

Sovereign Caribbean Disaster Mythopoetics:

Anti-colonial Poeticist's poetics and aesthetics towards sovereignty



Fig. 1: Ryan Roberts still fishing. Photo credit: Alejandro Cegarra via Bloomberg Business

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Abstract: In the Caribbean, (non)sovereignty remains a central material and ideological obsession, driven by the ongoing reality of the "coloniality of disaster" (Bonilla, 2020). Engaging the Anglophone Caribbean intellectual tradition, this project interrogates how aesthetics and poetics function as praxes for enacting "affective sovereignty" (Harjo). The study examines the contemporary conjuncture in Trinidad and Tobago, where recursive crises in postcolonial governance, economic precarity, and displacement produce vulnerabilities that are political and colonial rather than merely natural. Framing these converging catastrophes as outcomes of slow, structural violence, the research positions the present as both arrested and generative and thus a "fertile ground" for alternative political imaginaries. Utilizing a transdisciplinary framework, the project integrates an analysis of Caribbean poetics, aesthetics and vernacular knowledges with a research-creation component set in the littoral zone of Las Cuevas, Trinidad, mobilizing the indelible connection between catastrophe and awakening to synthesise a "disaster mythopoetics" of sovereignty. This framework approaches disaster not only as ruination but as a site of ongoing gestation and relational becoming, imagining social life beyond territorial control.



Fig. 2 De Las Dos Aguas (2007) by María Magdalena Campos-Pons. Photo credit: Image via *INDY Week* (2024)

Identified theoretical problem	Disaster studies predominantly privilege state-centered frameworks of sovereignty and control, treating catastrophe as an exceptional rupture rather than a structural, colonial condition. This epistemological limit obscures the "coloniality of disaster" (Bonilla) and renders invisible the relational, affective, and nonsovereign praxes through which communities imagine political and social life beyond territorial authority.
Identified practical problem	In Trinidad and Tobago's contemporary conjuncture, recursive crises in postcolonial governance (marked by violent crime, economic precarity, and migration) produce a "traumatized present." Dominant disaster frameworks and emergency temporalities fail to register these intersecting political and social vulnerabilities as forms of "slow violence," thereby ignoring their cumulative affective consequences.
Research Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrogate disaster not as a natural event, but as a political and colonial condition shaping vulnerability. • Examine non-sovereignty as a generative site of "affective sovereignty" enacted through relational practice. • Synthesize a "disaster mythopoethics" drawn from Caribbean literary and vernacular imaginaries to conceptualize sovereignty beyond the state.

Theoretical Framework: This study is grounded in critical Caribbean and Black studies that conceptualize disaster as a colonial and political condition. Drawing on theories of the coloniality of disaster, the research understands vulnerability as produced through long histories of structural violence and postcolonial governance. Sovereignty is theorized not as a state centered juridical form but as a relational, effective, and iterative practice enacted in everyday life. The framework engages Caribbean intellectual traditions that link catastrophe to awakening, adopting modes of witnessing as requiem to



attend to trauma, silence, and political failure. Nonsovereignty is approached as both constraint and generative condition, enabling speculative and poetic imaginaries of political life beyond territory and institutional control. The study further draws on Black feminist poethics and catastrophe theory to conceptualize the destruction of form as a site of gestation, where new modes of relation and meaning can emerge through affective, performative, and speculative practices.

Methodology: This research adopts a transdisciplinary qualitative approach combining textual analysis, cultural interpretation, and research creation. The primary materials include literary works, poetry, musical compositions, and vernacular cultural practices drawn from the Caribbean intellectual tradition. These materials are analyzed through close reading, affective analysis, and comparative interpretation to examine how catastrophe and non/sovereignty are articulated beyond state centered frameworks. The study also employs speculative and mythopoetic analysis to trace how disaster imaginaries emerge through aesthetic and performative forms. A research creation component forms an integral speculative methodological tool, developed through a creative worksite situated in Las Cuevas, Trinidad. This component mobilizes narrative experimentation, poetic writing, and sensory engagement to explore affective experiences of catastrophe and relational sovereignty. Together, these methods enable an integrated analysis of theoretical reflection and creative practice, allowing the research to engage disaster as lived, imagined, and performed rather than solely as an empirical event.

Expected Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The study is expected to advance a theoretical reframing of disaster as a colonial and political condition rather than a natural phenomenon.• It is expected to contribute a nuanced understanding of non-sovereignty as a relational, affective, and generative mode of political life.• The research is anticipated to elaborate disaster mythopoethics as a critical framework for examining alternative imaginaries of sovereignty.• The research creation component is expected to yield a speculative artifact that substantiates and extends the project's theoretical contributions.
Practical Implications	The research provides a conceptual framework that can inform scholarly, cultural, and educational engagements with disaster beyond technocratic or emergency driven approaches. By foregrounding affective, poetic, and vernacular forms of knowledge, the study offers tools for critically engaging how disaster is understood, narrated, and represented in Caribbean contexts. The research creation component demonstrates how speculative and creative practices can serve as modes of inquiry and reflection, expanding the methodological repertoire available to researchers and cultural practitioners. More broadly, the findings support ethically reflexive approaches to studying disaster that attend to lived experience, historical conditions, and relational modes of meaning making.
Theoretical Implications	This research contributes to disaster studies and Caribbean intellectual thought by advancing a conceptual shift from event-based and state centered understandings of disaster toward an analysis of disaster as a colonial and political condition. By theorizing nonsovereignty as a relational and affective practice, the study extends existing debates on sovereignty beyond juridical and territorial frameworks. The articulation of disaster mythopoethics offers a critical lens for examining how aesthetic, poetic, and speculative practices function as sites of political imagination. Together,



these contributions deepen theoretical engagement with catastrophe, vulnerability, and political life in contexts shaped by enduring colonial structures.

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