Call for Papers: ‘The Making of Caribbean Not-so-Natural Disasters’

Deadline: 2 May 2018

Alternautas, an academic peer-reviewed blog, is calling for contributions for a special issue on ‘The Making of Caribbean Not-so-Natural Disasters’

On Wednesday 20 September the lives of Puerto Ricans on the archipelago and abroad changed forever. Hurricane María hit Puerto Rico as a category four storm (sustained winds of 155mph), leaving the Island in a state of emergency. Essential services such as power, potable water and communication services collapsed (Duany, 2017). The first response from the Puerto Rico and United States federal government was insufficient and slow (Sosa Pascual & Mazzei, 2017). Flooding did not discriminate between marginalised and affluent neighbourhoods. However, like the damage caused by Katrina in New Orleans (Werner 2017; Brand 2018), the island’s natural disaster uncovered the soaring levels of inequality, unequal status and commodification of disaster-related recovery for Puerto Rican residents. To varying degrees, this ‘Not-So-Natural Disaster’ (Lloréns et al. 2018; Seda-Irizarry and Martinez-Otero 2017) has also affected ravished Caribbean neighbours like Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands and Dominica - with their own variable ‘sovereign’ political arrangements and spatial and socio-economic frontiers of unequal development.

The government of Puerto Rico recently stated that “the devastation caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria creates an opportunity to redesign” the role of the government and the market (AAFAF, 2018:11). The Caribbean government is following Prince’s (1920) centenary idea of portraying a disaster as a chance of permanent social change. Jones (2009: 318) argues that major disasters “have rarely sparked significant social changes, other than to solidify the power base of elites and further immiserate the poor”. This reproduction of inequality can be seen in the wake of hurricane Maria, through the attack on an already weakened and financially beleaguered public infrastructure, including its public energy and education system-- a tactic Naomi Klein has critically framed as disaster capitalism and ‘the shock doctrine’ (2007) in cases like post-Katrina New Orleans and post-tsunami Sri Lanka. Referred to also as a ‘doctrine of trauma’ (Bonilla 2015), a unique exploitation of distress appears to underway in the island; where long-standing crises-- political, economic and environmental-- are being used to justify further acts of negligence and austerity. Given that the future Puerto Rico envisioned in the revised fiscal plan proposes further austerity measures, privatisations, stagnation, liberalisation and flexibilization of the labour market (AAFAF, 2018), we must ask ourselves, what type of significant social change would these post-disaster policies bring to residents?

Beyond Puerto Rico, what kind of alternative Caribbean futures are being imagined and enacted in the wake of the 2017 hurricane season, and how are these entangled with a sense of greater infrastructural, relief or racial justice-- both local and regional? This special issue seeks to address the disaster conditions, responses and consequences not only in Puerto Rico but also in impacted neighbouring islands like Barbuda, Cuba, Dominica, Haiti, Turks & Caicos, Virgin Islands, Montserrat, Guadeloupe, St Kitts & Nevis, St. Martin and the Dominican Republic, among others.
Articles can address (but not be limited to) any of the following issues:

- Historical and comparative dimensions of ‘hurricane’ responses and aftermaths
- Intersecting productions of ‘crisis’, ‘natural’ and ‘disasters.’
- Neo-colonial power structures: La Junta vs elected government of Puerto Rico
- Community vs state efforts in the emergency response and reconstruction
- Dismantling public infrastructure: deliberate neglect, collapse and exploitation
- International aid, developmentalist models and military interventions
- Divergences and solidarities in pan-Caribbean recovery struggles
- The uses and abuses of ‘resilience’ and ‘vulnerability.’
- Logics, practices and politics of disaster capitalism
- Economic and socio-spatial dynamics of foreign capital incursions
- Colonial instigations of racialised and gendered differences
- Art-as activism
- Deepening of poverty and intensification of inequalities
- Media representations of disaster and crisis (including political leadership)
- Discourses, practices and aesthetics of political ‘post-disaster’ leadership
- Designing reconstruction: legal, social and material reconfigurations of land, property and homes

The call is open to contributions from different disciplinary approaches, from sociology, anthropology, and political geography to architecture, law, history, economics or political science. They are expected to be of a length between 1,500 and 3,500 words and should include two (or more) pictures of your choice, eligible for unlimited reproduction. Please send your contributions before 2 May 2018 to Gibran Cruz-Martinez at gcruz(at)ichem.cl, Melissa Fernández at M.FernandezA(at)lancaster.ac.uk, Janialy Ortiz at janialy(at)gmail.com, and Patria Román-Velazquez at P.Roman-Velazquez(at)lboro.ac.uk

**Timeline**

Deadline to submit papers: 2 May 2018
Peer review process: 2 May - 2 June 2018
Author revisions: 2 June - 30 June 2018
Publication: Second semester 2018
References


Jones, M.M. (2009) There is no such thing as a natural disaster: Race, class, and hurricane Katrina, Global Public Health, 4:3, 318-320, DOI: 10.1080/17441690902831253


