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PART I  
THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS OF CARIBBEAN  
LANDSCAPES

## CHAPTER 2. Healing Landscapes from a theoretical perspective

The interdependency between natural environment and health has been discussed for millennia (e.g. Hippocrates' *Airs Water Places*) and are at foundations of epidemiology.<sup>16</sup> In the past the reflections upon the link between human health and the environment were incorporated into ethnographic publications on magic, folklore, animism, and totemism, but most of the time these were examined in a rather traditional way as part of the traits and “survivals” of past cultures, which supposedly represented the “primitive thinking” of “the other” (see the next chapter). In contrast, the “Western” perceptions were discussed in terms of physical, medical, and therapeutic benefits of landscapes for the human body. The past two decades have experienced a general increase of environmental concerns in Western societies and academia, specifically regarding the relationships between the natural environment, health, and wellbeing, which has resulted in the development of research on this topic in human geography, environmental psychology, medicine, environmental anthropology, and anthropology of religion. The value of the natural environment in its relation to body is here addressed with the term “*healing landscapes*” (Russo 2008).

The first part of this chapter addresses the contribution of cultural memory theory to landscape studies, as a means that may help us to understand how healing landscapes are subject of historical changes, how landscape features facilitate knowledge transfer across generations, and how people, through healing rituals and medicinal cultures, engage with the past. The second part reviews some of the literature on the value of the natural environment in its relation to the body, including its role in health and the quality of life. The concept of “*healing landscapes*” serves us to bring together some insights of studies that touch upon human relationships with the environment, focusing on improving individual and collective health and quality of life in the Caribbean, West Africa and South America.

### Introduction to landscape studies

The concept of landscape has been variously used and debated within multiple disciplines ranging from geography and history to cultural anthropology, linguistics and archaeology. Until now, landscapes, as Bender (2002, p. 106) has said: “*refuse to be disciplined; they make a mockery of the oppositions that we create between time (history) and space (geography) or between nature (science) and culture (anthropology).*” Indeed, the differences in thinking about and perceptions of the landscape depend on the disciplinary perspective, on both the cultural and the personal background (gender, age, status, ethnicity) of the researcher and on the specific moment and context of the observation: as such they are rather to be understood as “*always in the making*” (Bender 2002). Given the historical particularity of western discourses, a critical reader might wonder whether and in what way the concept of “landscape” is accurate when speaking about the engagement with the past in the Caribbean or more specifically when assessing

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<sup>16</sup> Hippocrates, the father of medicine, applying inductive reasoning, expressed in his work *Airs, Waters, and Places* (± 400 BC) his firm conviction that there was a relation between the geographical location and one's character and health. Hippocrates opposed the idea that illnesses were caused by divine intervention and could be cured through appealing to the deities. Instead, he argued that illness is a result of humoral imbalances. He distinguished four humors: blood, phlegm, black, and yellow bile, each of which had its own complexion (characteristics). An illness was to be diagnosed by determining the complexion of the illness, and its cause. The cure consisted of restoring the balance in the body by correcting the diet, the humoral imbalance of the body, or the relationship with the environment. Physicians following Hippocratic teaching believed in deterministic relations between seasons, waters, prevailing winds, physical geography, the soil of a place and the humoral balance, which all together influenced human health. Hippocrates and Galen's teaching were influential during the Renaissance at important Spanish medical centers such as Sevilla, Salamanca, and Alcalá de Henares. The humoral theory seems to have also been prominent in popular medicinal cultures in Spain. Spanish healers were said to heal with their breath, saliva or even touch, thanks to their natural complexion, because of a balance of the four humors (Castañega 1997 [1529]).

healing practices and knowledge. Before explaining the relevance of the concept we therefore will first have to reflect upon some of its meanings.

Many landscape studies start by tracing the etymological origin of the term “landscape” back to the term “landschap” from the Dutch language (Wiley 2007). First, in both current English and Dutch, landscape/landschap denotes a picture representing a natural inland scenery. Second, a prospect of natural inland scenery, such as what can be observed from a glance at one point of view towards a tract of land with distinguishing characteristics and features - this is considered a product modified by geomorphological processes and changes introduced through human agency.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the English definition simply refers to a tract of land. While the most popular use of ‘landscape’ refers to a picture, probably because of the popularity of the Dutch landscape paintings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the word already occurred earlier, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when it denoted a “*landstreek*,” literally referring to a part of a country/area, or “*landelijke omgeving*”, rural/pastoral surrounding. The latter definition denotes something that is physically out there, a physical material entity. This coincides also with one of the basic meanings in English. These different definitions are indicative of alternative disciplinary approaches, each of which emphasizes a particular concept of landscape. While sometimes described in dichotomies and oppositions, it is clear that also in present-day English this word has multiple meanings. The painterly view indicates the particularity of one’s perception, which is embedded within a cultural historical context. For example, when Dutch landscape paintings gained popularity there was a shift from religiously oriented scenes to daily realities, and still life scenes, a change most likely motivated by religious changes during the period of reformation. The Dutch landscape painting seems to be framed by a specific religious view, different from that of the Spanish Roman Catholic Church of early modern encounters in the Caribbean or from popular beliefs of the Spanish countryside.<sup>18</sup>

These meanings of the word landscape have guided landscape studies to address landscapes as cultural representations as well as material measurable landscapes (Wiley 2007). The interrelation of nature and culture returns repeatedly to the theoretical discussions, most recently because of the “ontological turn” in South American anthropology in the form of Viveiros Castro’s perspectivism and its critiques (e.g. Halbmayer 2012, Rival 2012). The definition of the link between nature and culture has been discussed and refined for a much longer time than that of landscape (see also Descola & Pálsson 1996). One of the hallmarks of the nature/culture dichotomy is precisely its academic history, which has placed it at the foundation of geography studies, from where the concept of landscape has been transferred to other academic disciplines.

The current buzz word ‘landscape’ has gained popularity in Europe due to the work of German geographer Schlüter who used it in order to set the boundaries of geography, or in German *Landschaftkunde* (literally Landscape science) as a discipline (Martin 2005). A major task of this discipline was to trace changes in two types of landscapes: *Urlandschaft* (primeval landscape) and *Kulturlandschaft* (cultural landscape, i.e. landscapes modified by humans). In a reaction to the environmental determinism of his period, Sauer (1925) developed the concept ‘cultural landscape’ as an entity fashioned from natural landscape by cultural groups. Over the past two decades, however, there has been a dramatic increase in attention paid to the complex relations between culture and landscape. This new cultural geography went beyond landscapes as material expressions of culture to emphasize its cultural character, loaded with symbolic meanings. This approach was adopted, for example, by Cosgrove (1998 in Wylie 2007), who addressed how landscapes are portrayed, defined, and viewed as a reflection of processes of social

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<sup>17</sup> See the Oxford English Dictionary for these general definitions.

<sup>18</sup> See for more on the historical development of the landscape studies Hirsch & O’Hanlon (1997), Wiley (2007), or Hermans et al. (2013).

formation at the time of its creation, so that they cannot be understood in purely aesthetic ways free of this context. More attention has also been paid to the question how the culturally constructed landscapes are products of social relations, including power, and economic circumstances (Wylie 2007). Post-structuralist's currents in geography have further emphasized that this relational character of meaning is always present in the process of 'becoming' according to a particular context.

Within the Caribbean context the term 'landscape' has been implemented by UNESCO for a combination of works of humans and nature, which expresses a long intimate relationship between humankind and their natural environment.<sup>19</sup> UNESCO declared the cultural landscapes of Viñales Valley, the First Coffee Plantations in the Southeast Cuba, and the mixed site of Jamaican Blue and John Crow Mountains as heritage of universal value for humanity. The recognition of sites such as Blue and John Crow Mountains called also for more recognition of important non-monumental archaeological sites in the Caribbean and worldwide. Simultaneously, this highlights the importance of heritage for peoples without written history because it shows how Maroon memory of some historical events has been kept alive through ritual practices and narratives.<sup>20</sup>

Within this context, it is also clear that cultural landscapes or mixed sites are generic umbrella terms. The cultural landscapes and mixed sites maintain implicitly the constructivist view of humans being outside of their environment. This would speak to an audience that rarely experiences a daily engagement with landscapes that leave traces behind and evoke memories of past activities, persons and social relations. Similarly, such a spectator's view seems to undervalue the mutual agency of all living organism and the interdependency of humans and environments for their health and wellbeing.

Some tensions between the multiple meanings of the term 'landscape' have marked the anthropological research on this topic. Hirsch and O'Hanlon (1995) argue that at first landscapes were deployed as a framing background, which informs the way an anthropologist brings his or her study into view. In this approach, anthropologists were distancing themselves from emic views because they deemed their own perspective to be more 'objective'. Later, this approach moved towards capturing the emic meanings attributed to physical surroundings, to the extent that these could be made object of ethnographic description and interpretation. In general, such descriptions emphasized the cultural associations that were different from the researcher's own cultural background, which led to an overemphasis on the differences between cultures and on the 'exotic' character of the studied culture. In contrast, reacting to this distancing and alienating perspective, phenomenological approaches have sought to understand cultural landscapes in terms of embodiment, inhabitation, and dwelling.

Ingold (2007) has fundamentally criticized the human exceptionalism (separation of the human from nature) by observing that it is problematic to describe nature as a-human and a-cultural, yet knowable to the landscape scientist who supposedly can translate its value-free data into reliable theoretical constructions. To illustrate this point, Ingold argued that: *"If all meaning is thus culturally constructed then the environment on which it is imposed must originally be empty of significance. But if we hold that the culture is man's means of adaptation to the environment and if environment prior to its ordering through*

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<sup>19</sup> UNESCO distinguishes various subcategories under the heading 'landscape'. The world list includes the intangible aspect of landscapes, the first nominated sites being Tongariro National Park in New Zealand and the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in Australia. Surprisingly few sites from the Americas have been recognized as cultural associative landscapes and most of them include monumental architecture. Among these are, for example, the Maya archaeological sites Calakmul and Tikal, the Inca site Machu Picchu, and Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>20</sup> The cultural heritage is materialized in form of the Nanny town heritage route and associated remains such as trails, settlements, archaeological remains and hiding places, which bear witness to Maroon history. The forests and their rich natural resources provided everything the Maroons needed to survive, to fight for their freedom, and to nurture their culture. Descendants of Maroons hold strong spiritual associations with these mountains.

*cultural categories is mere flux, devoid of form and meaning, it follows that culture is an adaptation to nothing at all*" (Ingold 2002, p. 39).

The awareness of the interdependence of culture and environment seems to be generated to a certain extent by intrinsic values that the environment affords to humans (Ingold 2002). Those who are dependent on the landscape for their living are also more likely to be aware of its vulnerability and threats such as climate change. Ingold (2002) understood this mutually constitutive relation between persons and environment as effectivities and affordances between the actions of capabilities of subjects and possibilities for action offered by objects. In these lines, environmental affordances should be searched for not just in the visible, physical, or practical use, but also in terms of affordances for the process of construction of cultural meanings, which go beyond (but likely relate to) material satisfactions.

From a religious viewpoint, the landscapes are symbol and/or manifestation of a divine creative force, a locale of interaction between people as well as between humans and other beings, whose invisible superhuman powers can intervene in human wellbeing and health by causing sickness or curing it. Aspects of the environment can also become signs, which communicate information given by invisible and non-human agents. In material terms, natural environments can be beneficial to human physical health by affording green medicine and a healthy environment to dwell in. For their mental health landscape may give humans a sense of belonging and place by providing them a context of being-in-the world that transcends the human lifespan. This may help us to position ourselves in space and time (which, according to religious teachings, may go back all the way to creation itself). Such a positioning not necessarily refers to a linear sequence of historical events but may also involve culturally bounded notions of time and place. And as Bender has argued, "*people relate to place and time through memory, but the memories may be of other places and other times*" (Bender 2002, p. 107). As Halbwachs (1992 [1941]) suggested, even individual memories are of a social nature. In conclusion, even the most intimate memories and interaction are constructed on the basis of individual experiences of dwelling in familiar or foreign landscapes, which are negotiated in the framework of collective and cultural memory.

### **Memory landscapes**

All different definitions of landscapes in western discourse entail the notion of the passage of time, be it geomorphological modification of land mass, or historical trajectories embodied in experience of the landscape at specific moments (Bender 2002). Ingold (1993) proposed to move beyond definitions of the landscape as a neutral, external backdrop to human activities, towards a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space by a 'dwelling perspective', "*according to which the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of - and testimony to - the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves*" (Ingold 1993, p. 152). Following this understanding it is proposed here to use the concept of "*landscape*" as an opportunity to understand time and space as integral to each other.

In that connection heterogeneous human perception of time should be examined in order to understand its relation to or engagement with the landscape. Therefore, this study focuses rather on ways how present-day populations engage with these landscapes full of ancestral material imprints. It is not just that landscape narrates a story. We follow Ingold's observation that to perceive landscape is "*to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past*" (Ingold 2000, p. 189). As Kolen and Renes (2015) argued, landscapes contain also traces of those predecessors whose life and dwelling at occasions felt into oblivion in the collective memory or were never intended to be remembered.

This capacity to narrate about the past was also recalled by Glissant, who suggested for Martinique: “*Our landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history*” (1996, p. 11). In a similar vein the project ‘Nexus 1492’ investigates the material traces of life and dwelling of the pre-colonial inhabitants of the Caribbean and the impact that the European conquest had on them.

The understanding of healing landscape also involves the consideration of its temporality. Distinct time dimensions may be found in the explanation of the origin of a specific disease or in the interference of the ancestors or deities in the health and wellbeing of the patients. The ancestors have been present already for a long time, deities have been living since the time of creation.<sup>21</sup> The engagement with the past can also be materialized in individual healing traditions, for example through particular healing locations associated with sacred narratives that explain the function of particular herbs, or interpret the environment in a symbolic manner as a communication of the invisible beings. In this way different perceptions of time are expressed in culturally diverse medicinal cultures.

The motives for recalling the past within healing practices might be guided by origin narratives which might be evoked to call attention to specific features of the landscape, in order to show and maintain their cultural importance (Ingold 2000), create a sense of belonging (Santos Granero 1998) or locate and perceive other worlds in this world (Halbmayer 2012). Herein also the past of the before time intervenes with a spacialization of memories into natural features or built sites (Pierre Nora 1997) that transcend at least one generation (Santos Granero 1998; Hill & Santos-Granero 2002). Until now built memory places have received more recognition as monumental heritage places. More attention should be given to alternative places or spacializations of history (incl. religious ones) or natural environmental features, which are not calling our visual attention but nonetheless might be of great importance for local history. This ought to be of particular importance when we try to understand the character of the healing landscapes in the Caribbean region today. The temporality of the landscape might be of particular importance during the healing ceremonies as many places entail a religious experience through interaction with the numinous, manifested in ancestors or primeval divine forces while they also may be places of longstanding reputation for successful healing activity (Gesler 1993).

For the understanding of the historical construction of the healing landscapes it is important to highlight that the continuous long-term use of sacred places with their related rituals in the healing tradition is not to be equated with immutability or inflexibility. While many peoples, especially indigenous peoples, have claimed land rights in terms of their rootedness in the landscape, this does not warrant the conclusion that populations forcibly removed from their lands of origin did not reinterpret their worldviews in new environmental contexts. Halbwachs (1992 [1941]) showed in his *Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land* how Jews, Romans, Muslims, and Christians re-modeled the landscape of Jerusalem according to their religious needs, and that memories are often symbolically reproduced when separated from their original space. Similarly, Arawakan groups replicated common sacred places in newly settled areas, inhabited as a result of colonial processes of displacement or socio-political dynamics. Santos-Granero (2002) and Whitehead (2002) have noted that widely dispersed Arawakan peoples share similar toponyms, sacred cartographies, and enchanted landscapes, which appear to have been reproduced in newly inhabited regions, an indication that their landscape constructions are not fixed in time and place.

Thus, when accounting for the conceptual landscape transformations in the Caribbean we should consider the construction of culturally significant landscape features. Santos-Granero (1998) calls this process topographic writing: historical memory has been inscribed (and is re-inscribed) on the land through

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<sup>21</sup> For more details on the issue of time in landscape see Overing (2004).

sacred narratives and rituals, leaving us (in the Yanesha case) with sites that remind us of past consecration and the more recent desacralization of traditional territory. Bollig and Bubenzer (2009) and Kavarie et al. (2009) are among those who have studied similar processes of inscribing histories into landscape features to memorize significant activities of past on the African continent.

The importance of landscapes lies beyond being just a mnemonic “tool” carrying historical and cultural knowledge. The transfer of the historical knowledge might also be less intentional. The landscape bridges the past and present not only through material human imprints, but also by the continuation and re-adaptation of practices such as narratives and rituals associated with the landscapes that our predecessors were part of. We and our predecessors are connected through landscapes which are essential to our human existence. Their importance and knowledge related to them is culturally encoded in various forms often conveying values and messages from the past, reinterpreted according to the current cultural (medicinal) cultures. The time depth of some of these healing traditions and the role of the landscape often go beyond one generation. This time depth will be assessed with the help of Assmann’s concept of cultural memory.<sup>22</sup>

Assmann’s (2011) theory of cultural memory focuses on the role of the past in constituting our world and investigates forms where the past presents itself to us as well as motives that prompt our recalling of it. Drawing on Halbwachs notion of collective memory, Assmann (2011) extends the time span of collective memory – some 80-100 years – back towards the time of creation. In short, his cultural memory encompasses collective memory, but also traditions that go back much further than a few generations. Because individual memory is considered to be in a constant interaction with other human memories. The individual memory is registered and communicated in symbols, it is embedded and embodied in cultural frames of reference and stored away in symbolic forms, which may be transmitted (and transformed) from one generation to another. Therefore, memories are stored in landscapes, texts to be learned, feasts to be celebrated, churches and places of commemoration, reflection and devotion, music, theatre and other performances, and especially narratives that contain messages about the world and about life.<sup>23</sup>

According to Assmann, placement also plays a main role in the collective and cultural mnemotechnics. The placement has been a popular mnemonic tool in ancient Greece (method of loci) but is also present among, for example, indigenous peoples in Australia. The study of cultural memory should consider the interaction between memory and landscapes or reminding objects, but also pay attention to how these change and how these changes produce memories of their own. Cultural items or landscapes may trigger a beholder’s memory because they carry the memories that previous inhabitants invested in them. The transfer of this memory is not dependent on the individual’s memories (which tend to fade away easily); through codification it becomes part of the cultural framework shared by the community at large.

The concept of cultural memory was selected in order to examine what the role of indigenous peoples may have been in the becoming of contemporary medicinal cultures. In the case of Caribbean healing traditions it is to be expected that different time dimensions will emerge which might further complicate Assmann’s differentiation between communicative and cultural memory. That division is mainly based on the work of Halbwachs (1992 [1952]), which is reinforced by arguments of Vansina (1985) about the value of oral tradition for historiography. Assmann (2011) incorporated Vansina’s argument concerning the

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<sup>22</sup> Places transcend generations and connect the present time with the time of the ancestors. As Morphy shows, the past time is materialized in places as transformation of ancestral beings, representing forever the memory of associated events (Morphy 1995; 188). More specifically, for Yolngu speakers of Arnhem Land in Australia, landscape is not just a sign system that serves the purpose of passing on information about the ancestral past, but it is a referent integral to the message.

<sup>23</sup> Assmann sees landscapes as disembodied forms of cultural memory, which is preserved because it does not depend on individual memory – but its reproduction depends on the wider framework of participants through which it is handed down to the posterior generations. He also used the concept of mnemotopes, which are cognitive maps as networks of places, which form a grid to which the collective memories are attached (Assmann 2011).

“floating gap” between generational memory (referring to the closer past) and formal memory (referring to the remote absolute past, the period of origin). In short, the floating gap refers to the limitations of oral tradition for the reconstruction of historical events (Vansina 1985). This issue – the possible historical value of oral tradition – is of obvious relevance for the Caribbean context (see the earlier discussion by Price 1983).

The floating gap might be less important in religious experience or cultural expressions for which the exact date is of less importance than the message that is conveyed. To illustrate this idea in a Caribbean context: the memories of resistance to slavery can be activated when engaging with places and landscapes related to this part of people’s history and can also be enacted later in rituals for spiritual or physical health, obviously without regard for exact chronology. In addition, there may be more temporalities involved, which may become manifest in the various cultural interactions of communities with their landscapes.

Assmann’s division between communicative or generational and formal or cultural memory may become blurred in healing practices in another way as well. To illustrate this: Hill and Wright (1988, p. 79) explain that the Wakuenai in Northwest Amazonia (an oral society according to Assmann’s definition) integrated historical events into narratives about the time of origin, while also weaving events from that primordial time into the historical past.<sup>24</sup> An example of the integration of historical events into narratives of the time of origin is the reference to the white man who is said to have also emerged from the rapids of the Hipana river, the place of origin of the Wakuenai (Hill & Wright 1998, p. 91-92).<sup>25</sup>

This brings us to the consideration of the participatory structure of botanical knowledge and healing knowledge transfer in the Caribbean. More specifically, Halbwachs (1992 [1952]) argued that an individual cannot remember without the recourse of group thought. His view on memory as being socially conditioned, in accordance with an individual’s involvement in a variety of social groups, led him to conclude that forgetting was caused by the disappearance of the old social frameworks. Bastide (2011 [1978]) argued that by following Halbwach’s ideas literally we would not be able to explain the survival of African religions in Brazil where the Transatlantic Slave Trade has destroyed this transmission structure. The process of continuity, according to Bastide, relies on the (religious) structure of the groups rather than on the groups per se. In this sense, he supports Mintz’s argument of a shared grammar of African heritage (see Mintz 1992 [1976]). Bastide suggested further that the collective memory does not come into play unless the ancestral institutions have been preserved, which is why survivals of African religions have maintained themselves infinitely more vigorously in towns than in the countryside (Bastide 2011). In the countryside, religions would be learned during the process of initiations, through the inheritance of images from an older generation, or in conversations with a few devotees. If these conditions would not be there, the totality of the liturgical order would disappear. In contrast, Bastide believes that in cities the old structure could easily find many of its actors so that memories could be reconstituted almost in full (Bastide 2011). When assessing African heritage in rural areas the mobility of individuals especially in the period after emancipation should also be considered.

One of the institutions that were crucial for the transfer of the medicinal cultures in the Caribbean context was that of the brotherhoods (fraternities). These were organizations that had an important role in attending to the sick, providing funeral services, and dealing with the inheritance of members of the brotherhood throughout the colonial period in the Dominican Republic and Cuba (see Deive 1988, chapter

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<sup>24</sup> First was the time when no spatial distances had come into being and when beings were still undifferentiated from each other. The spatial distances between places as well as the places themselves were created later by journeys of primordial creators. Today narratives about earlier and later primordial time are also related to places and spatial movements, which are used as metaphors to re-enact past times (Hill & Wright 1988: 87).

<sup>25</sup> For more detailed descriptions of the coexistence of multiple timescapes see Halbmayer (2009) for the Carib speaking Yukpas and Overing (2004) for the Piaroa.

5). Besides the brotherhoods, there are clearly more actors who could pass down their knowledge of healing practices and the underlying religious worldviews onto the next generations. Therefore the whole participatory structure in the transfer of knowledge and ideas about healing landscapes is to be examined.

The distinction between communicative and cultural memory has guided Assmann to examine differences in their respective forms of transmission. Generally, communicative memory should be less formalized as to its register and be passed down by non-specialists. In contrast, cultural memory if it is to be carried on has to be formalized, institutionalized and transmitted by an expert, such as the *griots* in West Africa (Assmann 2011). Ethnographic works, however, show that these patterns (derived from the analysis of cases in Ancient Egypt) are not universal across all contexts. The degrees of institutionalization, formality and uniformity may differ as well. Macuil (2017) has described the central role of the *tlamatque*, “wise persons” (fiscals, mayordomos, grandfathers/mothers, and healers), as important indigenous agents in the transfer of worldview and knowledge through oral traditions and ritual practices, which express the collective memory in Nahua communities (Mexico).

In a similar vein, we find that healing activities and related knowledge in the Caribbean context often is in the domain of both specialists and non-specialists. Specialists such as healers, herbalists or midwives, but also the public at large have a general knowledge of medicinal properties of certain plants and their religious symbolism. Next to healers, herbalists and therapists (*sobadores*), many other agents such as storytellers, poets (*decimeros*), and agriculturalists express by different means their particular views of the healing qualities of the Cuban and Dominican landscapes. All these various agents pass down meanings, values and behavioral norms that are associated with the healing landscapes and play a role in the general process of enculturation. The traditional healers often possess a type of more specialized knowledge that is learned according to the specific prescriptions of the professed religion, and these are to be situated within the broader cultural landscape symbolism, which might also be evoked during other tasks, for example agricultural activities. Memories of religious significance of the environment are not only meaningful for the patients and healers but also for a broader public in a specific time such as time of patronal celebrations. The broad participatory structure that assures the continuity of diverse medical cultures until today often involves oral means and healing rituals that position themselves on a continuum of variance and invariance.

Based on Assmann (2011) the basic premise is that traditional healing practices have survived until today – although always in a process of improvisation and change – because the previous generations considered them to be meaningful and wished to transmit them as a particular message and valuable knowledge for their descendants. Obviously, there can be tensions between what is considered to be meaningful by people and its institutionalization. The fourth chapter mentions and analyses some discrepancies in the institutionalization of medicinal cultures and their underlying religious systems in a colonial context.

Clearly, the construction of meaning of landscapes does not occur in a socio-political vacuum. The cultural hegemony is an important factor in the continuity of knowledge and worldviews that are being passed down, and may also subsequently affect the character of healing landscapes. When speaking about the memory of specific population groups one of the questions that arises is: whose memory is being remembered and why. The transfer of the knowledge is interweaved with power, or one’s ability to “*define what constitutes information.... control of this socially-constructed information, and the symbolic mobilization of support*” (Russo 2008, p. 51). Consequently, the continuity of (some aspects of) cultural memory may be limited or restrained due to oppressive power structures.

This institutionalization of the cultural memory may be part of the general process of enculturation, or, in Ingold's words, education of attention through, for example, an initiation ritual.<sup>26</sup> Rituals can indeed be considered a specific form of the education of attention. Rappaport defined ritual as "*the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers*" (1999). The fact that performers of a ritual have not themselves encoded all the acts and utterances that constitute their performances begs to clarify its origins. Just like Rappaport (1999) suggests for the case of religious rituals, healing rituals too are rarely considered to be calculated and deliberate inventions. There must be some degree of social consensus on the correctness of the ritual because otherwise it might seem a charade. As in the case of religious rituals, the healing rituals, though often including many new elements, are largely composed of elements taken from older rituals. This produces an internal stratification of the cultural practice in accordance with the complex and layered cultural history (see Chapter 5).

Its relative invariance is precisely the reason for the continuity of certain rituals over long periods of time. The religious rituals are given frequently as examples of practices that involve the most invariant and the most repetitive features. However, even within the most invariant of liturgical orders there is an unavoidable variation between performers at different moments in time (producing the self-referential messages of ritual). The adherence to a specific form, defined by a clearly distinct stylization, repetitive punctual behaviour and a performance in a specific (often liminal) time and place; all these elements contribute to the fixation of the message in collective memory.

Returning to the basic premise of transfer of cultural memory, identified by Assmann (2011) as meaningfulness, Rappaport (1999) argued the main function of ritual is not its physical efficacy: it does not achieve goals through principles of physical causality, but it does so through what he terms occult efficacy, which is founded upon emotions and words. Rappaport continues by stating that efficacious rituals are a sub-class of a larger class of ritual, which is itself one of many modes of communication. Therefore, an efficacious ritual is the one that achieves its effects through the communication of meaning; the efficacy being meaningful rather than physical. One might expect that this aspect will not be essentially different in the case of healing rituals, although a direct physical impact (more than placebo) is likely to be connected to a higher order of meanings as described by Rappaport. Our analysis will, therefore, consider the healing rituals as a form of communication but also as having physical efficacy.

According to Rappaport (1999), there are two broad classes of messages that are communicated. First there is the canonical message, which is not encoded by the participants themselves but is encoded in the liturgy and tends to be positioned on the continuum towards invariance. The second aspect is the self-referential message, concerning the participant's physical, psychic, or social status, which is of a specific nature at each specific occurrence of the ritual and therefore is likely to vary over time.

Since rituals represent a social contract of humans among themselves (as the construction of a community) and a covenant between humans and the forces of the cosmos, we must consider how a healing ritual can order healers/patients' experience of the world and how it positions the participants in time and space. As such we will assess also healing practices that engage with the cultural memory of the indigenous

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<sup>26</sup> According to theories on cultural learning meanings are transmitted through a process of socialization within a specific cultural context and via individual experiential learning. In a sense, Ingold applied the latter idea to the environment in his description of the process of dwelling, active engagement with the environment in combination with education of attention. Like Ingold (2013) proposes later in his short reaction to Barrett's work: "*...religious experience does not lie in the perception of a ready-made world, nor does religious practice lie in mastering the skills for engaging with its constituents. It lies rather in the perception of a world that is itself continually coming into being both around and along with the perceiver him-or herself.*" And he reminds us that the word education literally means in French: "*to wait*", and even in English "*to attend to things or persons carries connotations of looking after them, doing their bidding and following what they do.*"... "*So than animism is about attending to other beings, in perception and action, as they attend to you-or, in a word, about corresponding with them...* As with animism in particular so religion in general, I would argue, is about neither belief nor direct perception but mutual attention or correspondence. As the philosopher Michel Serres (1995, p.48) puts it, *the opposite of religion is not atheism or lack of belief but negligence*" (Ingold 2013, pp. 157-158).

past, which is expressed through narratives and rituals at specific places where the indigenous spirits are invoked and participate in the healing process.

To situate this within a broader overview of the healing landscapes (where healing is only a particular way to engage with the past), it is of foremost importance to concede that many worldviews regard the whole environment as a divine creation, which humankind and other beings are part of. Sacredness and numinous agency are therefore qualities that may permeate and manifest themselves in specific places (Santos Granero 2004, p. 102; Santos-Granero 1998; Viveiros de Castro 2002).<sup>27</sup> Different perceptions of temporal aspects within the landscapes (events in sacred or secular history) may motivate the selection of a specific landscape feature for its innate power to heal.

### **Healing Landscapes**

Like landscape, healing (which, in turn, implies a concept of health) is a cultural construct to be understood within a particular historical context and trajectory in the region of study. The following wider theoretical and empirical horizon of the relation between healing and landscape will provide some background for further data analysis of the knowledge and ideas concerning this matter that are present in Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

In general, the concept of health in indigenous communities in the Americas is not restricted to the physical corporal wellbeing but includes a psychic or mental component that implies the need for a harmonious, and respectful dwelling in the world, which has both visible and invisible dimensions. As such, the concepts of illness are closely related to a broader medicinal culture, which is often intimately connected to religion and worldview.<sup>28</sup> The history of studies on the religious experiences of landscapes has been marked by various misconceptions, biases and stereotypes, and this is particularly true in the case of the cultures historically related to the Caribbean. As Perrin (2011) showed, the efficacy of the Wayúú traditional healing practices is until now ridiculed rather than systemically studied.<sup>29</sup> Similar tendencies have been observed in past reflections upon Cuban and Dominican religious beliefs of historically marginalized groups (see Chapter 3), and are still very influential in the present (see e.g. Taylor & Case 2013; Tejada Ortiz 2013).

In contrast, since the ecological turn in the humanities, the therapeutic function of the landscape returns again to the “Western academic field”. Previously to this turn, perhaps the longest and the most widespread practices and beliefs in the salutary effects of the environment in Europe are those pivoting on curative waters (balneotherapy) or sacred sites of religious pilgrimages. Cultural geographer Gesler (1992, p. 735-6) introduced the concept ‘therapeutic landscape’ into the academic literature as a “*landscape associated*

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<sup>27</sup> According to Taçon (2010), certain landscape features are more likely to be sacred because they are able to elicit feelings in people such as awe, power, beauty, respect and enrichment. In general, these feelings are supposed to occur in response to four types of places. Firstly, it should be places “*where the result of great acts of natural transformation can best be seen, such as mountain ranges, volcanoes, steep valleys or gorges.*” In addition, it includes “*...points of relatively abrupt transition in geology, hydrology, vegetation, or some combination of these*” or “*unusual elements such as peak, cave or hole in the ground that one comes upon suddenly*”. At last, the same impact should have vantage points with “*dramatic views*” (2012, p. 37). Similarly, Tomkins (as cited in Moyes, 2012) confirms that mountain peaks, rivers, monuments, tombs, and caves are often liminal spaces that help to create the sense of distance or otherness that is necessary to distinguish ritual time and space from everyday life activities. However, both approaches are quite ocular-centric. In addition, there might be also other landscapes features like trees, plants, stones, winds, the sun, the rain, which might be conceived as sacred and therefore are also engaged with when seeking recovery.

<sup>28</sup> Following Taylor and Case (2013) the term ‘religion’ is applied to all religious beliefs dealt with in the following chapters. This concerns both institutionally acknowledged and not recognized religious beliefs.

<sup>29</sup> This is illustrated by what Pineda Giraldo (1950, pp. 57-58) wrote about the Wayúú perception of disease: “*All that relates to the surroundings of primitive people: rocks, plants, animals, natural phenomena..., are active beings in the best sense of the word, capable of intervention and worthy of the Indian’s respect, fear, or admiration. The primitive has not at this stage reached the discernment necessary to establish the logical relation between phenomena and their real causes, but establishes a magic relationship that in the majority of causes does not correspond to any concrete or objective reality.*”

*with treatment or healing*”. In his later publications he refined this definition to describe various places that have a long-standing reputation for healing, promoting physical (in the sense of biomedical), mental (psychological), and spiritual healing (inner renewal and wellbeing), such as Epidauros in Greece (a sanctuary of Asclepius, the god of healing), the Spring at Lourdes in France, and the hot springs of Bath in England (Gesler 1993, 1996, 1998). Next to the role of faith and its power to heal, Gesler also argued that some material aspects of these places are conducive to health, for example, as they invite you to remove yourself from daily stress, and that such places lead to psychological renewal by providing a sense of belonging to a community and place. The sense of belonging is considered in social psychology as a fundamental human need, a powerful factor that influences people's health (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Walton & Cohen 2011).

The definition of therapeutic landscapes has been further extended to include places, settings, situations, locales, and milieus that encompass both the physical and psychological environments associated with healing treatments, and the maintenance of wellbeing (Williams 1998). Following Gesler, Palka (1999) suggested, on the basis of surveys of visitors to Denali National Park in Alaska, that here the therapeutic quality of the landscape was the historical link to the spirituality of the indigenous peoples of Alaska: the awareness of this link provided a sense of place, a social interaction between the visitors, an escape to a relaxing and aesthetically pleasing environment, remoteness, and the perception of an authentic setting, which all contributed to a belief in and experience of the park's healing powers.

Wilson (2003) assessed the existence of a therapeutic landscape among First Nations in Canada, arguing that the concept of health of the Odawa and Ojibway peoples has to be examined within the context of their cosmology, which sees Mother Earth as a provider of all things necessary to sustain life and as an essential force for maintaining or restoring health. Such cosmologies imply the need for a balance of reciprocal relationships between humans and earth (referring to earth's overall importance for health, not just to the effects of a specific place).

In a similar vein, Russo (2008), examining healing landscape from a historical perspective among the indigenous peoples of Pacific Northwest Coast of United States of America, has emphasized the relational concept of health and landscape. In the category of healing landscape Russo included places associated with religious rituals such as those carried out for spiritual renewal or reinforcement. Healing landscapes may be sacred natural places where one may communicate with the spirits (e.g. the guardian spirits associated with animals), but also historical places. The latter are considered able to cure long-term negative impacts on health and wellbeing (for example those that resulted from the loss of sacred sites) through their ability to reaffirm the connection between history and place.

Seeking recognition of indigenous worldviews, Russo (2008) compared the roles of landscape in Western worldmaking and indigenous peoples' concepts. According to him, the latter considered space as an extended emplacement, being empowered, and relational to the self, which is spatialized, divided, and embedded within the landscape. According to his analysis, the Western conventional making of space is more site-localized and neutral, while people's relation to it has disembodied the personal identity and made it rather autonomous from space. The latter account refers to a Western atheist perspective of a person living in a capitalist system. The fourth chapter will argue that this perspective differs from the Spanish religious view of landscape wherein such a nature / culture dichotomy was not present; instead, the Christian idea of the environment as divine creation was somewhat comparable to indigenous concepts, which may have facilitated the process of transculturation concerning this subject matter.

When trying to understand how the healthy self is embedded in place among one of the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Pacific Coast, O' Brien (2013) argues that to be healthy among Coastal Salish is

tied to place through particular resources, through a sense of ancestral connection to particular place, and through personal relationships with the spirit powers that emerge from and are tied to natural landscape. According to that study, the Coastal Salish view healing as restoring wholeness to a person by means of maintaining or re-establishing a balanced reciprocal relation with spiritual, ecological communities in the landscape (nature).

The previously mentioned spiritual link between landscape and health in the cosmology of the Coastal Salish seems to be related to a general awareness of interconnectivity and interdependence of humans and natural resources, which are translated into ritual practices involving crops, animals, and places that are of key importance for the community. This can also be interpreted as respectful treatment of the environment, including animals, plants, and places, which all are considered powerful beings of their own or the abode of such forces, and as such are crucial in maintaining the health of the community. The character of this relation is fundamentally social, which usually is explained by narratives about the shared natural origin of humans and landscape features.

The relational character of health and the surrounding landscape has also been noted among several indigenous peoples of Venezuela. Here, Freire (2011) suggested that health is not just the presence or absence of illness, but a condition that results from relations that a person establishes with the social group and with the physical and symbolic environment. Etiologies as soul loss or penetration of a pathogenic object into the patient's body seem to be triggered by other beings living in the landscapes (see Perrin 2011 for the Wayúu; Wilbert & Ayala 2011 for the E'ñepa; Villalón & Corradini 2011 for the Warao).

In the Amazonian context we find that this relation is often based on the original state of the common condition of humanity. Viveiros de Castro (1998) argued that animal species, which have a key symbolic and practical role, have their spirit masters and are treated as ex-humans in Amazonian Indigenous religious history (for critiques see Halbmayer 2012 and Rival 2012). Some scholars qualify the relationship between humans and other beings in the landscape in terms of predation and reciprocity. Viveiros De Castro (1998), for example, has emphasized the predatory character of this relationship: certain animals are inedible or require their desubjectivization by ritual means before they can be consumed, a ritual that, if omitted, can lead to an illness. However, while indeed many illnesses are considered to have been caused by a spiritual attack, it is not convincing to characterize the whole relationship of humans with the healing landscape as one of a predatory character.

In contrast, Descola (1996) argued that there exist two main variants of Amazonian animistic belief: one centered around predation, as in the worldview of the Jívaro, and another focusing on reciprocity, as in the worldview of the Tukano people. More specifically, Århem (1996) suggested that in the case of the Jívaro the predation is to be understood also as a process of procreation, in which people can be hunted by creator gods, divinities, jaguars, anacondas, and other spirits. Consumption of human souls allows the souls of humans to return to their birth house. In this eco-cosmology, the animals live and behave like people and are linked to humans by acts of reciprocity, concretely by exchanging spiritual aliments (e.g. coca, tobacco, and incense from wax) with the animal owners who allot animals and fish to the humans.<sup>30</sup> Similarly to Viveiros de Castro's observations, Århem's account shows the Jívaros' conviction that aliments, fruits, cultivated plants and animals share the forces generated during the time of creation, which are necessary for continuous recreation and must be "blessed", i.e. transformed from being harmful and causing illness to being vitalizing factors. By blessing them, the spiritual specialist helps the souls of these to return to their birth house and enables their rebirth by neutralizing the weapons that the unblessed foods contain. Illness

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<sup>30</sup> Ecocosmología is defined as "*un modelo cosmológico que estipula una estrecha relación de continuidad y contigüidad entre lo social y lo natural*" (Århem 2001, pp. 270- 271).

is seen as a temporary soul loss, which in the majority of cases comes from improper and unblessed food. This can be cured by “sucking out the weapons,” i.e. removing entangled objects like spines, and splinters from the patients’ bodies (Århem 1996, p. 196). Disease is also often seen as a result of neglect to offer the spiritual aliment to the animal owners, which, therefore, capture human souls and take them away to the rivers and hills, causing the illness or death of humans. Not only the gods and the animal spirits, but also malevolent necromancers have the capacity to slay humans with sickness.

Århem’s interpretation of the Makuna people’s theory of disease (which emphasizes the relatedness of humans with other beings), expands the notion of health beyond the individual or natural to include a social whole of which the patients are a component (Århem 1996). In other words, by conceptualizing the world as consisting of different living beings, which are interconnected and interdependent, the Makuna link the illness to environmental abuse, and cosmologic mismanagement. In spite of the diversity of modes of nature-human relatedness, this link is, according to Århem, characteristic for the whole Amazonian region. The illness has been considered as a consequence of nature’s revenge also among other indigenous peoples worldwide, and should be understood as a cultural codification of ecological insights emerging from the long intimate interaction with the environment (Århem 1996). This approach offers a glimpse into an experience of the landscape not just as a setting or backdrop of healing activities but as an active agent in recovery or curing. Similar observations have been registered in the Circum-Caribbean and West African contexts.

### **Glimpses into the relation of health and landscape on the South American mainland**

There is consensus that the pre-colonial inhabitants of the Caribbean islands had strong cultural and linguistic links with the South American mainland (e.g. Rouse 1992; Boomert 2000; Wilson 2007; Keegan et al. 2013; Keegan & Hofman 2017). Therefore it is worthwhile to have a closer look at the way healing landscapes are conceived by contemporary indigenous peoples in that vast region. The Wapishana, for example, consider that the landscape – especially places like big lakes, certain mountains, areas with rock engravings, rocky outcrops and some mineral springs – is populated by spirit beings and keepers that should not be disturbed (David et al. 2006, p. 37).<sup>31</sup> The visit to such an area is possible only when taking ritual precautions in order to not offend the spirits of the place (see also Gomez 2017, p. 201). In addition, each species or family of animals and plants has its own spirit “grandfather” or “keeper” which watches over it and can bring illness or misfortune if it is wasted or abused. Among the grandfathers of animals who are dangerous for health are the grandfathers of aquatic anteaters, anacondas, and boa constrictors.<sup>32</sup> This cosmology is reflected not only in the healing practices but also in other customs such as asking permission from the spirit keeper of the tree or plant before trees are felled, or medicinal and charm plants are collected.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, fishermen are cautious not to provoke the spirit keeper of the fish as well as other water spirits.

The *marunao* (“shaman”) can cure the spirit-related illnesses (brought on by a violation of ritual prescriptions or customary law) through the communication with the grandfather spirits of the savannah,

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<sup>31</sup> In their study of indigenous hunting patterns across the landscape, the authors not only took into account the biophysical aspect but also some spiritual factors; they identified more than sixty spiritual places including streams, ponds, rivers, rocks and mountains, which usually have guardians and associated narratives.

<sup>32</sup> A variety of beings dwells in the dangerous parts of the river such as land camouidi, anaconda, boa constrictor, aquatic anteaters, tiger-like and giant-like beings. More specifically, aquatic anteaters are able to capture and drown swimmers while anacondas and land camouidis appearing in a dream may cause harm that is felt during the day.

<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the Jívaros ensure the successful growth of plants through ritual chanting to the Mother of plants and her sons. Simultaneously, these protect humans and in particular children from the danger that comes from the cultivated plants such as yucca (Århem 1996).

bush and mountains (David et al. 2006, p. 37).<sup>34</sup> The traditional remedies for illnesses caused by spiritual entities have different remedies, which may consist of the application of plants, blowing, massages, bathing in ritually prepared water, incense for ritual cleaning or more specialized methods such as blood-letting, soul retrieval, and extrusion (Henfrey 2002).<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, the Kaliña and Lokono teach us that everything that is on the planet has a soul and everything is interconnected (Kambel & De Jong 2006). All kinds of animals and plants, but also stones, creeks, and rivers, have protecting spirits, which have character and individuality just like human beings. If the balance between humans and nature is disturbed, or does not exist anymore as a result of misuse or overuse, there can be negative consequences, such as illness, accidents, and bad luck. The shamans, called *pyjai* by the Kaliña and *semechichi* by the Lokono, play an important role in maintaining this balance. They are the persons who are in contact with the spirit world and are able to find out through their protectors or allied spirits (*jakoewa's* in Kaliña) if someone has committed an error and ask forgiveness – also through the *jakoewa's* – for the misconduct. The balance also has to be maintained by following a social conduct that prevents misfortune and disease. This social norm includes all other human-like-beings and is expressed in customary laws with respect to hunting and gathering. These activities are also social interactions in which balanced relationships have to be maintained by collecting only what is needed, or by respecting hunting taboos.

There are many sacred and spiritual places in the Bajo Marowijne region where hunting and fishing is prohibited or can be entered only by *pyjai* (shaman). Among these places are different creeks, which are abodes of the king rooster, water spirits (*okojemmo*) or other invisible beings, as well as swamps and places where unusual sounds and events occur – some of these places have archeological remains. The hunting of certain animals should be avoided completely.<sup>36</sup> Some trees hold a spiritual and historical importance, and never should be cut.<sup>37</sup> The powers of trees and plants used by Arawakan speaking communities in healing rituals are not restricted to effects of their chemical composition on people's bodies but also proceed from an inner force (Van Andel 2013).

In Wayuu belief (Perrin 1987), health is the harmonious co-existence of body and soul. In normal circumstances, the soul only leaves the body in dreams, which may indicate the cause of harm. The immediate cause of sickness is an alteration or departure of the soul, whatever the symptoms, whatever the ultimate causes. Death is the permanent separation of the soul from the body. The healer can travel to another world to discover the causes of the diseases and calamities in the patient's life, and so cure the

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<sup>34</sup> While there are less and less specialized shamans who go through an extensive training, there are still prayer specialists present in many communities. Prayers specialists tend to specialize in specific types of traditional prayers, for curing and preventing specific illnesses, but they lack the knowledge to diagnose the source of the illness and to divine the future (Kambel and De Jong, 2013, p. 307).

<sup>35</sup> The blowing is an exhalation of air or tobacco smoke in the process of saying a prayer or chant. The blown water refers to the water that has undergone this ritual.

<sup>36</sup> This category includes, among others, the constrictor boas, marine turtles, sea cows, dolphins and nutrias (Kambel and De Jong 2006). Dolphin and sea cows also figure in the origin narratives. Before hunting, the hunter sprinkles some water and talks to the spirits so that they may remove all evil from his path and that he may have good fortune. It is customary to keep the environment clean and not disturb the invisible beings when one goes fishing. Other Kaliña and Lokono's customary laws prohibit the entrance of menstruating women to agricultural plots because this could offend spirits that could cause poor growth of the crops. Women in their period should avoid coming close to the river because this would enrage the water spirits (*okojemmo*) (Kambel and De Jong 2006).

<sup>37</sup> One of the trees that helps to remember historical events is the Aware tree (*Astrocaryum vulgare*), which represents the killing of indigenous peoples by runaway enslaved persons. The Kaliña and the Lokono agree that the following trees should never be cut: the Kankantie (*Ceiba pentandra* L.), the kwasini, the posenterie, the takini, the urewari. Takini and urewari have also an important role during healing sessions. Places with takini and kankantie are sacred, and can provoke sickness when not respected. It is also custom to make offers before hunting and when gardening. It is said, for example: 'You take a calabash with *beteri* (sweet cassava drink) (Kambel and de Jong 2006). Then you speak and pour it on the land to let your plants grow well and chase away spiritual obstacles'. Van Andel et al (2015) on the ritual use of plants among speakers of the Arawakan language family in Suriname and Guyana indicate the following species to be prominent: *Caladium bicolor*, *Maranta arundinacea*, *Eleutherine bulbosa*, *Zingiber zerumbet*, *Cladium schomburgkii*, *Capsicum annum*, *Cyperus articulatus*, *Hippeastrum puniceum*, *Xanthosma brasiliense*, *Abelmoschus moschatus*, *Caladim humboldtii*, *Lycopodiella cernua*, *Mimosa pudica*, *Montrichardia arborescens*, *Protium heptaphyllum*, and *Scoparia dulcis*.

sickness by reconstituting the soul or bringing it back to the patient's body. Diseases are the consequence of the souls being detained elsewhere. If the person passes away it means that his/her soul has travelled to the Jepira homeland of death souls. The entrance to this place is a small well at Cabo de la Vela, and/or the cavern Jorottuy Manna. Jorottuy Manna is the passage point of the deaths when going to the skyworld and at the same time the site of origin of the Sun (Kaí), the Moon (Kashi) and the Wayuu.

The Wayuu perception of sickness and death is well summarized in the following statement of Makaerü Jitnu: *"To each of us is attached a soul. It is like a bit of white cotton fluff. Like smoke. But no one can see it. Our soul leaves us only when we sleep or when we are sick, we have been pierced by the arrow of a wanülü... Everything that happens in our dreams is what happens to our soul...And yet it's our soul that makes us die. He who dreams that he is dead never wakes up again. His soul has left him forever. He is still alive, he who dreams that knife has been stuck in his chest, but his soul is already wounded. Sickness is there. Death is near. When a Guajiro is sick, it is as though his soul were a prisoner in Dream's abode. It's there that the spirits of the shaman can find it and bring it back to the sick man. But if he doesn't find it ...the Guajiro dies...But already his soul has gone to its homeland, over there, in Jepira, the land of the yolujas. When they die, the Guajiro became yolujas. They go to Jepira by Milky way...."* (Perrin 1987, pp. 8-7).

### **Health in West African landscapes**

For understanding the healing landscapes in the Caribbean it is also important to consider the influence of concepts introduced from Africa. A quick review of ceremonial landscapes in Nigeria, Ghana, Benin and Cameroon shows that they include natural shrines of deities, spirits, and ancestors, which live or are being materialized in physical landscape features such as groves, rivers, trees, rocks, etc. As subjects of ritual activities and social restrictions, these places or natural features are considered sacred. Their long-term protection has led to high environmental diversity in Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, and Togo (see for an overview Verschuuren et al. 2010; for Benin see Juthé – Beaulaton & Roussel 2006).

Sacred groves are prominent among the sacred places in West Africa. The most internationally famous example of a sacred landscape is probably sacred grove in Osogbo, Southern Nigeria, which has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. This sacred grove was probably founded four hundred years ago together with the city of Osogbo, the remains of which are still observable in the forest. Through the forest meanders the river Osun, the abode of the Yoruba deity of fertility Osun. Osun helps the Osogbo people with their physical and spiritual problems in exchange for their worship and respect of the deities' shrines. The waters of the Osun river have healing, divinatory, protective, and procreative powers. This example demonstrates that even when this sacred grove is mainly a domain of Osun, the grove surrounding the body of the deity is full of shrines dedicated to this same deity as well as to other Yoruba deities manifested in sacred trees, stones, metals, mud, animals and temples. All of these are active contributors to the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the Osogbo people. The Ifa Bush in the grove is a place for initiation of priests, known as *babalawos*, who are able to identify the causative agents of diseases. Furthermore, the grove contains shrines dedicated to other deities such as Sango, Oya, Esu, Obatala, Ogun, Ela, and Sopoona (NCMMA 2004).

In a related vein, the sacred grove Jaagbo, a dwelling of Twin Gods, in Northern Ghana is a place associated with fertility where people come to ask help from the deities when having problems conceiving babies, healing the sick and bringing rain. In Coastal Ghana a ceremonial landscape is inhabited by *Kusasi* beings, which are manifested as stones, rocks, large trees, ponds, and forests. These sacred forests are places

where ancestors are buried: therefore, their powers also reside there (Chouin 2002). The different spirits of the land are often fused with the spirits of the founding ancestors, and, according to anthropologists, provide the ultimate rationalization for establishing and maintaining reciprocal relations with the land (Chouin 2002). In other contexts, the spirits animating the soil or particular places might not even be considered to be direct ancestors, but just people that have been dwelling in these landscapes before the ancestors (Post et al. 2014). The ancestral worship in the Vodoun religion in Benin is not restricted to the known deified ancestors, but includes also *Toxosu*, the abnormally born, who become spirits of rivers and guard the entrance to the kingdom of death, and are ruled by the king of abnormally born children, as well as the group of *Damabala* or *Dambada Hwedo*, which encompasses powerful unknown ancestors who have entered loko and silk-cotton trees or mountains (Herskovits & Herskovits 1933).

Mathers (2003) suggests that in North Ghana sacred groves are associated with archaeological settlements such as the Asantemanso, the cradle of the Asanti nation. The grove itself has been used for rituals and burial practices since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (see Bosman 1967 [1705]; McCaskie 1990; both cited in Chouin 2002). Besides the sacred groves, there are several individual plants and trees that are considered to be sacred; each of them has a specific symbolism, which might be replicated in new Caribbean environments.<sup>38</sup>

In the Niger Delta, the Biseni and Osiana peoples perceive their lands and particularly their lakes as the sacred abode of the gods Esiribi and Adigbe (Anwana et al. 2010). Similarly, the Duala, Bakweri and Sawa peoples of Cameroon worship a *jengu* (pl. *miengu*), a water spirit similar to Mami Wata, a water deity honored in West, Central Southern Africa and African diaspora in Americas. The *miengu* are said to be beautiful, mermaid-like beings with long hair, who live in rivers and the sea and bring good fortune to those who worship them. The West African belief in this deity has crossed the Atlantic Ocean and has survived in Suriname, Guyana, the Lesser and Greater Antilles.

Likely the fact that African water deities and spirits have analogies in American environments facilitated a process of symbolic exchange, transculturation and synergy. Water symbolism – and more specifically the figure of a Master of the Water – is well-known in the Lowland South American cosmologies. Rivers are considered the abode of deities or spirits by peoples such as the Arawatés (Viveiros Castro & Howard 1992), Barima (see Gillin 1936), Makuna (Barandiarán 2012), Pemón, Trio, Warao, (Roe 1982; Hugh – Jones 1980), Wayapi (moyo anaconda: Campbell 1982, 1989), as well as Misak, Nasa and Sanemá (Rocha Vivas 2010).

In many cases the subterranean world has an aquatic connotation. The Araweté believe in Iwikahá, the Lord of rivers, who steals women and carries off the souls of children who live in their villages; Iwikahá also controls fish (Viveiros Castro 1992). Similarly, the Makuna venerate Water Anaconda, which is the Spirit Owner of an underwater *maloca* at Maneitara, the mythical birth place and waking-up-house of the Water People. The waking-up-house of the Water People is also the birth-and-dance house of the fish population that inhabits the river system, which defines the territory of the Water People. When death finally comes, the human soul separates from the body and travels to the spirits in the Sky World. Here, according to Makuna shamans, the gods cook and consume the dead person, thereby reconstituting the dead

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<sup>38</sup> Among the vegetal elements used in rituals in Benin are products that can be extracted from the sacred iroko tree (*Milicia excelsa*), the raffia palm (*Raphia sp.*), cola nuts (*Cola acuminata*), Guinea pepper (*Aframomum melegueta*), products used in offerings such as African palm oil (*Elaeis guineensis*), maize flour (*Zea mays*), cowpeas (*Vigna unguiculata*), and calabashes (*Lagenaria siceraria*, *L. breviflora* and *Crescentia cujete*). Gabonese plant products included: *Pterocarpus soyauxii*, *Garcinia kola*, *Aframomum giganteum*, *Aucoumea klaineana*, *Xylopia aethiopica*, *Tabernanthe iboga*, *Barteria fistulosa*, *Alchornea floribunda*, *A. melegueta*, *C. acuminata*, and *Lagenaria spp.* *A. klaineana*, *T. iboga*, *G. kola*, and *P. soyauxii*, *A. klaineana* and *T. iboga*. Ritual use in the Caribbean has been documented for the following of plants of African origin: *Newbouldia laevis*, *Kalanchoe integra*, *Lagenaria siceraria* (Molina), *Cyperus Rotundus*, *Sesamum radiatum*, *Pennisetum Purpureum*, *Cola acuminata*, *Aframomum melegueta*.

as a spirit person in the birth house of the clan. Reincarnation is evident because the deceased is reborn as a new person.

### **Previous approaches to healing in Cuban and Dominican landscapes**

It is important to acknowledge that for the Native American and African cultures mentioned here the cause of a disease is not necessarily limited to metaphysical agents; physical factors are generally also taken into account in both the explanation and the cure. Also, if the disease is explained in terms of the divine or spiritual agency this does not imply that its diagnosis or cure is not based on empirical evidence. For the Garifuna the concept of illness can be perfectly linked to the agency of the ancestors who feel neglected, the malevolent agency of another person, or the physical contact with a powerful entity represented in a place or object, while many illnesses are also agreed to have “natural causes” (Bianchi 1988). Yet, my attention has focused generally on the religious aspects of illness in order to examine the links with cultural memory and ritual landscapes.

Inspired by previous approaches, this study will examine relevant agents such as ancestral spirits, deities, and other powerful, normally invisible beings, which intervene in human health. These beings often reside in natural places or are manifested as natural entities. At the same time, this study will use the concept of healing landscapes to identify other natural entities that promote physical, mental, and spiritual healing.

Until now the studies of healing landscapes in the Cuban and Dominican contexts have focused on particular facets. Different authors have registered the medicinal use of flora properties (Roig Mesa 1974; Portorreal 2011; Germosén-Robineau 2005; Ososki 2004; Roersch 2016), clarified their religious symbolism (Bolívar Aróstegui et al. 1998; Quiroz-Moran 2009), or described healing practices (Brendbekken 1998), either in monographic fashion or as part of a general overview of Caribbean religions (e.g. Deive 1988; Tejeda Ortíz 2013; James Figarola 1989).

In healing practices, the religious and botanical knowledge are integrated, the ritual plants are collected at specific places with permission and blessings of the divine entities and later used in baths invoking others. One of the corollary aims of the study therefore is to provide a general overview of different religious associations of landscape features that exist in both study regions in order to define how some of these entities influence individual health.

Among the first Caribbean scholars who addressed the landscape symbolism and its relation to the health was the Cuban author Lydia Cabrera in her book *El Monte* (2009 [1981]). This title is loosely translated, not just as the “mountain”, but also as “uncultivated nature” (manigua – bush). For Afro-Cubans (Congo and Lucumí), “*el monte*” is sacred because it is the place where life originated, the locus of the foundation of the cosmos, providing all things needed for life, health and protection of the person (Cabrera 2009). *El Monte* is equivalent to the land, to earth, as the source of life and the universal mother. One of the contributors to her book compares *El Monte* to a church, “*full of saints and deceased people, we pray to them for everything we need, for our health and for our business*” (Cabrera 2009, p. 21). It is clear that in some Cuban religious practices trees and plants are animated beings, with intelligence and will as everything that grows under the sun, as all natural manifestations and existing things, and even those that are not the abode of a specific deity or saint have their grace (*aché*). As *El Monte* is the domain of all deities, souls of deaths, saints, and spirits, it is also a dangerous place where both benevolent and malevolent divinities reside in bushes and trees such as jagüeyes and ceibas.

Cabrera defined the cause of the illness according to Afro-Cuban religions as a minor divine punishment for forgetting, offending or failure to comply with a debt to one of the deities, or just their

whim.<sup>39</sup> As also pointed out by previously mentioned studies, disease can be caused by the attack of a spirit but trees and plants can help to defend against such an attack: the soul is then to be “*tied up*”. Illness can also be a work of “*some bilongo, uemba or morubba, wnaga or ndiambo, of a harm, iká or madyáfara, that is introduced to the body: and one must submit to the evidence that it is the result of the work of some hidden enemy*” (*ibidem*, p. 30). The etiologies and the remedies are based on the hierophanies and symbolism reflected in the environment. The consulted ritual specialist, in whose body a saint, orisha, or other spiritual entity, has incarnated – makes the diagnosis and suggests the remedy.<sup>40</sup> In spite of the occasional presence of biased vocabulary, due to the period of the creation of the book, *El Monte* brings us closer to the understanding of Cuban landscapes wherein seemingly inanimate beings (trees, stones, rocks) are filled with *aché*, and of the related worldview in which the divine beings may communicate with humans through their incarnation into human bodies or by influencing the outcome of divination.

Since Cabrera’s pioneering work multiple works studied different Cuban religious traditions, especially *Regla de Ocha* (e.g. Meighoo et al. 2013; Edmonds & Gonzalez 2010). Cuban and Dominican sacred places are important loci during annual celebrations of popular saints and orishas. Our Lady of Charity (patron of Oshún) is publicly honored with a pilgrimage by thousands of devotees. Similarly, great amounts of pilgrims gathers at El Rincón in Havana to pray to Babalú-Ayé/Saint Lazarus for their health and wellbeing. More detailed studies of particular religious traditions reveal also the symbolism and significance of various landscape features. From this broader perspective pilgrims making their petitions at sacred places as the sanctuary of the Virgen of Altagracia in Higüey or the Virgen of Mercy at Santo Cerro. By focusing only on the officially recognized sacred places we might leave out other important divine entities that are considered to have a powerful effect in the reconstruction of human health and wellbeing.

Also for devotees of *Palo Monte* (Bolívar Aróstegui et al. 2013) the surrounding environment is empowered by different invisible forces. To illustrate this rich symbolism, the Ngurunfinda, the Nature Spirit (in Regla de Ocha: Osain) brings wellbeing and prosperity. The Ngurunfinda can have various names depending on the place from where it proceeds: from *el Monte* (Simbi, or Yimbi), from rivers and lakes (mbuiri, Nkisi Masa, Mother of Water, Nkisi Mbumba), or from *manigua* (Nkisi Minseke), while the one that is the spirit that inhabits the boa is called Nkisi Mboma. This spirit is enclosed in a vessel of calabash, turtle shell, head of jutía, with other ingredients and buried this under the silk cotton tree (ceiba) for three weeks. The knowledge of environmental elements representing divine and spiritual forces returns in offerings, amulets, plants and animals that belong to specific divine beings and therefore are an inherent part of the religious life of the devotees and consequently important for their wellbeing.

Dodson (2008) mapped several spaces that are sacred for Palo Monte, Vudu, Spiritism and Muerterá Bembé de Sao in Oriente. Among the various sacred spaces registered were house temples including small ones that were destined for individual devotion as well as large settings for communal performance and reenactment of religious traditions. All these stimulate the communication and communion between devotees and divine / spiritual entities through ritual exchange. In addition, they serve to create meaning and memory, reminding participants of the traditions. Dodson furthermore notes that these sacred spaces include uncultivated environmental features (e.g. rocks, stones, seeds, trees) which represent the creative life force.

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<sup>39</sup> Similar to the Catholic beliefs that certain Saints can cure specific diseases (e.g. *Saint Lucia – eyes, San Bernardo – stomach, San Ramon – birth*), also some Afro-Cuban deities are associated with specific illness Babalú Ayé with smallpox, lepra, Changó of burns, Obatalá blind and *paralizes*, *Oshún and Yemayá of the illnesses relate to abdomen, and punish by the rain and humidity, and kill in the sweet and salty waters*.

<sup>40</sup>Orishas are intermediate beings, which were created by Olodumare, the supreme -being, the owner of all destinies (Edmonds and Gonzalez 2010). For more on the topic see Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert (1997).

These previous works raise more questions about the symbolism of the Dominican landscapes and their role in healing practices, and also about how these compare to and interact with the religious traditions of Cuba. In Dominican studies there have only been vague references to the spiritual relation with powers residing in the landscape. In *Talking to the Plant* (1998) Brendbekken briefly elaborates on the social life of the plants, their role in identity construction, and more specifically their “*curative, nutritive, esthetics and magical properties*”. In the testimonies she collected, it becomes clear that at least in Río Limpio (the site of her study) there are ideas about illness that are similar to those registered by the above-mentioned Cuban studies. Here we also find the distinction between illnesses caused by natural causes (including the disruption of the humoral equilibrium) and illnesses caused by a malevolent spirit that has entered the patient’s body. This spirit is then paid by a third person that later penetrates his head and body. These causes may also include social conflicts, divine punishments, and not behaving according to ascribed social norms. If the spirit takes control over the patient’s body involuntarily it can cause an illness. The spirit (*lwa*) can also enter the head of an initiated healer (“*caballo del misterio*”), who then may establish the diagnosis and the cure.<sup>41</sup> There are indications that some diseases are the results of the soul being “tied up”, but Brendbekken does not elaborate on this aspect.

In summary, this is the state of the art that was the point of departure for my dissertation research. Obviously the existing data set needed to be expanded. Therefore, I have carried out ethnographic fieldwork in the Dominican Republic and in Cuba: the results will be presented in Part II. In interpreting these data there is always the question how the ethnographic present is related to the pre-colonial and colonial past. This is particularly complex in the case of the Caribbean, a crucible of cultural influences from diverse continents. The limitations of the historical records make it very difficult to trace continuities, disjunctions and transformations. Furthermore, the colonial encounters implied a series of problems in intercultural communication, which need to be taken into account. In order to create an adequate context for discussing this matter, the rest of Part I will deal with the historical background of the present-day healing landscapes and their social context. First, chapter 3 will briefly review how the European conquistadors and colonizers of the Greater Antilles have interpreted the unknown lands and peoples of the “New World” according to their own cultural and religious framework.

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<sup>41</sup> *Lwas* or *misterios* are spiritual agents, which intermediate between Gran Dios (Bon Dieu) and the adherents of 21 Division. *Lwas* can incarnate in persons at certain occasions such as consultations for healing or celebrations of Patron Saints.

