

“we are still here holding fast”: Stillness in the wake of Hurricane Irma in Richard Georges’ *Epiphaneia*

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Abstract: This article looks at Richard Georges’ poetry collection *Epiphaneia*, which is set on the British Virgin Islands in the aftermath of hurricane Irma. While Georges’ poems are placed amidst destruction, they go beyond narratives of devastation; instead, they articulate a poetics of livingness on the hurricane-struck island. This paper first draws out critical debates on the coloniality of climate that show the *longue durée* and complexity of a history of catastrophe in the Caribbean context. It addresses how *Epiphaneia* challenges one-sided discourses of island dependency and victimization by offering ways to perceive islands in the Anthropocene not as passive victims of catastrophes but as sites of living within what Glissant calls a chaos-world. This article then advances an ecopoetics of the archipelago in the wake of the hurricane. The various tensions held by the island after the storm will be traced through the word ‘still’: the ongoing violence of coloniality, still present; yet continuously resisted due to the island’s and islanders’ resilience and survival, still alive. This paper explores the poetics emerging from the island in the Anthropocene: What poetics are needed to sustain life after, and within, catastrophe? What does it mean to exist and move, still, on the island in the wake of the hurricane?

Keywords: Anthropocene, archipelago, Caribbean poetry, hurricane, islands

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Introduction

The poetry collection *Epiphaneia*, published in 2019 by Caribbean author Richard Georges, is set in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, a category five hurricane that ravaged across the Caribbean archipelago in 2017 and particularly hit the British Virgin Islands. It became one of the strongest storms in the Atlantic and created long-lasting damage across the islands: demolishing houses and homes, tossing around vehicles and boats and destroying parts of the islands’ vegetation. While Georges’

poems are placed amidst destruction and loss, they go beyond narratives of devastation and desolation; instead, they thrive for livingness (see McKittrick, 2021, p. 3) on the hurricane-struck island. This paper addresses how *Epiphaneia* challenges one-sided discourses of island dependency and victimization by offering ways to perceive islands in the Anthropocene not merely as passive victims of catastrophes but as key sites for “Anthropocene thinking” (Chandler & Pugh, 2021a), evolving from the island after the hurricane. In doing so, this article first sets Georges’ book into the wider anthropocentric context of hurricanes and catastrophe in the Caribbean, relates it to recent debates in island studies and questions of remoteness and then draws out an archipelagic poetics of livingness in a close reading of the poems.

Hurricanes like Irma are forceful reminders and harbingers of further impending climate disasters that are increasing in today’s Anthropocene, a term pointing to direct human involvement in geological and climatic changes on the Earth. Climate catastrophes are often depicted as novel and singular events in much climate change discourse, at times detached from wider historical, political, economic or socio-cultural implications. However, crises such as these are complex and longstanding; as Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2019, p. 2) explains, we need to be “attentive to the historical *continuity* of dispossession and disaster caused by empire.” Bajan scholar and poet Kamau Brathwaite (1985, p. 457) draws attention to a “history of catastrophe” that includes not merely singular events but the *longue durée* of crisis. Referring to the Caribbean, Brathwaite (1985, p. 460) writes, “the nature of our catastrophe, the effects we feel, have ancient, subterranean but identifiable sources; that our condition: frustration, exploitation, underdevelopment, slavery, colonialism.”

It is thus important to acknowledge the *Anthropos* in the term Anthropocene, which should not be understood as pointing to humanity as a whole, or to any individualistic idea of climate guilt, but to a perspective that Sylvia Wynter (in McKittrick, 2015, p. 21) denominates ‘*homo oeconomicus*’ (also referred to as Man2), working within and driving the current predominant exploitative and destructive system that devastatingly and rapidly impinges on the planet. As Wynter (in McKittrick, 2015, p. 22) explains, responding to scientific climate reports that:

logically assume that the *referent-we* – whose normal behaviors are destroying the habitability of our planet – is that of *the human population as a whole*. The ‘we’ who are destroying the planet in these findings are not understood as the *referent-we* of *homo oeconomicus* (a ‘we’ that includes themselves / ourselves as bourgeois academics).

Writers like Wynter and Brathwaite thus call for a recognition of current catastrophes as not just singular events but as intricately entangled with a history of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism, one that further critically considers the ‘we’ implied in the Anthropocene (see also Sharp, 2020; Yusoff, 2018). It is against the backdrop of these entangled histories that Caribbean scholars and writers articulate

what David Scott (2017) calls “the eco-poetics of catastrophe that constitute our Caribbean worlds.”

However, much Western discourse following climate disasters on islands employs tropes of the remote and dependent island, a trope that has been abundantly used in the past to justify colonialism (see Roberts & Stephens, 2017), culturally reproduced in literary texts of the deserted island (see DeLoughrey, 2007; Gillis, 2004) or commercialized and exoticized for white, westernized dreams (see DeLoughrey & Flores, 2020; Nimführ & Meloni, 2021). Debates surrounding islands and ecological disasters overemphasizing island vulnerability due to their precarious position far apart and encircled by the ocean, threatened by rising sea levels, deflect from the convoluted complexity of climate change and the implication of colonialism and imperialism. This deliberate setting apart of the island serves to justify the mainland’s own reluctance to act and to aid. Numerous scholars in island and archipelagic studies have critically examined tropes of island remoteness (Baldacchino, 2006; DeLoughrey, 2001; 2007; Hau’ofa, 1999; Ronström, 2021) and argued for an archipelagic framework (Pugh, 2013; Roberts & Stephens, 2017; Stephens & Martínez-San Miguel, 2020; Stratford et al., 2011), drawn attention to the “slow violence” (Nixon, 2011) intricately related to the *longue durée* of colonial exploitation and racial capitalism and to the question of climate justice for affected places like the Caribbean (Sheller, 2020), and shifted the debate from island vulnerability to islands’ and islanders’ agency in the Anthropocene (Baldacchino, 2018; Chandler & Pugh, 2021a; 2021b; DeLoughrey, 2019; Ruehr, 2022; Sheller, 2020).

Its precarious location making it more prone to hurricanes and earthquakes is just one part of the Caribbean’s ecological vulnerability; the slow violence of resource exploitation, debt, military intervention, racial capitalism and neoliberalism, what Mimi Sheller (2020, pp. 8-13) refers to as the “coloniality of climate,” equally plays a considerable part in this ongoing crisis. Islands in the Anthropocene thus come to reckon with these fraught colonial entanglements impinging on them with daunting intensity when hurricanes hit. The Atlantic Ocean is the fastest warming ocean, with an increase of its temperatures by two degrees Fahrenheit since 1900 (Berardelli, 2020). The Caribbean, identified as one of the world’s “climate change hot-spots” (Giorgi, 2006), bears the brunt of hurricanes intensified through ocean warming, as the numerous hurricanes like Matthew in Haiti in 2016, Irma and Maria in the northeastern Caribbean in 2017, Dorian in the Bahamas in 2019, and Iota in Central America in 2020 testify to. Increasing academic interest has been directed at hurricanes and other catastrophes in the Caribbean and their aftereffects (see, e.g., *Small Axe* Issue 2020 with articles on crises related to hurricanes by Garriga-López, 2020; Jobson, 2020; Lightfoot, 2020; Welcome, 2020), embedded in larger discussions on racial capitalism and neoliberalism. Responding to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Naomi Klein (2007) coins the term “disaster capitalism,” that is the capitalization of disaster for the market; yet this is directly connected to colonialism, referred to as the “coloniality of disaster” by Yarmiar Bonilla (2020) in the wake of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

Former US President Donald Trump's reaction to accusations of his lack of response to Puerto Rico's devastation after Hurricane Maria stands as a continentalist example of the positioning of islands by a mainland rhetoric: "This is an island, surrounded by water. Big water. Ocean water" (in Associated Press, 2017), as well as "it's very tough, because it's an island [...]. In Texas, we can ship the trucks right out there [...] But the difference is, this is an island sitting in the middle of an ocean. And it's a big ocean; it a very big ocean" (Trump in Bump, 2017). While the ocean has not been much of a hindrance when invading Haiti in 1915 or Grenada in 1983, when it comes to governmental assistance, Trump sees ocean water as a hindrance, almost like a giant border wall that makes aid from its own government impossible. And yet, from a Caribbean and archipelagic perspective, the ocean has never signified an insurmountable border. Rather, Caribbean scholars and writers envision the ocean as a link, as Édouard Glissant (1989, p. 139) teaches us, "each island embodies an openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea. It is only those who are tied to the European continent who see insularity as confining." Moving away from a continental bias towards the archipelagic allows one to actually see the ocean not as something vast and insurmountable but as part of a larger planetary whole.

DeLoughrey (2019, p. 2) calls for a provincialization of the Anthropocene in order to turn away from grand westernized narratives of island victimization and white saviorism, which often exclude local perspectives. David Chandler and Jonathan Pugh (2021a, p. 209) further argue that "the figure of the island has become particularly generative for the development of non-modern, relational ontologies and epistemologies in wider Anthropocene thinking." Such scholarly endeavors show that islands and archipelagos are by no means remote but have to be an integral part of environmental debates, not only because many are the first to bear the increasing brunt of climate change but also because islands and their inhabitants have long been continuously renegotiating living within the Anthropocene.

This paper, then, explores the poetics emerging amid the island in the Anthropocene. As Brathwaite (in McSweeney, 2005) notes, "art must come out of catastrophe," pointing to the necessity of poetic creation not despite of but especially within crisis. The need for art, poetry in particular, in moments of crisis has also been famously and powerfully maintained by poet Audre Lorde (1984), saying that "poetry is not a luxury" but a means for survival. Similarly, *Epiphaneia* is not so much concerned with documenting and measuring the amount of destruction after Hurricane Irma but it creates a poetics of livingness in moments when catastrophes of the Anthropocene hit the island. Georges' poems, thus, are not a luxury but vital articulations of living in the wake of Hurricane Irma. The opening poem asks, "What are poems but prayers?" (Georges, 2019, p. 15), a rhetorical question promptly answered in the following line: "An unfurling / of hope, wonder." Hope and wonder thus echo throughout every poem of the collection, creating an ecopoetics of catastrophe that sees beyond destruction and loss.

Ecopoetics of the archipelago

This paper takes its cue from Chandler and Pugh's (2021a, p. 179) argument in their book *Anthropocene islands: Entangled worlds* that "islands have become one of the most emblematic figures of the Anthropocene." They invoke potentialities and capacities of islands and islanders to respond to environmental changes in terms of "relational agency" (Chandler & Pugh, 2021a, p. 2), meaning their understanding of "how all life in the Anthropocene is relationally entangled and co-dependent." This finds resonance in Glissant's (2020, p. 26) distinction between "archipelagic thought," which to him is "non-systematic, more intuitive, more fragile, threatened, but in tune with the chaos-world," and "continental thought," which he describes in terms of "systematic thought," that "forecast[s] the world." While predictions of immanent ecological threats are immensely valuable, they are largely based on probabilities; yet in past years, climate disasters have increasingly occurred in unexpected places and with greater intensity. Amitav Gosh (2016, p. 25) in his book *The great derangement* reflects on the unpredictability of climatic events in the present era and how humans adapt – or can no longer adapt – to them:

I suspect that human beings are generally catastrophists at heart until their instinctive awareness of the earth's unpredictability was gradually supplanted by a belief in uniformitarianism – a regime of ideas that was supported by [...] a range of governmental practices that were informed by statistics and probability.

Gosh here criticizes the political preoccupation with risk calculations, which presumes predictability, and asks how we can relearn to live within the Anthropocene and its unpredictability, resonating with Glissant's archipelagic thinking. Archipelagic thought thus adds another dimension to anthropogenic events, as it not so much tries to rewire what has already been done but deals with the afterlives of ecological changes. Consequently, archipelagic thought does not merely write and think *about* islands but *amid* them, placing one's thinking not only between islands, or islands and continents, but always seeing oneself as surrounded by islands as an intricate part of living (see also Roberts, 2021). Through the archipelagic, one is always already entangled with part of its whole, with its multiplicity, and becomes not only part of, but also moves through what Brian Russell Roberts (2021, p. 81) refers to as "this *shifting of being* amid shifting lands and waters." Being amid presupposes Glissant's (1997) notion of 'Relation', which also offers an important perspective on living and the environment as it "does not think of a land as a territory from which to project toward other territories but as a place where one *gives-on-and-with* rather than *grasps*" (Glissant, 1997, p. 55, emphases added).

Such an understanding of world-making defies hierarchical and exploitative perspectives on the planet and essentially places any object or living being as equal part amid their surroundings. It acknowledges the world not as a place that needs to

be ordered, changed and shaped to fit a universal conception of Man's way of being in the world, but as what Glissant (1997, p. 94) calls 'chaos-monde', or 'chaos-world', which is not per se 'chaotic'. Rather, chaos-monde alludes to the unpredictability within Relation, which to Glissant is fashioned through diverse cultural encounters without the suppression of any one, that constitutes the world. By acknowledging that much cannot be *grasped* or *predicted*, it also works against universalizing and essentializing, which Glissant (1997, p. 94) expresses through his elaboration on poetics:

The ambition of poetics, rather, is to safeguard the energy of this order. The aesthetics of the universe assumed preestablished norms; the aesthetics of *chaos-monde* is the impassioned illustration and refutation of these. Chaos is not devoid of norms, but these neither constitute a goal nor govern a method there.

An eco-poetics of the archipelago thus operates within the understanding of a 'chaos-monde', as a poetic world-making that is placed *amid* and in *Relation* to its ecological surroundings, one that importantly conceives of these relations as continuous movement, rather than something that can be pinned down, and thereby becomes movement itself.

Staying with the trouble of chaos-monde

In Richard Georges' poetry collection *Epiphaneia*, these eco-poetics of the archipelago play out amid the British Virgin Islands in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, dealing with what is left and how to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016) within a chaos-monde. The immediate surroundings are depicted as playground, monument, testament of the hurricane, and thus become fundamental to poetic world-making. In the context of environmental disaster, the intricate relationship between landscape and power becomes particularly poignant. W.J.T. Mitchell (1994, p. 1) defines landscape "not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed." The environmental surroundings are framed not as passive backdrop but as active participant in power relations, being placed *amid* world-making processes. This also resonates deeply with Caribbean thought, for instance Glissant (1989, pp. 105-106) writes that in the Caribbean archipelago "the individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process," and "landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history" (Glissant, 1989, p. 11). Glissant articulates a poetics of landscape that needs not rely on anthropocentric tools of measuring, impacting or *grasping* land. Rather, his poetics always makes space for opacity, also granting opacity to land itself, its right not to be understood in purely human and linguistic terms.

Staying with the trouble of loss and destruction brought about by the hurricane, Georges' poems also span beyond a singular disaster and speak for what has been lost,

what remains, and what is emerging. *Epiphaneia* presents a mobile speaker who ventures on the island, yet not with any attempt of grasping, measuring or conquering it but with a sense of awe and wonder. The poem 'An inventory for survival' (Georges, 2019, p. 30) captures the morning after the storm and attunes to the remnants of island life, where "coral lay in piles," speaking to the havoc wreaked by the hurricane. Death and devastation always also mean renewal and creation, as the poems paint scenes of children playing in the ruins created by the hurricane or people "making bathtub altars" (Georges, 2019, p. 30). The poem ponders on how to make a living after, not despite, the storm, as it reads: "The thing that breaks / us is all there is sometimes" (Georges, 2019, p. 30). The enjambement serves as both separation and connection of these two lines: The line break quite literally breaks the "us" away from the first verse, yet joins it with "all there is sometimes," signaling abundance in the bonds created in the wake of the storm. The double linkage of "us," which can be read as both object and subject, makes one wonder what place the "we" takes in the Anthropocene, which has to be one that is not just human but necessarily entangled with the more-than-human, an urgency repeatedly stressed in Haraway's (2016) *Staying with the trouble*. The island in the poems is thus never passive, but continuously creates anew. This invites a reading of the island not as static noun, but as a verb, following Teresia Teaiwa's (2007, p. 514) call: "Shall we make island a verb? As a noun, it's so vulnerable to impinging forces [...] let us also make island a verb. It is a way of living that could save our lives." To understand 'island as a verb' thus evokes an active way of becoming rather than an immobile way of being that rests within island vulnerability.

Reading stillness

In the following, I will perform a close reading of the poems in Georges' (2019) *Epiphaneia*, taking the strikingly reoccurring word 'still' as a guiding thread to structure my analysis. 'Still', in the book, expresses multiple different meanings, sharpened through various poetic strategies such as rhymes or repetition, and can thereby be read as archipelagic. Still, thus, conveys repetition. As Glissant (2020, p. 19) writes, "it is through repeating things that one begins to glimpse the emergence of something new."

This ties in with the pervading theme of the title – *Epiphaneia* – and the awe expressed by the speaker moving across the hurricane-struck island. The title suggests a biblical reference, appearing in the New Testament, of a revelation that is both miraculous and threatening. The opening page provides an explanation of epiphaneia as in "appearing, appearance" which is "often used by the Greeks of a glorious manifestation of the gods, and especially of their advent to help" depicting "God as a helper" (Georges, 2019, p. 10). Elsewhere, in an interview, Georges alludes to being inspired by the "deep sense of awe" (in Bago, 2020) after storms hit the British Virgin Islands. Epiphaneia, as in 'epiphany', thus alludes to a sudden realization, something that could not have been predicted or planned. The poems are not necessarily about rebuilding what has been lost but about these moments between loss and restoration,

about making “life amidst the strife” (Georges, 2019, p. 15), within a chaos-world, which holds the potential for alternatives, an otherwise. By jointly reading Robert’s evocation of being *amid* and the poems’ repetitious stress on the word ‘still’, temporalities and spatialities are bridged in the archipelago. Both words express continuity and embeddedness and thereby inhabit the urgency of reading across past, present, and future, as well as across the archipelago.

In the poems, ‘still’ articulates the various tensions held by the island after the storm: the ongoing violence of coloniality, still present yet continuously resisted due to the island’s and islanders’ resilience and survival, still alive. It thus also stands as a marker of protest, of retort and of affirmation of a right to *be* and to *become*. And, lastly, as a noun, stillness expresses something quiet, motionless, as in holding still, tending to that moment of stillness, of quiet, right after the storm.

Holding still

‘Still’ expressing something that is ongoing links to the archipelago in terms of temporalities. Roberts (2021, p. 20) writes, “the archipelago, then, as it shimmers through time and water, becomes a geographic form that permits human temporalities to link up – perhaps even to archipelagize – with nonhuman temporalities.” In the poems, landscape is fused with legacies of the past, both of colonialism and the more recent hurricane, and it is in landscape that temporalities of the past, present, and future intersect. As the speaker moves through island space, various strands of history are woven together, fusing devastation and recovery of both human violence and natural disaster of the more distant and recent past.

Through the word ‘still’, one can trace the “holding sites,” as Chandler and Pugh (2021a, p. 23, emphasis original) call the hauntings and traces of coloniality and its afterlives, which show that islands are “not only existing *within* complex relations of coloniality and global warming but as *holding* these forces and being held by them.” Islands, thus, frequently disrupt linear temporalities, storing memories of the past – of colonialism, modernity, ecological disruptions – and thereby “are regularly employed to highlight how there is no ‘away’ and no ‘past’ in the Anthropocene” (Chandler & Pugh, 2021a, p. 23). The understanding of islands as holding sites of a colonial past also evokes the nominal form of the hold, which has been linked to the Middle Passage by Christina Sharpe (2016, p. 27) in *In the wake: On Blackness and being*. Here the hold “is the slave ship hold; is the hold of the so-called migrant ship; is the prison; is the womb that produces blackness.” Across different forms of immobilization and imprisonment, the hold continues in the present. ‘Still’ emphasizes what has been, what reverberates in the present and what extends to the future. Sharpe (2016, pp. 119-120) further draws attention to the significance of the word ‘still’ as temporal marker of living in the wake, that is, in the wake of slavery and colonialism. Still, thus, carries both the meaning of duration, moving across time, and non-movement, the wake that is still ongoing. It thereby carries the slow violence as explained by Rob Nixon (2011, p. 2),

the kind of violence that happens incrementally over time, as a process, rather than suddenly as an event.

In *Epiphaneia*, the legacies of colonialism are perceptible in landscape both in terms of its past – a history of slavery and indentureship – and its present devastation of the hurricane (which could be seen as testament for the coloniality of climate). The poem ‘Rituals’ (Georges, 2019, p. 21) employs the word ‘still’ to express an ongoing circle of violence. It articulates the transgenerational endurance of the afterlives of slavery as it opens by addressing the speaker’s daughter: “Come, daughter, we must go now to the hill / where our ancestors strode amongst the tall grass / and worked and worked and worked until.” The repetition of the word ‘worked’ in one sentence as well as of the whole sentence reoccurring multiple times in the poem emphasizes the repeating, never-ending hardship across generations. The speaker addresses the daughter, mother, father and, finally, in the last stanza, a more general ‘the children’, symbols for the future. This is heightened by the ultimate temporal change of the word ‘worked’ into ‘work’, which propels the reader, and the children, into the present, insisting on the continuity of catastrophe: “Come, children, we must go now to the hill, / and work and work and work until.” The temporal marker ‘until’ at the end of the repeating phrase alludes to an opening: leaving open the end of this intergenerational circle of hardship, pointing to the *longue durée* of colonialism; instead, the poem opens into a gap, holding still for a moment, before moving to a new stanza with a repeating rhythm.

‘Still’, here, thus marks repetitious movement and continuity, emphasized through its notable use of rhymes, as in still: hill, until, will, fill. The rhythmic pattern places these words in close relationship to one another, linking them through their similar sounds, yet it also marks repetition, creating the impression of an endless rhythmic cycle. Finally, the word ‘still’ itself holds a double meaning in the poem, which is emphasized by archipelagizing human and non-human temporalities through the image of the sun. In the second stanza of the poem, “The sun still sets its burning light,” continuity is expressed through the lasting presence of the sun, or “Where your blessed ancestors are still,” suggesting a lasting spiritual presence.

In the last stanza, ‘still’ is imbued with new meaning, one that asserts enduring existence and unwavering resilience: “The sun sank like a hurled stone and still / we are here, we are still here holding fast.” Again, this is affirmed through the presence of the sun: the simile comparing the sinking sun to a hurled stone bestows it with a certain heaviness, alluding to the cumbersome past, yet the speaker repeatedly asserts their existence in this very place on the hurricane-struck island in the present: “we are still here holding fast.” The poem expresses a remarked strength of the islands’ inhabitants, who despite, or because, of the ‘hold’ manage to ‘hold fast’ still. Circling back to Sharpe’s (2016) meaning of the ‘hold’, it is seen as a reminder and remainder of the Middle Passage, and articulates the hauntings and confinements of the slave ship for the Black diaspora till today. ‘Holding fast’ or ‘holding still’ in that sense attain yet another layer of meaning linked to unwavering endurance. Georges’ poems thus meander amid the island’s immanence of the hurricane while illustrating that its present ecological devastation is still enmeshed with colonial exploitation of the past.

Still alive

Sharpe's reflection on 'still' takes from Dionne Brand's (2018) Verso 55 in *The blue clerk*, where 'still' expresses not just survival but an affirmation of survival, tinted with wonder. In repeating assertions of aliveness, Brand (2018, p. 223) writes, "You are still alive, they said. Yes we are still alive." In the wake, in this case in the wake of the hurricane, aliveness, or what McKittrick (2021, p. 73) calls 'livingness', needs to be repeated and thereby becomes a "radical generous political act." Assertions of aliveness in *Epiphaneia* speak for a certain kind of resilience, perhaps particular to the island. The term 'resilience' has been problematized particularly in the context of climate change as it risks shifting attention to a bounded community or place, rather than taking into account the responsibility of international players, particularly industrialized states, who contribute to global climate change yet are not necessarily the first to directly experience the repercussions (see Nash, 2018, pp. 130-132). Chandler and Pugh (2021a, p. 53) offer a framework of resilience ontologies in the Anthropocene that "draws heavily upon the idea that island life is by necessity relational, in the sense that survival is always a matter of being more than an entity, more than an individual, more than a set of fixed essences, tastes and preferences." Islands, to them, are central to resilience approaches due to their adaptive capacity and relationality. It is thus their archipelagic constitution, rather than a bounded and individualistic one, that considerably forms their resilience. The term 'resilience', here, should not be understood as being made functional within a given system again, "or the ability to absorb and bounce back from experiences" (Bonilla, 2020, p. 2), but as survival and livingness in the wake of the hurricane, affirming that "Yes we are still alive" (Brand, 2018, p. 223). It is upon the convoluted history deeply rooted in the island's soil, and immersed in its waters, that its resilience is built.

In Georges' poems, resilience is found not in rebuilding what has been lost or in the island's capacities to 'bounce back' to what was before. His poetics is not one of nostalgia and restoration but one that is placed within the present. The first part of the poem 'A longer loneliness' (Georges, 2019, p. 32) traces the quest of "lonely wanderers in search of bodies," hit by the devastating reality of the hurricane, reminding the reader that nothing is permanent:

lonely wanderers in search of bodies we know
by the clarities of blue-grey light. This place
will teach you how to make your selves small, narrowed

into thinner spaces, always learning anew
that the fire can consume you, the house you build
(your borders, your monuments) can be broken.

Addressing their readers, the speaker declares this place – which is the island – as generative for Anthropocene thinking. In the wake of the hurricane, the island asks

its inhabitants to build their resilience on relationality, establishing a sense of their being as not singular but amid their surroundings, which impact and shape their living and potentially break even what they thought of as their most stable and fixed shelter. The brackets embedding borders and monuments put these entities slightly off from the rest of the text, as if to safeguard them, while emphasizing that even those rigid structures – which are also humanly construed structures – will not hold. The addressee in the poem is invited to remain open to unpredictability, to develop resilience through their living in relation to the more-than-human. In this sense, the individual's resilience of the addressee 'you' is extended to a wider archipelagic resilience, to a multiplicity of their 'selves', instead of the singular yourself, and shifting to a collective 'we' in the rest of the poem.

While the first part of the poem illustrates why resilience is needed, the second part changes its tone to a more hopeful and promising presence of the island and islanders, as if imbued with the resilience previously invoked:

We have never been more alive than today.
Look at the greenness and blooming from the stiff trees!
The island thrives. Yellow mornings peel away

the clouds. The ticking sea keeps time on the coast.
And do you see the pelicans measuring
the breakers? They will know that there is life here

and they and us and all of this are made of
the same stardust, made with the same stinging love,
made with the same delicate intemperance. (Georges, 2019, p. 32)

In the aftermath of the hurricane, and following the opening more somber stanzas of the poem, the given first verse almost seems like a paradox, asserting the island's utter vibrancy through the use of a superlative. The vitality of the speaker's collective 'we' is reflected in the island's persisting thriving, expressed in the poem through its colors and natural surroundings that give life. Being and becoming are necessarily constituted in relational terms, as "they and us and all of this," to the extent that all origin seems to go back to something shared, emphasized by the alliteration "same": the "same stardust," "same stinging love," and "same delicate intemperance." Based on a resilience that is relational, the last stanza ends on a hopeful note that expresses persistence: "But we are here. Now. There is still light." The staccato rhythm of this penultimate line powerfully sounds the island's being into existence, both in terms of space – "here," on the hurricane-struck island – and of time – "Now." Still, here and now, expresses a sense of persistence fostered through relations amid the archipelago, the island's and islanders' relational resilience that, still, holds on.

Throughout the collection, the island's and islanders' resilience is thus expressed through relationality, emphasized by the employment of metaphors and similes such

as “the children, skittering like birds” (Georges, 2019, p. 36) and “You can twist your limbs the way trees do” (Georges, 2019, p. 23). The poems illustrate how, after the hurricane, any life on the island becomes more-than-itself; in other words, “the more-than-human is always already relationally entangled with the human after the end of the world” (Chandler & Pugh, 2021a, p. 57). Islanders and islands fuse within the archipelago in the poem ‘Still life of a ruin’ (Georges, 2019, p. 31). ‘Still’, here, can be read in two ways: ‘still life’ evokes a work of art depicting motionless or inanimate objects, yet read as ‘still life’ with a short pause can also be seen as an emphasis of life, that still there is life amid the ruin. This poem, then, firmly speaks its existence into the wider archipelago: “we are still here – rocks circled by blue” (Georges, 2019, p. 31). The archipelagic constitutes an essential part of its existence, surrounded by the blue of the ocean, which both provides it with life yet also stands as an immanent reminder of its existence threatened by environmental changes, not only of intensified hurricanes but also of sea levels rising. Yet, “we are still here,” so often repeated in various poems, affirms the right to be, to become, here, on that very island, amid the chaos-world after the hurricane.

Still hope

While survival and persistence are of primary concern in the wake of the hurricane, strengthened through island resilience, *Epiphaneia* offers more than that. The poems do not just invite ways of dwelling, simply being, but they invite ways of becoming, or islanding (see Teaiwa, 2007, p. 514), in an active and generative sense that sees the island as mobile space that opens out to the world. ‘Still’, here, expresses the unwavering sense of hope and joy, of livingness, of the island.

In the poems, that sense of livingness on the island is possible because they move within the aesthetics of a chaos-world, which “embraces all the elements and forms of expression of this totality within us; it is totality’s act and its fluidity, totality’s reflection and agent in motion” (Glissant, 1997, p. 94). Totality, for Glissant, subsumes the chaos and diversity that make up the world. Ultimately, the chaos-world is built on Relation and thereby always stays in motion: “The poetics of Relation (which is, therefore, part of the aesthetics of the *chaos-monde*) senses, assumes, opens, gathers, scatters, continues, and transforms the thought of these elements, these forms, and this motion” (Glissant, 1997, pp. 94-95). It thus does not operate in a linear and straightforward manner but moves *chaotically* while sensing into what is there. In the Anthropocene, chaos-world provides an important way of not only seeing but also moving amid the world in its totality; as “chaos-world exists because unpredictability exists” (Glissant, 2020, p. 21). It thus not so much intends to *grasp* the world, make sense of it, but stays open to it, so that unexpected new things can emerge. To quote Glissant (1997, p. 94) again, “The aesthetics of the universe assumed preestablished norms; the aesthetics of *chaos-monde* is the impassioned illustration and refutation of these.” Formerly established norms do not hold anymore in a chaos-world, just like they do not after the hurricane, which is why a chaos-world invites one to move through unpredictability.

Most poems are imbued with a sense of hope and beauty amid the uncertainty of the hurricane. As a stanza in the poem “The year has become more beautiful” (Georges, 2019, p. 34) reads, “I’ve begun to learn that *devastated* does not mean *dead*, / that ruin can be resplendent, / that what has been emptied can be filled.” Associating seemingly incongruent words and oppositions, yet refusing to link what is usually seen as going hand in hand, the poem, as does the book, continuously refuses to be placed merely within destruction and death, yet unabatedly finds ways to express livingness within a chaos-world. “This year has become more beautiful for the scars” (Georges, 2019, p. 34), the same poem reads, turning scars – often seen as markers of vulnerability and weakness – into the sign of the island’s greatest strength, and beauty, as part of its chaos-world.

Islanding in the poems comes to fruition through renewal within paradox. The hurricane has created devastation and loss, yet it is the element of air that most vividly delivers hope in the poems. When houses are crushed on land, air offers a new home: “we must build our new homes in the air” (Georges, 2019, p. 37). People are memorialized through their movement in the air: “Remind me again, how people become / weights, or how they become feathers. Then wings” (Georges, 2019, p. 33). “Hope,” as Emily Dickinson (2005, p. 140) reminded us, “is the thing with feathers.”

In ‘Notes on road town’ (Georges, 2019, p. 37), the poet performs a kind of reckoning with the storm, yet not one that hinges on anger or resentment but one that continually moves to adapt new perspectives. It is a poetics that allows its readers to widen their imagination even among moments of devastation. The poet ultimately takes on another point of view, one up in the air, stretching to the cosmos, to contemplate the beauty of storms:

Perhaps from the cloud perch, or from a fine
cratered moon, storms can be beautiful things.
Exemplars of asymmetry, of a natural mechanics
[as natural as sound], of how they form a language
their own that both poet and fisherman understand.

When the unmaking is stilled, the land
a negative space, there are still ghosts outside,
unstilled. There are still so many winds still
to come. That blue porcelain will not remain
long above us so plainly, so unremarkable.

The second part of this longer stanza, its change in tone marked by the indented new sentence, brings us back to the word ‘still’ and its multiple meanings. The repeated employment of the word ‘still’ in varied grammatical constellations allows the reader to “glimpse the emergence of something new” (Glissant, 2020, p. 19) so that, eventually, when read aloud, the multiple meanings of ‘still’ seem to commingle and fall into place: the quiet after the destruction, juxtaposed to the deadly presence of the moving ghosts, never stilled in the face of luring storms of the future.

Departing from the previously evoked 'hold', hope continuously lingers in the word 'still'. For Sharpe (2016, p. 19), hope, or the possibility of other ways of being, is realized through the image of the door, which is a reference to the Door of No Return: a door that holds the promise of return yet return can never be realized for the African diaspora whose ancestors went through that door into slavery (see Brand, 2001). However, it does allow for imaginations otherwise not possible. George's poem 'The storm is here and a new world is awakening' (2019, p. 29) equally displays such an ambiguous tension between loss and renewal. The poem opens with the line "Survivor stories begin to meld together" (Georges, 2019, p. 29). It is thus about survival, one that weaves together multiple other stories, stories of the hurricane but never merely ones about destruction. The power to see beyond devastation is also inscribed in landscape, as the poem reads: "Here, every tree has been made a monument," evoking Glissant's (1989, p. 11) understanding of landscape as monument. The stories to be told in the poem might not necessarily be purely of survival, yet hold the promise of hope. The poem recounts the story about a man holding on to his door, even when going skyward with that door. As the poem reads, "They say he held the door, / still, long after the storm had taken him skyward, / like hope" (Georges, 2019, p. 29). This is an image that reoccurs in the speaker's dreams – "on still nights," in moments of quiet, yet the image that remains is again one of hope, rather than death:

A flying man,
opening a door in the sky.

The door, here, articulates the promise of an otherwise of living, expressed through the opening to the sky. "We are only / ever so far from ruin," one of the last lines reads, reminding the reader that nothing is permanent and that one needs to live with unpredictability. This poem fuses the element of air, materiality of the storm, with hope. It is the door, firmly held on to by the man while propelled skyward by the hurricane, that delivers the promise of renewal, or of a becoming, that is made possible on the island in the wake of the hurricane. Even though the narrative of the flying man taken by the hurricane's power suggests his death, Georges' poetics are not linear and final but provide an opening. The rich symbolism of the door carved out by Brand in *A map to the Door of No Return* (2001) resonates in this poem. The door, which is both real and metaphorical, holds the possibilities of an otherwise: "This is the trick of the door – to step through and be where you want to be" (Brand, 2001, p. 118). As it opens into the sky, Georges' poetics reach beyond the hurricane-struck island and animate hope and wonder. 'Still' signals holding on to that skyward door, which opens into possibilities. These rich imageries that stay present with the chaos-world of the hurricane's aftermath create a poetics of livingness allowing the readers to imagine how still life is possible on the island in the Anthropocene.

Conclusion

George's *Epiphaneia*, set amid the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, pushes against notions of islands as remote and passive and instead creates a rich tapestry of poetic imagery testifying to island livingness in the context of devastation and loss. While any critical engagement with hurricane devastation on the island has to consider the role of histories of catastrophe, colonialism, imperialism, and its ongoing projects, *Epiphaneia* further offers possibilities of livingness. It thereby pushes against single narratives of destruction and loss by showing what is still there. In this article, I have traced an eco-poetics of the archipelago through the poet's repeating employment of the word 'still', which inhabits multilayered and complex presences on the hurricane-struck island: 'still' expresses the hold, the continuity of colonial violence which leaves its traces on the island, slowly, rather than immediately, yet with brutal vehemence when the hurricane hits. In the poems, 'still' also stands for possibilities of living that do not waver even during disaster. This is expressed through a relational resilience, entangled with the more-than-human, and an adamant adherence to hope, or, in other words, an holding on to the door, poetically invoked by a man holding a door while flying skyward. The skyward door echoes a double meaning of Brand's door linked to the (Black) diaspora. This article thereby advances an archipelagic reading of literary texts dealing with catastrophes, such as hurricanes, through the word 'still', which bridges the tensions between devastation or precarity and hope or the door. The poems then arrive at a poetics of livingness, as I have argued, which suggests that there is always, and still, more to disaster than mere destruction: the hold, the door, or even hope.

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