

Trajectories of Resilience: Indigenous Healing Folkways in the Selected Short Stories of Wilson Harris

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The Guyanese philosopher and writer Wilson Harris¹ has long emphasized in his fiction and theoretical writing the myriad ways in which the Caribbean and South American human and natural worlds are interwoven. The deep impact of the Guyanese topography upon Harris's psyche has its roots in his early vocation as a government land surveyor during the 1940s and 1950s. His connection between the fluidity of the South American landscape and his creative imagination served to unfix reading habits that divided the world into colonial binaries. Inspired by the ancestral faces which he perceived in the ravines, rapids of rivers, tides, waterfalls, and rocks, Harris developed a literary methodology that encoded this reality. This critical process is emphasized in fluid time scales in the narrative, the coexistence of the dead and the living, juxtaposed images, and a dreamlike universe.

Historically, European capitalists designated the Caribbean and South American territories as destinations for capital flows and resource extraction. The vast volume of water, hectares of thick tree canopies, and giant freshwater lakes were prime attractions for Spanish, Dutch, and English undertakers. This historical backdrop encapsulates the deterministic cycles of conquest and disempowerment, which decimated the Caribbean's Indigenous people groups and landscapes. From the colonial gaze, the New World was fundamentally perceived as monolith, one-dimensional, and incapable of independent creativity and self-productivity. This led to the European scientific objectification of the Caribbean universe, which translated into conquest and mastery.

Many communities and ecosystems were sacrificed at the altar of relentless production. Although Harris's main focus has been on the South American hinterlands, his planetary and geological turn opens up ways to think about the global, historical, and modern dynamics of neocapitalism marked, for example, by forms of debt and bonded labor, territorial dispossession, and ecological plunder. He searches for a radical change to these tragic fates through the cultural horizons of myth. In the essay, "Profiles of Myth and the New World," he defines myth as the sedimented aspects of culture that pertain to every ethnic group in the Caribbean and South America (1999, 201). He avers that these foundational vestiges, which have been lodged in the Caribbean and South American womb of space, can be retooled in literature as identified in settings or locations that contain spiritual gateways, sacred figures, archetypal characters, totems, spirit companions, and a sense of time that is fluid—all for rebuilding a viable reality (1999, 201–211).

The way in which Harris intermixes a diversity of cultural histories in his fiction has been documented by many critics, including Sandra Drake. Drake notes that Harris's deployment of dualities, conjoining motifs, and ambivalences can be read as his rejection of any perspective that resembled tyrannical paradigms (1986, 177). Harris scholar Michael Gilkes also observes that Harris's poetics of "heterogeneity" and "radical dialectic," with its intersecting expressions of Greek deities, West African limbo and Haitian vodun, Meso-American bush babies, resurrection motifs in Christianity, and Indo-Caribbean mythologies (as in the multilimbed Kali goddess), enable a rethinking of worldly dynamics (1989, 10). Guyana's vast sociocultural and ethnically diverse position can consequently be seen to have inspired his global approach. The aim of this essay is in part, to build upon the multicultural and theoretical value system of Harris's aesthetic markers. At this point, it should be noted that while the intended audience for this inquiry encompasses the First communities and people-groups impacted by (neo) colonialism, it does not preclude any other demographic (formerly colonized or otherwise) from meaningful engagement with the work. The tradition of Caribbean literature is a naturally comparative one, particularly within the context of postcolonial critique and the world at large. Given that Harris's concerns have been framed within a cross-cultural ethos, a greater degree of participation and affective understanding of Indigenous communities are afforded.

In this vein, Harris is not alone in his literary experimentation with multicultural, theoretical models. In *Caribbean Man in Time and Space* (1974), the Barbadian writer Kamau Brathwaite conceptualizes the wholeness of the Antilles as "the curve" sweeping from Florida to the Amazon and Brazil (1–14). This reterritorializing of the Antilles sounds new directions in Anglophone Caribbean literature as Brathwaite attempts to reinvigorate a cultural expression of the Caribbean as a space of multiple, intersecting spatialities that connects with North American historical realities of globalization through forced migration and the rise of the global economy. Similarly, in "Caliban's Guarden" (1992) Brathwaite asserts: "I also began to recognize that these broken islands were the

sunken tops of a mountain range that had been there a million years before. That in addition to the death of the Amerindians I was also witnessing the echo of an earlier catastrophe. That the islands had been part of a mainland" (4). Brathwaite's archipelagic emphasis and multicultural disposition, not unlike Harris's cross-cultural poetics, seek to understand the complex imperatives of space.

In other words, the Atlantic's cross-currents, for Brathwaite, reveal the Americas (North, Central, and South) to be connected by ecology long before they were grouped together by colonialism. Importantly, this worldly approach moves away from nation-centric understandings of space, which arguably cannot account for the ecological ties that bind each territory. Some of the solutions to the present constellation of global crises could come from the long-dismissed voices of Indigenous peoples, who historically have been at the forefront of its economic, social, and political fallouts. It is therefore critical to note that Brathwaite is tracking how the coexistence of ancestral elements within the already hybridized moorings of each nation works toward the production of cultural newness² and resilience.

This attunement to the relations of space and time via cosmological perspectives is evoked, for example, in his story, "The Black Angel," when he perceives that the Jamaican and Barbadian woodland territories contain the calcified memory of the dead:

It was as if my spirit was waking up in the middle of
a very dark night
as if I was alone in a wood of presences and powers
vague enraged personalities I could not see or name. (1994, 28)

In this regard, Brathwaite's theoretical and creative works fulfill the sociocultural and geological imperative of reclaiming stolen territories through the creative imagination. Cynthia James fittingly states, "The Black Angel is a story of affirmation in which the landscape [is] a private and personal talisman" (1994, 759). Brathwaite's assertion, similar to Harris's, carries the ideology that Caribbean space is a vast memorial of sorts as it houses the vestiges of every ethnic migrant culture. The landscape, in this sense, functions as an indomitable entity that will continue to intensively regenerate itself through acts of remembrance and ritual contact.

In close proximity to Brathwaite's archipelagic formulation, J. Michael Dash (1998) puts forward the idea of the "other America" that creates a bridge between the different geographies of the Americas. Dash invites the reader/critic to envision the diverse historical, economic, political, and cultural realities of the Caribbean and South American continent as important sites that offer alternative articulations of the Americas within an aggressively globalizing world. Although Dash concretizes the connection between the Caribbean and North America via the image of the Mid-Atlantic Sea Ridge, he cautions that this dimension of intercultural criticism does not seek to neutralize the strong, visible

signs of internal difference and diversity but rather, facilitates important, visceral connections based on similar historical origins (3). He provides the paradigms of liminality and tropicity to capture the common history of movement, myriad self-expressions, travel, and the workability of a hyphenated identity to enable planetary insurgency against hegemonic forms of power that seek to pauperize, restrict, oppress, and undermine developing nations and its peoples (149–151).

Jan Carew (2006) makes good sense when he notes that any critical turn to the multicultural interests of the Americas would do well “to look back at... [the] seminal cultural developments... in Guyana over half a century ago, for these were replicated in many islands and mainland territories around the Caribbean Sea” (23). Taking a lead from Carew, this essay looks to a selection of the Amerindian fables written by Harris in 1970. Guyana is often linked to the origin of the term meaning “land of many waters” (Ludewig 2019, 79). In a symbolic sense, the definition emphasizes the liquidity of Guyanese social and cultural identity, which is usually divided into various ethnic groups: Indo-Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean, the First Peoples, and a small portion of Chinese, Portuguese, and Caucasian groups.

Harris’s short stories in *The Age of the Rainmaker* focus on the First Inhabitants/Amerindian Peoples who occupied the region before the advent of any other ethnic group. The original inhabitants are further subdivided into the Taino, Carib, and Warrau communities of the South American basin. Indeed, an extensive anthropological overview of the Guyana First Peoples would require another discussion altogether. However, this introduction serves to contextualize the springs of Harris’s thoughts, which interrogate the manner in which Indigenous cultural and religious traditions are wielded to repair a vision of the Caribbean/South American environment as multivalent. His utility of the mythic imagination with its focus on the deeply felt ideology that the land is a physical and psychic sanctuary, a complex repertoire of values, and a nexus of ancestral power relations, provides an alternative approach to envision new ways to be human. It is also worth noting at this point that while this essay extends existing theoretical standpoints on Harris’s oeuvre, it also proposes and sharpens the argument that ancestral memory is so powerful in the psyche of each protagonist in the selected narratives that it begins to command its own attention, and each individual is made to listen to its eruptive power.

Interestingly, Harris in “Tradition and the West Indian Novel” (1967b) distinguishes his New World epistemologies from Eurocentric structures by deconstructing ideas of linearity (28–47). Instead of monolithic paradigms that elided the complex spiritual tapestry of Caribbean experience, Harris presents the novel of fulfillment, which is characterized by its aesthetic features of geological motifs, mythic time scales, embodied characters, spatial metaphors, and gateways through which the wreckage of colonial history is manifested. It reflects a philosophical dimension that is related to Harris’s belief in the regenerative capacity of the Caribbean environment.

Harris's elaboration on the tapestry of Caribbean ecology via literature reflects the imperatives of liberating the human imagination from predetermined reading habits. His critical practice eschews monopolistic analyses of texts for alternative readings that are attuned to subtle resonances, fossils, buried clues, and opacities. Anita Patterson (2008) aptly notes that Harris seeks to re-enable a vision of the "continuity [of life that] appears to have vanished in the New World" through the intuitive imagination (138). In *The Sleepers of Roraima and The Age of the Rainmakers* ([1974c] 2014c), he recuperates Amerindian ontologies as a way of resisting empires' depersonalizing instincts and cultural severance from Caribbean ancestral epistemologies. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley fittingly postulate that Harris's eco-socialist convictions of nurturing the wounded landscape give rise to incisive cultural forms with the power to instruct and heal the psyche of the generations in the wake of neo-imperial dispossession (2011, 26). They contend that Harris accomplishes this through extensive flashbacks (allowing the narrated time to cover strategies for survival against eco-imperialism) and the construction of the landscape as an ineradicable presence (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 26). In *The Sleepers of Roraima and The Age of the Rainmakers* ([1974c] 2014c) and in particular, "The Laughter of the Wapishanas" ([1974b] 2014b) and "The Age of Kaie" ([1974a] 2014a), Harris appoints the environment as both a vessel of memory to repurpose the lifeways of Indigenous communities and to impart modalities of healing in a postindustrial era.

Interconnected Visions and Forests of the Imagination

The narrative "The Laughter of the Wapishanas" portrays a series of excursions into the Guyana heartland by a young girl called Wapishana who is desperate to return humor to her people, and whose habitats have been repeatedly destroyed by a series of colonial and neocolonial violence. It is written in the third person point of view and the plot enacts the protagonist's journey into the Guyana hinterlands to "search [for] the colour and nature of the laughter... which she was determined to restore to the lips of her people" ([1974b] 2014b, 143). The critical horizon of the text can be expanded through an ethnographic framing. Harris's introductory note provides the evidence that the group was indeed solemn and laughter-loving ([1974b] 2014b, 141). He likewise records the period of the 1960s, which marks the tumultuous years of transition from British colonial rule to an independent government under Forbes Burnham, whose Soviet leadership style exacerbated racial and ethnic rivalries. The backdrop of violence and the brutality of tyrannical regimes destroyed the hope of the ethnic communities who remained perennially exploited and controlled. Frank Birbalsingh cites George Lamming's sentiments that "the long survival of Mr. Burnham as Prime Minister and President of Guyana depended on the manipulation of race as a device" (1997, 11). In light of this chain of historical events, the story reflects on both colonial and postcolonial expropriation and disillusionment.

Subsequent to the author's insightful introductory remarks, a complex plot emerges: the narrator journeys into a primordial landscape to make known her complaint about the loss of ancestral territories, the abrogation of her community's ways of hunting, fishing, and grazing rights, and the de facto cancellation of their interaction with nature. It is an allusion to the First People's struggles against (neo)colonial extractive activities in Guyana, namely the degradation of oil reserves, logging, polluted landscapes left by bauxite mining, the contamination of watercourses, and deforestation. Harris posits:

The predicament of the Indian continues to deepen with new uncertainties as to the authority which governs him. Such authority has been at stake for centuries with the decimation of the tribes. And a political scale is still lacking: the land under his feet is disputed by economic interests and national interest. ([1974b] 2014b, 141)

Harris's attention to the despoliation wrought in the name of national interest hints to the enterprises of postcolonial governments that acted upon its Indigenous population in similar ways to previous colonial rule. With the future of the geophysical world under threat, Harris subsequently sets up the coping mechanisms of the Wapishana woman—a survivor of colonialism—who does not accept the evil of conquest and who sets out on a journey to reclaim her territory.

As the plot unfolds, Wapishana searches out the gift of laughter, which carries imperishable healing properties, and which she believes, will revoke the "years of drought" that plague the island ([1974b] 2014b, 143). The narrative divulges that not only did the colonial and postcolonial foreign experiments disrupt Indigenous ecosystems, but also equally devastated a symbiotic relationship between human and habitat. This inextricable connection between Amerindian ontology and the environment is underscored by Harris in the essay, "The Question of Form and Realism in the West Indian Artist" (1967a) where he observes that the "cosmic [interface] brings... authority [...] in terms of understanding and protect[ing] the kind of world we build, the kind of living substance we realize and cherish" (19–22). For Harris, the fates of creation, the people, and the woodland itself rest in a vision of cosmic interrelatedness.

An appreciation of the living cosmos is echoed by Wapishana who repurposes the role of native archetypes and myth in times of crisis. As she embarks upon her journey, she inspects the fate of the dying trees and the brokenness of "hunted bird and fish, animal and god" ([1974b] 2014b, 143). She laments about the poaching of species that deranges the natural population growth of the wildlife. As the narrative unfolds, she encounters a secret staircase while making her way deeper into the ruined heartland. While bravely climbing the set of steps, she sees that she is accompanied by a shamanic figure who explains that it is only through navigating a spirit-infused terrain that she will be

able to locate the right dosage of tonic to bring healing to her people. Thus, it is through her laboring movements and commitment to defend the livelihood of her community that the process of social and ritual support is set in motion.

In his conceptually insightful essay, "Tradition and the West Indian Novel" (1967b), Harris expounds on the appearance of spirit guides or shamans in the world of the living, whose particular functions are to warn, instruct, and bless (30). Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro³ (2012) observes that Amerindian⁴ perspectivism integrates ideas of the human world with spirituality (117). de Castro asserts that this "conception [of a] universe...inhabited by different sorts of... human and non-human [entities]" (83) predicates a standpoint of "ecosophic [or intuitive] knowledge" (95). de Castro is describing a reality where the region's First Inhabitants were in constant partnership with forces who occupied the cosmos (94–95). It signposts a revolutionary horizon, which advances the point that despite modernity's growing instincts toward accelerating violence and sterile life forms, a path to knowledge is enacted by way of a cosmically attuned and eco-critical imagination. It is a perspective that has existed for eons longer than colonialism. Demonstrably, the elder's instructions in the narrative propel the young protagonist into a path of extremities, which involve her crossing through difficult and multiple thresholds. This sense of terrestrial simultaneity creatively connects with a nuanced understanding of Caribbean/South American historiography since the region's history cannot be expressed through images or ideas of linearity. Jean Antoine-Dunne observes that the physical and psychic shape of the environment, in itself, "is a map of the impact of the past as a broken set of miles" (2017, 30). The present reality is therefore caught in a circuit of relations that generates a multiplicity of possibilities. This pluralism is associated with the assemblage of realms and energies in Harris's story.

In terms of fictional methodologies, Harris opposes the machinery of imperialism, which produced taxonomies of the self that sought to negate mutualities, parallel time, and ancestral faiths. The logic of historical materialism, with its heavy focus on the concrete universe, produced the effect that the corporeal and social world must be commensurate with ideas of linearity. Damien Grant in *Realism* explains that the human world, according to Western realist narrative conventions, thrives on a hierarchy that compartmentalized communities and people groups based on caste, rank, and consciousness ([1970] 2019, 9). It is a reading practice that divided the sacred from the material and omitted the creative power of spiritual intermedialities. In a counterdiscursive manner, Harris assembles the haunting presences of history in the current milieu of the Wapishana woman. This style of narrative hybridity (as delineated in the pursuit of material and immaterial realms, the melting pot of human and nonhuman knowledges, and a merging of past and present times) foregrounds creative insights and provisional modes of freedom. When Wapishana arrives at the top of the staircase, she hears a cacophony of spirit voices that coalesce into one reality.

Several interesting ideas emerge at this point. The spatial metaphor of the staircase facilitates a new treaty of relations between spiritual energies and earthly beings. It also transposes the protagonist into a time tunnel of history and a world of the dead. Embedded in the concept of the steps that connect earth to sky, and the image of a self-determined woman climbing the staircase, is the sense of numinous intercourse. The ladder imagery provides the apparatus for establishing a dialectical relationship between heights and depths, not simply in content but in form. It represents a new genesis or vision of reconceiving the landscape as an entity with agential significance.

For Wapishana, the vibrancy of her ancestral past is heard across the seemingly dying landscape, which invigorates her consciousness. In this vista, she observes a “cloud of rain... [and] on one... horizon [there is a feathered man with a] yellow beak, crest [and] claws” ([1974b] 2014b, 144–45). The fictional use of bird-headed figures unfolds as an imprint of immortality. The kinship with animals and constellations suggests the ways in which Harris’s cross-cultural imagination is activated to reverse the burdens of imperial, monolithic history. Interestingly, Harris’s pursuit of folk images, as outlined by Maes-Jelinek and Ledent (2002), encapsulates the myth of the feathered serpent god, Quetzalcoatl¹⁵ to signify the evolutionary wedding of earth and sky as well as outward and inner space (xix). The Mesoamerican myth of Quetzalcoatl—a prime creator-deity who provides rainfall for the fertilization of the earth—carries the idea of regeneration incurred through a merging of the elements (de Montellano 1990, 46–8). This reliance on mythical forms supports Harris’s philosophical interpretation of the revitalizing dimensions of Caribbean space, which sets in motion avenues for Wapishana’s self-fashioning. Accordingly, in this spiritual force-field, her consciousness expands and she is able to metamorphose into a communal self. This is evoked when “[s]he recalled how she seemed part and parcel of the... fabric of space—as if she herself... moved [through] inner and outer horizons [...]. Each step she made... corresponded to inner and outer crenulations of [the] psyche” ([1974b] 2014b, 145). This movement through interlaced spaces are consonant with shamanic passages that bring to the scene multiple personae—mystic plants and deceased shamans—that enable the discovery of new possibilities. Shamanic encounters thus energize the quest for liberty from the inside of rituals and ceremonies.

It comes as no surprise that in the ceremonial space of the Guyana interior, Wapishana enters into a folkloric consciousness, which undermines the silencing and erasure of oppressive practices. It is worth considering Harris’s attention to psychic intercourse on the facets of the protagonist’s journey. She must abolish the material or corporeal self that has been overexposed to imperial forces and embrace the heightened consciousness of the mythic beings who imprint upon her mind, the knowledge that she desires to restore her community’s health. In this nirvanic or transcendental state, she observes young trees or seedlings that stand rooted in the timberlands, breathing forward an imperishable balance and cohesion into the community. Here, Harris continues to bridge the divide

between the earthly plane and the cosmos, the material and the spiritual. It is through this intimate rapport with ancestral memory that the protagonist can recover transformational tactics for the benefit of the tribe. As Wapishana garners knowledge, she encounters the "Elder Tree of the Fish" ([1974b] 2014b, 146) and sees through the mists of time, the "bridegroom of conquest" (147) whose bargaining schemes of gold and silver precipitated the space-taker over of the hinterlands. The images of the "scissors of light" (146) that cut through her legs, the conquistador's arms that "clasped her to his breast" (147), and the "tyrannical" flood that "pull[s] her down into the depths of the pool" (147) suggest the logics of vulnerability, seduction, and entrapment. The light that pierces through the shadows of her limbs speaks to the assault that is cloaked in Europe's global civilizing projects. However, the girl is saved by the retributive rainfall that the shaman induces, and she swiftly advances into a reunion with the "Elder Tree of Animal" ([1974b] 2014b, 148).

The periphery of the rain and the watchful shamanic figure provides a site of complex interconnection with a variety of agencies. Harris is building new discourses about ecological renewal rituals aimed at facilitating awareness and validation of alternative healing pathways, which were condemned by imperial and neo-imperial powers. At this phase of her quest, Wapishana is confronted by a thick veil, behind which the laughter of her people is audible. She is advised by her spirit guide to attune herself with the music of the living landscape so that entry can be gained. As she obliges, the veil is torn and she enters into a horizon of spirits. Harris is evincing the potentialities of partnering with alternative systems of knowing as a precondition for the emergence into a new state of consciousness. While crossing into the arch of space, Wapishana encounters the "Elder Tree of God" who offers her a token that contains the "maiden juice of... laughter" (151). The remedy is rumored to awaken the human senses from the inhibition of the colonialism. As her primal instincts are aroused and the cheer penetrates the cells of her being, "the rain [begins] to fall from the elder tree of life" (151) and the land is fertilized.

This experience reveals cogent aspects of and interlapping connections among human expression and the natural world. Harris is conveying the precolonial mixture of landscape, hinterland, collective history, and personal geography. By affectively reorienting herself within the landscape, Wapishana as a human archetype plumbs the material topsoil of the land to locate the remedy that will dispel the spiritual and material drought that plagues her community. The ritual of laughter is presented as an elixir of life, which is necessary to repair the fragmentation induced by historical amnesia and geological dislocation. The impact is the repurposing of a usable past and a viable being in the world. The events in the narrative illuminate the extrahuman qualities of the environment and the ceremonial knowledge of deceased shamans who become instruments in restoring the soul of the tribe. At the narrative denouement, Wapishana's actions prove effective: the drought ceases and the exuberance of the community is restored. It is a demonstration of the sustaining power of transhistorical unity and

inventiveness. Through this fable, Harris, in Sylvia Wynter's words, pits "against those various faces of domination [...] the creative determination of women, workers, dominated races, and other groups to... affirm themselves" (1995, 64). Certainly, utopias are not found in Harris's narrative, but its ingredients are perceptible in the alliances with the material and nonmaterial world, the act of claiming communal responsibility, the establishment of networks of solidarity, and alternative ways of knowing, which are essential to any form of psychological and physical healing for the once-colonized.

Ancestral Partnership and Radical Modes of Healing

In keeping with the thematic concerns of Harris in "The Laughter of the Wapishanas" ([1974b] 2014b), the issue of environmental plunder and its effects upon other Indigenous communities of the Amazon rainforest are also depicted in the short story, "The Age of Kaie" ([1974a] 2014a). The protagonist, Kaie, is both the heroic ancestor as well as his contemporary descendent. He plays the part of the charismatic, native leader who sacrificially drowns himself to end the enemy of drought that exposes his community to social and cultural vulnerabilities. In this allegory, Harris portrays the historical specificity of capitalistic machinations that repositioned the center of the world economy toward the Amazonian hinterlands. Moreover, by focusing on the rainforest artery of the Amazon, which supports global life, Harris not only links North and South America but also asserts his global, environmental concerns. The consciousness of the landscape becomes a method for Harris, which he concretizes in the tensions and national catastrophe of the Rupununi rebellion. Evoked in the metaphor of the insurgency is the larger framework of territorial invasion. He provides therapeutic interventions to the social and environmental upheaval through the creative use of the Macusi myth of Kaie.

Seated at the edge of the Central Highlands plateau in Guyana, Kaieteur is the site of transcendence and healing against the background of the Rupununi uprising in Harris's fiction. By entering into the myth of Kaieteur, Harris changes the "discovery" of European conquest into a recovery of space and events. Importantly, Kaie derives his interiority and strength from an intimate connection with the land. As the society plummets into civil war, the Indigenous communities suffer spiritual distress and loss of morale. The elders' roles are threatened and the unavailability of low water reserves induces dislocation and communal fragmentation. Contextually, the causes and events of the 1969 Rupununi uprising were fueled by the greed and uncontrolled ambitions of transplanted European cattle ranchers of the savannahs and a group of Venezuelan rebels who disputed national borders. The effect was the displacement of Indigenous communities, who were open targets to state violence and modern warfare. In Harris's tale, the effects of civil unrest erupt into cosmological disorder. The images of the "fire... across the landscape" ([1974a] 2014a, 115), "the torn waterfall" (109), "the diffused radiance of... leaves" (111), and "the decline in the volume of the river" (113) foreground the ecological collapse. Not

only were the forests damaged by planned fires—with the intent to destroy habitats and ecosystems—but also there were the subtle ruses of tyrannical governance, which betrayed former peace treaties with tribal communities. The reterritorialization of lands, which were given to Indigenous small-scale farmers, for example, compromised any semblance of trust and mutual respect. The keen narrator observes that the voices of the gods have gone silent and their absence is felt in the prolonged drought. However, from the many lacerations and communal traumas, Harris conceives an aesthetic of rebirth via specific acts of sacrifice and metamorphosis.

Not unlike the role of Wapishana, the writer illustrates the transformational power of human responsibility in the character of Kaie. There is the deep understanding that Kaie's determination to invoke rainfall, which he believes will end the dry spell and famine, is connected to alternative cosmologies of time and space that exceed capitalism's materialistic narrative of modernity. To begin this enterprise, he summons out of the nearly dried-up waterways, "[h]is namesake ghost [and] long-dead ancestor" ([1974a] 2014a, 117) who possesses the knowledge to produce rain. An essential feature of Harris's organic concept of community is the absence of a fixed boundary between the living and the dead. The coexistence of both the living and the deceased is cognate with an awareness of the double-faced view of reality and the relativity of time. The symbol of the resurrected ancestral presence serves as a retributive counterpoint and agent of justice to the impact of neocolonialism.

Through this ancestral recovery, Harris delineates the substratums of the Caribbean and South American womb of space to make connections with supposedly exterminated peoples who cannot be erased from the environment no matter the circumstance present. It is through the cultural practices of remembrance, enactment, and cognitive processes, which recall submerged memories, that Kaie can invoke his namesake ancestor. Equally important is the point that these ghostly presences and buried bodies of the Amerindian holocaust allow for the recirculation of the small histories of those who have been marginalized because of their difference. As the deity rises to the surface, he imparts the knowledge that cosmic healing can only be afforded through a full reunification with the landscape. He admonishes Kaie that animal, vegetable, mineral, and human life are evenly valuable in the circle of life and divinely connected to the geological balance of the earth. After internalizing this knowledge, Kaie determines to sail his "sacrificial boat" ([1974a] 2014a, 117) over the waterfall to appease the rainmaking gods.

While making his crossing, he calls upon the power of the cosmos for pardon and healing. It is an act that foregrounds the precipitation of "[t]he rain [which] began to grow... until a spectre of flood arose" (Harris [1974a] 2014a, 117). As Kaie submerges himself into the constellations of water, sky, and sunlight, he arises as an everlasting deity. Ingrained in both his sacrificial leap and the lack of distinction between the human (Kaie) and the nonhuman (water) is the idea of renewal. The ability to sink wholly into the landscape demonstrates patterns

of continuity. The concept of continuity is potently epitomized in the title and cascading beauty of the *Kaieteur* Falls that sit valiantly today in a section of the Amazon rainforest. Possession of or integration with the earth reflects Harris's eco-cultural resistance to exploitative progress and systems of plunder, which are evident in the era of globalization. For Harris, this act of repossessing the environment through reunification with the region's mythical presences produces a vision of reclamation.

Following his crossover into the world of the gods, Kaie enters into a theater of memory and becomes "aware of two anchors... one grey, one green—lodged together. His namesake ghost... had sown the grey one" to Kaie's hook ([1974a] 2014a, 117). It is here that he comes to the understanding that "the two ages—past and present—[were destined to be] intertwined" (117). The image of the entangled anchors—one old and the other new—facilitates ideas of twinship, which becomes an important continuation of thought for Harris's eco-critical eye. The interconnected images of colonial and neocolonial resistance convey the significance of rootedness and attunement through conscious acts of repossession. The anchors are not only agents of psychic and physical forces, but also are signifiers of a guiding vision. It is in this instance of ceremonial contact that the spur of creation is achieved, thus setting in motion the turbulent "torrent" (12) that drenches the entirety of the rainforest.

There is the profound awareness that while aggressive neo-extractivist enterprises such as logging, mining, pollution, and deforestation may succeed in destroying the topsoil of the land, the luminous spirit of the folk community cannot be eradicated. They are reborn to redress the devastation of habitat and creature perpetuated by invading forces. This is evoked in the narrative of Kaie, who becomes an everlasting rainmaking deity and returns to the earth as water. In relation to the myth, Arthur Seymour (1965) avers that as Kaie "feels the impact of the waters [while] plunging to [his] death on the rocks below [... he is] resurrected into lovely mist" (37). The landscape thus appears as a factual co-presence in the text, which provides important support for human communities.

The narratives "The Laughter of the Wapishanas" and "The Age of Kaie" both influence the shaping of a significant ecological imagination and work to ventilate the utterances, instructions, and guidance from the nonhuman world. As postulated by Harris in *The Mask of the Beggar* (2003): "The world [itself] will be the driver on [wo/mankind's] return to nurture... the birds, the snakes, the fish, the whales, the seals, the lambs, the sheep, the tigers, the butterflies [... and the list of] interminable series of destroyed and threatened species" (111). There is the revelation that the very landscape with its animist associations and mythic dimensions will generate its own forces to outmaneuver the systems that have vilified and truncated Indigenous cultures and folkways of being. By close observation of the submerged presences lodged within the Caribbean/South American environment, Harris offers a rich repository of insight into the values, priorities, and vigorous cultural practices that are grounded in Indigenous praxes for survival. Thinking through these pathways in relation to the contemporary

global space of remembrance engages evidentiary strategies of resistance through discovery and responsibility. It delivers a powerful inventory of how people groups make meaning of their lives and catastrophes, which can be utilized for contemporary and future applications.

Notes

¹Harris's first published novel was *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), followed by an additional twenty-three novels with *The Ghost of Memory* (2006) as the most recent. His poems and experiments with drama are found in *Eternity to Season* (1954) and *Fetish* (1951). His short fictions include "Kanima" (1964) and *The Sleepers of Roraima and The Age of the Rainmakers* ([1974c] 2014c).

²While the scope of this essay does not permit an extensive overview of the Caribbean's intellectual history, it is important to note that there are various phases to Caribbean literature. The fighting or early anticolonial category that emerged in the 1950s gave epistemic and thematic saliency to revolutionary and material, social action. Opposed to Europeanized-inflected discourses, which negated the ontologies of Caribbean persons, intellectuals like Frantz Fanon and C. L. R. James deployed political symbolism and naturalist existentialism, which affirmed the self-rule of societies and people-groups. However, beyond the realism of the canonical writers was a cultural awakening that marked a revival of folk culture in order to assert a more inclusive expression of resistance toward neocolonial forces. This community of intellectuals were known as the poeticists voices, which included figures such as Earl Lovelace, Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, and others, whose works championed causes of intercultural reconciliation, ecological preservation, cosmic-human interrelatedness, and syncretic spirituality. Discourses of this nature effectively facilitated modalities of self-autonomy, healing, negotiation, and affective bonding. This shift became definitive after independence (1960s onwards) and has continued through to the current era. For further insight into the history of Caribbean intellectualism, see Silvio Torres-Saillant's *Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature* (1997) and Paget Henry's *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (2000).

³Anthropologist and theoretician Eduardo Viveros de Castro has dedicated the last four decades of his life to assessing the ontologies of the South American and Caribbean First Peoples. His discipline initiates the ontological turn within Amazonia communities and offers a decolonial method to understanding the group's ideologies, religion, politics, commerce models, and cultural pathways. His research addresses the absence of Indigenous cultures in literary criticism and production from the 1970s onward and seeks to fill the gap. He accomplishes this by assessing the worth of Amazonia ecology and the multiplicity of interactions between natural and social agents—a disposition that has been eschewed by Eurocentric discourses. de Castro's multidisciplinary works include *Cannibal Metaphysics* (2015a), *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society* (2020), and *The Relative Native: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds* (2015b).

⁴Although the term, "Amerindian" is arguably outdated and has been replaced by "Indigenous" in contemporary discourses, the phrase is referred to in this essay by its original appearance in de Castro's and Harris's respective texts. It is also imperative to note that the titles, "First Peoples," "Amerindian," and "Indigenous" are used interchangeably within Caribbean criticism. According to the scholarship of Gordon Rohlehr in "Folk Research: Fossil and Living Bone" (2007) and Jennifer Rahim in "Issues and Developments in Caribbean Literary Theory and Criticism" (2013), the expressions have been derived from the oral traditions

used to depict the communities of the Caribbean's First Inhabitants.

⁵The myth of Quetzalcoatl, as deployed in this narrative, illustrates Harris's cosmopolitical vision and his emphasis on the entanglements between forests and nature-based communities. The multiplicity of relations established between different mythologies and Indigenous communities calls for a re-appreciation of the role of shamans and deities as brokers, mediators, and translators among diverse spaces.

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