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Indigenous ancestors and healing landscapes : cultural memory and intercultural communication in the Dominican Republic and Cuba

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CHAPTER 1. Rhizomes of Healing Landscapes

The research for this dissertation has been conducted within a broader project, ‘Nexus 1492’, which investigates the first interactions between the Old and the New World. Nexus 1492 focuses on the histories and legacies of the indigenous Caribbean across the historical divide introduced by European colonization and addresses the ensuing complex intercultural dynamics over the past five centuries (Hofman, Davies, Brandes & Willems 2012). This research has been funded by the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013)/ERC Synergy grant agreement no. 319209 (NEXUS1492: New World Encounters In A Globalizing World). Within the framework of that project, this study focuses on current healing practices in relation to intercultural dynamics, paying special attention to the indigenous legacy. Concretely, this research examines current Dominican and Cuban healing landscapes as expressions of cultural memory.

By combining data from ethnographic fieldwork and critical historical analysis, this thesis explores the perceptions about connections between people’s health and the surrounding natural environment. The main problem that informs this research is: how do healing landscapes encapsulate cultural memories of the indigenous past? In order to gather a better understanding of the contemporary healing landscapes this study offers first insights into how contemporary medicinal cultures have been historically constructed. Fieldwork was carried out in order to explore how community members relate some landscape features to the indigenous past and how these associations play a role in traditional healing practices. A further analysis of the historical and ethnographic data will help us to situate the concept of the healing landscape within current landscape theories.

This study builds on insights from previous studies, which have discussed the material and nonmaterial aspects of healing practices in order to sketch the contours of a rich environmental symbolism and the values displayed in healing rituals. Following studies that address healing practices from a holistic perspective, humans are seen as a part of landscapes together with different living and other-than-human beings, which are interconnected and relevant to people’s health and worldmaking. Within the context of healing practices, of particular interest is the human interaction with divine and ancestral beings residing or manifested in places, plants and natural features, with the aim to promote physical, mental, and spiritual healing. This interaction defines ‘healing landscapes’, an etic term which use to summarize some of emic concepts.

This study highlights the importance of local epistemologies, which help us to further nuance some of the contradictions and ambiguities in local medicinal histories. In doing so, it hopes to contribute to the understanding of landscape transformations in the Caribbean after the European conquest and to the deconstruction of representations of present-day Caribbean societies in terms of uprooted hybridity or impurity, and as being too fragmented (i.e. by colonization) to have any spiritual relation with the local landscape.¹

¹ Glissant (1997) counterpoises the relation and root identity the latter defined by a claim of legitimacy based on proclaimed entitlement to the possession of land, vision of distant past, and a myth of the creation of the world. In Glissant’s view the claim for the legitimacy of the land possession becomes the Caribbean context problematic. The root identity based on the thought of self and territory related to the myth of creation and remote past has been invalidated in the Caribbean through “*the massacre of the Indians, uprooting the sacred*” (Glissant 1997, p. 146). The colonization and the massive import of new population implied construction of a new relation as a rhizome land defined through relation with others, not as “*absolute ontological possession regarded as sacred but the complicity of relation*” (Glissant 1997, p. 147). Does not, however, the root identity follow too much the Eurocentric vision of nationhood and its relation to the territory? Instead, here the relation identity is conceived as an opportunity to think about how the manifestation of numinous and sacred has been perceived by various ancestors in newly occupied natural environments and changing societies of the Caribbean.

In contrast, current healing landscapes seem to be testimonies of how people recreated their relationships with the new environment according to their own worldviews and in relation to new socio-cultural contexts. One of the authors who have put forward interesting insights into how Caribbean communities constructed relations with newly inhabited landscapes was the Cuban ethnologist Lydia Cabrera. In her pioneering work *El Monte* (Cabrera 1954) she addressed some aspects of environmental symbolism within Cuban religions. Inspired by her approach, this study aims to further understand the importance of landscapes within healing rituals by integrating information about medicinal plant properties (Roig y Mesa 1974; Portorreal 2011, Germosén-Robineau 2005, Ososki 2004, Roersch 2016), their religious symbolisms (Bolívar Aróstegui et al. 1998; Quiroz-Moran 2009; Rodríguez Reyes 1998) and those of other landscapes features, within the context of Caribbean religions and healing practices (e.g. Deive 1988; Tejeda Ortiz 2013; Brendbekken 1998).

The concept of ‘cultural memory’ is applied here to investigate how people engage with the past through healing practices, and how these practices in turn are continuations and/or reinterpretations of past beliefs, knowledge and customs. One of the motives for approaching healing landscapes from a cultural memory perspective is that, current understanding of healing landscape is ultimately linked to the present-day conceptualization of the past, and its role in the present. According to local etiologies, illnesses may be caused and remediated by ancestors. Their role and identification of and with their heritage is enweaved in the broader socio-cultural transformations after the European invasion. The healing landscapes also convey historical and religious knowledge, which can be indicative of past landscape transformations.

Medicinal histories within the Caribbean are not to be separated from the construction of knowledge about the different Caribbean peoples and their past, a process that is based on archives formed through centuries of colonial power relations. Historically there has been great interest in Caribbean natural resources, including botanical knowledge, starting with the first written accounts of the Caribbean (for overview see Deive 2002). After brief approximations to Cuban medicinal history (Górdon y Acosta 1894; López Sánchez 1997), the understanding of contemporary healing practices requires more information about the contribution of non-institutional medical experts including those that were historically marginalized.

The Spanish historical sources about indigenous peoples, enslaved peoples, and free peoples of color are marked by beliefs of the authors concerning their own cultural and religious superiority. This bias has generated many instances of silencing historically marginalized peoples and of replacing their voices with stereotypical descriptions in conformity with the interests of dominant groups. This process of silencing the colonized peoples in history was not only instigated by the colonial authorities but may also have occurred as a particular form of resistance through perpetual concealment (Glissant 1996). Consequently, histories of healing practices of different population strata have been power-saturated.

This historical bias then became integrated into scholarly theories about cultural change, which influence the interpretation of existing medicinal cultures until today. Before embarking on our research, it is therefore imperative to examine a set of theoretical and methodological issues that emerge from this situation.

Colonial discourse and the question of cultural continuity

As the Caribbean has become an emblematic case of colonial enterprise, neocolonialism and anticolonial resistance, there has been a lot of reflection about its legacy of colonialism in the last decades. The persistence of colonial biased attitudes was addressed within the campaign to dignify Afro-Caribbean heritage. Since Fernando Ortiz, one of the pioneers in advocating acknowledgment of the importance of

enslaved peoples' heritage for the national identity, and his followers like Cabrera (1940, 1954) in Cuba, there have been many Caribbean scholars who have denounced the still persistent nexus of power and knowledge displayed in the studies of enslaved and indigenous peoples.²

Martinican author Aimé Césaire (1972 [1955]), one of the founders and most famous representatives of the *négritude* movement, denounced racism as one of the live legacies from the colonial period. Césaire condemned historians for refusing to acknowledge any merits of non-white races, and condemned psychologists and sociologists for their views on “primitivism”, their insistence on the marginal, separate character of non-whites, and their ethnocentric applications of the term ‘rational’. The recent French government policies emphasizing the country’s former colonial enterprise in a more positive light make clear that Césaire’s criticism is not just about the past, but also challenges present-day practices.³ Similarly, the authorization of the French state to use pesticides in Guadeloupe and Martinique while the same were prohibited in France and while authorities were aware of their detrimental effects on human and environmental health has been interpreted as a continuation of colonial legacies (Ferdinand 2017).

Césaire’s call for more attention to the language of “neutral” academic definitions, such as e.g. “colonial contact”, for its trivialization of the detrimental impact of colonialism was also followed by his students, for example Fanon. Fanon denounced that a researcher’s “objectivity” is often used as an excuse to not pay attention to the social realities of injustice, and so in fact hinders the understanding of the so-called “Black Problem” (2012 [1952]). This distancing of researchers from their “objects of study”, “the poor traditional other”, was also criticized by scholars like Fabian (1983). Fanon’s analysis suggests that the bias in the academic literature has impact on constructing public knowledge through educational formation. More particularly, he argued that stereotyping representations of black Martinicans in popular culture and in children’s textbooks as people without culture, history, and civilization has a strong alienating effect (Fanon 2006).

Various other authors have acknowledged the impact of ideologies in Dominican historiography that justified the conquest and enslavement of peoples from the island and of those kidnapped from West and Central Africa (Cassa 1999). Deive (2009) showed the dichotomies that marked the accounts of Dominican populations throughout the centuries in which the descriptions of peoples were politically manipulated: many of them exalted the kindness and warmth of Dominican people as inviting the foreign occupation, and others caricatured Hispaniola inhabitants in negative terms when resisting these occupations.

Although different historical trajectories have marked both countries of this study, their past and consequently their cultural memories are marked, among others, by domination and resistance. When addressing cultural memory in societies with a colonial past, one of its main defining traits is the influence of colonial discourse.⁴ In short, a discourse is seen as a way of representing different material and immaterial aspects of the world (Fairclough 2003). Though this discourse is fluid and changing over time, it is rooted in human practices and institutions. In this sense, historians, as well as other individuals, are part of the discursive process. Whether based on observation or imagined, the colonial discourse was formed in direct connection with the process of colonization in order to rationalize and justify colonial conditions, and as such it had a real impact on human lives, bodies, and on human interaction with

² For a brief overview of how the Afro-Cuban ancestors have been discussed in Cuban historiography see (Barcia Zequeira 2004).

³ For a critique of Césaire read Glissant’s *Caribbean Discourses* (1996).

⁴ Caribbean criticism of colonial discourse has developed in conjunction with modern ideas about discourse as such. Several European scholars, such as Foucault (1970 in Loomba 1997), Saussure (1960 in Loomba 1997), and Lacan (1967 in Fanon 1967) have questioned the Enlightenment’s assumption that individuals are the sole source of meaning; they rather consider language as a socially determined system. According to Foucault, all ideas are ordered by some medium that imposes a pattern that is called a discourse (Loomba 1997). This discourse is then modified by various rules that form a whole domain within which language is used.

landscapes. The 16th century European raids of the Lesser Antilles capturing people accused of cannibalism are only one illustrative example of how a biased image of people from foreign lands can have real impact on the lives of those people.

The persistence of colonial discourse in current research has been a concern of many Caribbean scholars. Edward Said's conceptualization of the colonized being constructed as different and Other, as well as Foucault's reminder that every regime of representation is a regime of power/knowledge, was very influential. Jamaican cultural theorist Stuart Hall has drawn attention to the difficulty of decolonizing the discourse while accepting its total hegemony.⁵ Hall (1992) addressed the problematic nature of decolonizing the mind. He shows that stereotyped notions from colonial times still persist in present-day sociological assumptions about the Third World through influential figures such as Marx or Weber.⁶ In his view, the discourse about the West was formed in relation to the "Indigenous others" during the colonization of the Caribbean, and in diverse transformed manifestations this discourse continues to inflict its image of self and other on social practices and relations. In contrast to Césaire's view of racism as a direct legacy of colonialism, Hall sees present-day discourses not so much as direct continuities of previous ones but rather as framed by the human tendency to create in-and-out groups. In accordance with Foucault, Hall sees knowledge about the past as never neutral, because it is shaped and exercised by structures of hegemony but he also acknowledges the limits of this hegemony. Hall highlights the importance of the interpretative processes, the ambiguity of the message being transmitted, and the agency of those decoding the discourse.

Power is encoded in knowledge not just from the top down but also from the bottom up. As Haitian historian Trouillot (1995) has emphasized, the construction of historical knowledge relies not just on academic texts but also on public contribution. While there are multiple views about past events, not all people have the same opportunity to voice their views, and scholars should make more of an effort to record marginalized voices in the production of histories. As Trouillot suggests, it is not the case that the subaltern cannot speak, but rather that they are not heard. While it is clear that history can be silenced in different stages of the production of knowledge and manipulated to serve the interests of a particular group in power, there are some undervalued sources of historical information, which should be critically assessed (Trouillot 1995). Simply put, the past is constructed from the present, and there are multiple ways in which the past is interpreted and can be significant for the present. At the same time, the broader societal interpretations of the historian's studies should be taken into account (Trouillot 1995).

The formal construction and public production of knowledge have been discussed often in opposition, as history and memory, but both can also be seen as different modes of remembering (Erl 2008). The first hypothesis of this study is that a more inclusive view of Dominican and Cuban medicinal history can be achieved when looking at the intersection of official historiography with the formal construction of knowledge and public production of knowledge. Consequently, present-day healing practices are formed by formal and informal ways of knowledge production. Within this context, we may investigate how the current healing practices can inform us about the medicinal past of these societies.

Healing is performed in a particular time and space, in which the past is reenacted in a more or less conscious way. Thus, healing can be performed at historical places in which ancestors are actively

⁵ Said (1978) also highlighted the dialectical relationship between texts and their social / historical context. Inspired by Gramsci's theory on the nexus between hegemony and knowledge, and by Foucault's concept of discourse, Said wrote one of the most influential books in colonial discourse studies: *Orientalism*. In this work, he shows how the colonial discourse was used to justify and maintain the exercise of power over *The Other*. One of his greatest contributions is to have revealed the strong bias in the representation of the colonized, as a consequence of colonial processes, and the influence of this bias and of the colonial process itself on the whole range of academic ideas about non-western cultures.

⁶Posterior works such as that of Marxist author Amin (1989) have analyzed contemporary Eurocentrism as a distortion, a justification of capitalism. As some of the critics of this work argued, Marxism is one of social theories that did not escape from the rigid models of evolutionary thinking also evident in Amin's discussion of communal and tributary civilizations.

commemorated and consulted concerning matters of health and wellbeing. Ancestral knowledge can also be transferred in a rather unconscious way, e.g. through bodily practices, or stored away in other forms of cultural memory formalized in collective origin narratives or communal celebrations. In practice, the distinction between collective and individual forms of remembering, and between formal and informal modes of knowledge transfer, is often difficult to make so that they merge into one common pool of knowledge.

As stated above, for centuries the production of historical knowledge has been part of a colonial power game, the legacy of which is still discernable in present-day processes of socialization. In accordance with this paradigm, the history textbooks of formal education transfer have selected pieces of information (top down) about the past, which may contrast with the contents of informal learning (bottom up, e.g. through oral traditions).⁷ This may yield various counterpoints of different modes or facets of social memory, which sometimes lead to an erasure of local epistemologies under the influence of colonial perspectives, and in other cases allow those local epistemologies to continue to exist in spite of the hegemony, though possibly fragmented by or embedded in intercultural dynamics and power relations.

That formally produced knowledge is inseparable from broader ideologies becomes clear when one looks at current interpretations of legacies. Several authors have discussed how historical and ideological bias is reflected in theories that explain cultural change, and how this bias keeps influencing later academic interpretations of the contribution that particular population groups have made to national heritage.

A number of authors such as García Arevalo (2008), Sued Badillo (2003), Vega (1981), and Ulloa Hung and Valcárcel Rojas (2016), have criticized the exclusive focus on the Indigenous, Hispanic or African contribution to the national heritage and to particular cultural practices in Dominican and Cuban history. The overemphasis on such a particular influence was not just driven by ideologies but also caused by methodological issues due to the scarcity of historical and ethnographic literature. Deive addressed this issue in the study of Afro-Dominican heritage, which is complicated by fragmentary historical records and the general lack of studies on the forms of enslavement, consequently obscuring the nature of cultural change (Deive in Vega 1981).⁸ Similarly, Ulloa Hung (2015) has addressed methodological issues in the study of material heritage of the African diaspora in the Dominican Republic. The scarcity of studies on material heritage, the focus on monumental heritage, the emphasis on acculturation instead of considering other models of cultural change such as transculturation or ethnogenesis seems to be driven by ideologies that deny the diversity and agency of enslaved peoples and further contribute to undervaluation of this heritage (Ulloa Hung 2015).

The ideological shifts have been related to methodological changes. Since the first pioneering works of Fernando Ortiz, the Cuban religions received a greater interest in and appreciation, and also their studies replaced earlier views that denigrated the practices of Regla de Ocha or Palo de Monte as mere “witchcraft” and “superstition”. An emic perspective became important, while the position of the investigator shifted from that of a distant observer to that of a participant. Investigators of the institute Casa del Caribe developed a tradition of full immersion by initiation and actively sharing the system of beliefs that one studied (personal communication with Raul Ruiz Miyares 2015; James 1999).

The concerns of scholars who focus on African legacies have been shared by authors who study the indigenous heritage of the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and the Caribbean in general. The Caribbean criticism receives support from different anticolonial studies on and by indigenous peoples all over the

⁷ For more on problematics of teaching about the precolonial history in the Caribbean see Con Aguilar’s upcoming dissertation as a part of the Nexus 1492 project.

⁸ Some of the factors were the adaptation to the new environment, the degree of control imposing by official policies on assimilation (urban, plantation, household context, day laborers, and refugees) and the contact with other cultures.

world (Pérez Jimenez 2015; Artist 2016; Tuhiway Smith 1999; May Castillo & Stecker 2017; Jansen & Perez 2017). The relevance of Caribbean critique is still obvious, especially in contexts in which a formal process of decolonization was not yet completed, has not even begun or where violations of human rights, discrimination, and even killings of indigenous peoples continue. Among the many recent cases we might mention the murder of Bertha Cáceres in Honduras, or the forced disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa, Mexico. Indigenous peoples' struggles against colonial legacies, climate change and neocolonial exploitation are connected to present-day social problems in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and other parts of the Caribbean.

The concerns voiced by Caribbean commentators about legacies of the colonial past in the present also resonate in other contexts marked by genocide, ethnic wars, injustice, institutional exploitation and discrimination. The decolonizing approach, as advocated by many Caribbean and indigenous scholars, is globally imperative in times of neocolonial forms of exploitation, in which the states are replaced as actors by multinationals, which create new dependencies in the so-called Third World.⁹ In both study regions colonialism is not a closed chapter of history. The colonial discourse is preserved in school textbooks, colonial hierarchies of class/race are reproduced and especially in the Dominican Republic these are apparent in the persistent social marginalization.

Like the history of enslaved peoples and otherwise historically marginalized groups, the history of indigenous peoples is charged with methodological and ideological problems. The study of histories and legacies of indigenous peoples is obscured by a profound demographic decline, and possibly by the process of transculturation. The violent European invasion, accompanied by the no less violent spiritual conquest, has resulted in a profound transformation and loss of indigenous worldmaking in the Dominican Republic and Cuba. In combination with the introduction of diseases, the conquest and enslavement have led to loss of lives, cultures, languages, and knowledge, including botanical science and medicinal skills.

Different studies have argued that current botanical knowledge and medicinal cultures in Cuba and the Dominican Republic originated from the worldviews and knowledge of indigenous peoples (Barreiro 2002; Estevez 2013; Beauvoir-Dominique 2008; Taíno Legacies Project; Ososki 2004; Portorreal 2011; Bisnauth 1989; Forte 2013).¹⁰ Other authors, such as Deive (1988), while acknowledging certain indigenous influences, suggest on the contrary that current Dominican popular medicine is largely of Iberian heritage. In contrast, recent studies have emphasized the importance of the West African botanical legacy in healing practices and concepts in the Americas (Voeks & Rashford 2013; Carney 2003; Van Andel et al. 2015). In general, the transformations of the conceptual landscape after the European conquest and the role of the indigenous medicinal cultures or worldviews in these transformations are poorly understood. More studies are needed to understand the complex intercultural dynamics of the construction of present-day healing landscapes (Vega 1981).

⁹ See also Jansen and Pérez Jiménez' recent critique (2017) of studies about but without indigenous peoples.

¹⁰ See also the website of the Taíno Legacies Project financed by Smithsonian Institute: <https://global.si.edu/success-stories/caribbean-indigenous-legacies-project-celebrating-ta%C3%ADno-culture>, see also Barreiro 2001, García Molina, Garrido Mazorra, Fariñas Gutierrez 2007). Different authors have argued that indigenous peoples have correlated their own belief systems with Catholicism (Mitchel 2006) and inserted their beliefs into the religion introduced by the colonizers. For example, Mitchel (2006) suggested that the Arawaks identified the Christian God the Father with their creator-god, Wamurreti-Kwonci, whom they otherwise knew as the benign Jochahuna. Jesus Christ could also be identified with Jochahuna, while the Virgin Mary was "confused" with Atabei [Atabex, Atabeira], a Goddess of Arawak belief (Bisnauth, 1989 in Mitchell, 2006: 12). Mitchell draws further parallels between the Holy Spirit and Hurakana, the role of *behiques* and Catholic priests, Kanaima and Santa, Heaven and Coyaba. However logical these parallels might seem, the author does not provide any further historical evidence to support his arguments. More studies have proposed that certain elements of contemporary beliefs have an indigenous origin. Beauvoir-Dominique (2008) identified *vévés*, *rara* feast, healing rituals such as the cleansing with chicken and bathing with tobacco smoke or the ritual use of corn, as indigenous spiritual heritage. Keegan and Carlson (2008) have searched some connection with the indigenous peoples in *opias* and *obeas* relating it to the current Jamaican belief in duppies living in ceibas and almond trees..

Although it is clear that the biography of Dominican and Cuban landscapes begins long before the Europeans invaded in the Caribbean, the role of the indigenous peoples according to general historiography seems to have ended rather quickly after the introduction of the *encomiendas* in the early colonial period. The idea of the indigenous peoples' rapid disappearance has profoundly marked theories of cultural change used in explaining the societal makeup of Cuba and the Dominican Republic. In contrast, this idea leads to severe inconsistencies in the argument of different authors who present contemporary medicinal cultures as indigenous legacy. From a historical perspective it is then necessary to assess how the healing landscapes may have been conceptualized after the conquest.

Forgetting Indigenous Peoples of the Greater Antilles

More than seventy years ago, Felipe Pichardo Moya criticized the widely accepted notion that Cuban indigenous peoples were practically exterminated in the first decades after the conquest. First because of the bias of colonial historians who wished to justify metropolitan control, and later due to the uncritical acceptance of the extinction of the indigenous population as part of a critique of the colonial regime in the context of constructing the national identity, many historical references to the presence of Cuban indigenous peoples after 1550s have been passed over in silence (Pichardo Moya 1945).

The rapid extinction of the indigenous peoples as portrayed in history books, was also later transferred into the theories of cultural change. The first models of the transformation of indigenous cultures in the region of study attributed a low degree of agency and cultural development to the original inhabitants. However, there is an increasing body of literature about (and evidence for) indigenous responses to the European conquest and colonization. The study of Valcárcel Rojas (2016) shows diverse modes in which indigenous peoples integrated into the new colonial context, which nuances the opposition of portraying the indigenous peoples as passive victims of genocide or exalting them as martyrs and rebels against the colonial regime. His results add to the complexity of the Cuban and Dominican ethnogenesis and are important in taking into account the models of cultural transformations after 1492.

Different concepts have been utilized to describe the transformations that occur when different cultures and peoples interact in colonial contexts: acculturation (Herskovits 1941, Malinowski 1963), assimilation, cultural crystallization (Foster 1960), bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1966), creolization (Brathwaite 1971), hybridity (Bhabha 1994), mestizaje (Freyre 1933), syncretism (Herskovits 1937) and transculturation (Ortiz 1994 [1947]). Here I will focus on the theory of transculturation of Fernando Ortiz, whose legacy is still influential in studies of history, society, culture and religion (Font et al. 2005). The concept of transculturation has been further developed in studies of cultural change (Restall 2005) and of transformation of indigenous cultures (Fariñas Gutiérrez 1995; Valcárcel Rojas 2012).

Ortiz proposed the term 'transculturation' in order to replace 'acculturation', as a way to describe the result of the extremely complex transformations of Cuban culture. In contrast to the concept of 'acculturation' that was popular in Ortiz's time, 'transculturation' was designed to describe mutual adaptations and influences going in different directions, not only from the dominant group to the subaltern. In this way, Ortiz reacted to a tendency in the research on acculturation, which assumed unidirectional cultural change, in which the dominant or "donor" culture (Europe) impacted indigenous cultures (a theory later also criticized by Foster 1960). Ortiz argued that the process of cultural transformations is more complex: it may include processes of acculturation but also involve deculturation (defined as the loss or uprooting of a previous culture), and the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, called

neoculturation (1994 [1947], p. 102). The latter term accentuates that a union of two cultures carries certain continuities from both these cultures but also leads to the creation of a new culture.

Even though Ortiz' initial work was considered to be heavily impacted by social Darwinism and a reductionist view of human development – and some of this discourse remained influential up to his last book (Ortiz 1975) – his *Cuban Counterpoint Tobacco and Sugar* has been read by cultural theorists as the first serious systematic attempt to grant more agency to non-Europeans in the process of cultural change and to understand Afro-Caribbean heritage (De Feo 2014). However, scarcity of studies on indigenous colonial history at the time when Ortiz wrote his Counterpoint has had a determining influence on how the theory of transculturation has been applied to Cuban indigenous peoples. For Ortiz, as far as the indigenous peoples are concerned, the transculturation failed in a biological and cultural sense. His idea of biological discontinuation was based on the lack of historical references for the period in question. The supposed biological discontinuity then became the point of departure for arguing cultural deculturation.

Ortiz' explanation of that "failure" seems to be guided, however, by his unilineal view of cultural development: "*First came the transculturation of the Paleolithic Indian to the Neolithic, and the disappearance of the latter because of his inability to adjust himself to the culture brought in by the Spaniards.*" The historical disappearance of Taíno was explained as the result of a clash of cultures in different stages of development, living in different historical times: "*Taínos in the stone age*" and "*Europeans in the Renaissance*" (Ortiz 1995, pp. 98-102).¹¹

Some authors have taken Ortiz's theory of transculturation to integrate the indigenous contributions (Morales Patiño & Pérez Acevedo 1945; García Castañeda 1949; Domínguez 1980). Following more up to date historical and archeological studies on the colonial history of the indigenous peoples of Cuba, Fariñas Gutiérrez (1995) showed that the indigenous presence in different locations was long-lasting, accompanied by integration into Catholic system (e.g. through baptism), or by resistance against this, as well as by material expressions of the transculturation. Fariñas Gutiérrez highlighted cases in which parallels could be drawn between different worldviews. To pinpoint the origin of these examples, like the appearances of the Virgin, in the Caribbean context remains challenging. As Mintz (1989) explained, to determine the origin of a particular cultural trait is problematic because there are at least three processes functioning at the same time: the internal forces within the particular culture (replacement, cultural loss, and invention), cultural change due to the contact between different cultures, and adaptations to the new natural and socio-cultural context.

In a culturally diverse region such as the Caribbean, there are many coincidences and directions that might influence the process of transculturation. This process is complicated by the presence of multiple ingredients, like in Cuban *ajiaco*, to follow Ortiz's metaphor, and of diverse factors that influence the sometimes parallel processes, which gave foundations to present-day Caribbean societies. The origins of the cultural forms that result from such a process of transculturation are especially difficult to discern if there is a lack of historical sources or studies on their antecedents.

The transfer of knowledge may be influenced by factors that can be culturally specific, one of which is our perception of time. Our perception of the nature of time motivates and determines how people interact

¹¹ The discourse about fixed stages of development has been prominent for years in the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology during the period in which Ortiz developed his theory of transculturation. In fact, this idea was at the root of anthropology, marked by an expectation of the inevitable extinction of the indigenous peoples, which according to evolutionist logic had to make space for Western civilization in the near future. This led to efforts to map the knowledge about these "dying races" in order to capture the relevant data of human development towards civilization. With these objectives Schoolcraft and Gallatin founded the American Ethnological Society in 1844. Similar ideas were adopted by evolutionists such as Morgan, who considered indigenous peoples to be examples of a pre-stadium on the way to the real (western) civilization. He built a unilineal classificatory system around the idea that technology is the engine driving human moral and intellectual progress. Conceiving history in terms of universal progress, he identified *The Others* as savages and as survivals of ancient states of development.

with the past and how the past presents itself today. The current understanding of healing landscapes and their historical background is thus linked to cultural practice and memory. The reflection upon the past may be made more or less explicit during healing performances by, for example, ritual commemoration of ancestors in sacred places. The past might be stored away in individual bodily memory such as in the dispositions of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990). People make and remake history and memory in their practices. Oral traditions, rituals, symbols and other representations are modes of handing down meanings from the past, which are reinterpreted according to the new sociocultural context. Healing practices conducted at ancestral places using ancestral botanical knowledge may inform us about historical continuity and change, but also about why it is considered important to remember, to engage with the history in this particular form.

The historical background of healing landscapes and their current character cannot be understood without the consideration of memory politics. Caribbean islands have been inhabited for thousands of years prior to European colonization. The indigenous voices may have been passed over in silence in the historical sources, but their imprints are still visible in the Caribbean landscapes. Enslaved people, freed people, and later Creoles when working the fields have encountered these imprints, materialized in artefacts and present in traditional notions of the spiritual importance of particular places.

Contemporary inhabitants are more or less consciously engaging with the past through dwelling in this landscape. Current healing practices may therefore be understood as an interaction with the surrounding material and immaterial world, as part of being-in-the-world, which is historically and spatially contingent. The study of healing landscapes in the region today holds crucial keys for understanding past landscape transformations (including material and conceptual change) after the European arrival, and vice versa: the study of the past contributes to an understanding (and appreciation) of heritage and identity in the present. Approaching the healing landscape as an expression of cultural memory permits us to learn from the engagement of present-day population with their history and with the heritage of peoples who were living in the Caribbean landscape before the European conquest.

Approaching Healing Landscapes

This research centers on the present-day character and historical background of healing landscapes in the Dominican Republic and Cuba. More specifically, the research questions interrogate the healing landscape from a memory perspective, in order to access their historical link with indigenous peoples. Specific questions are: How do healing landscapes encapsulate cultural memories of the indigenous past? How have contemporary medicinal cultures been historically constructed? Which landscape features are associated with the indigenous past, and how are these engaged during healing practices? How can interpretations of specific healing landscapes be situated within current landscape theories?

The first objective of this study is to identify contemporary healing landscapes in the Dominican Republic and Cuba, which until now have barely received scholarly attention. The concept of the healing landscape became immediately relevant during my first ethnographic encounter with the region. From the beginning of the fieldwork it became clear to me that the natural environment is not just a background or resource for herbal medicine, but often an agent and a constant referent in religious life, history and culture, which is consequently reflected in traditional healing practices. For devotees, healing is often a religious experience, embedded in a rich system of symbolism connected to their surrounding environment, which teaches them the knowledge and moral codes of the ancestors. The religious symbolism and multiple

meanings of the landscape are directly related to its centrality in the lifeways and subsistence activities of the people.

The term 'landscape' enables us to go beyond an ethnobotanical focus on medicinal plants and their applications, and to consider more broadly the general role of the environment in the process of healing. Such an approach follows the school of human geography studies on healing places (Gesler 1993) and anthropological studies from the South American context, by focusing on the articulation of the connection between health and landscape, which have also been addressed in West Africa. The 'landscape' concept also makes it possible to situate the healing landscape within broader studies that address landscapes as mnemonic tools (Bollig & Bubenzer 2009; Santos-Granero 1998, 2004).

This reading of landscape as a healing agent was particularly motivated by discrepancy between the assumption of uprooted identities and Cabrera's insights about rich landscape symbolism within Cuban religions. As such it contrasts the widespread assumption that inhabitants of Caribbean islands were too fragmented and uprooted to have any spiritual relationship with the local landscape. However, investigation concerning sacred landscapes on Caribbean islands is rather scarce (Cabrera 1954; Dodson 2008). When compared to the copious literature on the same topic in other parts of the Americas, where a strong continuity of indigenous languages and cultural traditions is evident, Caribbean sacred landscapes remains rather undescribed. In fact, there is little understanding of how newcomers in the Caribbean interpreted the landscape they encountered and how (or from where and from whom) they obtained their botanical knowledge.

The second objective of this study is to provide some new insights into the ongoing process of the historical construction of healing landscapes. This includes the need to summarize some of the available data on plant histories, etiologies and worldviews of historically marginalized groups.

As Caribbean landscapes are in an ongoing process of cultural transformation, the significance of some historical, religious and other types of symbolic places is still being reinterpreted within healing rituals. The process of engagement with the past can be reflected in, for example, the selection of locations for healing practices. The selection might be motivated by the presence of physical remains of traditional *lieux de mémoires*, which are often monumental human built structures, but also by cosmologies and etiological narratives about the origins of disease, which guide the patients to certain plants, trees and natural healing shrines.

Memories emerge in social frameworks, which are influenced by hegemonic structures. Even those memories that are perceived as very inner and individual experiences are constructed within a social and cultural context. This context often includes institutional directives as to what ought to be remembered, especially in the form of a national top-down education system. There are also limits to the hegemonic influences on memory. This study has collected a considerable amount of data on cultural memory that relies fundamentally on informal education, received through oral traditions, rituals, and healing practices. A broader knowledge of the epistemic communities provides more nuances to the grand narratives of Caribbean history.

The focus on the "memory of the indigenous past" will help us to further understand the effect of alienation mentioned by Fanon (1952). Without doubt, the armed conflict, the forced labor, the introduced diseases, together with processes of (institutionally directed) cultural change and loss, profoundly marked the current status of what ought to be the Caribbean indigenous heritage and the way people identify with this heritage. How this identification is contextual and is the subject of official identity politics will become clear in the historical overview. This will later be contrasted with fieldwork data about how the valorization

of this heritage is often displayed in current healing practices. Many people not only interact with ancestral places but also perceive indigenous ancestors as agents that influence human health and wellbeing.

Data collection and fieldwork methodology

This research started with an analysis of the colonial history of indigenous peoples, and their role in the medicinal histories of the region, consisting of a close reading, historical contextualization, and textual analysis of the main primary and secondary documents, which were used to better understand the medicinal cultures, as well as the cultural and religious transformation of the 16th century. Further research concerned documents relating to the history of the indigenous peoples in Hispaniola after the encomienda period. These texts were read “against the grain”, assessing the author’s motives, political agenda and intended meanings, and identifying agencies and internal contradictions in the texts. The sources on the Greater Antilles, in particular Cuba and the Dominican Republic, were complemented with historical and ethnographic accounts from the Lesser Antilles and from the Arawakan speaking communities on the South American mainland. The resulting insights were then incorporated into transculturation theory used to describe the cultural history of the region.

The main corpus of knowledge originates from ethnographic fieldwork, interactions with local experts and mentors in the field. The contributors to this study were approached by my guides, by the local authorities and by other contact persons, who introduced me as a student interested in the local customs and history. The settings of the interviews were the households of the contributors, patronal celebrations, certain sacred and ritual places or surroundings of their dwelling when e.g. collecting the plants. All information used in this dissertation was used with the contributors’ explicit consent after having been informed about the purpose of the study and their rights. The majority of them are local experts and carriers of oral traditions, historical and cultural knowledge of various ages (predominantly above 50 years old). Nearly all agreed with the use of their names or nicknames in this dissertation. In the cases of those who did not consent, or when I believed that the information they provided might reflect negatively on them, their names were not included.

The selection of the locations was consistent with the goals of the Nexus 1492 project with respect to the transformations of indigenous cultures after the colonial powers invaded their territories. Therefore, more attention was paid to locations where archeological or historical indications of cultural contact between the different cultural groups were available. The overview of places that were visited is displayed in figure 7 and 10. In total, I have spent twenty weeks in the Dominican Republic in the periods of January–February, August–October 2014 and June–August 2015, and eight weeks in Cuba in May 2014 and May–June 2015. This time discrepancy was due to the fact that the region studied in Cuba was smaller and the work-permit and logistic restrictions were more complicated in rural areas.

The data set was collected during my participation in different rituals, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions in different settings. The interviews were recorded, I kept a log with overviews on a daily basis and included photographic documentation.

Although no compensations were requested, a small present was offered and to those whom I visited repeatedly I brought some groceries. To my guides I paid a general salary since they spent the entire day with me, and I refunded their families for accommodations. In conformity with general customs, I often left “something for *misterios*” after the consultations with traditional healers.

After the fieldwork, all recordings were listened to again; the most important parts were transcribed, and coded with the program *Atlast.ti*. The interviews and recording from which I later used direct quotes in

this text are available through the Leiden University Depository and DANS.¹² The analysis of these interviews was based upon the constructivist version of grounded theory (Charmaz 2001) rooted in pragmatism and relativist epistemology, acknowledging that social realities are mutually constructed through interaction. The advantage of this method is that it draws upon the interviewee's concepts while acknowledging the investigator's influence. The data from these interviews were triangulated with my field notes. The final interpretation of the results was enriched by comments made by local researchers. Their insights were especially important for achieving a correct interpretation and representation of statements, given the aforementioned impact of colonial discourse in the social sciences and in society at large.

One of the influential factors in the collection and interpretation of the data is, as in other types of ethnographic studies, the researcher herself. Even though I tried to highlight the voices of the contributors as much as I could and to acknowledge their contribution by mentioning their names, some researcher bias will remain, reflecting my background as a 30 year old female, atheist, trained in linguistic and cultural studies, originating from the Czech Republic, living in the Netherlands with a partner of Mixtec-Dutch background, at the time of the migrant crises in Europe and rise of xenophobic and right wing sentiments. The different cultural background often helped in breaking the ice when initiating conversation, but without doubt it also led people to avoid discussion of certain customs because of some form of stigma, or to leave out aspects of the tradition that would be perceived as shared and well-known (e.g. the names and functions of Catholic Saints).

Vansina (1987) already emphasized the importance of involving local scholars when recording oral histories and studying the meaning of such texts, as these often include metaphors so that their significance goes beyond the vocabulary. Some interviews – especially those made at the beginning of the fieldwork – were not without intercultural communication problems, which are also clear in the transcripts, where some question had to be repeated or reformulated. Although these communication differences were not considered a severe obstacle to the transfer of the message, my limited linguistic skills (confronted with a different vocabulary and accent), but also my unfamiliarity with certain concepts and other intercultural differences should – as in other ethnographic works – be taken into account. This experience was considered as valuable for a reflection upon colonial prejudices embedded in colonial inequality and upon intercultural misunderstanding still present today. Frequently, however, my interlocutors would surprisingly share very personal information with me. Obviously, some information was only communicated after prolonged contact, while other topics would just be omitted from the conversation with an outsider.

Caribbean scholars have pointed out the danger that a foreign investigator tends to impose Western epistemologies on the local frames of knowledge, and to pay most attention to unfamiliar habits, which may lead to “othering” in terms of time, culture and religion. Fabian (1983) reminds us that anthropology itself contributed to the intellectual justification of the colonial enterprise. The focus of earlier studies was usually on differences, which were situated on a fixed time line of human evolution, and as a consequence sometimes reinforced the distancing from the cultures and peoples described, making them into just an object of study, the other, which was portrayed as more savage, primitive, or traditional than the Self.

Being aware of these dangers, before going on the first fieldwork I focused on the analysis of the historical construction of the biased representation of the indigenous ancestors. During the various religious celebrations and rituals instead of just observing I actively participated. Part II contextualizes the ritual use of the landscape and approximate it to readers who might not share the same belief system by explaining their relevance in the daily and agricultural activities. By drawing examples from various Caribbean

¹² DANS stands for Data Archiving and Networked Services, available at <https://dans.knaw.nl/>.

religions, including those of European origin, in general terms I aimed to show the universal value of the environment as a source of physical and mental health. This also shows the creativity and symbolic means through which Caribbean ancestors and contemporary communities established new relationships with their surrounding landscapes and overcame various obstacles including individual and communal ailments. These various examples should help to overcome an alienating language about *The Others*.

Ethics

In this study I have followed the Codes of Ethics of the AAA and of Leiden University.¹³ The emphasis on the memory of the indigenous past should be considered as one of many possible approaches to healing landscapes. Here the focus on healing landscapes as cultural memory of the indigenous past highlights some problems that are still affecting historically marginalized strata of the Caribbean population. This study by no means aims to prove that local medicinal cultures are solely the heritage of a particular group or an isolated ideology of a particular time.

The focus on the indigenous past within the healing landscapes is used here to enable me to show and discuss intercultural dynamics and politics of memory. Many previous reconstructions of the indigenous past, especially in the Dominican Republic, were proposed in opposition to African heritage, and more particular that of their Haitian neighbors. As this study took place when Law 169-14 was adopted, implying denial of basic human rights as access to higher education, formal employment or adequate health care to people of Haitian origin, the subsequent chapter and especially the third, fourth and fifth will show the undeniable importance of West African heritage in Dominican society. In no way does this text support the nationalistic use of the term “indigenous” or other practices of social exclusion.

It is worthwhile to emphasize that the definition of Indigenous Peoples as accepted in the international legislative framework was developed not on the basis of a particular ethnic origin but rather on the basis of a shared condition of experiencing the detrimental effects of colonial legacies. Indigenous peoples all over the world face the continued presence of colonial structures and mentalities, which results in discrimination, exploitation, marginalization, oppression and other forms of social injustice that primarily (though not exclusively) affects the communities which descend from the pre-colonial inhabitants of the territory. In the case of Cuba and the Dominican Republic there are few people who consciously identify as descendants of peoples that lived on these islands prior to the European conquest. Consequently, one might say, the majority of the population of these countries does not fit into the definition of indigenous peoples as descendants of the original people or occupants of lands before these lands were taken over or conquered by others. On the other hand, few contemporary Dominicans and Cubans, regardless of their race or ethnic origin, have ancestors who were not deprived of their original lands or who were not profoundly and negatively impacted by colonialism. The history of these ancestors, however, is often silenced and forgotten in favor of those who have been inscribed in the historical records preserved until today. When discussing the demographic history and the process of the transculturation the term indigenous people (distinguished from the former by a lowercase letters) is used to refer to the ancestors who descend from peoples who populated Caribbean and Americas prior to the European conquest in order to avoid confusion with Indigenous Peoples which might originate in Africa or Caribbean.

The topic, as well as the approach, of this study also implies other ethical concerns. While I have obtained clear consent from local mentors to publish data, some of the information will not be included. The exact locations of the ritual places are not revealed because of concerns for vandalism and ongoing

¹³ Both codes coincide also to a large extent with the Nexus Code of Ethics.

persecutions of the 21 Division in the Dominican Republic.¹⁴ A small part of the collected data on the plants has been included to illustrate the richness of the local botanical knowledge and the potential of plants to narrate cultural history. Neither the project nor the author claim ownership of this intellectual property about the medicinal properties of the plants. All profits based on the botanical knowledge facilitated by this study must therefore be directed to the local owners of this intellectual property.

The recent appeal of CARICOM (2014) for reparatory justice concerning crimes against humanity perpetrated during the colonial era and for more research providing an understanding of the imperial history from the local perspective reminds us of theoretical, methodological, ethical implications that still remain relevant in times of global imperialism, the war on terrorism, and the increasing privatization of cultural knowledge and communitarian resources.¹⁵ This thesis supports the call for reflection upon this issue and hopes to stimulate more research in this sense and to construct more dialogue between different epistemological communities.

Studies generated by community experts and local investigators are an important contribution to the understanding of the relationship between health and environment, and at the same time an important step in the healing process after a long history of social injustice. One Puerto Rican historian, Morales (2001), suggested that revisionist approaches to history are potentially beneficial for healing from historical injustice. She proposes that the examination of imperial history should be grounded in a diagnosis of aspects that do the most harm in contemporary society. In her view, through a critical revision of the erasure of the historically marginalized groups, historical narratives can heal the traumas of oppression. Likewise, an emic understanding of colonial legacies and local responses is needed to develop tailored policies to address them.

As the studies by Cain (2015) and Phulgence (2015) show, memories and memorialization of slavery and its legacies should be important topics in both the Caribbean and Europe. The colonial history of slavery and its consequences in the Caribbean are often conveniently forgotten on the other part of the Atlantic. Is the recognition of suffering not an expression of fundamental norms of human dignity? Are the memorials of 18 million victims of the Transatlantic Trade and Slavery, as placed in New York or Amsterdam, the end or the precursors of efforts to establish the right means of restorative justice? The data collected on cultural memory about the indigenous past offer more points for the discussion about the current memory politics on this topic.

Caribbean healing landscapes are bridging generations by their materiality and memories encoding ancestral knowledge, conflicts and reconciliations. The current healing landscapes are deemed to be a legacy of histories of illness, displacement, disrupted communities, but they also demonstrate a people's capacity to resist, to survive, and to heal. As such these landscapes are testimonies of the human creativity with which communities responded to colonial oppression by integrating various religious and healing practices. The contemporary testimonies invite readers to think about the human capacity to heal not by forgetting but by remembering, a process in which memories are recalled in constant interaction with the outside world, impregnated with our common past.

¹⁴ 21 Division is the term preferred by some contributors for Dominican Vudú. For more literature on this topic consult Deive (1988) or Tejeda Ortíz (2013).

¹⁵ There is renewed interest in cultural reparations of Caribbean cultural objects located in European museums. The legal status and history of these collections has been addressed by Françaço & Strecker (2017).

Outline of the dissertation

The main body of this dissertation consists of two parts, with consecutively numbered chapters. Part I, comprises chapters 2 to 5, and deals fundamentally with the historical dimension of the research question and its implications, but also relevant ethnographic data and contemporary reality are interwoven in the presentation and discussion.

Chapter 2 discusses the concepts of healing landscapes and cultural memory in more detail and situates them within the broader landscape and memory studies concerning various regions including African, American and European examples.

Chapter 3 reviews briefly the historical genesis of representation of the landscapes and indigenous peoples of the Dominican Republic and Cuba as an important node of collective memory.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of available historical data on the background of medicinal cultures of the 16th century. This highlights some aspects of broader landscape transformations, including intercultural encounters of heterogeneous worldviews underpinning the healing practices.

Chapter 5 includes the historical background of locations where the ethnographic fieldwork was conducted. It reveals the long-continued existence and social integration of the indigenous peoples during the colonial period. Together, these historical sources make it possible to assess the contested nature of the cultural memory of indigenous past.

Part II, which comprises chapter 6 to 9, describes different landscape features that are associated with the indigenous past and clarifies how these are engaged during traditional healing practices. Chapter 6 first shows the significance of natural resources in daily life, and then proceeds with discussing the landscape symbolism in agricultural, ritual time and the liminal life period of disease.

Chapter 7 provides a general overview of different landscape features as agents, and discusses related etiologies, the roles of healers, and their interaction with medicinal plants.

Chapters 8 and 9 deal in more detail with two types of natural sites that are often loci and settings of religious life and healing practices, associated with narratives concerning indigenous ancestors. The analysis of various examples of water sources and caverns will make it possible to draw connections between these elements and provide us with insights into the more and less conscious ways of remembering, which create links between present and previous generations.

Chapter 10, which entails the final discussion section of the dissertation, synthesizes the data from the previous chapters relative to the research questions and formulates the conclusions. It proposes a new interpretation of the historical background and contemporary character of the healing landscapes as well as of their relationship to the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean.