the interview with Doña Carmela.
394 The same statement was made by an elderly woman from Fermíz Beato in Piraguas Arriva (interview no. 201430) when speaking about the sacredness of the cavern. On my question why she thought this cavern is sacred she answered: because it is there were Indians live.
395 See also Interview no. 105416.
396 I have not visited La Cidra; it is to be verified in the future whether this is the same as the La Cidra Cave that is known as an archaeological site in the same province.
The celebration of the Virgen de Altagracia drew on previous traditions of local inhabitants, which were bringing offerings to the “Indians” long before Mrs. Carmelita de La Rosa started her celebrations. One of the residents of the location Patricio Luciano confirmed that after Mrs. De La Rosa stopped with the celebration, only very few persons continue to visit the cavern. He considered such visits as a custom stemming from the generation of his parents and grandparents. In addition, he explained that in front of the cavern there is a higo, a fig tree (*Ficus genus*), which is very much respected because “the Misterio enters your body there” …and continued: “They say that indigenous peoples were coming out, they guarded themselves in the cave; to my mother appeared a marked goat, with combed hair.” The last remarks refer to a belief that we encounter also in the northern region of the Dominican Republic, namely that braided hair can be sign of indigenous agency. This account illustrates that even if in this account it is easy to date the beginning of the celebration started by Mrs. Del Oro, according to Luciano this tradition was preceded by older traditions conducted by his parents and grandparents in which he did not participate so he could not give us more details.

![Figure 69 A shrine dedicated to Virgen of Altagracia, Bánica region.](image)

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Figure 70 The Mass at the day of Virgen Carmen at the house altar of Mr. Hecfredes Gómez in Bánica.

Figure 71 The altar at the day of celebration of the Virgen de las Mercedes, Bánica.
Figure 72 A Mass in house-temple on the day of Virgen Carmen.

Figure 73 A Vessel for indigenous misterios house-altar Bánica.
Ritual activities and healing practices in caverns at La Mancha and in Bánica are just two examples of how people engage spiritually with places that are associated with the indigenous past. The next section will illustrate how some Cuban caverns connect present-day people with the indigenous past.

**Healing among Spiritists, Managuaco cavern, Holguín, Cuba**
Cuban caverns are also accompanied by narratives about and rituals dedicated to indigenous spirits. Narratives about how trash that was left behind mysteriously disappeared and was apparently consumed by “Indios” – are told in the different Dominican and Cuban places that I visited during fieldwork. In general, these are considered “tales of old people”. However, devotees of Regla de Ocha and Cuban Spiritism believed in the agency of the indigenous spirits in daily life. Devotees of Espiritismo del Cordón perform ceremonies in which these spirits are regarded with great respect. They do so in Managuaco, and, in the past, performed these also in Niquero. In Managuaco I got the chance to collect more information on these practices.

Managuaco is a small settlement in the province Holguín and has been previously discussed as one of first small farms in this region, and the first Catholic hermitage in Holguín province built at the end of XVII century. Currently there is only a small altar outside for the Virgen of Charity and many inhabitants are devotees of Espiritismo del Cordón.

One of the cabeceros (Head Medium) of the Espiritismo del Cordón, Mr. Jerónimo Santana felt a spiritual link to indigenous forefathers that he believed was inherited through the mother side of the family. The spiritual connection with the indigenous past may be reinforced by invoking the “Indian commission”.

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397 The cavern is sometimes also used for other types of ceremonies like ritual cleansing. The description of these is left out in accordance with the wishes of the local spiritual leader.
This is a group of spiritual entities, summoned with the objective to achieve their help and protection. The devotees seek communication with those spirits in their dreams and most often in cord ceremonies at a house-temple.

The ancestral agency is also connected to specific places and features in surrounding landscapes. Mr. Jerónimo Santana described places that are used for healing practices according to domains of two major commissions: the “African” and “Indian” commissions. Each commission has its own specialization as to curing, remedies and places that are especially apt for communicating with the respective spirits of each. The domain of the “African” commission consists of mountains with trees of hard wood such as yaya, ciguaraya, or quebracho. Like in Regla de Ocha, Palo de Monte and Mixed Spiritism, the head medium asks permission before entering “el monte”. The Indigenous commission works with plants like yerba mora and romerillo. In the contributor’s opinion even if the plant is sent by an “African spirit” the botanical knowledge is the domain of “Indian spirits”. The curing receipt is passed down from spirits via mediums to their patients.

Rituals for spiritual cleaning and empowerment are performed at the banks of rivers where prayers are dedicated to the Mother of All Waters (here: Yemayá) and Oshún (the river flow). As we mentioned earlier, Mr. Alcides Campo Tarragó, another medium, from the same house-temple, considered the water bodies in the same location to be the domain of Sitochi, The Queen of the Water, as she revealed this to him in a dream. Like Sitochi, also other beings or spiritual entities of other commissions can reveal themselves to the people in dreams or during the cord ceremony.

The contact with this “Indian commission” can indeed be facilitated through dreaming and it can take place in house-temples. For Mr. Jerónimo Santana from Managuaco this communication is also established at places “where there have been communities in the past, where they (indigenous spiritual entities) can feel well, where there is a better fluidity, such as temples, mountains, caves, and rivers”. One of the places where a mass is organized is a cavern near Managuaco. Mr. Santana explained the motive for selecting the cavern as a place to celebrate mass: “in their world they have lived there, they have their own forms, for example when you are going to communicate, the caciques who were living there with others, did not go away; their spirit remains there, it does not leave the place, if you want to communicate directly with it you have to go there.”

The mass takes a place in the cavern approximately every four months or when a special necessary presents itself, e.g. in the case of an illness. Not everyone who participates in the mass in a “house-temple” is selected to join for the ritual in the cavern. People with health problems are more likely to be designated by the guide spirit to receive advice. Before entering the cavern, permission is asked to form a circle and through dance and singing of hymns communicate with the spirit. The ultimate goal of the ceremonies organized for the indigenous commission is the spiritual development of the practitioners and a means of recovering health and of obtaining spiritual protection.

The cultural memory of the indigenous past does in this context not rely on only one individual to transmit the values and meanings of rituals. The collective nature of the cordón also broadens the participatory structure of the cultural memory. The continuity of Spiritism in this location can be explained by the meaningfulness of these practices to the people, especially to those who have been cured in this manner: the therapeutic function of religion is in general a binding element for the community. Broader societal contexts, however, such as the aging of the rural population and the limited job opportunities in

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398 Interview no. 103025.
399 The word ‘monte’ may have different meanings: hill, or uncultivated land covered with trees, shrubs, bushes or grass.
400 The reason for the selection may be the spatial limitation of the place: this cavern is rather small and not many persons fit in.
401 Pleiada is a type of song in which the spirits are mentioned and called to descend to the place where the mass is held.
these areas, are important factors that may interrupt the further transmission and local expression of collective memory about the indigenous past.

The spiritual link that is felt by some of the Managuaco inhabitants should be contextualized within the broader region where the commission of indigenous spirits is also recognized by other centers of Spiritism in nearby Guayacanes, in more remote Jiguani or in Cienfuegos. These particular expressions of the cultural memory take also place in a landscape with rich material imprints of the indigenous predecessors. While Managuaco’s contributors did not preserve knowledge about the fact that indigenous ancestors resided here during the colonial period or that some of the present-day families might have genealogical link with the past indigenous population, they were well aware of the historical link that – in conjunction with formal education – was situated in the pre-colonial period. The recent excavations by the CITMA institute of Holguín is likely to reinforce the awareness of a historical link with the indigenous predecessors.

Figure 75 Mr. Jerónimo Santana in Managuaco, Cuba.

402 In the nearby settlement Guyacanes the adherents of Cord Spiritism also organized their mass in home temples to the commission of indigenous spirits. The lyrics were composed by one of the devotees who was always searching for inspiration at the rock wall where he felt he had a better connection. An example of such lyrics: “Que lleguen los indios buenos, porque yo les estoy llamando, yo le hago un llamamiento pa’ que vengan labrando.” Another pleiada, called The Drum, sounds: “Llegan indios misioneros hoy llegan con su tambor para que quiten el dolor a todo el mundo entero.” These texts illustrate how the indigenous past is actively engaged with in the context of the healing practices.
Cueva De los Santos Gibara, Cuba

Not all Cuban caverns are associated with indigenous spirits. The reflection of Mr. Torre Anguilera about his past spiritual works at Cueva de Los Santos is one of the testimonies about the spiritual value of these places for the Cuban population at large. Mr. Torre, as taita\textsuperscript{403} of Regla de Ocha, founded his altar in one of the Gibara caverns approximately 17 years ago. Like in the case of Mrs. Del Oro’s from Bánica he decided to construct this altar after a revelation. In this revelation a spirit of a dead indicated this site to him as a powerful place where he had been spiritually working before. While this taita did not share many details about the biography of this dead he remarked that he was living in el monte.

The cavern was consecrated to Chango/Santa Barbara and Oya/Santa Teresa de Jesús, who dominates the tomb/the world of the dead. The main guardian of the cavern is Oggun guerrero, who together with Ochosi is considered to be the owner of el monte or to be el monte. Oggun gives followers of Regla de Ocha the authority to enter this place and work there. Like in the La Mancha case, before entering the cave a bell is rang to announce that people are arriving.

Mr. Torres explained that the altar at the Cueva De los Santos, Gibara, was founded with the aim to heal and develop strong spiritual links with the dead.\textsuperscript{404} The cavern was designated to that effect by a muerto, i.e. the spirit of a deceased person, and therefore the presence of other remaining dead could be felt better at this place. According to Mr. Torres, the spirits of the dead are most likely “Afrocubans”, and on the basis of their form of speech most certainly are Cubans. Although he does not personally work with the spirits of indigenous people, these are considered one of many agencies dwelling in the landscape. They are not associated with this particular cavern, however.

\textsuperscript{403} Taita is an initiated ritual specialist who can train novices.

\textsuperscript{404} For more on the role of dead in Regla de Ocha see Rodríguez Reyes (1993) and González Peréz (1997) or those of Yoruba Vidal (1993).
The ceremonies that took place here were organized in groups of seven different priests (for whom the Spanish word sacerdote is used). Each priest has his own group of dead to work with. Like in the Dominican cases explained earlier, the ceremony culminates when the spirit of a dead person is reached through trance elicited by drum music, chanting, and stimulants like tobacco and alcohol. One of the priests asks in trance to receive a recipe for medicinal plants, and an assistant (perro de prenda) goes to search for the plants in el monte. Almost always medicinal plants that were used by “los muertos” are applied. Among them are: Zazafaraparilla, Rompezaraüey and Pederaja macho.

Different testimonies speak about cures of illnesses (psychological and physical ailments), which were made possible through the agency of the muertos (the dead) from this cavern. In addition, if there is a type of problem that is considered to be the domain of another deity, this other deity can also be invoked here. This was also the case of a newborn of one of the members, which was saved through the help of San Rafael (Inle, orisha of all medicinal healing) invoked in this place.

Also Cueva de los Santos did not escape the above-mentioned disputes and the altar was destroyed. The vandals, it is said, will be punished by the dead; in the meantime there are already plans to reestablish a new altar there and to continue the ceremonies.

Although these ritual activities seem to have been entirely initiated rather recently, there are some precedents of ritual cavern use in the same town. Mr. José Corella Varona, cultural promoter and speleologist from Gibara, tells us that at the beginning of the 20th century peregrinations were organized to the so-called Cueva de la Virgen, now known as Los Panaderos. This cavern was named after a rock formation associated with the mantle of the Virgin, where flowers were brought as offerings. The exact details are not known. Today, this cavern is known as an archaeological site and by some related through a narrative with the cacique Catuco. Mr. José Corella described how according to this local narrative cacique Catuco and his daughter, when fleeing from the Spanish invaders, could escape because a deity, Granma (Bayograma), transformed them into a rock formation inside this cavern. This rock formation is more distant from the cave opening than the altar of the Virgin.

According to oral history, the Gibara landscape is entangled with the lives of escaped enslaved people. In the context of explaining sacred places related to the ancestors, Mr. Tomás Rodríguez Gonzales from Holguín also mentioned Palenque de Gibara. After describing el monte as a place related to ancestors “because it was there where enslaved Africans where cutting the sugar cane, collecting the coffee, and therefore there developed also more their religion”, he gave as an example “Palenque in Gibara, where there are some caves that everyone knows.” These caves are situated near an old sugar mill. Being very conscious about his West African heritage from his mother’s side (Angolan) and from his father’s side (Cuban), Mr. Rodriguez added a popular Cuban proverb saying: “who does not have something from Congo has from Carabalí”. He clarified that when talking about sites of the ancestors he referred to places related to the enslaved Africans, but added that he honored also an indigenous man (“Indian”), whom his grandmother and mother knew, and to whom they were praying, and to whom he sometimes is praying too.

Likely the opinion of José Corella from Gibara was somewhat influenced by his role as a local historian and cultural promoter: “In Catuco there is a site of cultural encounter. There lived a cacique with his daughter who was very beautiful. When the Spanish conquerors arrived and started to attack the village they flee to the mountain. Catuco and his daughter with a child in arm fled to the mountain and four Spaniards with dogs chased them. When they arrive at the cave of Los Panaderos they invoke the god Bayograma to help them hide and then Bayograma magically illuminates the path of these Indians who are running away while the Spaniards lost their time to light their torches to enter the cave and then they got advantage over them and the Spanish keep up with them and when they almost can reach them and let’s say that by the same intervention of Granma these Indians are turned into stone. There are two rock formations that are identical and one is like an Indian in the position of a cuckoo with a spear and the other is an Indian with a child on her arm and when you look at them they are identical and they say that these are the stone statues of Catuco and his daughter.”
In Mr. Rodríguez’ view, this does not mean that he is indigenous descendant.

Figure 77 Altar of Mr. Torres, Gibara, Cuba.

Figure 78 Cueva De Los Santos, Gibara.\textsuperscript{407}

\textsuperscript{407} This photo was kindly facilitated by J. J. Guarch Rodriguez from CITMA Holguín.
More caverns figure in Cuban collective memory and sacred history. In many the religious practices have by now been abandoned, like in the case of the Cavern of the Virgin. Another example of a cavern where the use for spiritual aims has been discontinued is the Cave of Samuel in Niquero. This cavern was valorized for its huge concentration of spiritual energies by past Espiritistas from Niquero. This special character was revealed to one Espiritista approximately 40 years ago in a dream. The use of the cave ceased after the death of the spiritual leader but some people still remember the ritual experience and plenas song in the cavern. Espiritismo has a strong tradition in Niquero, and until the present day it is estimated that there are nearly three hundred different house-temples. This spirituality is sometimes translated into occasional visits of the caverns of El Guafe, which are situated in the national park neighboring to Niquero. In the recent past, an investigator from the Smithsonian, and young Espiritistas from Niquero organized a ceremony in the cavern of El Guafe. The role of the investigator in dealing with the collective and cultural memory of the indigenous past is often much more subtle but may trigger its preservation, modification or even discontinuity. Personal observations at the caverns and the testimonies of park rangers, suggest that the caverns of Guafe are sometimes visited for spiritual purposes by “people from Habana”. One of the constraints for the renewal of traditions by inhabitants of Niquero is the general poor state of transportation in Cuba.
Cuban and Dominican caverns as memory places of indigenous past
Caverns are sacred and empowered natural sites, loci of history, and settings for oral traditions. In describing a few examples I have highlighted some of their rich symbolism on the basis of discussions with devotees of Roman Catholicism, 21 Division, Spiritism and Regla de Ocha. Within these plural meanings I have emphasized the role of caverns in healing from a cultural memory perspective. Regardless of their religious affiliation, and their specific invocation of divine beings and spiritual entities, the visitors undertake their journey in order to improve their health, wellbeing, and protection (spiritual and physical, also for example in the hurricane period). Being physical, natural features of an extraordinary characteristics, caverns create easily a bridge towards invisible worlds and, as we have seen, also across generations.

This chapter elaborated on the meanings of these heritage sites in contemporary societies. The connection with the past is made across different religious affiliations and according to people’s own perception of history. More specifically, I have focused on cases where the commemoration of the indigenous ancestors has been integrated in the patronal celebration of Saint John and Saint Francis. These data were complemented by the information on the significance of the cavern during the Spiritism ceremonies in Managuaco and by accounts of the agency of the dead in healing ceremonies in Gibara.

While during the patronal celebrations it was possible to communicate with lwas, and consult them about different cures, the emphasis at these moments seem to have been on the attendance of celebration. People’s own participation can be conceived a way to express one’s commitment with the Misterios or the Saints who will be of benefit for one’s life. From this viewpoint the commemoration of indigenous ancestors within these celebrations seems to be a confirmation of a mutual caring relationship, by looking after, honoring and keeping the memory alive of those who passed away. In a symbolic way, it is at the same
time a recognition of those predecessors who passed on their knowledge of what to do in time of illness, who warn and protect us with their previous experience and accumulated knowledge.

People’s inclusion of indigenous ancestors into their own pantheon in landscapes that are scattered with historical imprints provides them also with a sense of belonging, as it positions the devotees in time and space. Personal participation in feasts or listening to elders creates a shared cultural background; shared experiences and as such it promotes a community identity and fosters group cohesion. According to social psychology social inclusion contributes positively to mental health as it fulfills the basic human need to belong (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Walton & Cohen 2011).

Devotees of 21 Division, Spiritism, and Catholicism commemorated Indigenous  lwas and spirits in cavern settings. Similarly, indigenous ancestors are also recognized as important forces in Haitian Vodou Brazilian Candomblé, and Surinamese Winti (Stephen 2002; personal communication Sony Jean 2015). As earlier suggested, from the viewpoint of popular Catholicism a cavern can be a place where the indigenous spirits dwell because their souls are in penance. Being historical places with rich material imprints of the indigenous predecessors, these sites are likely to be situated in locations where the communication with the ancestral world may take place. This seems to be a shared belief among Spiritism, Regla de Ocha and 21 Division.

The altars dedicated to Barón del Cementerio/San Elías, the head of the guedes, in Cueva de La Mancha or those for the dead Maroon in Gibara indicate that these caverns are – together with cemeteries – gateways to the world of deceased ancestors in general. This view overlaps with archaeological records about the rich funerary practices from the pre-colonial period (e.g. Vácarcel Rojas et al. 2003) and with information that suggests that these sites were used by Maroons (e.g. Pereira Pereira 2008). The accounts about spiritual entities residing in specific places may sometimes have historical value as it is bounded to local histories. The testimony about the agency of the dead from the cavern of Gibara, for example, is connected to the oral history about Maroons in this particular place, an information that is open to verification by future historical and archaeological studies.

One of the crucial questions concerning these ritual places, which have been the focus of attention for Caribbean residents during centuries (and in some cases even during millennia) is whether and to what extent the present-day meanings and practices can be considered a continuation or reinterpretation of previous traditions. Within the framework of the Nexus project one of objectives of this study was to examine the possible link between the ancient indigenous population and contemporary traditions. One of few accounts that we have about indigenous worldviews concerning the caverns in the Caribbean is that of Friar Pané (ca. 1498/2011). This source depicts caverns as sites where the ancestors had originated and where Sun and Moon had emerged. It suggests that one of the caverns was held in great esteem as a place to celebrate religious ceremonies. It is plausible, therefore, that the present-day association of caves with indigenous ancestors and their ritual use echo – at least in a partial and transformed manner – pre-colonial ideas about the landscape.

Another (possibly unconscious) continuity of ancestral practices may be the selection of maize, beans and possibly also maní as ritual offerings. Maize and beans have been found in pre-colonial cavern sites (Pagán Jiménez 2008) and maní at one Cuban site (Birama, Trinidad), dated to the beginnings of the 12th century (Angel Bello et al. 2002). As earlier suggested, corn and beans, however, may have been

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409 The community identity is comparable to the Turner’s communitas as referred by Rappaport (1999).
410 The analysis of the starch residues in the cavern site Cueva de los Muertos in Puerto Rico (Pagán Jiménez 2008) identified guáyiga, maize, sweet potatoes, batata, yams, lerén (Calathea allouia), yautia, corozo palm seeds (Acrocomia media); beans (Phaseolus vulgaris); arrowroot (Maranta arundinacea); manioc; and the seeds of achiote, bija (Bixa orellana). The presence of these plants in a non-residential context, whose functions relate to religious activities (based on the archaeological record identified as burial, postmortem rituals and/or ceremonies related to the numinous
recognized by the African ancestors upon their arrival to these islands since the second half of 16th century: they continued to be important components of the diet during colonial times.

The indigenous conviction that these places were connected to miraculous ancestral forces would have been easily incorporated in popular Catholicism and West African beliefs. The development of these traditions cannot be divorced from the specific historical context. Caverns were centers of both Catholic and non-Catholic beliefs for many centuries in Europe, and also Spain they were popular for ascetic practices, sites of pilgrimages, and healing in for centuries. From this perspective, Spaniards observing the indigenous rituals in local caverns were also able to understand its symbolism according to both Catholic and non-Catholic European reference (Pané as a Catalan had to sacred cavern of Monserrat, see the previous D’Aghier’s comparison to Greek beliefs).

Spanish caverns have been sites of pilgrimages and sites of healing prior to and after the conquest of the Americas. One of many examples is Virgen Candelaria which had her shrine also in a cave in Tenerife. The same Virgen became a popular in both Cuba and the Dominican Republic. The Marian manifestation in both islands registered also historically (Tricando 1997; Portuondo 2016), during this study in the form of ascetic use of caverns in this study (Evangelist in La Jaiba and Boca de Yuma) should be seen in the light earlier miracles which occurred in the caverns.

The meanings attributed to caverns, even by atheists, are interwoven with socio-political relations, which sometimes have conflictive historical backgrounds. Although caverns were once sacred natural shrines in Spain as well, the Spanish ruling orthodox policies in the 16th century aimed at demonizing caves in the colonies. Already during the early colonial period, this official discourse was contested by local spiritual practices. From different accounts, it is clear that Caribbean caverns raised fear and curiosity among Europeans. D’Anghiera describes how one of the colonizers, Morales, was scared to enter a cave in the Americas. One of many examples is Virgen Candelaria which had her shrine also in a cave in Tenerife. The same Virgen became a popular in both Cuba and the Dominican Republic. The Marian manifestation in both islands registered also historically (Tricando 1997; Portuondo 2016), during this study in the form of ascetic use of caverns in this study (Evangelist in La Jaiba and Boca de Yuma) should be seen in the light earlier miracles which occurred in the caverns.

Diverse European worldviews related to caverns should be taken into account when reading for example Gómara’s narrative about a group of indigenous men who were hiding in a cave for a storm. Those who had derided God’s name were struck by lightning. The only man who prayed to the Virgin Mary survived (López de Gómara 1922 [1551-1552], Chapter XXXIV, p. 79). Without doubt, Gómara aimed to exalt the success of the Catholic missionary activity in rescuing indigenous souls through their conversion, but at the same time his text is evidence of the widespread belief that a manifestation of the Virgin Mary could take place anywhere, including in caves, because the divine power was omnipresent.  

This Virgen is patron of Tenerife and now is also patron of following locations San Fernando de Camarones, Camagüey, and Sabana Grande de Boya. One of first brotherhoods from Santo Domingo composed of “Biafaras and Mandingas” had her as a patron. In Dominican 21 Division she represents Candelina Sedife and in Regla de Ocha her image represents also Oya.
the province of Caizcimú in Hispaniola because his crew “was terrified of hell” (D’Anghiera 2002 [1494-1526]). The fear of the unknown is also present when these dark caverns were described as gates to hell or as hiding places of Amazons as in the case of Madanina or Matinino (possibly Martinique) or loci of human sacrifices in Venezuela (D’Anghiera 2002 [1494-1526], First Decade: Book II & VII; Lopez Gómara, as cited in Urbani & Urbani 2011).

Even if Caribbean caverns raised fears of gates to hell and the unknown, in exceptional cases this did not impede for Spaniards to consult piaches in Venezuela about their future, the same persons who were known to be initiated and perform ceremonies in these places in Venezuela (López de Gómara 1551). News about indigenous treasure hidden in caverns from the mainland (Mexico, Peru, Brazil) arouse enough curiosity. The long-term piracy and privateering in the Caribbean regions contributed even more to expectations about the findings in these places. One of account about treasure hunting from the second half of 18th century Cuba illustrates how one of caverns close by to Bayamo was a mysterious place where indigenous spirits revealed and where the Virgen of Charity miraculously rescued her devotees (Portuondo Zúñiga 2016).415

As today the past early diasporic communities were likely attributed to cavern various, sometimes contested meanings. Contemporary religious disputes often follow the argumentation of colonial discourse, in which the religions of the colonized are stigmatized and considered to be witchcraft. The recognition of some of these places, like Saint Francis’ cavern, by the Church authorities is clearly reflected in the number of pilgrims that come to visit them. The great popularity of Saint Francis’ cavern in Bánica has parallels in other pilgrimage sites in sacred landscapes elsewhere, for example Monserrat in Spain, the Grotto of Saint Francis in Assisi (Italy), the Grotto of Lourdes in France, Cave Achbinico in Tenerife or the less known South African Motouleng cave. Certain features of the above-mentioned rituals, such as ex-votos, processions, the reappearance of saints and their miraculous effect on the patient’s body, show clearly Catholic influences, which can also be observed at sacred places in present-day Spain.

The Dominican and Cuban Cuban Spritism, Regla de Ocha and 21 Division perceive the numinous in various caverns. Although their views are sometimes stigmatized, these places are widely recognized as important sites of spiritual reflection about the mysterious invisible power of ancestral, divine and natural forces. In accordance with the respective religious frameworks, caverns are seen as dwellings or loci of manifestations of different divine beings. Curiously, the interviewed contributors did not mention an equivalent lwa in 21 Division for the involved patronal Saints, Saint John and Saint Francis. Maybe these two Saints do indeed not have any associated lwa, as occurs more often with other Catholic Saints. It is to be noticed that in Haitian Vudu Saint Francis is associated with Loco, the guardian of vegetation, who gives healing property to plants and transmits botanical knowledge to healers. The hagiography of Saint Francis – as an important healer who for a while was living in a cavern – might be sufficient for devotees to identify the values this Saint represents. The supervision of this celebration by the local church authorities may have led to greater secrecy about associations with non-Christian meanings, and also may have influenced the

415 In the 1520s some of Spaniards were consulting the piaches in Venezuela in order to know when the boat would come, and their predictions seemed to be fulfilled. One of these piaches would also go to invoke a “demon” in one of the caverns (Herrera y Tordesillas 1601, p. 111). López de Gómara (1979, p. 126 in Urbani and Urbani 2011) writes: “Invocan al diablo de esta manera: Entra el piache en una cueva o cámara secreta una noche muy oscura; lleva consigo ciertos mancebos animosos, que hagan las preguntas sin temor. Siéntase él en un banquillo, y ellos están en pie. Llama, vocea, reza versos, tañe sonajas o caracol, y en tono lloroso dice muchas veces: 'Prororure, prororure', que son palabras de ruego”. Portuondo (2016) gives us an account from the second half of 18th century by Diego Terral de Bayamo. This narrates about one of the inhabitants from Bayamo who went to explore a cave called Guaya that is located close by to this town. The motive of this visit was to explore whether it contained “enchanted treasure” because it was said that “barbarous indias” live there. During their exploration they encounter human remains from which an invisible guanajo, spirit would emerge. At that moment they could hear an “areito”. After this encounter they had to fight a large snake and got lost. After a long time without finding the way out one of them made a promise to the Virgen of Charity to visit her in her holy house. The Virgen miraculously rescued them.

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attributed meanings themselves. There were not Catholic officials were present at the Saint John feast and devotees did not refer to the celebrated saint in other terms. While it is now nearly impossible to assess whether Saint John was for Viviana de La Rosa the representation of another divine force, it is clear that at least in Bani where she came from, this Saint is now seen as associated with Indigenous Division through the water element (Lundahl & Lundius 2012).

The presence of a multiplicity of *lwas* in a context where not all healers are initiated creates a fluid and changing the atmosphere, which may lead to forgetting one or more specific characteristics or attributes.

The interpretation of caverns as dwelling places of spiritual or divine entities associated with rain may well have pre-colonial indigenous roots. We find this also in the short accounts of recent ritual cavern use in Cuban Spiritism. The cave in Antilla and the Cave of the Dead in Guara (Western Cuba) have been interpreted as places dedicated to the invocation of rain (see Rodríguez Cullel & Peña Obregón 2000; Fernández Garcell 2015). Indigenous icons that were discovered after a revelation by one local spiritual medium in the cave in Antilla were used to invoke rain in times of drought (Rodríguez Cullel & Peña Obregón 2000). In Mesoamerican worldview, specific caverns are called House of Rain (i.e. dwelling place of the Rain God), where religious specialists communicate with the divine power to pray for and help with the production of the rain (Jansen & Perez 2017; Jiménez Osorio & Posselt Santoyo 2018). The date of the Holy Cross – 3 and 4 May – associated with the main ritual in the Cave of the Dead (Guara), coincides with the celebration of the Holy Cross as the central rain ritual of indigenous peoples throughout Mexico (Jiménez Osorio & Posselt Santoyo 2018) – in the Mexican case the ritual is clearly of pre-colonial origin: the timing coincides with the first zenith passage of the sun, which marks the beginning of the rainy season in this region. Calculations by my colleague Manuel May Castillo (using Starcalc) show that the sun passes the zenith in the Dominican Republic on the 15th of May and the 27th of July, and in Cuba on the 24th / 25th May and the 16th/18th of July. The zenith passage on the 15th of May coincides with the very popular feast of San Isidro, the patron Saint of the agriculturalists, who is also invoked to remove the rain and make the sun shine in accordance with Spanish habit.

In the above-mentioned caverns the water aspect is often emphasized: there are man-made waterpools inside and offerings for the indigenous ancestors are deposited below the stalagmites or on a place where water had naturally accumulated. In one interview with an inhabitant of Bánica the cave of Saint Francis was explicitly associated with the rain, when he suggested that when one hears the drums from the caves it means that it will rain. Also in Boyá the Virgin of Boyá was suggested to be the regulator of the storms and rain. The association of indigenous people with the water element can also be directly related to the narratives about the subaquatic kingdoms where indigenous ancestors dwell.

**Concluding remarks**

The association of caverns with indigenous people seems to derive from a pool of knowledge in which information from different sources is mixed. Oral tradition about ancestral agencies in these places, the general association of caverns with remote past and “primitive peoples”, and the extraordinary characteristics of these liminal places – eliciting the sense of entering into contact with the mysterious and dark spirit world – in combination with material remains from ancient times are likely to construct and maintain this link across the generations.

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416 When making a documentary about the archaeological heritage in local caverns Jorge Fernández Garcell and his team interviewed adherents of Spiritism about this celebration (presentation by Fernández Garcell at an International seminar in Santiago de Cuba 2015).
This chapter discussed how relations between the indigenous forefathers and caverns have been constructed and kept alive in the cultural memory. The local contributors to this research connected to their indigenous ancestors through various means, including oral “stories about spirits” or religiously charged histories. The oral traditions describe these places as the dwelling of the indigenous spirits, which are generally considered to be ghost stories whose objective is to excite fear (and a wish to avoid such places), but they also highlight the marvelous agency of the beings living in those places. The sacred histories, including the biographies of famous healers like Viviana or the hagiography of Saint Francis, focus also on the marvelous agency of the forces that manifested themselves at these sacred places. Adherents of 21 Division, and Cuban Spiritism but also Catholics engaged with indigenous spirits in the caverns during patronal celebrations or individual ceremonies.

The interpretation of caverns as domains of indigenous misterios is also encoded in the physical characteristics of the caverns. As natural shrines of rather fixed material features they are stable mnemonic tools across the generations. The “betwixt and between” characteristics of the caverns – as entrances into a earth and into a world of darkness – allow the visitors to feel a drastic break with the normality of quotidian life and to experience “time out of time” (Rappaport 1999). Their extraordinary features affects the senses, eliciting physical emotional reactions and contributing to the experience of liminality. This experience made caverns across cultures places where the visitors naturally reflect upon the threshold between the visible and invisible realms, upon the distinction and the links between past and present, upon the connections with those who have passed away but still belong to our memory. The material evidence (e.g. remains of ancient artefacts or rock art) recalls the ancestral presence of people dwelling in the same landscape centuries ago.

The knowledge about caverns as domains of indigenous ancestors is transmitted through collective and individual rituals as well as oral traditions, which together rely on a broad participation structure that is not restricted to a few specialists. The feast of Saint John includes not only performers who pay tribute to the indigenous lwa, but also a wider public audience, which supports the structure of the celebration for economic reasons. The religious traditions in these places continue also because of the influence of charismatic leaders and last but not least, as Assmann (2011) proposes, because they are meaningful to the participants and the carriers of these traditions.

The rise and continuity of these traditions are intimately connected with a specific socio-economic context, which has been influencing the religious life and the healing practices. Its role should not be seen in fully deterministic terms, but without doubt the large-scale poverty and lack of medical attention (including mental care) in Dominican society, as well as the anxieties and hope of a better future in Cuban society, have a strong influence on the choices and reactions of the people. As does the general human need for spirituality and moral guidance.

The last three chapters provided numerous examples of how the memory of the indigenous past is part of the present-day healing landscapes. The following chapter will further assess the main question of how healing landscapes encapsulate cultural memories of the indigenous past in the light of the historical and selected fieldwork data we have discussed so far.