



Hurricanes and Headpieces: Storytelling from the Ruins and Remains in Caribbean History and Culture

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Abstract

In this article, I ask: What can hurricanes teach us about our relationship to nature, time, and storytelling? I propose a methodology called “hurricane-thinking” to answer this question. I categorize “hurricane-thinking” as a mode of thinking used by those who have experienced hurricanes first-hand. Throughout, I consider three concepts: ruin (what remains from the aftermath of hurricanes); whirl (how hurricanes challenge periodization); and awareness (what those living in the Caribbean diaspora or on mainlands learn from hurricane survivors) and how these stories are conveyed. Ultimately, I set out to consider how hurricane-thinking, as a transhistorical and multi-geographical approach, allows us to trace multiple connections between the past, present, and future.

I position a Caribbean-inspired headpiece as a central symbol to visualize my method of “hurricane-thinking.” Headpieces are frequently found in both indigenous Taíno iconography and Caribbean carnival costumes. In this piece, art (the headpiece) acts as an artificial performance for a natural performance that occurs mainly in the Atlantic (hurricanes). In addition to the headpiece, I engage with 18th century written accounts by plantation owners and personal interviews from eyewitnesses during Hurricane Gilbert (1988). I join these primary sources in relation to theorists such as Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Édouard Glissant, Melissa Hudasko, Stuart B. Schwartz, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. By combining hurricanes and headpieces, I contend that art and storytelling advocate for narrating stories as knowledge. These artistic mediums also make visible how we can salvage fragmented histories and stories, erased voices, and natural materials from the wreckage.

Keywords: hurricane-thinking, Caribbean studies, island studies, diaspora, environmental humanities

Moy digs a hole beside Grandma who tends to the hibiscus tree in the garden. It is a muggy July in Markham. Satisfied that the hole she's dug is a sizeable home for the new batch of baby rabbits, Moy looks up at the sky. The clouds are starting to turn gray.

"Come gyal," Grandma says. "Pass the rope."

"What are you doing?"

"Tying the tree."

Moy notes the scraggly tree in front of her. It hardly looks like it will blow away. She turns towards Grandma.

"Why?"

"Rain coming. You feel it?"

Moy doesn't; she only hears silence. But she nods in agreement anyway.

"It's like Gilbert."

"Who's Gilbert?"

"Moy, pass the shovel, nuh. And go inside."

Later, Moy sits herself on a kitchen stool and rolls a mahjong tile in her hand. Grandpa hands her freshly squeezed orange juice.

"Grandpa, who's Gilbert?"

Grandpa hums. Moy knows that's the sound all Jamaicans make when they need clarification.

"Grandma was tying the hibiscus tree cause of the rain," she explains. "And then she said something about Gilbert."

"Oh, Gilbert! The hurricane."

Grandpa takes a pen and paper from the counter and sits beside Moy. He draws a map of Jamaica, while she points to the birthplaces of her ancestors beside him, "Savanna la Mar. Port Antonio. Spanish Town. Kingston. Old Harbour."

"Your Apo and Gung Gung were there, too, so they can tell you more. But I remember Gilbert hit here..."ⁱ

Writing from the Caribbean diaspora, I ask: What can hurricanes teach us about our relationship to nature, time, and storytelling? In the personal story above, many elements and identities whirl in my personal memory which grows out of my Jamaican-Chinese descent and

being raised by my Jamaican grandparents in Markham, Ontario. I include this memory as an entry point into demonstrating how people living on islands and mainlands can begin thinking with hurricanes. In this article, I propose a methodology that I call “hurricane-thinking” that aims to analyze how survivors of hurricanes understand and impart survival tactics onto others by way of stories. To do so, I divide this article into three points of focus: ruin; whirling; and coming-to-know in the diaspora. In addition to these concepts, I use art and storytelling as vehicles to illustrate how “hurricane-thinking” signals both cultural and environmental awareness of the Caribbean, and becomes used as a survival tactic by those living in the diaspora and who are spared by the effects of hurricanes first-hand.

Headpieces and Hurricane-Thinking

Perhaps there is nothing more environmentally damaging to Caribbean islands than hurricanes. It results in rupture, disorientation, and the loss of lives, economy, and the natural environment. The Caribbean region experiences an average of eight hurricanes per year. Thus, we can conclude that the archipelago has experienced about 4,000 to 5,000 hurricane-level storms since Columbus’s arrival in 1492 (Schwartz 2015, xix). How do we think about and with hurricanes? In what follows, I propose three approaches to this question.

First, much of the scholarship on the Caribbean is focused on the colonial era. The reason being is that the region was occupied by various European empires since the 15th century which led to the establishment of sugar plantations from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Tracing the economic and racial histories of its peoples, Caribbean historians, such as B. W. Higman, Elsa Goveia, and Eric Williams, conclude that most people currently living in the Caribbean (and in the diaspora) are descendants of enslaved Africans and indentured laborers from China and India who were transported to these islands to work in the sugarcane fields. Hurricanes have existed even before the colonial period which calls on scholars to include the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean who are frequently left out of discussion. Therefore, my focus on hurricanes opens up the possibility to think with the Indigenous peoples of Jamaica: the Taíno.

While the Taíno peoples populated most of the Greater Antilles, I focus on the island of Jamaica because it is the island with which I am most familiar. I want to emphasize that I do not return to the Taíno for locating a sense of origin. After all, many Jamaicans cannot claim indigeneity since its Indigenous populations (the Taíno, the Arawaks, and the Caribs) were

decimated under Spanish rule before English arrival in 1655.ⁱⁱ Cuban theorist and novelist, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, summarizes the erasure of the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean: “In the Antilles it was not necessary to deculturate the Indian, because he disappeared with servitude on the *encomienda* [controlled by the Spanish], and with massacres, famines, mass suicides, and contagious diseases that the conquistadors brought and against which his organism had no defense” (1996, 55). Due to the systematic decline of the Indigenous populations as well as increased globalization and reliance on coerced labor from overseas, many Jamaicans are descendants of African, East Asian, South Asian, and European origin. In an effort to include the voices of Caribbean Indigenous populations, I set out to consider how Taíno epistemologies of nature influence current modes of thinking in the Caribbean.

Second, Caribbean islands (and island spaces in general) are often deemed isolated and insular because of their physical separation from continental mainlands and other nation-states within the archipelago. When looking at islands from a continental perspective, the island and its surrounding ocean are constructed to be isolated and empty (Roberts and Stephens 2017, 14). The ocean itself also adds to this insularity by separating individual islands from each other. Because of their smaller landmasses and economies, islands are often dependent on trading goods with mainlands (rather than neighboring islands) for economic expansion. Much of this economic expansion is provided in the form of tourism. However, academic discourse in relational and archipelagic studies disrupts the idea that islands are insular spaces. Specializing in island and archipelagic studies, Jonathan Pugh observes that islands are “relational spaces” that “unsettle borders of land/sea, island/mainland, and problematize static tropes of island insularity, isolation, dependency, and peripherality” (2018, 94). When considering the perceived problem of islands in isolation, the movement of hurricanes emphasizes that islands are not in isolation of each other because multiple islands (and, within the context of North America, the United States) are hit in the hurricane’s path. In addition to the collective damage razed by hurricanes, the destructive aftermath of hurricanes leads to a collective sense of loss between nations that is asymmetrically experienced and resourced.

Finally, hurricanes reflect the system of the Caribbean. Benítez-Rojo describes this system as “a system full of noise and opacity, a nonlinear system, an unpredictable system, in short a chaotic system beyond the total reach of any specific kind of knowledge or interpretation of the world” (1996, 295). We are a society defined by fragmentation, whirling between each

other like the motion of hurricanes. On a related note, it must be acknowledged that individual islands experience disjunctions between their people. Jamaican sociologist, Orlando Patterson, observes that “[t]he Jamaican rarely experiences any sense of social solidarity either with the total society or with any sizable groups within the wider context of the nation state” (2019, 245-6). In a society highlighted by differences, solidarity and relativity present themselves during Caribbean Carnival. Benítez-Rojo observes that “white and Black and Indian stop playing at Self and Other” (1996, 306) during Caribbean Carnival. In other words, Caribbean Carnival is one of the few moments when people from different racial groups and socioeconomic levels experience solidarity with each other. This unity occurs not only within the island, but between islands since it is common for people participating in Caribbean Carnival (called “masqueraders”) to travel to other islands or to the Caribbean diaspora to celebrate.

Inspired by Caribbean Carnival, I turn to art. By creating a headpiece, I aim to momentarily unite an archipelagic region often fragmented socially, culturally, racially, politically, and linguistically. Martinican poet and philosopher, Édouard Glissant, observes that “[i]f at present Caribbean countries experience or are subjected to social, political, and economic regimes very different from each other, ‘artistic vision’ creates the possibility of cementing the bonds of unity in the future” (1989, 235). If hurricanes are a type of natural performance, the headpiece I’ve created is an artificial performance. The headpiece also reflects an artificial aesthetic experience of rupture within the Caribbean. If the Caribbean is defined by its syncretism, I consider this headpiece a “syncretic artifact” which is defined by Benítez-Rojo as “a signifier made of differences” (1996, 21). If the whirling motion of hurricanes as a metaphor for the whirling of cultures, histories, and peoples living in the Caribbean, then the materials used to construct the headpiece represent a type of whirling of (seemingly) incongruent things together. The differences unify the whole. Thus, this headpiece is an artificial type of syncretic performance that occurs naturally in the Caribbean. In addition to hurricanes, I foreground the headpiece in this article because headpieces are frequently found in both Taíno iconography and current Caribbean carnival costumes. The Taíno, particularly their *caciques* (translated as chiefs), are often depicted wearing headpieces. Examples of this can be seen in the statute of Agüeybaná El Bravo, the last Taíno *cacique* in Puerto Rico, and of a man and woman standing side-by-side in the Jamaican coat of arms. Likewise, headpieces are the highlight pieces in Caribbean carnival costumes. They are adorned with feathers and jewels as seen in costumes featured by bands, like

Xaymaca International, and in magazines, such as *Caribbean Beat* and *Insight Guide to Trinidad and Tobago*. Because headpieces are a defining symbol in both the past and present Caribbean, the headpiece I have created serves to act as a bridge between two seemingly distant temporalities. Let us take a look at the headpiece (Fig. 1) for a moment:



Fig.1. Grayson Chong, *Headpiece* (Left to right: *Front view, Top view, Left view, Right view*), 2020, personal photograph.

By way of this headpiece, I have curated my materials according to Caribbean Carnival traditions that borrow from West African traditions. Traditionally, both Taíno and Caribbean Carnival headpieces are made of feathers. In West Africa, feathers are frequently used on masks and headdresses to symbolize the ability to rise above problems, pains, and illnesses. Instead of

using feathers, I chose to incorporate leaves (particularly of the spider plant and branches of hibiscus and bougainvillea) to highlight a sense of ecological awareness of the Caribbean. I use a mixture of natural and artificial materials that both reflect Jamaican culture and environment to highlight what is often left in the aftermath of hurricanes. The poinsettia, spider plant leaves, bougainvillea branches, and hibiscus leaves were sourced from my grandmother's garden. My own ecocritical awareness of the place and function of flora in Caribbean history comes mainly from the teachings of my grandmother. The seashells and broken coconut pieces on the headpiece represent what is scattered during and after hurricanes. Finally, I employ bottle caps and the keys of corned beef (known as bully beef in the Caribbean) tins to highlight what provisions are used to survive. All of these materials illustrate an ecological and aesthetic awareness of the Caribbean, while also highlighting what we can salvage from these landscapes ruined by the natural performance of hurricanes.

More than the aesthetics that the headpiece affords us, I use this artistic performance as a visual to propose a mode of thinking that I characterize as "hurricane-thinking." This methodology emphasizes a type of survival tactic used by those who have experienced the effects of hurricanes first-hand. It is both transhistorical and multi-geographical. Like hurricanes, hurricane-thinking strives to visualize ruptures of the natural environment and conceptualize ruptures of time. Its rupture of time creates an opportunity to include Taíno epistemologies of nature that are often left out of Caribbean discourse. In addition, hurricane-thinking challenges the idea that islands are insular and lay along the periphery because the effects of hurricanes are not only experienced by islanders but also by those living on mainlands, which often experience an increase of heavy rainfall and flooding. This results in economic and social interventions needed to mitigate and repair damages. Finally, hurricane-thinking confronts the social and cultural fragmentation of Caribbean islands since its peoples are often the first to experience the effects of hurricanes first-hand. In the midst of disaster, it is a time when peoples experience a type of solidarity most felt during Caribbean Carnival.

Ruins and Remains

The aftereffects of hurricanes force us to confront both the presence and erasure of natural and historical ruins. Writing from the context of Latin American studies, Jon Beasley-Murray uses the Peruvian ruin of Vilcashuamán to illustrate the significance of the village to

multiple populations throughout history: the Incas and Chancas, the Spaniards, and the Peruvians. Here, history memorializes itself through the ruination of stone. As demonstrated through Vilcashuamán, “[m]odernity creates the ruin as something to be discarded but also to be read, its story obsessively recapitulated” (Beasley-Murray 2011, 212). However, for the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, there are no sites of stones. Caribbean scholars often lament that the Caribbean suffers from the phenomenon of nonhistory. There is no collective memory and no sense of chronology (Glissant 1989, xxxii). Perhaps this is why so much scholarship looks to the slave trade as the site for collective memory. The ruins we fixate on are the ruins of plantations because collective memory is formed by non-Indigenous groups who arrived as a result of the transatlantic slave trade and indentured labor. By the time that the English controlled Jamaica in 1655, the Taíno population had been effectively decimated by the Spanish. With no monumental stones to announce their presence, it became easier for the English to construct a narrative belief that erased the existence of the Taíno population.

This lack of monuments forces a reconceptualization of how ruins are defined. To reconceptualize what constitutes a ruin, I turn to Melissa Hudasko’s method of “ruin-gazing” (Hudasko 2020, 2).ⁱⁱⁱ Ruin-gazing centers on stratified time. We gaze into the ruin’s past which asks us to think about our present and future experiences. By gazing at a static thing of the past, a rupture in time opens for us to foresee potential dynamic futures (3). Writing from the medievalist tradition, Hudasko employs the term when reading the Old English poem, “The Ruin.” She notes that when we read the poem, “our temporal consciousness stratifies: we gaze upon a ruin (the Old English language of the poem) about a ruin (the scene: even older), and then we whirl: we project that ruin-gaze future-ward” (2). I find ruin-gazing to be a useful strategy in attending to multiple points of temporality (the past, present, and future) simultaneously. It demands a certain degree of critical awareness on gazers (us) to examine the ruin being gazed upon in the present moment to see its histories. Then, we project this ruin-gaze into the future through the teachings we pass onto others. In the case of ruins of the Taíno, there are no monuments. There is, however, the vegetation of the natural environment.

I use the headpiece to think about how natural materials ruin at different times. We notice the leaves and the poinsettia plant have withered between Day 1 and Day 16. Take a look at the differences in the headpiece (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3):



Fig. 2. Grayson Chong, *Headpiece – Front View (Day 1 vs. Day 16)*, 2020, personal photograph.



Fig. 3. Grayson Chong, *Headpiece – Side View (Day 1 vs. Day 16)*, 2020, personal photograph.

But what about waste materials that do not ruin? Environmental humanities scholar, Elizabeth DeLoughrey observes that “[w]aste is a remainder, a remnant of history, a ruin, and might be understood as an unintended archive” (2019, 103). I focus on the pieces of plastic (the bottle caps and the keys from the bully beef tins) for two reasons: 1) they represent what Jamaicans hoard to survive during the aftermath of hurricanes; and 2) this waste is often the very things left behind

or discarded. These products also take the longest to decompose if they decompose at all. Thus, they become part of the landscape in an artificial way as reflected in the artificial performance of the headpiece. These pieces of plastic and seashells are what DeLoughrey terms as “technofossils” that exceed our own temporal limits. She uses “technofossil” to describe “a new stratigraphic signal of the Anthropocene produced by plastics and other materials that are globally distributed, such as CDs, cell phones, and ballpoint pens” (28). When we participate in ruin-gazing, the headpiece serves to hurl us forward into time(s) that extends beyond our own human lives which echoes Hudasko’s insistence that “ruin-gazing always entails an imperative for forward thinking” (2020, 3). We may not live on to see plastic bottlecaps and bully beef keys ruin, but the natural environment and future generations will. The presence of the natural and non-natural materials that remain from hurricanes challenges how we perceive time, particularly linear time.

Whirling and Periodization

Hurricanes whirl in and out of time, challenging periodization. What is of most interest to me about the concept of whirling is both its circular, non-linear motion. Social anthropologist, Tim Ingold, writes: “Whirl is a question, *where?* Hurl delivers the answer, *here!*” (2017, 426). I find Ingold’s words helpful when thinking about how hurricanes create rupture at any given moment. Not only do hurricanes rupture landscapes, but they rupture time. They are nonlinear and chaotic. The whirling of hurricanes reflects Glissant’s “poetics of relation” in that it “inscribes itself in a circularity” (Glissant 1997, 32). Similarly, he focuses on the motion of the ocean, describing waves as “backwash, bewildered at constantly turning” (2020, 46). How, too, are hurricanes a type of backwash? In this section, I consider how hurricane-thinking asks us to attend to circularity and constant turning by comparing how Jamaican travel narratives from the 18th century and 21st century testimonials by hurricane survivors speak to each other.^{iv} By looking at these experiences across linear time, I am most interested in what hurricanes afford us when we think about how different people in different periods experience similar effects of destruction and survival. I notice a circularity in that their experiences and survival tactics are similar rather than different. Finally, I will return to my headpiece to consider how visual art mimics the reality of whirling both of the natural landscape and the testimonials.

Before turning to testimonials, it should be noted that hurricanes were prominently featured in Taíno cosmology, particularly in their *cemís*. *Cemís* refer to two things: 1) they refer to the gods or deities of Taíno cosmology; and 2) they refer to the artifacts that contain the spirits of these deities. One of the *cemís* (deity) was Guabancex, Mistress of the Hurricane. She is commonly depicted in Taíno imagery as a bodiless circular head with two hands spiralling off in opposite directions. The *cemí* (artifact) is a simple reflection of the counterclockwise motion occurring at the center of hurricanes (Keegan and Carlson 2008, 13). Specializing in the history of colonial Latin America, Stuart B. Schwartz notes that “perhaps the most remarkable and most impressive evidence of Taíno familiarity with the hurricanes is the archaeological evidence from eastern Cuba of ceramic [...] which suggests that the Taíno perceived the circulatory nature of the hurricane winds around the eye, a fact that would not be established by Western science until the mid-nineteenth century” (Schwartz 2015, 8). Like waves, the *cemís* participate in a constant turning found throughout linear time. When writing about backwash, Glissant describes it as “repetition, which endlessly tears itself apart” (Glissant 2020, 52). Hurricanes themselves are repetitive natural disasters that tear the natural environment apart. The Taíno use the *cemís* to visualize this repetition and circularity found in many testimonials by hurricane survivors.

When we turn to the written experiences of hurricane survivors in the 18th century, we can see similarities between their perspectives and that of current hurricane survivors in the 20th century and 21st century. Plantation owners like Edward Long (1734-1813) and Thomas Thistlewood (1721-1786) note that the land razed by hurricanes appeared to have been blasted. The storm and rising rivers were the main reasons for death due to the flooding of towns and drowning of livestock. Recovery was slow and difficult. Food and clean water became major problems. Analyzing these accounts, Schwartz summarizes the progression of decay:

Portable water sources were often fouled by brackish water from the storm, and food became a major problem. In the first days after a hurricane, there were plantains, guanabana [soursop], and other edible fruits that had fallen to the ground, but these soon were consumed or rotted, and then hunger set in. People turned to emergency foods like roots of plants not usually eaten that were grated and then made into bread or soup. What followed next were various kinds of sickness [...] Mosquitoes, flies, and other arthropods reproduced in great numbers. Both floodwater and still-water species of mosquitoes

flourished in water-soaked fields and pools of standing water after hurricanes struck.
(Schwartz 2015, 41)

A hurricane that my own grandparents collectively remember is Hurricane Gilbert that struck the Caribbean in 1988 which echoes the testimonials of the planters. In a recent telephone call in February 2020 with my grandparents (Apo and Gung Gung) living in Jamaica, they first described the change of climate, telling me that “when hurricane hits, the trees whip and bend into the earth.” Rain falls in great quantities that the gullies overflow. There is no electricity and no news; you rely on a battery radio. They tell me that the wooden poles from Kingston to Spanish Town to Old Harbour all splintered. When the hurricane stops, people who cannot afford to buy provisions eat what survives from tamarind trees, soursop, guinep, and mangoes. Apo and Gung Gung tell me that hurricane shelters are set up for those in lowline areas. Apo (telephone interview, February 2020) notes that “[p]eople in Jamaica are quite poor, so they often can only take themselves to the shelters.” Hurricanes are often moments of increased social tensions due to fear of looting and the breakdown of authority. Schwartz notes that “slave populations were often the most debilitated by the shortage of food and the diseases that followed the hurricanes” (2015, 49). Both testimonials highlight how the social and economic disparity between peoples are exacerbated in the event of hurricanes. Of course, it is hard to prepare for storms because hurricanes, like other natural disasters, rupture at inconsistent times.

Like the whirling of temporalities, art asks us to (re)consider how we conceptualize time, particularly linear time. I draw our attention back to the headpiece as a useful visual to think about how whirling and fragmentation are created by the rupture of hurricanes. The testimonials of my grandparents and planters in Jamaica highlight how the physical environment becomes fragmented and how hurricanes exacerbate social fragmentation. The headpiece makes manifest what is created when fragmented parts whirl together. Like the backwash that shapes the edges of Caribbean islands, art is repetition that endlessly tears itself apart (Glissant 2020, 52). My headpiece engages with Glissant’s idea of backwash in that it visualizes how hurricanes tear the landscape apart only for it to become altered (as seen in the purposeful curation of natural and non-natural materials). The headpiece asks us to consider what it will look like (and what other materials will be added) when another hurricane strikes. The headpiece and hurricane-thinking remind us of what remains when we hurl onwards in our understandings of linear modes of

thinking and concepts. This leads me to my final question: how can hurricane-thinking be adopted by those living on the mainland?

Awareness in Diaspora

How do hurricane survivors teach hurricane-thinking to people who have never experienced this natural disaster, particularly those living in the Caribbean diaspora? Tao Leigh Goffe (2014) proposes that those living in the Caribbean diaspora are “thrice diasporized.” She uses the term to describe the position of those shaped by the experiences of the African diaspora, the Asian diaspora, and the Caribbean diaspora which is made of those who have migrated to Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom after World War II. In this section, I analyze how people from islands impart hurricane-thinking to future generations living in the Caribbean diaspora and, more generally, on mainlands through education of awareness. Much of this section is inspired by the epistemologies and traditions of North American Indigenous scholars. It should be noted, however, that understandings of land, land ownership, and indigeneity between North American Indigenous scholars and Caribbean scholars are vastly different. I turn to North American Indigenous scholars, particularly the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory, because I am inspired by their focus on storytelling and the reverence they have for elders as knowledge-makers which echoes much of my own upbringing. Indigenous scholars are teachers for Caribbean scholars in that they model ways of awareness that are independent of colonial education models to understanding one’s community, culture, and personhood. While I write from the perspective of Caribbean studies in the Caribbean diaspora, I find North American Indigenous methodologies helpful in analyzing how children living on continents learn about hurricane-thinking when they do not have the island available to facilitate this type of thinking. In this way, art and storytelling become paramount tools for understanding awareness when people from the islands have been transplanted elsewhere. DeLoughrey notes that “[s]ince the etymological roots of ‘diaspora’ derive from spore and seed, this provides an apt metaphor for the forced transplantation of peoples and plants and the ways in which countless crops, including sugarcane, breadfruit, coffee, nutmeg, mango, and other staples of the region, have adapted and been naturalized” (2019, 40). I use the transplantation of nature to consider how hurricane-thinking is taught through the natural environment in diasporic conditions. For those living in the Caribbean diaspora, the (is)land is not lost, but rather the conditions that help create and facilitate

hurricane-thinking experiences are. Thus, Caribbean elders living in the diaspora must find ways other ways to educate future generations of this disaster-type thinking.

I turn to the transportation of flora, fauna, and foodstuff to the Caribbean diaspora to consider how hurricane-thinking is taught through the land by cultivating plants in gardens. Indigenous environmental justice scholar, Kyle Whyte, notes that through practices of colonization and migration, Indigenous peoples have witnessed the “away-migration” of nonhuman relatives (2017, 155). An example of this ‘away migration’ is the yam in that migration of Caribbean peoples have introduced the yam to the mainland. It connects the diasporic peoples to their ancestry. However, this transplantation of foodstuff does not stop with the yam. Wendy A. Lee, an environmental educator, notes that indigenous foods to Jamaica, such as the pimento, sweet potato, pineapple, cassava, and guava, as well as foods and flowers brought to the island by Africans are now found in the diaspora (2006, 94). Whyte also observes that “away-migration” is not simply a physical transition, but a psycho-cultural one as well, occurring when “people lose customs, protocols, skill-sets, and identities [...] related to particular plants, animals, insects, and ecosystems” (2017, 156). In the personal story that begins this paper, Grandma takes her cues from the squirrels and birds around her, something that Moy does not yet understand. Apo (telephone interview, February 2020) echoes these natural signals: “Animals run to the hills. Everyone takes a sign from them. Everything is very still, and the silence is deafening. But the dogs make a particular noise. Like a primordial howl”. To mitigate the effects of “away-migration,” elders pass on knowledge of environmental awareness to their children and grandchildren in the hope that future generations will do the same. The natural materials on the headpiece reflect this cross-cultural migration.

Another way that diasporic children learn about hurricane-thinking and Caribbean intelligence is through sustained relationships with their elders. Elders are of utmost importance to Nishnaabeg intelligence. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, notes that “[i]t is this relationship [with Curve Lake Doug Williams], more than any other, that has made me Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg” (2014, 19). Likewise, it is my relationship with my grandparents that make me Jamaican, and in the broadest sense, Caribbean. They teach me to be a practitioner of hurricane-thinking because they embody this thought. In the diaspora, this education transpires through stories about hurricanes and the aftermath. It is through seeing grandparents and parents hoard bully beef tins, sardines, and bread in the basement (only for

these children to do the same when they live on their own). In order to understand where hurricanes hit, children need to know Caribbean geography. Elders teach this geography by showcasing maps of the islands on placemats, on dishtowels, on beach towels, and framed on walls. Like the whirl of the hurricane, children are whirled into Caribbean education by elders even when they cannot access the island itself. In many ways, Caribbean education is not maintained by being on the physical island, but through relationships with elders that embody island-thinking. Simpson notes that “[y]ou cannot graduate from Nishnaabewin; it is a gift to be practiced and reproduced” (2014, 9). Likewise, diasporic children are presented with the task to practice and reproduce Caribbean thinking. While the goal of Nishnaabeg intelligence is to create a generation of people attached to the land, hurricane-thinking in the diaspora fails in this regard. This is why it is all the more important for elders and children to embody and live out “culturally inherent ways of coming to know” (13) so that we do not lose these cultural and social systems. Whyte observes “our actions today are cyclical performances; they are guided by our reflection on our ancestors’ perspectives *and* on our desire to be good ancestors ourselves to future generations” (2017, 160). While the headpiece itself is a reflection of education and awareness of hurricanes from living in the Caribbean diaspora, it is also a performance that reflects an accumulation of cyclical performances of hurricane-thinking born out of catastrophes.

Conclusion: The Importance of Art and Storytelling

Throughout this article, I have considered what hurricanes can teach us about nature, time, and storytelling by using the methodology of hurricane-thinking. Both the remains and ruin of the natural environment create an opening for us to consider multiple histories, particularly Indigenous histories of the Caribbean, that are often left out of conversation. This is especially important when there are no stones and very few archeological artifacts and remains to announce the presence of these peoples. This dive into history calls for a type of “ruin-gazing” of the past that we carry futureward. Thus, the headpiece illustrates the importance of foregrounding nature as an archive when stones no longer exist. It turns out attention to what happens when remains ruin, exemplifying the transitory lifetimes of natural things and the permanence of the unnatural. This vantage into the past, present, and future asks us to attend to the various cultural, social, and geographical histories of material objects that survive natural disasters. In addition, hurricane-thinking asks us to reconceptualize our understanding of time. The testimonials of hurricane

survivors, both living and past, echo each other in a motion that creates a sense of whirling. Hurricanes rupture linear time. Thus, hurricane-thinking attends to this circularity between testimonials to observe that survival tactics of hurricane survivors are more similar than different. While the headpiece shows a sense of fragmentation in that natural and non-natural materials are meshed together, something new is born from this circularity and whirling. Finally, out of hurricanes comes stories of catastrophe and survival. Often times, these testimonies of survival are articulated through art and storytelling. Hurricane-thinking is passed on through storytelling when first-hand experiences of the catastrophe are not found on mainlands. For those living in the Caribbean diaspora, storytelling becomes a way of creating awareness for younger generations that they begin to embody. According to Glissant, “[s]tories unravel History. Everything to me is a wave, narrated!” (2020, 46). I created the headpiece to communicate a story about loss, remains, and rupture. In this way, the headpiece is a material manifestation of the unravelling and rupture of history caused by hurricanes. It materializes the catastrophe as well as the survival that transpires in the aftermath of destruction.

Hurricanes, as catastrophes, inspire artistic performances, particularly in visual art and storytelling. Glissant narrates Caribbean peoples’ understanding of the imminent presence of these natural performances: “We wait for a cyclone, year after year, in this drily archived procession of our catastrophes. We know that it will come, but from where, and when? On Guadeloupe again, on Dominica? The hurricanes swell in the depths of the Atlantic, they come spinning towards us, they pass between us, they pass over us. Who will be hit this time, oh mother Caribbean?” (2020, 53) Both the frequency and the trajectory of hurricanes across islands are unpredictable. But out of this unpredictability comes the need to always reinvent new ways of surviving and coping with destruction. Writing from the context of blue humanities, early modernist, Steve Mentz notes that “[c]atastrophes are opportunities. Out of disasters come possibilities for new order and new ordering systems” (2015, 180). My headpiece considers one out of many new forms of thinking that arise from these opportunities. Perhaps this is why, as a literary scholar, I turn to art. Art advocates for new form in a way that allows us (in the present) to access the past and look towards the future. While the headpiece originates from the idea of thinking with the remains of ruins, upon seeing it for the first time, Marjorie Rubright (personal communication, 23 April 2020), an early modernist, says, “It feels more to me like hope and beauty than despair and ruin.” I think the beauty and hope she sees are reflective of the hope

instilled by generations of ancestors. It is a hope inspired by what arises when the past, present, and future whirl in a single moment to signify what is and what can be. The point of this headpiece and hurricane-thinking are not to romanticize catastrophe, but to look forward to what survives no matter the wreckage.

By way of concluding, let us recall Caribbean Carnival. Like Caribbean Carnival, I also take from the African tradition of using feathers on my headpiece. However, in lieu of feathers, I use leaves to foreground and curate an ecocritical awareness of the Caribbean environment. Like the feathers on West African masks and headdresses, the leaves signify being able to rise above catastrophes and (re)create something from the remains and ruins. Here, the remains come together to create a new order. Similarly, when we ruin-gaze on the headpiece, we are reminded of the concept of backwash: a constant repetition that endlessly tears itself apart. The materials on the headpiece have been torn apart to create something new. Thus, the headpiece is only one articulation out of infinite possibilities. By thinking with hurricanes and engaging in hurricane-thinking we are constantly asked to find our identities, stories, and histories – those things broken apart and whirled together, only to be (re)created anew.

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Notes

ⁱ In Hakka Chinese, “Apo” means “mother of father” and “Gung Gung” means “father of father.” I use Apo and Gung Gung to refer to my paternal grandparents. and I use Grandpa and Grandma to refer to my maternal grandparents.

ⁱⁱ The Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean are usually categorized in three groups: the Arawaks, the Taínos, and the Caribs. The Arawaks were the ethnic group that lived in the northern part of the Guianas and South America. The Taíno language is said to belong to the Arawakan language family tree (Atkinson 2006, 1). The Taíno are referred to as Island Arawaks. It should be noted that Taínos are often referred to Arawak in Jamaica. The Taíno are generally considered to be the native population of the Greater Antilles. The Caribs are indigenous to the Lesser Antilles. For more information about the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, refer to *The Caribbean: A*

History of the Region and Its Peoples (Stephan Palmié and Francisco A. Scarno, eds., 2011) and *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (B.W. Higman, 2011).

ⁱⁱⁱ There was no published source for Melissa Hudasko's "ruin-gazing" at the time of publication. This methodology is cited from her conference presentation, "Whirled in Ruins" (Eco-Entanglements: Ruin, Grafting and Stratification) presented at the University of Massachusetts Amherst on February 22nd, 2020. This work is used with permission from the author.

^{iv} I focus on the 18th century in this article because most of the travel narratives found in the archives were written during this time at the height of sugar plantations and production in the Caribbean.

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Born and raised in Markham, Ontario, Grayson Chong is an English PhD candidate at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. As an artist-scholar, she creates visual art to articulate how early modern ideologies of race and gender influence current attitudes and policies between inter-ethnic relations in the Caribbean. Her research uses transhistorical, feminist, and diasporic approaches to explore how family structures and ideas of womanhood are performed in the Caribbean and Caribbean diaspora.