States of Crisis: Disaster, Recovery, and Possibility in the Caribbean

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States of Crisis, Flags of Convenience: An Introduction

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On 24 August 2019 a tropical depression formed in the Atlantic Ocean approximately 805 miles east-southeast of Barbados. Later that evening, the US National Hurricane Center in Miami upgraded the depression to a tropical storm with sustained wind speeds greater than forty miles per hour. When the storm eclipsed this crucial threshold, it received a name: Dorian.

Five days later, a Hess-contracted floating production storage and offloading unit concluded a forty-two-day journey from Singapore to Guyana. As the first oil production vessel to reach Guyanese territorial waters, the *Liza Destiny* arrived decorated in the colors of Guyana's Golden Arrowhead and signaled the opening act of the nascent Caribbean petrostate.

But the entry of the *Liza Destiny* marked a tragic irony. Despite its ceremonial adornment, the ship was not registered under the Guyanese flag. Instead, it completed its journey flying a Bahamian "flag of convenience," joining more than 50 million gross tons of seafaring vessels registered under the Bahamas Maritime Authority (BMA). A flag of convenience is a common practice in which a merchant ship is registered in a country distinct from that of its owners. After The Bahamas opened its registry to foreign shipowners with the passage of the 1976 Merchant Shipping Act, Bahamian officials encouraged the registration of foreign vessels through generous tax exemptions on income and capital gains, customs duties, and stamp taxes, as well as waivers on annual registration fees. In its capacity as a preferred flag state, The Bahamas lends a competitive advantage to cruise lines, shipping magnates, and energy multinationals. At the same moment that carbon-driven climate change encroached on The

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Bahamas, the friendly terms of the BMA facilitated the next and perhaps greatest oil boom in the history of the Caribbean.

Tragic irony descended with deadly force on 1 September, when Hurricane Dorian made landfall on Great Abaco Island in The Bahamas, with winds in excess of 185 miles per hour. The islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama sustained the cruelest devastation when category-five winds (greater than 157 miles per hour) persisted for a period of twenty-two hours. The casualties of this terror are incalculable. Not unlike after Hurricane Maria's torrent through the Eastern Caribbean almost two years prior, survey and demographic data proved insufficient to quantify the sum of death and destruction left in the wake of Dorian.

I will not reproduce a speculative tally here. Refusing the genre of the actuarial ledger, the terror of climate devastation in the Caribbean is better apprehended through its sensory frequencies. As Erica James opines in her requiem for those who perished at the hands of Dorian, the sound of category-five-hurricane winds resonated as a new grammar of Caribbean life and death: "As I shared video footage with friends in Puerto Rico, they remarked, 'I know the sound of that wind.' Is this what it means to be intimately connected by horror?"[1] Pace Kamau Brathwaite, the submarine unity of the Caribbean resurfaces violently in meteorological tempests. Indeed, hurricane winds and seismic shocks have no regard for the fabricated borders of our archipelagic states and territories.

In the ruins of Dorian, The Bahamas inhabits a greater contradiction of Caribbean political futures.[2] According to Norman Girvan, climate disasters constitute existential threats to the viability of regional governance.[3] This is not the province of The Bahamas alone. The postcolonial experiment in the Caribbean—for those who entered the ambiguous temporality of the postcolonial, that is—has not displaced state sovereignty as its political horizon. The "right to run up a national flag" comprises little more than the right to extend a flag of convenience—to offer preferential tax havens and multinational exemptions, ship registrations, free economic zones, and tourism investment subsidies. The state of climate crisis in the Caribbean is at the same time a crisis in the state as an insufficient remedy for the existential threat of climate change.

The registration of oil tankers and drilling vessels under the Bahamian flag does not support the dubious assertion that Bahamians themselves are principal culprits of climate change. It does, though, reveal the limits of the state in its efforts to confront climatic challenges to Caribbean existence. To passively divest from fossil fuel multinationals and their monstrous

1 Erica Moiah James, "Hurricane Dorian Makes Bahamians the Latest Climate-Crisis Victims," *New York Times*, 4 September 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/09/04/opinion/hurricane-dorian-bahamas.html.

2 As David Scott observes in *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Postcolonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), tragedy constitutes a basis for "re-thinking the narratological relation between colonial pasts and post-colonial futures" (9). While Scott's preoccupation in this monograph lies with the narrative revisions to C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins*, we might consider the tragedy of climate devastation in similar terms as an opportunity to revisit the unfulfilled promise of postcolonial sovereignty as a normative aspiration of Caribbean politics.

3 See Norman Girvan, "Existential Threats in the Caribbean," *Caribbean Review*, 6 August 2017, www.caribbeanreview.org/2017/08/existential-threats-in-the-caribbean/.

carbon footprint only leaves the familiar conditions of sovereign debt and arrested development in their stead. Rather than demand a straightforward indictment of regional bureaucrats for their complicity in carbon-intensive extractive ventures, we might inquire further into the conditions under which offshore drilling and preferential ship registration appear as the only viable grounds for the reenchantment of Caribbean political futures.[4]

The persistence of nationalism restricts the very capacity to envision the Caribbean beyond the shocks of climatic disaster. On social media, each disaster event inspires the creation of hashtags and amended profile images that feature the flag of a devastated country or territory. The gesture behind such virtual flags of convenience is a testament to the frustrated solidarities that endure in the present. At the same time, the ritual circus of rotating flags demonstrates how proposed remedies for climate change remain sutured to the state form as the constitutive limit of our political horizon.[5]

The plight of Haitian nationals in The Bahamas is a case in point. In a commentary written after Hurricane Dorian, anthropologist Bertin Louis reminds us that Caribbean peoples have circulated between Haiti and The Bahamas for centuries.[6] Yet this two-way traffic is occluded by state violence against Haitian-Bahamians who are cast outside the borders of national citizenship.[7] Haitian survivors of Dorian were threatened with deportation: fewer than two months after Dorian ravaged Abaco, Bahamian prime minister Hubert Minnis voiced his intentions: "I serve notice to all those who are here illegally that they can leave voluntarily or they will be forced to leave."[8] Even as the threat of climate change demands a renewed regionalism, it is discourses of bans rather than sanctuary that emanate from the lips of Caribbean statesmen.

As the climate crisis demands a swift resolution, it is nonetheless imprudent to equate recovery with the fortification of regional governments that remain vested in the interests of local and multinational elites and the displacement or deportation of working people. Flags of convenience, of course, are only convenient for the former and disastrous for the latter. In the moment of disaster, the stark character of this divide is laid bare. It is unveiled in discovery of hoarded relief supplies in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, in the disappearance and

4 As Trinbagonian economist Keston Perry observes in a recent article, fuel subsidy reform programs devised by international financial institutions mobilize the language of climate change mitigation to place "additional pressure on low-income and marginalized groups in least developed countries, most recently in Ecuador and Haiti, and no similar pressure or burden on rich countries with the highest historical records of greenhouse emissions." Keston Perry, "For Politics, People, or the Planet? The Political Economy of Fossil Fuel Reform, Energy Dependence, and Climate Policy in Haiti," *Energy Research and Social Science*, no. 63 (forthcoming).

5 On the construction of sovereignty as a North Atlantic universal, see Yarimar Bonilla, *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), and "Ordinary Sovereignty," *Small Axe*, no. 42 (November 2013): 151–65.

6 See Bertin M. Louis Jr., "Haitian Migrants Face Deportation and Stigma in Hurricane-Ravaged Bahamas," *Chicago Tribune*, 4 December 2019, www.chicagotribune.com/sns-haitian-migrants-face-deportation-and-stigma-in-hurricane-ravaged-bahamas-127008-20191203-story.html.

7 See Bertin M. Louis Jr., *My Soul Is in Haiti: Protestantism in the Haitian Diaspora of the Bahamas* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

8 Jacqueline Charles, "Bahamas to Resume Deportation for Haitians after Dorian," *Miami Herald*, 3 October 2019, www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/haiti/article235764957.html.

laundering of PetroCaribe development funds in Haiti, and in the standoff between Barbudan fisherfolk and police when Antiguan security officials seized the Barbuda Fisheries Complex in the months following Hurricane Irma. In each instance, this divide is collapsed only by autonomous mobilization and popular upheaval. Disaster recovery, in other words, does not require the reconstitution of the state. Only by heeding the independent activity of the Caribbean peoples may we as critics trace the contours of what must come next.[9]

The Common Wind of Disaster

This state of crisis is an occasion for criticism. As Greg Beckett details in his monograph *There Is No More Haiti*, the etymological roots of *crisis* and *criticism* lie in the ancient Greek medical tradition, indicating the moment at which a fatal condition prompts a decisive choice between alternatives.[10] Likewise, the climate crisis in the Caribbean is evidently a matter of life and death. And it is the grave character of the present that yearns for a new conceptual vocabulary. For this reason, Nelson Maldonado-Torres is cynical toward the diagnostic character of crisis. Crisis, in his estimation, presumes legible symptoms capable of remedy by identifiable courses of treatment. He instead turns to the language of catastrophe to appraise events that remain incalculable by prevailing modalities of thought and unmanageable by existing models of governance.[11]

The Caribbean, therefore, is a principal theater of a broader "crisis in crisis" in which crisis talk no longer compels a critical and decisive transformation but endeavors to, according to Joseph Masco, "stabilize an existing structure within a radically contingent world."[12] When climate crisis is understood to be permanent and inevitable, climate criticism is consigned to the register of elegy. Moreover, if Caribbean critique appears to have run out of steam, it is because the crisis it ministers to has outpaced our conceptual faculties.[13] In a total climate

9 As Matthew Quest observes in a commentary on the Barbuda Fisheries row, "The informal networks and practices of the Barbuda fisher folk and the broader fight for community control of the island in the wake of disaster capitalism could be pointing the way to a new movement for Caribbean federation and liberation from below." Matthew Quest, "Barbuda Fisher Folk Fight for Community Control," *Black Agenda Report*, 19 July 2018, www.blackagendareport.com/barbuda-fisher-folk-fight-community-control.

10 Greg Beckett, *There Is No More Haiti: Between Life and Death in Port-au-Prince* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 13.

11 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Afterword: Critique and Decoloniality in the Face of Crisis, Disaster, and Catastrophe," in Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón, eds., *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2019), 335.

12 Joseph Masco, "The Crisis in Crisis," *Current Anthropology* 58, no. S15 (2017): S65.

13 See Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 225–48, in which Latour responds to currents of climate denial among US lawmakers with a call to shift the locus of criticism from "matters of fact" to "matters of concern" (231). Critique has run out of steam, in his view, because of a misguided effort to deconstruct the ontological ground on which scientific facts are founded. My consideration of Caribbean criticism runs parallel to, but distinct from, Latour's. Caribbean criticism has hardly been welcomed by a fact-generating intelligentsia whose self-imposed demise he laments. Indeed, Caribbean criticism has long adhered to the very project that Latour prescribes for critical theory in the twenty-first century, "a multifarious inquiry launched with the tools of anthropology, philosophy, metaphysics, history, sociology to detect how many participants are gathered in a thing to make it exist and to maintain its existence" (246). If the Caribbean is a geography in which no *thing* can be taken to hold an essential character outside constitutive histories of racial slavery, genocide, and ongoing colonial rule, if Caribbean critique

of ontological abjection, we are afforded little more than mourning the dead in the aftermath of disaster.[14]

The survival of the Caribbean hangs in the balance between the growth imperative of economic nationalism and the livelihoods of Caribbean peoples. Put differently, our criticism can no longer take for granted the existence of the Caribbean as a habitable geography. While Dipesh Chakrabarty regards this as an occasion to collapse an artificial distinction between human and natural history in service of a "new universal history of humans that flashes up in the moment of the danger that is climate change," his appeal too easily effaces the uneven political geographies borne out of histories of racial bondage.[15] This new universalism poses a unique predicament for the Caribbean. The survival of the species may well be secured after the onset of Caribbean extinction. Beyond its status as the proverbial canary in the climatological coal mine, the Caribbean is a measure of the limits of liberal universalism and the category of the human it purports to defend. Will the survival of humanity once again rest on the backs of the innumerable Caribbean dead? Or will the changing climate occasion a turn to the Caribbean as a staging ground for a radical humanism unencumbered by the colonial logic of sovereignty that endures under synthetic flags of convenience?

Heeding Audre Lorde, "wind is our teacher." Her firsthand account of Hurricane Hugo and its devastation of St. Croix in September 1989 catalogs its lessons. Lorde recalls how the hurricane exposed the fragility of "super-structure created by extreme development" that Caribbean peoples increasingly rely on for our essential needs.[16] Once electricity and telecommunications infrastructures are stripped away by Hugo, suppressed modes of subsistence and mutual aid emerge:

> For the next month or so we share our collard greens, which is the only vegetable in the garden not destroyed by Hugo, along with the food, supplies and care-packages sent to us from the mainland by our families, friends, and strangers, all of whom respond to our plight with heart-warming acts of generosity and support. These gifts of food help sustain many worse off than we are.
>
> Since not one visible banana tree survived the storm here, the Caribbean island of St. Lucia sends the gift of a boatload of ripe bananas to the people of St. Croix. On Saturday the wharf at Gallows Bay is filled with people picking up their bunches of bananas, many seeing each other for the first time since Hugo.[17]

appears to have run out of steam, it is because it has been made to emulate the philosophical register of Latour and his interlocutors against its own critical genealogy drawn from beyond an imposed geography of reason.

14 On antiblackness as a "total climate," see Christina Sharpe, "The Weather," *New Inquiry*, 19 January 2017, thenewinquiry.com/the-weather/.

15 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 221.

16 Audre Lorde, "Of Generators and Survival—Hugo Letter," *Callaloo* 14, no. 1 (1991): 75; originally published in Gloria I. Joseph and Hortense M. Rowe, eds., *Hell Under God's Orders: Hurricane Hugo in St. Croix—Disaster and Survival* (St. Croix, VI: Winds of Change, 1990).

17 Ibid., 76.

For Lorde, Hugo inaugurates a temporal rupture. Postdisaster time is defined less by the contours of the capitalist working day than by repertoires of solidarity and care. She does not romanticize the latter. Care is accompanied by pain and desperation. "Remembering how that first yellow banana from St. Lucia tasted, three weeks after Hugo," she adds, "still brings tears to my eyes."[18] In this moment, the sharing of supplies, foodstuffs, and first aid serves as a model for a different form of living. Submarine unity is articulated in the form of emergency relief. Locally cultivated collard greens and a barge loaded with bananas are charged with the quintessential spirit of the gift as gestures that eclipse the arbitrary confines of the bourgeois family and nation-state alike.[19] Rather than a return to colonial order under the flag of the US Virgin Islands, for Lorde it is the flowering leaves of the "banana tree unfurling its first pale green flag" that provide the first visible signs of recovery.[20]

Even still, this experiment is short lived. US troops arrive in the unincorporated territory and are deployed to secure the road to the Hess oil refinery on St. Croix's south coast. Their arrival prompts a return to the homogenous temporality of colonial occupation. A frantic market for gas-fueled generators takes hold, offering a makeshift return to the comforts of extreme development and consumerist individualism.

Lorde insists we can learn from the wind even in its deadliest form: "The earth is telling us something about our conduct of living, as well as about our abuse of this covenant we live upon."[21] Hers is an entreaty to mind the common sensory terror of climate crisis as a basis for a politics of workers' self-management and mutual aid. For Lorde, this flashes up at a foreclosed moment prior to the restoration of the US colonial state in St. Croix. From the common winds of disaster, dormant solidarities are restored under pale green flags.[22]

States of Crisis, States in Crisis

This collection of essays features selected papers from the symposium "States of Crisis: Disaster, Recovery, and Possibility in the Caribbean," convened at Columbia University in New York City on 3–4 May 2019. The conversations that led to this symposium began in September 2017, when Hurricanes Irma and Maria ravaged the Caribbean and once again elevated

18 Ibid.

19 Kaneesha Cherelle Parsard theorizes practices of this order as a "barrack yard politics" that "depends not on the modern, bourgeois political actor" but on an "informal political economy" that refuses colonial mores of gender, sexuality, and the heteropatriarchal family. Kaneesha Cherelle Parsard, "Barrack Yard Politics: From C. L. R. James's *The Case for West Indian Self-Government* to *Minty Alley*," *Small Axe*, no. 57 (November 2018): 26.

20 Audre Lorde, "Of Generators and Survival," 75.

21 Ibid., 81.

22 On the "common wind" as a "regional network of communication" forged by enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and the Americas, see Julius Scott, *A Common Wind: Afro-American Organization in the Revolution Against Slavery* (London: Verso, 2018), xvi.

questions of climate and disaster to the forefront of regional discourse.[23] My co-organizers, David Scott and Yarimar Bonilla, and I situated climate crisis alongside a crisis in the state form that entails the practical exhaustion of a "'creole' middle-class project" of postcolonial sovereignty.[24] This impasse extends to nonsovereign domains where this climate demands alternatives to imperial incorporation, on the one hand, and nominal political independence, on the other. Our principal objective was to forge an innovative conceptual vocabulary at a moment in which existing modes of governance are exhausted by looming existential threats.

While the hurricane season of 2017 provided the impetus for our gathering and is the central preoccupation of multiple essays in this special section, our framing eschews a view of these events as exceptional or unprecedented. Hurricanes Irma and Maria marked only the latest in a series of disaster events that include the Soufrière Hills volcanic eruptions in Montserrat, the 2005 floods in Guyana, the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, and, unbeknownst to us at the time of the symposium, Hurricane Dorian's aforementioned devastation of The Bahamas in 2019 and the sequence of earthquakes and aftershocks in Puerto Rico in January 2020.

Moreover, the symposium placed the crisis of climate alongside crises of governance, such as the extradition of Christopher "Dudus" Coke and concurrent state violence levied against the community of Tivoli Gardens, Jamaica, in 2010; the 2011 state of emergency declared to combat "drug gangs" in Trinidad and Tobago; the 2019 #RickyRenuncia protests that ousted the erstwhile governor of Puerto Rico; and the continued violence against Haitian civilians following the termination of gas subsidies and the laundering of development funds from the PetroCaribe accord with Venezuela. In doing so, we directed our inquiry toward the limits of the postcolonial state and the prescriptive ideal of national independence in regional efforts to mitigate the climatological excesses of global petrocapitalism. Lending archival and ethnographic perspectives from Barbuda, Guyana, Haiti, Martinique, New Orleans, Puerto Rico, and Trinidad and Tobago, the contributors to the symposium forged new conceptual categories fashioned out of political realities of the Greater Caribbean.

The essays published in this special section compel us toward innovative approaches to crisis and disaster across national and linguistic boundaries. Greg Beckett alerts us to the mutual entanglement of climate crisis and political upheaval in Haiti. Reminding us again that no disaster is truly "natural" as the product of ordinary conditions of social vulnerability

23 Hurricanes Irma and Maria have already inspired expansive scholarly literature. Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón's edited volume *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm* assembles an impressive array of critical and creative essays to meditate on the colonial situation in Puerto Rico and its violent manifestations in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Likewise, a special issue of the journal *Transforming Anthropology* includes ethnographic accounts of postdisaster landscapes in Puerto Rico, Dominica, and the Virgin Islands. In *Transforming Anthropology* 26, no. 2 (2018), see Aisha Beliso-De Jesús and Michael Ralph, "Editors' Introduction: Hurricane María and the Caribbean," 99–101; Rosa E. Ficek, "Infrastructure and Colonial Difference in Puerto Rico after Hurricane María," 102–17; Adom Philogene Heron, "Surviving Maria from Dominica: Memory, Displacement, and Bittersweet Beginnings," 118–35; Hilda Lloréns, "Imaging Disaster: Puerto Rico through the Eye of Hurricane María," 136–56; Justin P. Dunnavant et al., "Assessing Heritage Resources in St. Croix Post–Hurricanes Irma and Maria," 157–72; Tami Navarro, "'After the Storms: Reflections on the US Virgin Islands,'" 173–80; and Angel López-Santiago, "The Antillean League," 181–94.

24 David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 191.

and bureaucratic neglect, Beckett weaves together diffuse instantiation of disaster from the sudden and spectacular devastation of the 2010 earthquake to the mundane experience of blackouts driven by fuel shortages after the withdrawal from PetroCaribe.[25] He insists that the aforementioned crisis in crisis is one in which the state maintains a monopoly on the definition of crisis—who determines its constitutive threshold and the forms of action to be taken. Turning instead to the affective register of what crisis feels like, Beckett argues that an attention to ordinary articulations of crisis inspires a political imagination that extends beyond the confines of the liberal nation-state.[26]

Leniqueca Welcome crafts a vivid ethnographic account of recovery efforts following the floods that battered East Trinidad in October 2018. Centering her analysis on the community of Greenvale Park in La Horquetta, Welcome attunes us to the technologies of governance and neglect that exacerbate the impacts of disaster events. Through her conversations with Greenvale residents and a historical archaeology of state-led housing developments in Trinidad and Tobago, she demonstrates how haphazard flood relief efforts fuel disenchantment with the state as an object of unredressed grievances. Linking the abandonment of communities impacted by floods to a broader abandonment of criminalized and hyperpoliced urban underclasses, Welcome draws a genealogical link between climate disasters and acts of state violence that foreclose emancipatory alternatives to party politics.[27]

Natasha Lightfoot situates the aftermath of Hurricane Irma against the history of communal land tenure in postemancipation Barbuda. As she details, the displacement of Barbudans is seized by Antigua and Barbuda state officials to circumvent the governing authority of the nine-member Barbuda Council. Following Irma, discourses of "emptying" and "abandonment" are mobilized as pretexts for the courting of foreign direct investment and the expansion of tourist infrastructure in Barbuda.[28] In turn, Lightfoot underscores how state-directed rebuilding efforts stand at odds with the practices of communal ownership that portend a sustainable future for the Caribbean in an epoch of anthropogenic climate change.

Sarah Vaughn turns to Guyana, where an impending oil boom is presaged by efforts to mitigate coastal erosion and rising sea levels. Extending Norman Girvan's writings on the transfer of technology as a historically embodied process, Vaughn's ethnography of Guyanese engineers locates the construction of sea-defense infrastructures as a practice of intergenerational responsibility. Technoscientific solutions to coastal erosion—concrete groynes and mangrove conservation, in particular—emerge as key sites for the articulation of collective vulnerability against a racial politics of patronage and clientelism.[29]

25 Beckett draws his inspiration here from Michel-Rolph Trouillot's framing in "The Odd and the Ordinary: Haiti, the Caribbean, and the World," *Cimarrón* 2, no. 3 (1990): 3–12.
26 Greg Beckett, "Unlivable Life: Ordinary Disaster and the Atmosphere of Crisis in Haiti," this issue of *Small Axe*, 78–95.
27 Leniqueca A. Welcome, "The Infrastructures of Liberation at the End of the World: A Reflection of Disaster in the Caribbean," this issue of *Small Axe*, 96–109.
28 Natasha Lightfoot, "Disrepair, Distress, and Dispossession: Barbuda after Hurricane Irma," this issue of *Small Axe*, 133–46.
29 Sarah E. Vaughn, "Caribbean Technological Thought and Climate Adaptation," this issue of *Small Axe*, 110–21.

The final contributions engage post-Maria Puerto Rico from distinct empirical and theoretical locations. Adriana María Garriga-López's ethnographic account of independent artists and farmers echoes Audre Lorde in documenting the practices of mutual aid forged out of the Donald Trump administration's willful neglect of Puerto Rico.[30] Here, small-scale cooperatives facilitate the circulation of black and indigenous knowledges concerning land and generate forms of community and care beyond a legal-juridical domain of citizenship.[31]

Lastly, Yarimar Bonilla engages Hurricane Maria as an event that unveiled long-standing patterns of fiscal austerity and social decay in Puerto Rico. Recasting Maria as the "result of a failed postcolonial experiment"—the failure to launch Puerto Rico out of colonial subjugation, that is—Bonilla insists that the suspension of the dual horizons of imperial statehood and independence generates new articulations of sovereignty and political belonging. Appealing to a critical register of "hopeful pessimism," Bonilla posits this moment of suspension as an opening to disrupt a "modernist telos of nationalist progress" and state sovereignty as the constitutive end of Caribbean political futures.[32]

Changing Climates and Caribbean Criticism

In a landscape of insular nationalisms and atomized sovereignties, Caribbean extinction appears inevitable. Despite urgent clamors for climate justice and reparations in international forums, a foundational antagonism endures between the rentier ambitions of regional bureaucrats and the survival of Caribbean peoples. The necessity of a genuine regionalism does not elude Caribbean peoples themselves, however. As George Beckford once put it, "Caribbean people are already integrated. The only people who don't know it are the governments."[33] At present, this takes the form of a general disenchantment with political elites and their neglect of those most vulnerable to the sudden shocks and sustained aftershocks of climate change.[34]

This peculiar conjuncture requires that we listen to the wind for what it tells us about the pathways of development and conduct of living required to weather its most brutal storms. While Caribbean political leaders consistently rally in support of their compatriots in the aftermaths of disaster, a more capacious regional consciousness must necessarily extend beyond a liminal period of recovery. Flags of convenience do not suffice as a proxy for decolonization.

30 On imperial neglect as a quintessential feature of liberalism, see Christopher Taylor, *Empire of Neglect: The West Indies in the Wake of British Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

31 Adriana María Garriga-López, "Debt, Crisis, and Resurgence in Puerto Rico," this issue of *Small Axe*, 122–32.

32 Yarimar Bonilla, "Postdisaster Futures: Hopeful Pessimism, Imperial Ruination, and *La futura cuir*," this issue of *Small Axe*, 147, 157.

33 Quoted in Norman Girvan, "Caribbean Integration: Can Cultural Production Succeed Where Politics and Economics Have Failed?" (keynote address, St. Martin Book Fair, 31 May 2012), www.alainet.org/images/keynote-st-martin.pdf.

34 On the prescient framing of "aftershocks" vis-à-vis climate disaster and the project of Caribbean criticism, see Bonilla and LeBrón, *Aftershocks of Disaster*.

The challenge of Caribbean criticism is to unmoor the postcolonial from the logic of the state to which it remains unfortunately tethered.[35]

Our intellectual practice is likewise troubled by the planting of scholarly flags of convenience founded in territorial claims to expertise and the prescribed borders of nationalist historiography. More than half a century ago, George Lamming insisted that the failure of federation and the "subsequent pantomime of separate sovereignties" need not mark the disintegration of Caribbean criticism. Turning to the radio as an unheralded medium of regional dialogue, Lamming outlines the way forward as a "maximum exchange of ideas and feelings about the daily course of our lives . . . as a way towards creating that critical public opinion which our situation demands."[36] Our present situation is no less urgent. In this changing climate, the prospect of life after disaster depends on our capacity to lower flags of convenience and extend the practice of criticism beyond the exclusive grasp of an intellectual vanguard. The survival of the Caribbean demands it.

35 Moreover, Shanya Cordis alerts us to the distinctly racialized circuits of gendered and sexual violence that undergird the nation-building project in postcolonial Guyana. Here, I share her entreaty to supplant the violence of sovereignty through a "willingness to be caught up *with* and entangled *in* the project of constructing an expansive decolonial feminist vision, one that attends to multiple geographies of violence and dispossession." Shanya Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference: Racial Gendered Violence and Dispossession in Guyana," *Small Axe*, no. 60 (November 2019): 32.

36 George Lamming, "The West Indian People," *New World Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1966): 71.