Taino Resurgence in Jamaica: An Indigenous Leadership for the Ecozoic

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Table of Contents

Abstract

This thesis explores a Taino model of leadership designed to foster a transition to what theologian Thomas Berry has called the "Ecozoic"—a period of ecological flourishing marked by reciprocal relationships between humans and the more-than-human world. Rooted in Taino philosophies, particularly those drawn from water as a matrix of connection, this research proposes a form of leadership that opposes the extractive, hierarchical structures of the "Technozoic" and centers instead on relational, decolonial, and ecological principles. By engaging in ethnographic research and Indigenous methodologies such as autoethnography and “two-eyed seeing,” the study synthesizes insights from Taino spirituality, decolonial anthropology, and kinship-based governance models to present a holistic approach to ecological leadership.

This work underscores water's teachings on balance, reciprocity, and kinship as foundational to Taino leadership, positing that a center-out, networked model of community governance—anchored by reciprocity, treaty-making, and gender inclusivity—can address the pressing environmental and social crises of our time. In tracing Taino resurgence and matrilineal perspectives, the thesis reimagines leadership as a dynamic, kinship-centered practice that cultivates balance between human and ecological communities. This Taino form of leadership not only revives Indigenous ontologies within academic contexts but also challenges colonial narratives through an inclusive framework that emphasizes relational ecology, cultural resilience, and Indigenous voices. In doing so, this research contributes a decolonial model for ecological and social justice that holds relevance for contemporary global efforts toward sustainable and just futures.

Keywords: *Socio-Cultural Anthropology, Anthropology Beyond the Human, Autoethnography, Indigenous Methodology, Religious Studies, Decoloniality, Ecozoic*

Résumé

Cette thèse explore un modèle taino de leadership conçu pour favoriser la transition vers ce que le théologien Thomas Berry a appelé l'« écozoïque » - une période d'épanouissement écologique marquée par des relations réciproques entre les humains et le monde plus qu'humain. Enracinée dans les philosophies Taino, en particulier celles qui s'inspirent de l'eau comme matrice de connexion, cette recherche propose une forme de leadership qui s'oppose aux structures extractives et hiérarchiques du « Technozoïque » et se concentre plutôt sur des principes relationnels, décoloniaux et écologiques. En s'engageant dans une recherche ethnographique et des méthodologies indigènes telles que l'autoethnographie et la « vision à deux yeux », l'étude synthétise les idées de la spiritualité Taino, de l'anthropologie décoloniale et des modèles de gouvernance basés sur la parenté afin de présenter une approche holistique du leadership écologique.

Ce travail souligne que les enseignements de l'eau sur l'équilibre, la réciprocité et la parenté sont à la base du leadership taino, et postule qu'un modèle de gouvernance communautaire centré sur l'extérieur et en réseau, ancré dans la réciprocité, la conclusion de traités et l'inclusion des sexes, peut répondre aux crises environnementales et sociales urgentes de notre époque. En retraçant la résurgence Taino et les perspectives matrilinéaires, la thèse réimagine le leadership comme une pratique dynamique, centrée sur la parenté, qui cultive l'équilibre entre les communautés humaines et écologiques. Cette forme taino de leadership ne fait pas seulement revivre les ontologies indigènes dans les contextes universitaires, mais remet également en question les récits coloniaux grâce à un cadre inclusif qui met l'accent sur l'écologie relationnelle, la résilience culturelle et les voix indigènes. Ce faisant, cette recherche contribue à un modèle décolonial de justice écologique et sociale qui est pertinent pour les efforts mondiaux contemporains en faveur d'un avenir durable et juste.

Mots-clés: *Anthropologie socioculturelle, anthropologie au-delà de l'humain, autoethnographie, méthodologie indigène, études religieuses, décolonialité, écozoïque.*

Contribution of Authors

This thesis is the original work of the sole author, Alicia Charles, and represents the culmination of independent research conducted as part of the requirements for the Master of Anthropology degree at McGill University. All aspects of the research process, including the development of the research questions, literature review, design and methodology, data collection and analysis, and writing of the thesis, were undertaken solely by the author.

Where external resources or support were utilized, they have been acknowledged appropriately in the "Acknowledgments" and "References" sections. This work adheres to McGill University's standards for academic integrity and originality.

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Hahom akia seneko kakona.

Prologue

Following Jo-Ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem (2019), Amy Parent and Jo-Ann Archibald (2019), and other Indigenous scholars,[1] I attend to Indigenous protocol by first acknowledging that McGill University, where I and this research are hosted, is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which I live and write this thesis. Tiohtià:ke, commonly known as Montréal, is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. I endeavour to respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in my ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

Following Indigenous and Caribbean[2] protocol I now introduce myself. My name is Alicia Charles D'Avalon (Abienratito). I am the kasike (chief) of the Yukayeke Yamaye Kokuio (Taino Firefly Tribe of Jamaica) and sister to the Yukayeke Yamaye Guani (Taino Hummingbird Tribe of Jamaica). My mother is Jacqueline Taylor Charles, and my maternal grandmother is Gurdalyn Harvey Taylor. My people are from Western Jamaica, in the area that is now called the parish of Hanover.

Locating oneself at the beginning of a process is a cultural tradition within many Indigenous cultures that serves to identify who you are and your connections to community.[3] As Strega and Brown explain, "locating ourselves within our research is one way to ensure accountability, build trust, and decolonize research. The naming of one's location has epistemological value for Indigenous peoples and communities because it establishes relationships; something that is, according to Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson (2008), 'at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous.'" (Strega and Brown, 10) I approach this research from a mixed racial and ethnic (Indigenous, Black, White), multi-national (Jamaican Canadian), female, queer positionality.

My experience of identity has always been one of liminality. I was born in Montreal, but my parents immediately returned to Jamaica when I was born so that they could raise their children with my mother's very close-knit family. When I moved back to Canada in my teens, I had the experience of being Black but not identifying with much of the "African

[1] Absolon; Burkhart; Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*; Strega and Brown; Tuhiwai Smith; Wilson.
[2] In many Indigenous communities, and throughout the Caribbean, you introduce yourself by saying who your people are.
[3] Absolon; Burkhart; Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*; Strega and Brown; Shawn Wilson.

Canadian" experience. As Jamaica is made up of a Black majority and neither my Blackness nor my Indigeneity was ever truly positioned as an obstacle. I have Scottish in my background, which is represented in my skin tone and the freckles that pop up when I spend time in the sun, but I am not at all white presenting. These are experiences that I still wrestle with and that inform my interests and motivations in my research. My journey of decolonisation started in childhood when I noticed that our family's traditions and practices often conflicted with what I was being taught in church and I realised that Christianity (the largely dominant religion in Jamaica) had been forced on most of my ancestors by colonisation and slavery. My family and tribe still have many of the traditions of our Indigenous ancestors but have lost much of the context around those traditions. I wanted to decolonise my identity, my spirituality, and my sense of worth. I wanted to parse our traditions and understand the original contexts of those traditions. This is where my passion for studying and attempting to understand 'culture' started. As the Indigenous resurgence movement grew in the Caribbean, my community decided that I had the skills and the calling for tribal leadership in this time of resurgence and climate change. My mother (the previous kasike) and our elders passed the mantle of kasike on to me. As we decided that we wanted our voices to be heard in the Taino Nation, I began training with kasike Kalaan Robert Pairman, kasike of the Yukayeke Yamaye Guani, and other elders in the Taino Nation.

It is in this context that I incorporate my culture into my research methodology and apply an anthropological and autoethnographic lens to my journey in Indigenous leadership in my own communities, exploring the Indigenous methodological idea of research as ceremony (Shawn Wilson). I am inspired by the work of other Indigenous researchers who understand Indigenous epistemology and ontology as being based on relationality and maintaining relational accountability. As the purpose of ceremony is to build stronger relationships with ourselves, each other and the cosmos, the research we do can be seen as a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight that allows us to be and move in the world in ethical and connected ways. It is my hope that this research is such a ceremony. Seneko kakona.

Introduction

The Taino were the first people Columbus encountered when he arrived in the Americas (Palme and Scarano). As Monzote stated, "Few events in human history have been as momentous as the arrival of Christopher Columbus and his companions in the Caribbean in 1492." (Monzote 83) In the years that followed, the more-than human Caribbean ecology the Tainos inhabited was transformed into a monocrop plantation economy, fueling industrialization, capitalism, and the rise of a new world order (Sued-Badillo). In the process, the Taino, this 'tribe of first contact', appeared to have slipped off the historical map. The combination of forced labour, disease, warfare, and societal collapse is often thought to have driven the Taino to extinction. Yet we are still here. I am a hereditary chief of the Yukayeke Yamaye Kokuio (Taino Firefly Tribe of Jamaica) as well as an anthropologist who seeks to use the ethnographic tools of my profession coupled and augmented by Indigenous methodologies to develop a form of critical intellectual, political, spiritual and decolonial leadership that will help potentiate the resurgence of Taino ways of being in contemporary Jamaica and beyond.

Contemporary Tainos understand that the destructive system that Columbus inaugurated continues to adversely affect all life and we are concerned about the real possibility of the collapse of planetary ecosystems and human life as we know it. In response, we are re-establishing our identities through a process of decolonisation and resurgence that fundamentally revolves around climate justice and is centred around re-Indigenizing our spirituality and culture so that it can include the greater community of other-than-human beings with whom we share this world. This research attempts to identify a Taino form of leadership that can help foster a transition to what theologian Thomas Berry has called the "Ecozoic:" a period of human-nonhuman ecological flourishing, which he sees as standing counter to the "Technozoic," the modern propensity to treat nature as an objectified resource.

A Brief History of the Jamaican Taino

The distinct Taíno culture developed in the insular Caribbean in about AD 1200 (Atkinson). The Taínos' ancestors are understood to have originated in the Amazon basin of South America (Keegan, *Destruction of the Taino*).

The term ‘Taíno’ refers to a social formation that incorporated distinct groups, allowing them to maintain their distinctiveness, while incorporating social groups in a regional political economy. The term came to be used to refer to the Indigenous peoples of the Greater Antilles during the time of contact (Atkinson; Rousse). ‘Taino’ refers to a culture that includes several distinctive but historically related socio-cultural groups that occupied Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Cuba, the Bahamas, and the Northern Lesser Antilles (Curet 54). When the Europeans arrived, the Caribbean islands had been inhabited for more than 7000 years by people that had migrated in several waves from South and Central America from Amazonian and Andean backgrounds. The last of these migrations occurred from 500 BCE to 300 CE, bringing language, religious symbolism, family structure, economic strategies and products, animals, metallurgy and pottery making, to be further developed into a unique Taino culture on the Islands (Sued-Badillo 99). Irving Rouse defines the Taínos as “the ethnic group that inhabited the Bahamian Archipelago, most of the Greater Antilles, and the northern part of the Lesser Antilles prior to and during the time of Columbus” (Rouse 185).

The Greater Antilles of the Caribbean was the first site of European--Indigenous encounter in the Americas. The communities that were invaded by the Spanish faced brutal treatment and rapid decimation, setting the stage for the long series of devastation of the Indigenous communities in the Caribbean and became the model for relations throughout the Americas by the Europeans (Dubois and Turtis). Jamaica first entered European history when Columbus landed on its coast during his second voyage in 1494. Columbus and his crew spent a year (June 1503 – June 1504) at Jamaica’s St. Ann’s Bay on the north coast, during his fourth voyage (Wesler; Wilson), “living on beached ships and relying on the native people for supplies.” (Wesler 252) Jamaica was densely populated at the time of contact. Las Casas noted that “the islands abounded with inhabitants as an ant-hill with ants” (Wesler 2013, 252), and Columbian sources said that the island was “thickly inhabited.” (Wesler 2013, 252) A letter written on October 28, 1495, by Michele de Cuneo, an Italian adventurer who accompanied Columbus on his second voyage, reported “an excellent and well populated harbour … during that time some 60,000 people came from the mountains, merely to look at us.” (Wesler 2013, 252) Those numbers were quickly decimated in the years that followed.

The Taino communities in Jamaica and the Caribbean suffered tremendously under European colonisation, and yet many found ways not just to survive but to “continue to cultivate independent worlds, to envision alternative futures for themselves that did not

involve vanishing but rather continuing to live and thrive as individuals and communities." (Dubois and Turtis 10) They survived by hiding in the mountains, adapting, resisting, and by joining with escaped Black slaves to found the groups who became the Maroons.[4] It is these ways of survival, adaptation and thriving that can help to guide the world in fostering a transition to the Ecozoic in times of climate change and social upheaval.

Framing Decoloniality & Resurgence

Decoloniality

Colonialism is the colonial situations that are enforced by the presence of a colonial administration. The term 'coloniality' is used to refer to the more abstract structure of colonialism beyond colonial periods. As Burkhart explains, "coloniality is the idea and ideology of domination, and colonialism is the practice of this domination." (Burkhart 26) Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021), in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* explains that coloniality is a mode through which "Europeans could develop their sense of European-ness" (22). The construction of Euro-American identity (conceptualised as the "West") also constructed non-Western identities such as Indigenous, African/Black, Oceanic, Asian, etc. These non-Western identities are further structured in hierarchical categorizations that create a hierarchy of the coloniality of power with Indigenous and Black peoples at the bottom of the hierarchy. As Dussel puts it, "the content of other cultures, for being different from [Europe], is declared non-human" (Dussel 11). This creation point is understood as the birth of modernity, when Europe "could constitute itself as a unified ego exploring, conquering, colonising an alterity that gave back its image of itself." (Burkhart 5) The manifestations of this world-system of modernity, as structured through the coloniality of power, depends on a cosmic reconfiguring of the foundational reality that exists in people and the land, therefore our relationship to land and each other is also constructed through the lens of colonial modernity. Coloniality reconfigures the way people are able to conceptualise their own ontology and epistemology in relation to subjectivity itself as well as the earth and other than human beings they are entangled with. Coloniality replaces the existing cultures and knowledge systems of non-Western categorised peoples with the culture and knowledge system of the dominant colonial culture that

[4] Forte; Guitar et al.; Feeble-Azcarate and Estevez; Wesler.

reproduces and reinforces domination. The colonial dominating system was and is most often the culture and knowledge systems of Christianity. The Doctrine of Discovery that states that all Indigenous property and person belong to the representatives of Christendom was a Christian doctrine. Hence, the lack of civilization and humanity that is ascribed to non-Western identities is constructed not from a rational ideal, but by being in relation to being European and Christian (Burkhart; Mignolo and Walsh).

Yet, non-Western identities have always resisted these categorizations and coloniality of power. Since the beginning of Spanish conquest and colonialism the First Peoples of these lands, and those brought here from Africa by force, have continuously resisted colonial ontology and rule through struggle, movements, and the creation and cultivation of modes of life, being and thought that confront, transgress, and undo the hold of coloniality and modernity. In his seminal work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Freire explains that "to divide the oppressed, an ideology of oppression is indispensable. In contrast, achieving their unity requires a form of cultural action through which they come to know the why and how of their adhesion to reality - it requires de-ideologizing." (173) Decoloniality is a form of struggle and survival, "an epistemic and existence-based response and practice - most especially by colonized and racialized subjects - against the colonial matrix of power in all of its dimensions, and for the possibilities of an otherwise." (Mignolo and Walsh 17) It recognises and interrupts the hierarchical structures of heteropatriarchy, race, gender, and class that are constitutive of colonial modernity and global capitalism.

These actions of resistance and de-ideologizing unsettle coloniality's negations and assert the 'otherwise' of decoloniality as praxis. The praxis of decoloniality is "the mechanisms that human groups implement as a strategy of questioning and making visible the practices of racialization, exclusion and marginalization, procuring the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity and self-determination, while at the same time confronting the bio-politic that controls, dominates, and commodifies subjects and nature." (Mignolo and Walsh 18) Disentangling from the colonial hold is a process of becoming conscious of how structures and systems in society construct reality, which enables individuals and communities to disrupt colonial violence and confront privilege and oppression. For Indigenous peoples this process of becoming conscious is a journey of reclaiming Indigeneity.

While the focus of Indigenous struggles and resistance has historically been mostly land-based, it has become clear that Indigenous people must also de-ideologize and heal from the psychological effects of colonisation (Absolon; Tuhiwai Smith). Decolonization requires

knowing and having a critical consciousness about our cultural histories and our positionality within them. My personal journey of decolonization has meant confronting the inherent conflicts and contradictions within the intersections of my identities. It means learning and practising my culture; embracing my Taino cosmology and spirituality; learning and speaking my language; and confronting ethnocentrism and institutional racism in academia as a scholar embedded in the academy. The very act of doing research projects with Indigenous research methodologies is an act of decolonization as I claim my own Taino subjectivity and Indigenous knowledge.

Resurgence

Indigenous nations are facing the crucial task of the "continued creation of individuals and assemblages of people who can think in culturally inherent ways." (Simpson 31) The struggle against colonially oppressive structures is meaningless without the commitment to build strong nations (Tuhiwai Smith). This is the praxis of resurgence. Resurgence is a term that refers to the theory and practice of Indigenous peoples creating an otherwise by exercising powers of self-determination outside of state paradigms and structures. Resurgence is reclaiming and reconnecting with traditional territories, governance, languages, economies, values, and social organisations by means of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. It is also about reestablishing sustainable relationships with the ecosystems that sustain all life. Indigenous peoples who are engaging in resurgence understand the need to understand and re-story (Archibald) who we are; and the need to re-establish and re-story the processes by which we live within our current contexts (Borrows and Tully; Simpson). This praxis of resurgence in oppressed and interrupted cultures often requires Indigenous peoples to draw on material and symbolic resources from beyond the current borders of their specific cultures in reclaiming, re-storying and reproducing their own Indigeneity. These materials and resources include ancestral teachings, land-based pedagogy, pan-Indigenous values and teachings, Indigenous and anti-oppressive scholarship, and even colonial archives. Indigenous identification therefore involves, "a positioning which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle." (Forte 9) This has been the case in the Taino resurgence movement.

Caribbean Decoloniality

"To tell the history of the Caribbean is to tell the history of the world," (Dubois and Turtis 1) Laurent Dubois and Richard Lee Turtis make this claim in their book, *Freedom Roots: Histories from the Caribbean.* The insular Caribbean was the first center of European conquest in the Americas. With over 500 years of European colonisation, the Antilles felt the impact of colonialism more keenly than any other area in the Americas. The Caribbean region continues to remain a nexus of global transformations, "at once a crossroads and a crucible for their unfolding." (Dubois and Turtis 2019, 1) The Caribbean has been deeply shaped and dominated by enduring Euro-American imperial projects that are predicated on implanting and sustaining extractive, exploitative and oppressive systems of plantation economies and agriculture. The incorporation of Caribbean lands, waters and populations were a crucial element in the construction of the capitalist world-economy. The 'developed' countries that are known as the 'Global North' still continue to gain wealth and power through the cultural, political, economic, and epistemic oppression and extraction in the Caribbean. The region provides a geographically strategic site for U.S. economic and military foreign policies. The Caribbean is a site of extraction for oil reserves that are almost as large as those in Iran, and numerous Caribbean states serve as tax havens for Western capital, while forcing most Caribbean societies to be structurally dependent on tourism, development aid, foreign investment, and remittances (Alegria; Beushausen et al.; Dubois and Turtis; Mignolo and Walsh).

These colonial projects have always been met with resistance by the peoples they oppressed, however, despite the most severe duress. The Caribbean also has a long legacy of subversion of oppressive structures, hybridity, multiplicity, and transculturality. Subjected Caribbean peoples have always been contesting, reimagining, and reinventing their worlds, creating an otherwise of survival and thriving, drawing on a long history of experiences of migration, transnational exchange, and transculturation.

The first recorded struggles of the Indigenous populations of the Americas against colonisation, enslavement and the hegemony of the colonial powers was initiated by the Taíno kasike Hatuey in Cuba when he led an uprising against Diego Velázquez and his troops. Many Taino communities across the Caribbean also resisted and rebelled, often preferring suicide over enslavement when faced with certain defeat. During slavery, both Indigenous Caribbean and African slaves escaped to the mountains and formed self-liberated communities all over the Caribbean. Rebellions and escapes were rampant. In Jamaica, well

known examples of resistance are the Maroon Wars (1731–1739 and 1795–1796), the Baptist War (1831), and the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865). The hugely influential Haitian Revolution of 1791 was the first successful slave revolution. Decolonial resistance and independence movements, such as the Cuban Revolution of 1959 during the Cold War, also shaped the region's history throughout the 20th century and led most Caribbean countries to gaining formal independence (Beushausen et al.).

The artistic, socio-political and theoretical contexts of Caribbean culture are often grounded in praxes of resistance. As Beushausen et al. outline, "in [Caribbean] music and dance, written texts and oral histories, linguistic and religious practices, pamphlets, essays, journalistic and academic writing, articulations of post- and/or decolonial discontent, and forms of protest express discursive and epistemic rebellion against histories and experiences of oppression, dispossession, and exploitation." (Beushausen et al. 6) Caribbean thinkers (such as José Martí, Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Stuart Hall, Sylvia Wynter, and Paul Gilroy) have been problematizing colonial knowledge politics and geopolitics, drawing on intellectual and artistic movements such as Négritude, Antillanité, Créolité, Negrismo, Afro-Cubanismo and the Harlem Renaissance (which was greatly influenced by Caribbean artists and critics). These movements grounded renegotiations of Caribbean identities and counter-narratives to Western representations by combining protest with the celebration of Caribbean cultures, Black and Indigenous lives, and ancestral heritages (Beushausen et al.).

The iconic Reggae songs of Bob Marley similarly illustrate the central ideological concern of radical social change. Marley's lyrics draw on a fusion of personal experiences of resistance, the Rastafarian movement, and scribal and oral literary influences to produce a dynamic process in which words, music and dance are organically integrated within a Caribbean resistance aesthetic (Cooper). Caribbean peoples engaging in resistance, decoloniality and resurgence are acutely aware of the de-ideologizing, the ontological and epistemological decolonisation, that Freire speaks of. During my fieldwork in Jamaica, every research participant that I interviewed mentioned Bob Marley's *Redemption Song*. In particular, the lyrics "emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds." (Marley 1:14) This phrase has become a pan-Caribbean call to action of resistance. Carolyn Cooper in her exploration of Jamaican popular culture asserts, "liberation becomes much more than the freeing from physical chains, for true freedom cannot be given; it has to be appropriated. Authenticity comes with the slave's reassertion of the right to self-determination. Emancipation from 'mental slavery' thus means liberation from passivity - the

instinctive posture of automatic subservience that continues to cripple the neo-colonised." (Cooper 124) Contemporary Tainos have also joined their voices to enact the forms of resistance and decoloniality expressed in Marley's redemption songs.

Contemporary Taino Resurgence

The Indigenous populations of the Caribbean have been subjected for centuries to paper genocide and the myth of extinction, narratives that insist that Indigenous Caribbean peoples "are doomed, vanishing, always on the verge of becoming nothing more than a memory." (Dubois and Turtis 10) And yet, we are still here. Taíno identity, bloodlines, and customs were never completely extinguished.[5] Historian Melanie Newton argues that the narrative of Indigenous disappearance in the Caribbean was one of the foundational imperial myths that has persisted, even in current academic scholarship and anticolonial texts from the Caribbean (Dubois and Turtis). Newton asserts that thinking about the Caribbean as an "Indigenous space and of Indigeneity as a key site of struggle in Caribbean history, gives scholars new ways to expose colonial forms of knowledge and power." (Dubois and Turtis 10) Taino peoples have survived through escape, concealment, intermarriage with Europeans in the encomienda system, creolization, and treaty making with escaped African slaves and the Maroon communities.[6] The Taíno is not a lost culture, but a people whose traditions are still alive today. The analysis of contemporary Taino communities' oral narratives, material culture, cultural practices, linguistic traits, and genetic data are vital to understanding the history and contemporary cultures of the Caribbean.[7]

The Taino resurgence movements began in the late 1980s, when Taino peoples in Puerto Rico began gathering at cultural events to discuss family oral histories and historical inaccuracies about their ancestors (Guitar et al.). It is worthy to note that identity is not fixed for eternity. Indigenous identities in the Caribbean, as everywhere, are constantly being reproduced, recontextualized and re-storied (Forte). As Freire explains, "through their continuing praxis, men and women simultaneously create history and become historical-social beings. Because - in contrast to animals - people can tri-dimensionalize time into the past, the present, and the future. Their history, in function of their own creations, develops as a constant process of transformation within which epochal units materialise. These epochal units are not closed periods of time, static compartments within which people are confined.

[5] Dubois and Turtis; Guitar et al.; Smith and Spencer.
[6] Dubois and Turtis; Guitar et al.; Marshall; Smith and Spencer.
[7] Atkinson; Forte; Smith and Spencer.

Were this the case, a fundamental condition of history - its continuity - would disappear. On the contrary, epochal units interrelate in the dynamics of historical continuity." (Freire 101) We are Taino through all temporalities, not separated into Taino of the past, Taino of the present, and Taino of the future.

The emergence of strong activist Indigenous leaders over the last quarter century across the Caribbean led to a surge of revamping of previously existing Taino governing bodies and new organisations being formed (Forte). Having greater access to the internet, international media, and regional gatherings, projects of resurgence and nation building, which are especially recent in the anglophone Caribbean, are making their presence known and their voices heard. Forte explains that "the economic transformations wrought by national development, and the increase in urbanisation, is a situation that has challenged the maintenance of Indigenous cultures while at the same time affording new bases for reproducing those cultural ties." (Forte 14)

Taino peoples have faced the total political, cultural and social collapse of our ways of life and being. Our very existence is resistance. Our communities know quite a bit about living through apocalyptic circumstances. That knowledge of how to survive and thrive against all odds can help contemporary societies around the world find solutions to the issues of climate change and societal collapse that we are facing today.

A Decolonial Anthropology

As Archibald and many other scholars have pointed out: research and academia have been critical tools of colonisation. Academia is the primary tool through which 'Western' culture consistently reaffirms Western ontology and epistemology as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as valid, 'civilised' knowledge. Academic research has historically been extractive, often taking non-Western knowledges and ways of being, 'sterilising' them by interpreting the non-Western knowledges through a Western, colonial lens, and repackaging them as Western, scientific knowledge. Anthropology, in particular, has collected, classified and represented other cultures in ways that have often positioned non-Western knowledges and ways of being as 'primitive', 'backwards' and 'uncivilised'. This Westernised interpretation of non-Western cultures becomes how society understands these cultures and greatly influences how the cultures that are being represented often come to understand themselves, despite the fact that Western research has historically been carried out by researchers who are not a part of the communities being studied. Indigenous cultures, in particular, have been the focal point of much of anthropology's ethnographic gaze. It is through a colonialist and imperialist gaze that anthropology and the West came to 'see', to 'name' and to 'know' Indigenous communities.[8] Jo-Ann Archibald explains, "colonial Western research of our traditional stories and research stories of our peoples was used to define, destroy, and deter the valuing of Indigenous knowledge, people, and practices. With the objective facade of research, and an assumed position of racial superiority (sometimes with benevolent intent) in the part of the researcher, the story-takers and story makers usually misrepresented, misappropriated, and mis-used our Indigenous stories. More than a theft of cultural property, this 'research' was an intellectual, cultural, and spiritual invasion that cast Indigenous characters in particular roles, framed from the vantage point of the 'hunter'". (J Archibald et al. 5)

Decolonizing methodologies is an anti-oppressive research approach that recognizes and challenges the western, Eurocentric research methods that have reinforced colonial narratives about oppressed peoples and that ignores the lived realities and valid ways of knowing of marginalized groups. [9] A decolonised, anti-oppressive research perspective understands that "knowledge does not exist 'out there' to be discovered. Rather, *knowledge is produced through the interactions of people* [emphasis my own], and as all people are

[8] J. Archibald et al.; F. Harrison *Outsider Within*; Tuhiwai Smith.
[9] J. Archibald et al.; F. Harrison *Outsider Within*; Tuhiwai Smith; Williams.

socially and politically located (in their race, gender, ability, class identities, and so on), with biases, privileges, and differing entitlements, so too is the knowledge that is produced. Knowledge is neither neutral nor benign, as it is created within and through power relations between people. Knowledge can be oppressive in how it is constructed and utilised, or it can be a means of resistance and emancipation." (Potts and Brown 19-20) Knowledge and truth are therefore socially constructed and not an objective, pre-existing phenomena that is easily observed and measured. Decolonial and anti-oppressive research has its focus on searching for meaning, understanding and insights that can facilitate resistance and change.[10]

Anthropology as the study of humanity has immense potential as a decolonial and anti-oppressive field. Pandian asserts that the experimental endeavour at the root of ethnography that allows for the immersion of the researchers themselves in a field of uncertainty is what defines Anthropology. He explains, "anthropological knowledge puts the being of its practitioners, readers, students, and interlocutors into question, subjecting all such experience to the torsions of foreign circumstance, to the vicissitudes of *relation* [emphasis mine] and communication, sensation and imagination." (Pandian 49) Ethnographic methodologies are a powerful means of experiencing the meaning-making, storying and moving between worlds that allows researchers to "work through experience of a field of inquiry and work on the experience of those we share that inquiry with." (Pandian 49). A decolonial anthropology therefore prioritises methodology over theories of anthropology and has a strong focus on relationality (Pandian; Viveiros de Castro).

This focus of relationality extends beyond the human. Human lives are inextricably bound and intersected with other than human beings such as animals and plants. Anthropologists of ontology affirm that by paying attention to the socialites of the more-than-humans that we are in relationship with "confounds the idea of human being as somehow unique and exceptional, by insisting on its entanglement with other living beings." (Pandian 78)[11] The crises of climate change in the Anthropocene that we all face requires that humans change not just our behaviour but also our ontologies to adopt an 'ecologizing' ethic of relationality with each other and with the more-than-human beings that make up our territories of life (Zanjani et al.). Kohn argues that "an anthropology that focuses on the relations we humans have with nonhuman beings forces us to step beyond the human," (Kohn, *How Forests Think* 42) "They force us to find new ways to listen, they force us to

[10] J. Archibald et al.; F. Harrison *Outsider Within*; Potts & Brown; Tuhiwai Smith; Williams.
[11] Haskell; Kohn, *How Forests Think*; Kohn, "Anthropology of Ontologies"; Kohn, "Anthropology as Cosmic Diplomacy"; Pandian; Tsing; Sagan.

think beyond our moral worlds in ways that can help us imagine and realise more just and better worlds." (Kohn, *How Forests Think* 134) Kohn explains that an 'ecologizing' ethic requires the recognition that we are "part of a larger living whole that exceeds us." (Kohn, "Forest Forms" 403) This is a common understanding in Indigenous ontologies. A decolonial and Indigenized anthropology would focus on the ontological and include an anthropology beyond the human. I draw from Kohn's ideal version of an ontological anthropology to assert that such an anthropology would be: "(a) metaphysical, interested in exploring and developing concepts; (b) ontological, attentive to the kinds of realities such concepts can amplify; (c) poetic, attuned to the unexpected ways we can be made over by those not necessarily human realities; (d) humanistic, concerned with how such realities make their ways into historically contingent human moral worlds; and (e) political, concerned with how this kind of inquiry can contribute to an ethical practice that can include and be transformed by the other kinds of beings with whom we share our lives and futures." (Kohn, "Anthropology of Ontologies" 322-323).

A decolonial anthropology rejects the academic myth of objectivity and allows space for indigenisation of methodology, Indigenous theorising and 'insider anthropology'. All experience and interpretation of data is filtered through the researchers. Researchers are not objective observers; they are people interpreting their experiences and the data they collect through the biases inherent in their positionalities. Decolonial research methodologies center Indigenous and other marginalised experiences and embrace subjectivity and other ways of knowing as strengths. Indigenising research means centering Indigenous worldviews.[12] As Jo-Ann Archibald explains, "Indigenous scholarship not only promotes transformative action in pursuit of social justice for Indigenous Peoples in academic settings, but also includes the valuing and validating of our own knowledge systems." (J. Archibald et al. 7) Indigenous researchers bring valuable perspectives and insights to anthropological research and knowledge from their own communities in an ethical way. They also enrich anthropological methods by bringing Indigenous methodologies of research that Indigenous peoples have always engaged in.[13] A decolonial anthropology is anti-oppressive, privileges praxis over theory, includes an anthropology beyond the human, makes space for Insider anthropology and approaches anthropology as the study of relationality. Smith asserts that "decolonization must offer a language of possibility, a way out of colonialism." (Tuhiwai Smith 259)

[12]J. Archibald et al.; Tuhiwai Smith; Williams; Wilson.
[13]Absolon; J. Archibald et al.; Wilson.

Therefore a decolonized anthropology must also work towards offering a language of possibility, a way out of colonialism.

An Indigenous Approach to Anthropology

Indigenous scholars, along with critical race theorists and feminist scholars, have long been critical of the processes of knowledge production. They have raised questions about who is entitled to create meanings about the world; which meanings accorded the status of valid knowledge; and how indigeneity, race, gender, and class are factored into these entitlements. Marginalised knowledges are persistently pushed to the margins while most research about marginalised peoples is done by those who are not marginalised (Strega et al.). As Strega and Brown have noted, "this research reinscribes the 'Other' (the racialized, the disabled, women, sexual minorities, etc.) while preserving those dominantly located from scrutiny, all the while cloaking the researcher under a veil of neutrality or objectivity...White people are socialised into an 'epistemology of ignorance' about the racialized while at the same time being entitled and expected to behave as authoritative agents of knowledge about them and all others who are different from them. This belief in our right and entitlement to 'know the Other,' and to access marginalised populations for our research, is deeply held." (Strega and Brown 4) Theoretical epistemological and cultural perspectives of marginalised scholars and Indigenous theorising have often been positioned as less universal, less adequate, and less scientific.

A decolonized anthropology requires the development and inclusion of theories that are based on non-Western perspectives. A decolonial and Indigenized approach does not completely dismiss Western methodologies, "they encourage us as Indigenous researchers to connect research to our own worldviews and to theorise based on our own cultural notions in order to engage in more meaningful and useful research for our people." (J. Archibald et al. 6) Indigenous methodologies allow Indigenous researchers to use our own ontological and epistemological constructs to 'research back', to recover, recreate, 're-cognize' and re-present our own cultures. Indigenous methodologies are required to meet the ethical imperative that the research being conducted in our communities meets the criteria set by our own communities. Shawn Wilson (2008) uses the term relational accountability to describe this ethical framework in research from the stance that research done through an Indigenous lens is a ceremony. Indigenous research articulates anti and non-colonial worldviews, is grounded

in Indigenous knowledges and produces new knowledge through meaningful community engagement.[14]

Indigenous methodologies are exemplified by Indigenous Storywork which prioritises the Indigenous principles that guide the sharing of our stories. Engaging and reengaging with Indigenous stories and storywork is critical to the resurgence of Indigenous communities. It teaches our communities who we are and how to govern ourselves (J. Archibald et al.; Gaudry). Storywork is a powerful research tool for both marginalized and Western scholars. As Bochner and Ellis assert in their explanation of the value of an autoethnographic approach to research, "as human beings, we live our lives as storytelling animals. We are born into a world of stories and storytellers, ready to be shaped and fashioned by the narratives to which we will be exposed, the stories we hear and the stories we tell are not only about our lives; they are part of them. Our lives are rooted in narratives and narrative practices. We depend on stories almost as much as we depend on the air we breathe. Air keeps us alive; stories give meaning to our existence." (Bocher and Ellis 75-76) Resurgence is in large part about re-storying our communities through engagement with elders, youth, ancestors, the land, spirits. Storywork within an academic context opens spaces of possibility for this work.

It is not only people that carry stories. Place and space also carry stories that can be accessed by contemplative practices of deep listening. Contemplative practices of deep listening are a method by which "interior processes can transcend their limitations, then integrate with understandings that originate not in the self, but in the community of life." (Haskell 125) Storywork of place is done by attending to the sensory particularity of place. These ecological meditations reveal knowledge that gives us direction about the world and how to live in it in sustainable ways. This "sylvan thinking" (Kohn, "Forest Forms") "ecologizes" our ethics and is a method of interrogating both land and spirit. Sylvan thinking has always been used by Indigenous peoples in our research and knowledge production. As Absolon explains, "Indigenous forms of knowledge production accept intuitive knowledge and metaphysical and unconscious realms as possible channels to knowing" (Absolon 55) Knowledge can be accessed through deep listening, ceremony, dreams, visions, stories, song and dance. Research that centres Indigenous epistemologies entails methodologies that respect and treat as valid these understandings.[15]

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[14] J. Archibald et al.; Davidson; Gaudry; Wilson.
[15]. Absolon; Hasksell; Kohn, *How Forests Think*; Kohn, "Anthropology of Ontologies"; Kohn, "Anthropology as Cosmic Diplomacy".

In my experience of Indigenous spirituality, to be a 'shaman' is to be liminal, to have the ability to cross boundaries, to become porous. To be a 'shaman' is to expand beyond the boundaries of dualism, of categories and absolutes, to be able to perceive the interconnectedness of being, to see the whole without losing sight of the details, and the ability to move between places, spaces and temporalities. The ability to become liminal is also a skill needed to be an effective anthropologist. In this way, anthropology can be approached as a spiritual process.

One of the main purposes for shamanic practice is healing. Indigenous peoples who are resurging and decolonizing are healing themselves, their communities and their connection to land and spirit. All peoples in the Anthropocene need to discern ways to repair our world so that we can not only survive but thrive. As Kohn asserts, this world "includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web." (Kohn, "Forest Forms" 402) Approaching ethnographical practices as a 'shamanic' practice is a valid method of co-becoming with Country where all elements, humans and non-human entities are connected, able to speak to each other, and share a belonging. Indigenous world making and meaning making processes are derived relational stories that are enacted through ceremony. Indigenous methodologies center relationality, reciprocity, respect, holism, responsibility, reverence, interrelatedness, and synergy.[16]

[16] Blair; Kohn, "Forest Forms"; Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*; Steffensen.

Research Design & Methodology

Given that Taino philosophy is contained in oral tradition, I employed autoethnography as my primary methodology, drawing on Indigenous Storywork principles (J. Archibald; Windchief). I drew on my interaction with community, land and spirit as I searched for a Taino form of leadership for the Ecozoic that I could employ as I stepped into community leadership. I employ "self-in-relation" and "researcher-in-relation," used by Kovach to describe researchers who center personal experiences, families, clans, communities, and nationhood (Kovach, "Conversational Method").

My ethnographic study, involving participant observation, structured, and semi-structured interviews, sensory ethnography and Indigenous methodologies such as research-as-ceremony (Shawn Wilson), two-eyed seeing (Peltier) and storywork,[17] focused on understanding how Jamaican Tainos (myself included) are employing a process of pluriversal design (Escobar) that draws on historic research, current efforts at social repair, and engages with sacred reality and non-human entities to renegotiate our relationship with the land. Establishing and maintaining good relationship with land and spirit is a primary responsibility of Taino leadership and I see seeking guidance from these other-than-human beings as central to Taino decolonial efforts towards a vision of the Ecozoic. I employed sensory ethnography as a tool for an anthropology beyond the human, to aid in discerning, recording and disseminating discourse with the land, ancestors and spiritual entities. My aim was to identify a Taino ontology and epistemology that informs Taino leadership and decolonial efforts.

Understanding how to fashion a new way of living from the shattered remnants of the past is important as we collectively grapple with a planet-wide anthropogenic ecological crisis. Tainos have already been at the forefront of the collapse of the world as we knew it, so we are in a unique position to provide solutions to our current climate and social crises. Decolonisation and resurgence is not just important for the Taino people. It is vital today, that our ways of being in the world, our ways of including humans and nonhumans as part of a single unfolding story, our resilience in the face of a world in collapse be part of a vast rethinking of how to live more justly, more equitably, more respectfully, for our times. A study of this process of decolonization and resurgence as it is unfolding in my community is a first step toward this objective.

[17] J. Archibald et al.; Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*; Windchief.

Interrogating Academia: Research as Resistance

As Taino societies were subjected to a massive alteration of their existence and culture for nearly half a century, enduring forms of violence that ranged from forced labour to population displacement, deliberate dismemberment of communal structures, warfare, disease, and mistreatment (Sued-Badillo 106); there is not much detail about pre-contact Taino culture and practices that have survived. The Taino resurgence movement emerged around the time of the quincentennial celebrations of Columbus' arrival in the 'New World' by people claiming Taino heritage and identity. The movement developed as a collective effort, most notably by Tainos from the islands of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba, aiming to explore and illuminate Indigenous Caribbean survival, as well as to organise around and assert Taino identity and ontology (Gonzales). Taino resurgence revolves around an Indigenous Caribbean way of knowing and being. Contemporary Tainos in the resurgence movement call upon "embodied memories of traditions and values disseminated across generations, often by family matriarchs, which espoused mindful relations in a world where all things have life, from plants, stones, rivers, forests, caves, sun and moon, to deceased relatives and disincarnate beings inhabiting their islands" (Gonzales 3). The revival of ancient Taino spiritual understandings and practices lost through colonialism and the colonial domination of Christianity is a central axis for Taino resurgence. Religion has been a key aspect of the colonial enterprise and experience and is therefore a primary focus of decolonization efforts. Pane's *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians,* particularly Arrom José Juan's translation, has become a primary source in Taino efforts to reclaim and revive traditional religious practices.[18] In my mentorship with Taino elders I was advised to read Pane's treatise with a critical lens as a way to gain insight on our traditional cosmology, spiritual beliefs and practices at the time of contact.

Much of what is known of the pre-contact culture of the Tainos comes from the study of their religious beliefs and practices as they were recorded by the Catalan friar Ramon Pane who arrived in the Caribbean in 1494, on Columbus' second voyage. Ramon Pane's *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians* "constitutes a watershed in the cultural history of the Americas" (Pane, xvii). In the opening of the book, Pane declares that he was sent by Christopher Columbus to live among the Tainos to report on whatever he could discover about the beliefs and religious practises of the Indigenous people as accurately as possible.

[18] Nibroni; Karalobuwi; United Confederation of Taino People.

The Account, written on the island of Hispaniola during the early days of the conquest, chronicled the Tainos' known myths and religious ceremonies (as well as some of their language and daily customs) and is the only surviving direct source of information about the myths and ceremonies of the first inhabitants of the Caribbean. It is the first book written in the Americas in a European language and Pane was the first missionary and ethnographer who learned the language and studied the beliefs of an Indigenous people of the Americas. *Accounts of the Antiquities of the Indians* by Pane can be analysed as a colonial archive *and* a decolonial tool by thinking ethnographically about this text by exploring how the text functions as an archive, by reading with the archive as a tool of resurgence for recovering and revitalising traditions and heritage, and by reading against the archive by examining its silences and colonial motivations. This is an example of research as resistance (Gaudry) and is an example of how both Indigenous research and Western academia can be effectively combined (Peltier).

In order to understand how the *Account* functions as an archive we must first define what an archive is, a task that has proven difficult as scholars have put forth several definitions that have shaped how the archive has been approached by academia. Literary scholars of imperialism, such as Thomas Richards, conceive the archive as "imaginative constructions and forms of knowledge that underpinned 19th- and 20th-century European empires." (Gordon 2) Africanist David Gordon puts forth the more conservative definition of the archive used in historical study: institutional (governmental and non-governmental) collections of documents (Gordon 2). Mills and Helm Mills posit a pragmatic definition of archives as "materials specifically collected for the purpose of preserving a history and housed in a distinct location" that is differentiated from the Foucauldian, poststructuralist definition of an archive as a "complex system of embedded rules that determines the production of knowledge." (Decker 3) All of these definitions can be applied to Arrom José Juan's translation of Pane's Account.

The most recent and prolific publication of Pane's *Account* is Arrom José Juan's translation that includes extensive notes, appendices and an introductory study that provides not only the most accurate translation of Pane's writings to date on his eye-witness account of Taino religion and preserves some of the Taino language, it also provides a wealth of information on previous translations, later colonial reports and ethnographies of Taino people, and historical context. These clarifications of the text include lists of other academic texts that explore the history and archaeology of pre-contact and contact era Taino culture. As such, the text succeeds in confronting the whole documentary context of the archive outlined

by Jan Vansina: “the institutions that generate written documents; the goals for which they were generated; the conditions under which that happened; the multiple links between authors, between institutions, and between the batches, series, and genres of the papers they generated.” (Gordon 1-2) The archive of the *Account* reveals Pane’s eyewitness accounts of Taino religion and culture as well as his opinions of the people he was studying, his motivations for doing this ethnography, Christopher Columbus’ and the empire’s colonial and political motivations and goals, and the foundation of the European construction of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas (Wilson 14) that continue to affect how Indigenous peoples in the Americas are perceived and treated today.

Pane’s *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians* reflects the learning process that Europeans and colonial Americans underwent in their attempt to understand the culture of the Taino people and reveals the difficulties of studying long-lost texts and attempts to understand disrupted oral cultures. It also reveals and reflects the imaginative constructions and forms of knowledge of the colonial empire at the time of contact and how these ontologies and epistemologies interacted with the Taino Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. This convergence of information allows this text to be read, not as a singular document, but as an archive (Pane xv).

As a structure of power, archives can be read as indications of power and/or of that which power suppresses. The recognition of archives as sites of power produces a two-directional approach to research: historical analyses along or against the archival grain. The grain is the “order of the archive, its organised topography that reflects the archive’s process of construction.” (Gordon 6) Reading an archive along the grain means analysing the archive as an institution of dominance and hegemony. This process is a reflection on power that questions what the archive reveals about the political, legal, and cultural framework that shaped it. Archives can also be read for silences: “what is revealed beyond or in addition to and in spite of these hegemonic conceptions and frameworks of power.” (Gordon 6) This process of reading against the grain is a reflection on oppositions and alternatives to power that identifies agents and voices even when those voices were meant to be silenced by those who constructed the archive.

One of the ways that contemporary Tainos are using Pane’s *Account* is reading with the text to reconstruct and revive Taino religious beliefs, stories and practices. Reading with the archive of the *Account* requires both a positivist approach to archival research and Indigenous storywork methodology. Positivist approaches to archival research maintain that the archive is a representation of an external reality and holds bits of historical truths. This

approach involves finding and correctly interpreting documents to reveal conclusions that are similar to ones other scholars who have studied the same documents have also arrived at. The positivist methodologies of archival research involve an attempt to gain an indication of the "representivity and significance" of any particular document through a sample of the archive to gain an in-depth, holistic, balanced, and accurate impression (Gordon 5). Like Decker, Tainos read the *Account* as an archive that records the stories and the sense-making of past actors (Decker 13). Ojibwe scholar Kimberly Blaeser has identified Western theoretical models as inappropriate for application to Indigenous stories and sees any attempt to do so as an act of colonial violence that violates the stories' integrity (J. Archibald et al.16). Contemporary Tainos seem to share this view and are attempting to apply an Indigenous analysis to the stories relayed in the *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*.

The stories documented by Pane form two narrative sequences dealing with the origins of the inhabitants of Hispaniola. The subject of the first series deals mainly with the origin of the island's population, while the second series deal with the establishment of a familiar order. These mythological accounts constitute the remnants of songs, hymns, and epic legends (Jara 277, 306). As the main text of the *Account* is a record of Taino oral mythological storytelling, contemporary Tainos are employing Indigenous storywork methodologies to a positivist reading of the text to extract, not only the religious stories themselves but also the traditional values, ethics, politics, societal structure, medicine, disease, agricultural practices, foodways, hygiene, the imaginative rescue of ancient historical events, and gender roles of pre-colonial Taino people (Bourne 8). As Jo-Ann Archibald reminds us, Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and codes of behaviour are embedded in the cultural practice of storytelling (J. Archibald et al. 11). Indigenous storywork methodology maintains that oral traditions reflect the belief systems and consciousness of a people. The decolonial efforts of contemporary Taino, that often centre on this recovery work through the archive, reflect the Indigenous understanding that remembering the stories is important, not only for continuing the story tradition, but also to "help one continue in a healthy way" (J. Archibald 27).

Another important principle of the pedagogical approach of Indigenous storytelling posited by Jo-Ann Archibald is that Indigenous interpretation and meaning-making of the stories are not tied to a static temporality, Indigenous meaning-making is fluid. Tainos are relearning the stories through the *Account*, not only to have a better understanding of the meanings ascribed by their ancestors but also to find new meaning in a contemporary context grounded in ancestral thought. Blaeser and Jo-Ann Archibald echoes this process in their own

work: “we must first ‘know the stories of our people’ and then ‘make our own story too’ … we must ‘be aware of the way they [Western literary theorists] change the stories we already know for only with that awareness can we protect the integrity of the Native American story.” (J. Archibald 16)

Although accuracy of comprehension cannot be ascertained, Pane appears to have been an effective ethnographer. His commission from Columbus required him to record the Tainos’ religious beliefs and practices as accurately as possible. Archaeological evidence discovered in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica has corroborated much of what he reported (Pane xxi). While Pane’s ultimate goal was to convert the Tainos to Christianity, textual evidence suggests that he was somewhat respectful of the Indigenous culture and appears to have developed a sympathetic relationship with the Taino with whom he lived as he is well known for his criticism of the Spaniards who he condemned as wicked for taking possession of Taino lands by force (Pane xiii). Additional proof of the reliability of Pane’s account is that some of the myths that he recorded bear strong resemblances to the Amazonian myths of the Tainos’ South American relatives. A clue that has led some Tainos to seek knowledge exchange with Amazonian tribes to aid in filling in some of the gaps left by the disruption of our culture.[19]

Contemporary Tainos understand that archives are not transparent nor complete views into the past and are attempting to recover pre-colonial culture by employing a post-positivist approach to archival research by reading against the grain of the archive. The work of recovery through a colonial archive is not only an empirical process of deciphering the importance and relevance of archival documents, but also a way of problematizing the relationships between voice, power, historical agents, and the bureaucracies that record or silence them. A post-positivist approach necessitates searching the archive for silences and conflicts that indicate an alternative perspective or version of events. This process begins with the recognition that archives are sites of power that already construct and silence aspects of the past and are not “innocent assemblages of documents waiting to become historical facts” (Gordon 6) Contemporary Tainos read against the grain of the *Account* by source criticism, questioning the translation, reading the silences, and acknowledging the colonial motivations and the challenges to storywork that they present.

Source criticism focuses on the difference between types of sources, particularly on a temporal basis. Pane’s primary source, the document that is closest in time to the event it

[19] Karalobuwi; Nibroni; Pane xii-xiii; United Confederation of Taino People.

refers to, has been lost (Decker 13). After Pane delivered his manuscript to Columbus in approximately 1498, we lose all trace of the friar and the original manuscript. The full text survives due to Columbus' son, Fernando, who included it in the bibliography of his defence of his father to the Spanish monarchs who Columbus had fallen out of favour with. Fernando was unable to publish his treatise, *History of the Admiral Don Christopher Columbus by his son Fernando* during his lifetime due to the hostile political climate in Spain. It is only known in Alfonso de Ulloa's poor Italian translation of 1571, which Arrom José Juan's translation is based on. Ulloa translated the text while incarcerated in a Venetian jail, where he died 1570. His translation was never finished and only left a rough draft. Ulloa's transcriptions of Taino words bore many inaccuracies and had to be compared with those given by three of Pane's contemporaries in an effort to determine the original Taino terms. The unfinished manuscript was sent to the press in its raw state in 1571. Ulloa's version became the point of departure for numerous translations made later, in which the many initial flaws of the text were repeated and augmented. These errors produced hasty readings that "yielded missing letters in some of the Taino words, the confusion of some letters for others, or changes in their order." (Jara 269) Ulloa also exhibited the habit of violently Italianizing terms that did not always correspond to their original forms when the text was translated into Spanish or other languages (Jara 268-269; Pane xiv).

Despite Pane's seeming accuracy, his version may also have distorted some Taino concepts as they were translated into Spanish and retranslated into English. Juan's notes points to an example where the term "heaven" in the second paragraph of the current edition was originally written as "cielo," by which Pane may only have meant "sky" rather than the Christian heaven that it is sometimes taken to mean. Contemporary Tainos have used the texts to try to determine the original Taino terms and aid in the reconstruction and revival of the Taino language (Pane xii-xiii, xiv).

A post-positivist approach to reading the archive also presents challenges to storywork. Colonisation and assimilation resulted in a loss of understanding of the worldviews that are embedded in Indigenous oral traditions as Occident-oriented forms of literacy displaced the oral traditions. Presenting Indigenous stories from oral traditions in textual form, and using written European language to portray Indigenous stories, proves problematic as European frameworks (principles, values, and format) may be very different from the Indigenous framework, and text limits the level of understanding of the story due to the inability of textual forms to portray the storyteller's tone, rhythm, gestures, and

personality which conveys much of the context of the stories in oral storytelling (Archibald 26).

Oral tradition also holds that the listener makes meaning of the stories without direction from the storyteller. Indigenous discourse assumes a context in which there is "unity and wholeness to be discovered or reaffirmed" (J. Archibald 18) and that it is the relationship between the listener and the storyteller that creates the discourse. Indigenous discourse is therefore mutable yet maintains its stability and its internal organisation in the core message of the stories. Meaning making in Indigenous discourse requires that the listener of oral stories think with levels of metaphor and implications. Indigenous stories are an epistemological structure, and Indigenous elders will direct the learning process of sharing their stories by connecting the listener with a teacher who is most appropriate for the listener, for the type of knowledge being sought and what the elder thinks the listener is capable of absorbing (J. Archibald 13-18, 24). The stories that Pane recorded cannot be taken as strict, literal transcriptions of original Taino stories, they are the result of the relationship between the Tainos he was living amongst and himself.

It must also be kept in mind that despite Pane's sympathy for the Taino he lived amongst, his motivations were colonial and missionary. While colonial ethnographers and administrators could be judicious observers of Indigenous culture and society, the data they collected, and their interpretations were highly influenced by colonial administrative priorities and conflicts (Gordon 8). The descriptions of Pane and Admiral Christopher Columbus and others were used to justify the colonial imposition of Western culture and Christianity onto the Taino people and other Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Pane was not, in actuality, attempting to learn anything new from his Taino informants, he was employing a mediaeval conception of knowledge and was confirming a Christian preconception of Indigenous religion as less civilised, ignorant and tantamount to sacrilege. Columbus's request of Pane was driven by the need to prove the presence of the devil among the Taino as justification for their 'punishment' through colonisation and slavery. While it was evident that Pane believed the Taino people possessed souls, he constructed them as true humans due to the willingness of many Taino who were open to accepting the tenets of Christianity: they were gentiles who "could be Christianized either peacefully or by force if needed." (Jara 297) Pane's attention to Indigenous culture was not rooted in an interest to understand it, but in the motivation to prove evil, Satanic influences. It is due to these reasons that even though the documents that were produced by these colonial chroniclers are extremely valuable, it is not possible to reconstruct a completely clear and accurate

understanding of Taino religious beliefs from these documents alone. Pane's written discourse mediated the Taino discourse; what he recorded was the result of a selective operation. He interprets Taino culture through his own perceptual, colonial categories (Wilson 80; Jara 293-297, 307-308).

Reading *The Account* as an archive also must be read for its silences. The silences in archives can be caused by the suppression of certain kinds of information, bias in selecting information that is deemed important, and selection of sources (Decker 10). As archival production and research tends to privilege the voices of the elite, reading against the grain of the archive for silences is extremely helpful to give voice to those who were neglected, women and slaves in particular (Gordon 7). *The Account* is no exception as it holds both gendered and class silences. Considering the patriarchal nature of Western and Christian culture, particularly at the time, it is likely that Pane's informants were mainly, if not exclusively, male and members of the elite class. All the specific individuals that Pane refers to in the Account are male elites. Pane's assistant and translator, Guaticabanu, was a Taino man (Pane xxiv-xxv). When he refers to specific Taino people that he was observing, they were also all male members of the elite class. He writes in depth about behiques (Taino spiritual leaders and healers) who he always refers to in the masculine gender, he writes about a male elite Guamarete who he describes as a "preeminent man" (Pane 27), and the caciques (chiefs) that he refers to are all male. He never refers to women other than women characters present in the Taino myths and never speaks about the roles or experiences of members of the non-elite classes. These silences make it impossible to reconstruct a holistic view of Taino society at the start of the contact era, particularly since Taino culture is matrilineal and practises gender egalitarianism. The perspectives of women and non-elites are completely missing from *The Account*.

Colonial archives can be useful in reconstructing lost histories and traditions, but it requires a methodology that combines positivist and post-positivist approaches that both reads with the grain of the archive and against the grain of archive. *Accounts of the Antiquities of the Indians* by Pane can be analysed as a colonial archive and a decolonial tool by thinking ethnographically about this text through exploring how the text functions as an archive, by reading with the archive as a tool of resurgence for recovering and revitalising traditions and heritage, and by reading against the archive by examining its silences and colonial motivations. Contemporary Taino peoples are approaching Pane's *Accounts of the Antiquities of the Indians* as an archive and using it as a tool for decolonization and resurgence.

Interrogating Land: Water

Caribbean ecologies have been drastically transformed since contact. Natural vegetation was replaced to a great extent by plantation and domestic agriculture causing a significant interchange of flora, fauna, pests and diseases between Europe, European colonies and the 'New World', as well as widespread deforestation. As we face global environmental degradation, Caribbean peoples are becoming more aware of the imperative to conserve what little indigenous vegetation exists and to use land sustainably (McGregor). Looking to traditional Taino ways of life, our ontology and our land-based pedagogies, are crucial tools in this endeavour. Taino people employ a process of deep ecology. Melissa Nelson explains, "to Indigenous peoples, the basic tenets of deep ecology are just a reinvention of very ancient principles that they have been living by for millennia before their ways were disrupted, and in many cases destroyed, by colonial forces. To learn who I am today, on this land, I live on, I've had to recover that heritage and realize a multicultural self … Cultural survival can be measured by the degree to which cultures maintain a relationship with their bioregions. Cultural histories speak the language of the land. They mark the outlines of the human/land consciousness." (Nelson 272) Our truths are held within the land, and we can turn to the land to repair our knowledges that have been interrupted by colonialism. As Indigenous peoples, we must liberate our own semiotic resources that colonialism has captured and rendered powerless, reviving "traditions and culture developed with the guidance of the natural law of the land, showing other Indigenous people how to read shared indicators in their own country is what really empowered the process. sharing these principles was helping them rebuild their knowledge of their own country." (Steffensen 231). Exploring land-based pedagogy is important not only for Indigenous cultural repair and resurgence, the principles of 'reading country' can be transferred from one place to another, allowing non-Indigenous peoples to also employ land-based pedagogy to tackle issues like climate change.

An ethnographic interrogation of land was a primary method of data collection in this research. This was done by living on the land and practising deep listening by focused attention, contemplation on the land and sensory ethnographies. When I entered the field, I had the expectation that land, solid and earthy, would be the country that was read, but it was water that made itself known. It was the sea, rivers and rain that drew my attention. Ecological issues that came up when speaking to Indigenous communities mostly centred

around water rights and conservation. The issues related to climate change that Jamaica is primarily grappling with currently, are water issues. I mourned the drastic degradation of the reefs when I swam in them, the impact of tourism rendering reefs I swam in since I was a child unrecognisable. Everywhere I focused my attention, there was water offering support while begging to be healed. The spirits that primarily manifested in ceremony to give guidance were spirits of water,[20] and those water spirits all presented as female. None more prominent than Atabey.

Water as Sacred Feminine

The first cemis[21] that were recorded by Pane were the Taino supreme spirits. In the opening lines of the *Account,* he describes the supreme spirits: "they believe that he is in the heavens and is immortal, and that no one can see him, and that he has a mother, but no beginning, and they call him Yocahu Bagua Maorocoti." (Arrom 21) Atabey is the mother of Yucahu. Yucahu and Atabey were historically the cemies of highest rank. They were the idealisation of the male and female principles (Lamarche 2021 20). *Yuca-hu* means 'Yuca Spirit'. He is the Cassava Giver, the main staple in the Taino diet. *Bagua* translates to 'Sea' or 'of the Sea' and *Ma-orocoti* or 'without grandfather" means (as explained by Pane) one 'who has a mother, but no beginning.' Hence, Yocahu Bagua Maorocoti is the 'Spirit of Cassava and the Sea,' 'Being without a Male Ancestor' and 'Lord Cassava Giver.' Closely tied to the ecology of the islands, he functioned as a generous sustaining being ruling the creative forces of land and sea (Arrom 22-35). The more names one had, the higher they were in Taino society. The high rank of Yucahu's mother was denoted by the fact that she had five names (more than Yucahu's three): Atabey (sometimes written as Attaberia), Apito, Guacar, Yermao, and Zuimaco, which respectively mean: 'Mother of Waters', 'the Lady of the Moon', 'the Lady of the Tides', 'the Lady of Motherhood', and 'the Mother Universal' (Lamarche 2021 20).

Atabey is described as a powerful and generous Earth Mother and as the life-giving waters of the bountiful sea. This understanding constitutes a "harmonious, spiritual relationship linking appreciative peoples to life above and below the waters." (Borrero, 20) Atabey is also celebrated as a goddess of music, fertility, menstruation, lactation, and beauty.

[20] In order to protect the integrity of the ceremonial context and abide by Indigenous protocol (explained by Leon and Nadeau) I cannot describe the details of ceremony.
[21] *Cemi* is the Taino word for an ancestral spirit, deity, or the object that represents it.

She was most often depicted as a frog-like figure who is sitting in a birthing position, symbolising her importance as Mother of All (Lamarche 2021 20).

Remembering that for the Tainos the cosmos, including supernatural beings, often have a dual nature, Atabey is often seen as having a destructive aspect. When adhering to the 'order of fruitfulness', Atabey represents the fertilising earth and waters. When she embodies the 'Order of Inversion' she is often recognized as Guabancex: driver of wind and water, rider and mistress of the hurricane, "the Amazon Woman, menstruating, untamed, and indomitable". (Martin, 72) Atabey, therefore, personified good water, while Guabancex personified destructive water. Both were diverse revelations of the powerful Mother of the Waters (Lamarche 2019, 111). Through her role as mother to Yucahu, the divine order was projected in Taino society as matrilineality (Lamarche 2019, 107).

The Taino worldview sees a proper cultural balance as requiring the presence of men, women, and children (Keegan 61). Atabey's prominence was reflected in Taino society through matrilineality (inheritance and rank was passed through the mother side) and the fact most people resided matrilocally. This arrangement permitted women to participate in and assume political status as kasikes (Keegan 98; Sued-Badillo 100). Taino women have always participated at all levels in public activities and political hierarchy. Traditionally, women can wield power, accumulate wealth and hold positions as kasikes. Gender roles among the pre-contact Taíno are not well understood, but most researchers agree that gender roles among the Taíno were relatively non-exclusive. Both women and men could assume political leadership, fight as warriors, and contribute to food production. Only a few social or economic activities are known to be assigned to an exclusive gender. Men usually constructed the conucos (raised garden plots), and women traditionally prepared the manioc, but both genders participated in the tilling, planting and harvesting of the fields (Florida Museum). The Taino also understood women as being particularly of divine descent and were seen as being closer to the spirit world and nature. In the Taino mythological cycles, original Taino women were taken by the mythological figure Guahayona and left on a (likely) mythological island called Matinino. New women were created from semi-divine tree beings, their sex carved into them by woodpeckers (Pane 7-12).

In contemporary Taino societies, Atabey has come to represent the spirit of Indigenous resurgence, resistance, connection to land and climate justice. The Caribbean served as the site of the experimental colonial quest among European powers to dominate and restructure the earth according to their ambitions, worldviews and value systems. Tainos were the first victims of this colonial enterprise and, as such, Tainos have experienced the effects

of colonisation longer than any other Indigenous groups in the Americas. Taínos have had to battle the myth of extinction, perpetuated by academia, that extends the narrative that the Taino peoples no longer exist, even though there are numerous self-identified Taino settlements and communities throughout the Caribbean and the US today. The Taino resurgence movement emerged around the time of the quincentennial celebrations of Columbus' arrival in the 'New World' by people claiming Taino heritage and identity. The movement developed as a collective effort most notably by Tainos from the islands of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba aiming to explore and illuminate Indigenous Caribbean survival, as well as to organise around and assert Taino identity and worldviews (Gonzales).

Taíno resurgence revolves around a Native Caribbean way of knowing and being. Contemporary Tainos in the resurgence movement call upon "embodied memories of traditions and values disseminated across generations, often by family matriarchs, which espoused mindful relations in a world where all things have life, from plants, stones, rivers, forests, caves, sun and moon, to deceased relatives and disincarnate beings inhabiting their islands" (Gonzales 2018). Marilyn Balana'ni Díaz, a Puerto Rican Taíno matriarch of the Taíno community *Concilio Taíno Guatu-ma-cu a Borikén*, emphasises this relational sense of belonging when she states: "You are part of nature. You're not outside of it…. We are part of the plants. We are part of the cosmos" (Gonzales 2018). The Taino worldview still regards everything in the natural world as conscious, having agency and interconnected within a shared ecosystem. Taino resurgence revolves around reviving ancient Taíno spiritual understandings and practices lost through colonialism and the colonial domination of Christianity. Religion has been a key aspect of the colonial enterprise and experience and is therefore a primary focus of decolonization efforts.

Ancestral lands and geographical features define Taíno identity and spiritual practices, and the feminine principle is the core of the spiritual dimensions of Taíno resurgence. The spirituality-liberation praxis defined in Andrea Smith's article, "Walking in Balance: The Spirituality-Liberation Praxis of Native Women" is also present in the Taino resurgence movement. Women are leading the spiritual resurgence efforts through the instructions of grandmothers. This role of women in the movement is seen as a current flowing from Atabey herself. Taíno writer and storyteller from Dominica, Nasha Holguín, describes Atabey as "the great mother of the natural world" (Gonzales 2018). Holguin understands Atabey as the entity to whom Tainos owe our sustenance and nourishment and

believes that “she is calling us back home.” (Gonzales 2018) This return home is not just a return to the land, but to the consciousness of the land.

Contemporary Tainos understand that Columbus’ unsustainable and exploitative worldview continues to adversely affect all life “above and below the waters” (Borrero, 20) and are concerned about the real possibility of the collapse of ocean and land ecosystems. Taino resurgence and resistance fundamentally revolves around climate justice. These efforts are seen as a process of making peace with Atabey (Borrero 21). For many Taino today, Atabey represents holding on to one's culture, history and spirit in spite of colonisation, patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalist greed. She has become a symbol of feminist strength and connection to the original Taino culture (Arroyo-Montano; Latino History Harvest). For contemporary Taínos, it is a reconnection to Atabey that predicates their liberatory practices. As Gonzales states, “whatever becomes of Taíno resurgence moving forward, its survived and rekindled spiritual expressions point to a desired and needed world where "the future is ancestral; the future is ancient; the future is Atabey.” (Gonzales 2018)

Atabey made her presence felt in all my communions with water. During my ethnography I went onto the land and did ceremony with the river. In ceremony, I asked the river what it meant to be kasike. The skies immediately opened up and it began to rain. I could hear Atabey’s voice echoing in the downpour. She brought my attention to the way the drops of rain hit the river, creating ripples on the surface. The rain drops came from the skies, interacted with the surface, creating a nexus point that emanated energy outwards and created ripples, before continuing beneath the surface. The teaching that came to me is that the surface of the river was our world, the rain drops connected the upper world, our world and the lower world as it fell from the skies and plummeted to the depths of the river. The nexus point, the center, is the kasike. The kasike acts as the connection point between the spirit world and our world. The kasike is the center of the community. Power and energy that the center holds radiates out into the community. From my communications with water and with Atabey (through direct experience with her and through my research of her) I learned that a Taino form of leadership for the Ecozoic involves embracing a matriztic ontology of leadership (Escobar) that favours a community based, center-out social and governing structure versus a top-down hierarchical structure. It also means confronting and decolonising our understanding of gender and gender roles to restore women’s power in community and governance.

Interrogating Spirit: Trickster

My intention in ceremony was to connect with spirits of the land and I was not surprised when Taino cemis answered the call. But they were not the only ones present, distinctly African spirits also made themselves known and heard. I came to realise that when African slaves were brought to the Caribbean by sea, they did not just bring their cultures and histories, they also, quite literally, brought their spirits (Marshall). Other than the water spirits I consulted, there was another spirit whose energy was always present in the background, always watching from the margins, the trickster.

Trickster figures are present in every culture. Tricksters and trickster tales are often comical, but they highlight important social values. They are instructive as they profane a culture's central beliefs. Tricksters express "the limits of existing knowledge paradigms and exposing the limits of those paradigms through creative and playful manifestations of knowing and meaning in locality." (Burkhart xxv) The trickster disorders, disassembles and deconstructs, breaking down division lines, and moves across borders with virtual impunity (Burkhart; Hynes and Doty).

Tricksters across the world share some characteristics: the trickster is ambiguous and anomalous, a deceiver or trick-player, a shapeshifter, a situation-inverter, a messenger and imitator of the gods who is a mixing of both divine and human traits, and a sacred bricoleur. The bricoleur works in devious ways, he displays ingenuity in putting pre-existing things together in new ways, and finds creative solutions by transforming anything at hand to be useful (Hynes and Doty; Peloton).[22] "The trickster traffics frequently with the transcendent while loosing lewd acts upon the world," (Hynes and Doty 42) yet the trickster causes such lewd acts or objects to be transformed into "occasions of insight, vitality, and new inventive creations.'" (42) The trickster is the spirit of decoloniality because the trickster allows for the thwarting of powerful and oppressive forces and represents the profound longing for freedom (Marshall).

The trickster spirit that most prominently made itself known during my ethnography was the Asante-Caribbean trickster, Anansi.

[22] "Bricoleur" refers to the term offered by Claude Levi-Strauss in *Wild Thought / La pensée sauvage.*

Anansi: Provocation as Leadership

In ceremony, with community elders and spiritual leaders meant to interrogate the spirits of, and on, the land; spirits of water came to hold space and give guidance. These spirits, who defined themselves as "the mothers" seemed to only allow women into the space, with the exception of one male-presenting figure that watched from the periphery. When questioned why he was allowed in this space, and who he was, he replied:[23] "*I am he, but I am beyond gender. I am Anancy, and I am Grandmother Spider that weaves all things. My web surrounds you and connects you to everything. You desire connection. I will teach you that you need not physically be near anyone or anything to connect, you only need to touch the web of the ancestors.*

Anansi is a Jamaican cultural hero. Anansi tales are known to every Jamaican child. Yet, Anansi is often relegated to folklore, his sacred meanings lost but to those who still practise traditional African and Caribbean folk religions. As a Jamaican, I knew Anansi intimately, but at the same time, I did not know him at all. It was only after this encounter with him, and through the subsequent research I conducted on him, that I truly began to understand this spiritual figure.

Several West African tricksters, such as Anansi, Eshu and Legba, were transported to the Caribbean by African slaves. Anansi (whose name is the Asante Twi word for "spider" - Marshall 5) is the Asante trickster. For the Ashante, the spider symbolises wisdom and they call Anansi, 'Anansi Koruoko' (The Great Spider), soul washer to the Sky-God. Anansi is a mediator between humanity and the gods, a shapeshifter who defies fixity, labelling and categorization. Anansi is in a continual state of metamorphosis that positions him as an agent of change and renewal. Through Anansi the power structures of the Asante were both tested and strengthened (Marshall).

Anansi underwent another metamorphosis during the Middle Passage and in the plantation context. His resistance to fixity "reflects the instability and unpredictability of the plantation environment and the dynamic social process of an uprooted people in a continual state of flux." (Marshall 65) The Asanti were a dominant force in the Gold Coast area of Africa, and more slaves from the Gold Coast were taken to Jamaica than to any other Caribbean island during the slave trade, creating a strong Asante influence on cultural forms in Jamaican slave society (Hynes and Doty; Marshall). Anansi became symbolic of the struggles of Black slaves. His ambiguity and resistance to fixity allowed enslaved Africans in

[23] Shared with permission from elders and spirit.

Jamaica and their descendants to continue subversive and resistant cultural practices. 'Anansi Tactics' became the key to the survival of runaways and rebels, tactics that were employed by the Maroons when they were hunted by the British, which made Anansi a primary symbol of Maroon resistance (Marshall).

Anansi continues to be immensely popular in Jamaica, particularly in oral and literary art forms. Anansi's now global popularity is heavily owed to the iconic Jamaican storyteller, poet, actress, and comedian, Louise Bennett. During the 1950s and 1960s, Bennett was immensely effective in promoting Jamaican folklore worldwide and for making Patois (Jamaican Creole) an acceptable medium of artistic expression (Marshall). Through Bennett's work, Anansi was reclaimed as a Jamaican source of resistance against ongoing cultural colonialism. Other Caribbean thinkers, writers and artists also began to portray Anansi as "the embodiment of Caribbean cultural resilience, renewal, cross-cultural fertilisation and creativity…a paradigm for the West Indian ethos of survival, inherent in the resourcefulness that has sustained West Indian people, regardless of particular ethnic ancestry." (Marshall 156) In the Caribbean, Anansi has come to represent the Indigenous syncretism that has been the result of centuries of Caribbean creolisation. Anansi had much to teach me about the importance of provocation, liminality and connection to death in decolonial leadership oriented towards the Ecozoic.

Freire (2018), Fern and Johnstone (2023) explain that fostering change and adaptation involves delivering difficult news and helping others adjust to a new reality. Provoking change means provoking people, it means critically examining and, often, upending the status quo. Creating change in oppressed peoples requires a pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire) that takes into account that people generally do not like being disturbed, especially when it is their traditions and habits that are being disturbed. Fern and Johnstone point out that people tend to learn best and be more willing to institute changes when they experience a "disorienting dilemma", a disrupting event; and that people require both support and challenge to navigate such disruptive events (Fern and Johnstone 2). Anansi is both the initiator of this kind of disruptive event, and what is needed to navigate disturbance to create change. Anansi continually disregards the rules of society and casts doubt on sacred institutions. Anansi makes us question our rituals of politeness and our avoidance of discomfort so that we can "develop greater awareness of the boundaries of our worldview and our own commitment and collusion in the world." (Fern and Johnstone 13) Anansi's provocation stimulates us into thinking and acting differently.

It is with provocation, 'Anansi Tactics,' that Anansi is able to overturn structured hierarchy.[24] On plantations in Jamaica, slave-rebels and Maroons employed Anansi tactics as a form of survival, resistance and rebellion. Understanding the capitalist drive of the slave trade, Anansi tactics often aimed at "hitting Massa in his pocketbook - where it hurt" (Marshall 91) and stirring up mutiny and revolt. These tactics included lying, stealing, working slowly, self-mutilation, misunderstanding instructions, setting fire to fields before harvest time, and mocking their slave-masters through parody and wordplay. As Marshal points out, "Anansi may play the 'smile-and-shuffle' role with Whiteman, but he does so only when he has a trick up his sleeve." Anansi embodies resistance to the given order and the subversive disturbances employed in Anansi Tactics were, and are, a source of empowerment (Marshall). Fern and Johnstone argue that provocation is a fundamental resource for change agents because it is essential for long-term, systemic change and is a means to "elicit new information and bring out hidden resources necessary to navigate change. It facilitates insight, discovery, and breakthrough." (Fern and Johnstone 4) Slave resistance started at the psychological level which, in turn, influenced physical forms of resistance. This is how provocation led to rebellion and revolt needed to overturn plantation power structures. Through provocation Anansi enables human life to be made and remade (Pelton).

For the Asante, liminality signals the reversal of social structure and Anansi's ability to disrupt social rules marks him as a liminal being, "his inner form is that of a personified limen." (Pelton 58) He tests and transverses established boundaries from his position on the margins, he occupies the peripheries and dark places. Liminality is recreative because it is a state in which openness to new forms of being are possible. As a spider, he is linked to animal instincts and natural forces. Anansi exists in the space between the human and non-human worlds.[25] Importantly, as Pelton argues, "He is a transformer whose contradictoriness makes 'nature' available for 'culture.' (Pelton 53) The Asanti understood Anansi to be a symbol of the human struggle to define the boundaries between nature and culture. Anansi symbolises the aspect of culture that is in a continual state of flux, the space where "binary oppositions are tested to strengthen the social structure." (Marshall 36)

A major component of Anansi's liminality is his ability to transcend gender. Anansi is sometimes referred to as the feminine gender in both Jamaican and Asante folklore. Anansi exhibits feminine characteristics in his/her dress, voice and perceived ability to menstruate.

[24] Fern and Johnstone; Hynes and Doty; Marshall.
[25] Hynes and Doty; Marshall; Pelton.

Some riddles about Anansi refer to him/her as 'Little Miss Nancy' and some West African tales depict him/her in sexual relationship with male figures (Marshall; Pelton). The fact that Anansi's gender and sexuality is fluid is particularly important in Jamaica where post-contact Jamaican society remains patriarchal and intensely homophobic. Anansi's energy is particularly present during Caribbean carnival where participants sometimes cross-dress (Cooper; Marshall).

Another liminal aspect of Anansi is as the lord of the crossroads and his connection to death and the ancestors. Like the Taino, the Asante also believe in the imminent presence of their dead ancestors. Marshall argues that the trickster is a psychopomp, "a mediator who crosses and resets the boundaries between life and death." (Marshall 19) Because of Anansi's ability to always find ways to overcome challenges he is often called on in life-threatening situations. Anansi stories are also traditionally only to be told at night and are believed to fend off unfriendly ghosts and entertain the spirits of the dead. Anansi's tactics can also be thought of as "crossroads behaviour" (Marshall 84). The Asanti credit Anansi with bringing Death into contact with humans, and the crossroads is known as a limen between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The crossroads is a place of structural inversion where community members can access death and commune with the ancestors. Through his disruption and connection to endings (death) and the ancestors, Anansi creates and renews society. As he crosses boundaries, redraws boundary lines and opens passages, Anansi shapes the physical world. Anansi demonstrates that the passage to new life is a continual story.[26]

Caribbean peoples share a collective culture that is the result of continual creation, deconstruction, renewal and cross-cultural fertilisation. Anansi represents this cross-fertilization between worlds. The crossroads is a liminal space where different cultures mix. Anansi "celebrates life's porosity, revealing its open endedness to be hilarious. Anything is possible; even feces can be turned into treasure." (Hynes and Doty 136) Anansi therefore also symbolises treaty-making between peoples and between humanity and the Earth. In ceremony, Anansi spoke: "*Atabey is here, such a lovely woman! she allows us to dance on her, she weaves and dances with us*." Through our roles in the Maroon communities and the Jamaican society, Jamaican Taino peoples also came to know Anansi. The fact that Anansi bears many similarities to the Taino cemi of the dead Maquetaurie Guayaba (Lamarche 178-179), the cemi most associated with my tribe, the Yamaye Kokuio, helped me to better grasp Anansi's teachings.

[26] Hynes and Doty; Marshall; Pelton.

The teachings of the trickster Anansi is immensely useful for leadership as provocation, the ability for leaders for the Ecozoic to be liminal boundary breakers who negotiates treaties between the human and nonhuman worlds. The teachings of Anansi are also pointing to decolonising our ideas of gender and gender roles, and the inclusion and re-sacralisation of queer identities. Anansi has shown him/herself as the spirit of decoloniality.

Interrogating Community: Taino Leadership for the Ecozoic

The last phase of my ethnography was to consult with Taino elders and community leaders. I wanted to know what good leadership and decolonisation meant to them. I wanted to hear from the human community. This interrogation of community also included understanding ancestral leadership through an interrogation of the archive. I conducted several semi-structured interviews with the kasike and elders of the Yukayeke Yamaye Guani (Taino Hummingbird Tribe of Jamaica), elders in the Charles Town Maroon community, and with elders in my family. Everyone that I interviewed and had conversations with positioned decolonising as a central responsibility of leadership, and they all framed decolonisation as a healing process. They are not alone. Indigenous and Caribbean scholars such as Linda Archibald (2006) and Lillian Comas-Díaz (2021) also frame decolonisation as a healing process. Decolonisation revolves around "healing the wounds of our collective colonial mentality." (Comas Diaz 69)

Kasike Kalaan of the Yukayeke Yamaye Guani explains leadership: "*A leader is one who serves the community and serves the ancestors, and their role is really to create balance. So, a good leader is one who is thinking about what the impact is of the actions that the community is making. Not only in the community itself, but in the environment and on the planet at large. There are different capacities of leaders. There may be a leader in the household and their focus is just the immediate family. There may be a leader for a community. There may be a leader for an island or physical space. And there are leaders with responsibility for the planet as a whole. And our view of leaders doesn't mean that, you know, because they're responsible for something, it means that they have dominion over it or that they're in control of it. It means that it's their responsibility, and the testament to their good work is how long this balance is kept. To live in good relationship with the earth is to be in sacred reciprocity, it means to be in balance. It means that we don't take more than we need, and we have an awareness of when the environment is in need and what we can give. So, there may be some healing that is required for that space. So, at that person, whoever it is that has that calling, the medicine person, the chief, whoever, it would be their role to add to that balance. So that's a scenario of where there is an imbalance, and it is our role to balance it. Mind you, the imbalance is coming from people, not specifically us or our community, but it is our role to try and balance those spaces.*" (In interview on August 5, 2022)

The study of Indigenous chiefdoms has driven archaeological research in the Caribbean. The sociopolitical networks of the Taino were one of the focuses of the Spanish

chroniclers when they arrived in the Caribbean. They detailed a social system called Cacicazgos in which leadership was centralised in *kasikes/casiques* (or chiefs). Other layers of society were described as *nitainos* (which Europeans described as nobles), *behikes* (medicine people/shamans), and *naborias* (which Europeans described as the working class) (Lamarche; Torres). Cacicazgos are described as "large territories, comprised of many smaller villages (yukayekes), ruled by a paramount casique (chief or lord) who commanded over social, economic, and ritual life." (Torres 348) The kasikes were, and are, the principal authorities in the running Taino society. The most essential occupation of the kasikes to be stewards in charge of organising and managing kinship networks (including with dead ancestors and other than human kin) and the agricultural, hunting, production and distribution processes (Lamarche 95).

Many names of kasikes that were recorded by the Europeans associated the kasike with the concept of the center. In the Taino mythological creation stories the name of the first mythical kasike, *Anacacuya*, means "Star of the Center" or "Central Spirit", and was symbolised by the polar star, the "immobile center of the universe, the cosmic Center," (Lamarche 97) the point of origin around which everything revolves. Thus, the kasike is traditionally thought of as the center of social and religious power (Lamarche; Mol). This points to, and validates, what I learned from my communions with water: a center-out form of leadership where the center is the nexus point between our peoples, our environment, and the spirit world.

Colonial archives also illuminated that Taino leadership does not only model a center-out structure, it is also heterarchical in nature. In contrast to hierarchical models of leadership, Taino leadership is based on a kinship network economy where roles of power are distributed. In this model, network nodes are intertwined like a web, and together they provide the political status of the community as a whole. This is what kasike Kalaan was alluding to when he said, "*There are different capacities of leaders. There may be a leader in the household and their focus is just the immediate family. There may be a leader for a community. There may be a leader for an island or physical space. And there are leaders with responsibility for the planet as a whole, and our view of leaders doesn't mean that, you know, because they're responsible for something, it means that they have dominion over it or that they're in control of it.*" Traditionally, other 'elites' and elders in the community, such as preferred heirs, would have acted as go-betweens during interactions with outsiders. Behikes/Behiques, for example, played a large part in sustaining network relations with the spirit world. Other community members held specialised roles that sometimes rivalled the

power of the kasike. This is why Mol describes the kasike's role in the network as a "jack of all trades and master of none." (Mol 209) For contact period Tainos, the kasike was the face of the community, responsible for overseeing all aspects of communal life with the help of "go-betweens" in specialised roles.[27] This would make versatility, multi-potentiality and strong networking skills primary requirements for the kasike.

Networking skills are so important because an ethic of kinship is central to the political structure of Taino communities. Archival evidence shows that Cacicazgos were more likely to form alliances than to compete with each other. Kasikes worked for mutual connection through the exchanging of gifts, the exchange of knowledge, multiple marriage alliances, and the exchange of personal names (Mol; Torres). Taino peoples were (and continue to be) extremely mobile and engaged in trade and treaty-making with distant communities, expanding their networks beyond communal territories to other islands in the Caribbean and South America (Dubois and Turtis; Mol). Taino peoples historically used the Caribbean sea as an "aquatic highway linking their islands and cultures rather than as a water barrier separating them." (Quoted in Dubois and Turtis 16) Here, again, we see the theme of water as matrix and the importance of treaty-making. A gift economy that is based on an ethic of reciprocity was the traditional foundation of Taino networking and treaty-making. Maintaining good relations with one's community and entering into relations outside of one's own community required gestures of generosity and reciprocity. The success of Taino leaders and their collectives depended on the kasike's ability to attract extra-local social others into their sphere of influence (Mol).

In my interactions with Taino and Maroon communities in Jamaica, I noticed that the vast majority of people who had taken up community leadership roles, and were working to decolonise themselves and their communities, were women. This is a common phenomenon in Indigenous communities across the world (A. Smith; Thomas). Taino societies are matrilineal and power, status, and even material wealth is passed down through the women. Women can hold all positions of leadership and colonial records mention female kasikes during the era of contact. Taino culture and sense of identity is ultimately derived from the divine. The roles of women in Taino societies reflect the Taino conceptions of the cosmic order. Atabey is the cemi of the highest rank, the mother of all, the cosmic clan mother. It is through her that Yucahu accesses power.[28]

[27] Lamarche; Mol, Wesler.
[28] Keegan; Lamarche; Mol; Wesler.

My interactions with community during my fieldwork helped to clarify my own understanding of what constitutes an effective leadership for the Ecozoic, and served to validate the information that was gifted to me from land and spirit. Qualities of good leadership, from a Taino perspective, that I was able to identify are: being community minded, creating healing, maintaining balance, being in good relationship with the Earth, reciprocity, responsibility, generosity, centering the needs of the youth and our descendants, flexibility, humility, courage, ability to see multiple perspectives, connection to the sacred, honouring the ancestors, and emotional connection/leading from the heart.

Conclusion

Using a two-eyed seeing approach that utilises the tools of a decolonised anthropology, along with traditional methodologies of Indigenous knowledge production, illuminates a path toward fostering an Ecozoic future by reviving Taino models of leadership deeply rooted in kinship, reciprocity, and ecological harmony. Taino leadership—embodied through the principles of figures like Atabey and Anansi—offers a profound, alternative framework to hierarchical, anthropocentric systems. This Taino worldview, which privileges a center-out, heterarchical leadership structure grounded in matrilineal and relational ethics, contrasts sharply with the extractive, dominion-based systems pervasive in the Technozoic era. By emphasising balance, community-centred decision-making, and spiritual reciprocity with the Earth, Taino leadership invites a transformative shift that nurtures interconnected human and ecological flourishing.

The Taino approach to leadership is a matrix of kinship, community, and ecological ethics that privileges reciprocity and "living-with" relations as essential components of governance. This matrix model, a center-out leadership, emphasises network thinking and treaty-making, which expand outward from a core of interdependence. In this kinship model, each member and entity contribute to the collective well-being, strengthening the bonds among humans and between humans and the more-than-human world. Mills (2018) frames this intentional networked action as a "treaty way," where rootedness and intentional relationships facilitate the sharing of resources, so that all members—human and nonhuman—have their needs met. This reciprocal way of relating challenges the growth-driven extractivism of coloniality and instead fosters sustainability.

Central to this Taino model is the concept of the kasike as a nexus of relational power rather than dominion, where leadership emanates outward to foster collective well-being across human and nonhuman communities. The Ecozoic vision here is realised not through the accumulation of power but through the alignment of human and ecological interests in a manner that honours ancestral and ecological wisdom. Embracing matriarchal strength and acknowledging the agency of nonhuman entities like water spirits exemplifies the relational depth that Taino leadership can contribute to this transition. Furthermore, by reclaiming the roles and voices of women and adopting decolonial practices that honour ancestral and Indigenous knowledge, Taino leadership provides a model for healing the ecological and social wounds inflicted by colonial structures.

Kalaan's perspective resonates with this kinship framework by stressing that balance is achieved by attuning to one's spirit, emotions, and relationships. Living well within this framework requires openness to others' needs, a sensitivity to the signs of imbalance in the ecosystem, and a commitment to relational reciprocity—a sentiment echoed by Noble (2018) in emphasising peace-making through intentional relational practice. These teachings also highlight the unique capacity of water to serve as a model for leadership that permeates rigid structures, connecting beings across space and sustaining all life, much as a kasike (chief) radiates influence outward, from the core of a community to its extended relations.

Further, by reconnecting with Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, this decolonial approach to leadership challenges the limitations of colonial knowledge systems, which often portray Indigenous resurgence as merely "resistance" (Simpson). Indigenous resurgence, as demonstrated by the Taino, is about flourishing from within, restoring traditions and building cultural, ecological, and spiritual connections. Absolon (2022) articulates decolonizing knowledge as a critical encounter that dismantles colonial narratives and restores Indigenous understandings and practices. The Taino model exemplifies "two-eyed seeing," integrating Indigenous philosophies with academic sources from Indigenous and Black thinkers to create a more comprehensive and localised environmental ethic.

In a time when water crises are intensifying globally (Barlow), the Taino's water-based leadership models provide invaluable guidance. If we are to transition from the exploitative "Technozoic" to the interconnected "Ecozoic," the responsibility of leadership must be reimagined through a kinship-centred worldview that treats water not merely as a resource but as a relational life source to be protected, respected, and shared. In aligning with these Taino-inspired practices of treaty-making, balance, and reciprocity, leaders today can embody the principles needed to steward both ecological and social resilience in an era of profound environmental transformation.

This research illuminates how the Taino resurgence movement emerges as a vital, decolonial force that not only resists erasure but also redefines the structures of leadership in alignment with eco-cultural justice. This revitalised form of leadership does not merely resist the colonial paradigm; it seeks to transcend it by reasserting a cosmology that is inherently inclusive and relational. As such, the Taino ways of being and doing offers critical insights into achieving the Ecozoic: a period of deep respect, harmony, and kinship with the more-than-human world, grounding a sustainable and just future for all.

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