3

Decolonial Approaches of Disaster Response during Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico

I was with my partner during the hurricane in my home in San Juan, Puerto Rico. We are kind of used to preparing for hurricane season, so, we thought the usual drills we do communication-wise once the hurricane passed would suffice. But as communications went down, we began to worry. Then the power went out completely. To communicate with my family, I wasn't worried. I live close, so I could walk and be with them in a matter of minutes. When the hurricane was ongoing, my family was at their home, and I was at my home. Afterwards, we spent a lot of time together and we helped each other. Regarding the communication with friends, that was trickier because, here in Puerto Rico, cell phone coverage was down. I don't know for how long, but I know that the calls would drop when I tried to reach out. That was really bad. In my case, I had AT&T, and the text sometimes worked. There was no internet or Wi-Fi, none of that, for some time. A year and a half has already passed, so, I don't remember the exact timeframe, but I do remember being cut off from my friends. When the internet signal for the cell phone came back, I found that WhatsApp was a good way to communicate because you could send the message and, even if it didn't go through in that moment, at some point it would. Another good thing about WhatsApp is that you could monitor when the person you are chatting with is online. So that was the way of more or less knowing if the person would receive the message or not. Facebook Messenger was another useful app too.

About 10 days after the hurricane, I started a GoFundMe page to raise money to buy renewable energy items like solar panels and mosquito nets and also to distribute purified water because having

> clean water was an issue as well. Once our communication lines were restored, things got better. I began fundraising, and people from Europe and the United States began donating. I kept receiving donations until May of 2018. At the end of it, I think I raised like $12,000. I was also receiving money outside of the GoFundMe page, and different people shipped items to my home. I also had an Amazon Wishlist. I would share my list with people so that I could let them know what I was buying or what I recommended. People preferred to buy the items themselves, but they would ship them to me. I haven't really done the math, I never counted item by item, but I think that I collected about $15,000 in donations.
>
> – Participant, Puerto Rico

On September 17, 2017, Hurricane Maria struck and devastated many communities throughout Puerto Rico along with several other Caribbean islands. Puerto Rico is an archipelago that was once part of the Spanish Empire and is now a commonwealth of the United States. My participants referred to Puerto Rico as an island during the interviews rather than using the word *archipelago.* Puerto Rico's political status is under constant debate, with some in favor of statehood, others independence, and still others who favor the continuation of commonwealth status. These differing stances create a constant dilemma over sovereignty ("Puerto Rico: History and Heritage"). Puerto Rico is prone to hurricanes, storms, and earthquakes. Every year there is hurricane season that people prepare for as the participant mentioned above. And unlike the Nepal earthquake, which came suddenly, hurricanes and their strength can be predicted by meteorologists and scientists. However, no one had anticipated the devastation and damage that Hurricane Maria would go on to cause. According to a study conducted by Kishore et al. (2018), "Maria caused an estimated $90 billion in damages, making it the third costliest tropical cyclone in the United States since 1900" (163). Additionally, the *Regional Overview: Impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria* claimed that 169,000 people and 75,000 buildings were exposed to wind speeds that surpassed 252 km/hr.

The official death count in Puerto Rico was 64; however, Kishore et al. claimed that the death toll exceeded 4,645 people, which is 70 times more than the official estimate. After this report was published, Puerto Ricans rallied with a symbolic demonstration of shoes that belonged to the people in San Juan who were killed by the hurricane. An online

hashtag, #4645, was also created to protest the official death count (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2). After the controversy surrounding the death toll, the governor of Puerto Rico commissioned the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University to conduct an independent study. In this report, the death toll was revised and estimated to be 2,975 people (Milken Institute School of Public Health). The institute found that physicians had a lack of awareness of appropriate death certification practices and that the governor's lack of communication about death certificates had created the death count problem (Milken Institute School of Public Health). Carmen D. Zorrilla in her article "The View from Puerto Rico—Hurricane Maria and its Aftermath" argues that, in contrast to other sudden disasters, hurricanes often allow officials to be prepared. "Yet our infrastructure, including the health care infrastructure was already in crisis" (1801). This was also because Hurricane Irma had hit Puerto Rico just two weeks before Maria.

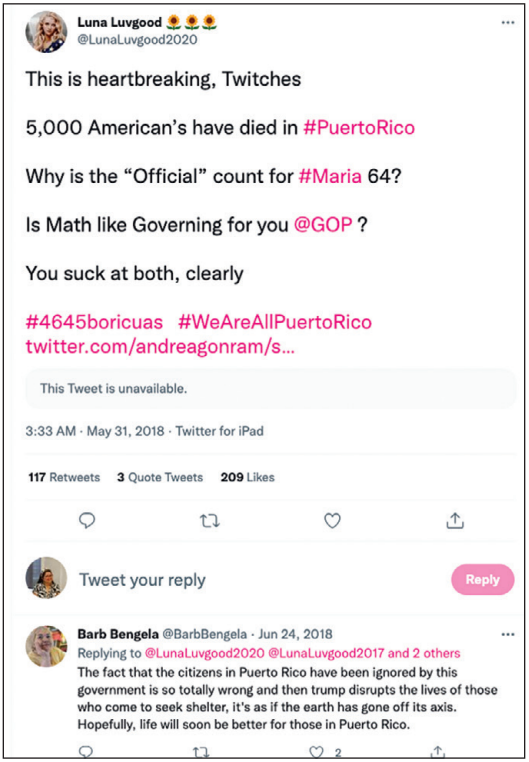

Figure 3.1. Conversation on Twitter that used the Hashtag #4645Boricuas.

Figure 3.2. Tweet showcasing a public protest on June 2, 2018, regarding the death count of Hurricane Maria.

Public life in Puerto Rico came to a standstill due to the unexpected amount of damage, which also caused large-scale power outages and communication disruptions. Hurricane Maria has been regarded as one of the most catastrophic events to devastate cities in Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands. And much like the Nepal earthquake, Hurricane Maria exacerbated the vulnerability of the communities in Puerto Rico who have suffered through "an ongoing recession, insurmountable debt, and coloniality" (Soto Vega n.p.). Lloréns argues that Hurricane Maria also brought endemic risks, vulnerabilities, and hidden crises into view, affecting people who are infirm, people who are disabled, people without access to transportation, those living in isolated areas, and those in extreme poverty with greater intensity (159). The lack of electric power and mobile phone networks after the hurricane also caused a serious communication crisis which cut the island off from the rest of the world. The hurricane also brought to light the ongoing sovereignty struggles. It highlighted how the severity of colonialist protocols and negligence by the US government impacted the most vulnerable. (In my interviews, all of the Puerto Rican participants articulated discomfort

with the colonization of Puerto Rico.) As a consequence, Hurricane Maria caused countless Puerto Ricans to relocate to the US mainland. A report written by Jennifer Hinojosa and Edwin Meléndez and published by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, *Puerto Rican Exodus: One Year Since Hurricane Maria*, suggests that 159,415 (and up to 176,603) Puerto Ricans have relocated to the United States in the year since Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico.

Similar to response efforts after the Nepal earthquake, various organizations (private and public) inside and outside of Puerto Rico were involved in relief and rescue activities, with a significant engagement by the United States. From the social web to the wider Puerto Rican diaspora (particularly the diaspora in the United States), Puerto Ricans formed a variety of networked communities or transnational assemblages to address the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. There is, however, one factor that differentiates Puerto Rico's situation from Nepal's. In Puerto Rico, the use of technology was not as powerful as it was in Nepal. This is because the hurricane disrupted electricity sources, telecommunication, and internet access. Despite this, there were some people and organizations, such as Burger King, that opened to provide meals to people that included internet access ("Burger King's recovery"). A lot of people also relied on unreliable internet connections to send messages on WhatsApp and publish posts on Facebook. Also, unlike with the 2015 Nepal earthquake, Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, did not raise funds for Puerto Rico on his personal Facebook page. Some news stories, however, described a partnership between the Red Cross and Facebook in which the two companies would work together to build "population maps" ("Mark Zuckerberg Tours"). In October 2017, Mark Zuckerberg also shared a livestream video of a virtual reality avatar of himself in Puerto Rico, but this livestream was highly criticized by people who regarded him as "a heartless billionaire" and accused him of "exploiting disaster" ("Mark Zuckerberg Apologizes").

Another aspect that distinguishes the two disasters is the United States' Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) involvement in the disaster response efforts. In contrast to Nepal, because FEMA was an active responder in Puerto Rico, there were already established technology-based applications like a Twitter account, FEMA's official Facebook page, and a website with information and reporting features that actors could use in case of emergency. Likewise, the Puerto Rico government also had their own disaster response page. Additionally,

United for Puerto Rico was an initiative brought forth by the then First lady of Puerto Rico, Mrs. Beatriz Rosselló, which was criticized by the people. After the declaration of a major disaster in Puerto Rico, FEMA configured this website to share all the available information regarding Hurricane Maria both in English and in Spanish (https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4339/). Even though the technology was virtually useless due to unreliable electricity and telecommunications, many people outside of Puerto Rico managed to use technology for information on support, even if that support did not include FEMA's state-funded outlets. The reason for this seeming avoidance of official channels was primarily due to FEMA's formal requirements that needed to be satisfied for victims to receive state-funded relief. For example, people who had generational family houses were affected by FEMA's requirements since they were not able to receive the relief without presenting proof of home ownership. As Ivis Garcia shares, Puerto Rico has a history of informal construction and an estimate of 260,000 homes in Puerto Rico do not have titles or deeds (21). Furthermore, in "The Housing Crisis in Puerto Rico and the Impact of Hurricane Maria," Jennifer Hinojosa and Edwin Meléndez report that "Of the total of 772, 682 valid homeowners registrations, only 40 percent were approved for FEMA assistance." There was a lack of governmental support in Puerto Rico in the post-hurricane context. These sorts of situations resulted in the creation of transnational assemblages who supported these families who, due to government protocols, would otherwise not be supported.

Much like actors in the wake of the Nepal earthquake, then, many disaster responders and grassroots activists both on the island and the mainland launched a decentralized disaster response effort that, given Puerto Rico's colonized status, was informed by decolonial practices (Lloréns; Ortiz Torres; Soto Vega). As such, my case study of Hurricane Maria will highlight how, much like Nepalis, Puerto Ricans created a transnational assemblage to resist Western practices by not relying on the government. To document their accomplishments, I again present the results of my narrative inquiry, this time involving 14 Puerto Rican activists, community-based organizers, and journalists, to showcase the survival practices of marginalized communities who have navigated the oppressive legacy of colonialist systems to restore peace and stability in their communities. The participants articulated intersectional identities that allowed them to take a nuanced understanding of their communities. For example, one of the community members worked

specifically in a community in Loiza with Black Puerto Ricans who live below the poverty line. Considering such community-based factors of disaster response in the analysis of the data has been important for this project. I then supplement this analysis by focusing on over 2,000,000 Tweets that were posted during the first week after Hurricane Maria to show how people in Puerto Rico and around the globe responded to the disaster. With these results, I introduce the decolonial approaches to disaster response and address how Puerto Ricans used various digital technologies to respond to the crisis their communities were facing.

TRANSNATIONAL ASSEMBLAGES WITH DECOLONIAL DISASTER RESPONSE STRATEGIES

After the devastating hurricane and the lack of support from the US government, Puerto Ricans took charge of disaster relief efforts in their own communities by implementing a decolonial approach to disaster response. Based on my participants' framing of their actions, supplemented by the work of decolonial scholars, I define decolonial disaster response in the context of Hurricane Maria as developing an alternative, grassroots disaster response that resisted colonial power and paradigms of disaster relief practices through recognizing community needs (Quijano). This means that Puerto Ricans, like Nepalis, did not wait for US government or local Puerto Rico government assistance to reach Puerto Rico before taking action. Such government assistance came with a lot of bureaucracy, which slowed or blocked aid from reaching the people who needed it the most and didn't provide support to the ones who needed it due to lack of documentation. For example, homeowners are eligible to receive FEMA assistance only if they have official papers showing home ownership (Talbot et al.). Puerto Ricans had to overcome colonial history and administration which restricts any international countries or their governments from sending food and aid to Puerto Rico. And what made the situation even worse was that aid was not being managed properly by the Puerto Rican government, the only country authorized to send supplies. As a result, much of the aid was parked in trailers and remained in cargo ships while people were suffering.

In response to such inefficiencies, Puerto Ricans created alternative processes for giving and receiving aid by developing cross-diasporic communicative opportunities, a situation which was similar to what Nepalis did in delivering aid and relief to the communities in need.

That is, personally developed transnational assemblages stepped in to help. Such transnational assemblages allowed personal and religious networks to participate in disaster relief actions. Not only that, there were community-based, smaller organizations that could draw upon larger networks for support. For example, churches became a network point for a lot of volunteers, relief providers, and activists. Churches had pre-existing networks and knew their communities better, so they became hubs for assorted relief-related activities (Petrun Sayers et al.). As is well known, Puerto Rico has a large Catholic population, and attending church is a central part of cultural and religious life in Puerto Rico. Hence, during and after Hurricane Maria, churches became spaces where people could not only find information and learn about people's whereabouts, but they also acted as spaces for relief operations that supported other organizations. There are around 1,500 churches in Puerto Rico, and all the major churches that have a website had some information about disaster recovery. Additionally, various interviewees also mentioned churches a lot as either being part of them or working together with them.

Many participants also articulated that one of the reasons why their disaster relief work was successful was due to the transnational connections they forged on social media. Puerto Ricans created the majority of their networks through the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States, through religious networks primarily mediated by the Catholic Church, and through the networks within their own locales. With the help of these networks, the participants were able to raise funds, carry out relief activities, and support communities in need. The participants echoed these strategies by highlighting that they reached out to their interpersonal networks and beyond to seek help, build communities, and support communities that had already established networks or were newly formed. Four participants represented community-based organizations that participated in community-based activities. One of them represented a food bank in Puerto Rico that included networks of more than 100 smaller organizations that helped in the distribution of food after Hurricane Maria. One participant represented a feminist organization that relied on its community leaders' networks to distribute disaster relief. Six participants mentioned the use of social media platforms like Facebook or GoFundMe to raise money throughout their networks. Three participants represented private organizations in Puerto Rico. These private organizations had connections in the

United States and beyond that allowed the participants to support the suffering communities. Three participants who represented the media mentioned that the networks of journalists on the island and beyond the United States made it easier to share information within both the community and a larger network. The religious network was also mentioned by five participants, who described how the church became a space for people to come together and organize relief efforts.

The havoc created by Hurricane Maria not only devastated land and communities, but it also revealed issues in aid distribution and colonialism, which further exacerbated the lack of disaster response. While the US government's response to Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, which struck the US mainland around the same time, was very quick and well-funded, the US government seemed indifferent when responding to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. Indeed, they created unprecedented bureaucratic barriers that severely hampered the immediate delivery of disaster relief materials. Here, the Western/colonial disaster response was more focused on their own spaces or "states." They completely ignored Puerto Rico as their territory, never making it a priority of discussion. A study conducted by Charley Willison et al. suggests that "within the first 9 days after the hurricanes hit, both Harvey and Irma survivors had already each received nearly US$100 million in FEMA dollars awarded to individuals and families, whereas Maria survivors had only received slightly over US$6 million in recovery aid" (2). To make matters worse, while the US government was neglecting Puerto Ricans, the Puerto Rican politicians were themselves hoarding supplies and not distributing them. Hence, the decolonial disaster response mediated via transnational assemblages was necessary to make sure that thousands of communities who were suffering would receive what they needed and that the disaster response was equitable and just. As one participant recounted, "There were ships with relief materials in the dock and no one was providing it to the community." This political crisis created the need for transnational assemblages that would position themselves against colonialist practices and actually help the people who needed it.

While people distrusted the governmental relief, Puerto Ricans trusted relief efforts carried out by activists, disaster responders, and volunteers who were in their own individual networks. Such networks created transnational assemblages that included people in the US mainland and beyond. Naomi Klein argues that "deep community

relationships, as well as strong ties to the Puerto Rican diaspora, successfully delivered lifesaving aid when the government failed and failed again" (10). The Puerto Rican community collaborated with the diaspora and launched various smaller scale relief efforts that went against protocol and saved people's lives. Dr. Mónica Feliú-Mójer, a Puerto Rican scientist working in the United States, wrote in a blog post that "I started convening with fellow Puerto Ricans living in the United States: How could we help? How could we leverage what we had at our disposal, our networks and resources? I started rallying the community. I became politically active." Just like Dr. Feliú-Mójer, there were many Puerto Ricans who dedicated their time, resources, and networks to disaster response efforts, thus creating their own transnational assemblages.

As in the previous case discussed, transnational assemblages were established by spontaneous actions that motivate people to act during a disaster. Like Dr. Feliú-Mójer, the participants I interviewed understood their actions as being grounded in their commitment toward the community and toward the people who were suffering in parts of Puerto Rico where the mainstream governmental response did not reach. These spontaneous, immediate, or affective actions, along with a sense of commitment, led Puerto Ricans inside and beyond Puerto Rico to create their own volunteer and relief networks, to join transnational assemblages, or work in the online or digital space by forging relationships among numerous other online participants. A participant shared:

> Well, you're not going to believe this, but at the beginning, the first tarps arrived from Australia. I have a Serbian friend who lives in Australia, and she was the first person to react and send tarps. So, we received tarps from everywhere, from the United States, and Mexico, from Spain, from the nearby islands. Afterwards, well, we created a website with a donate button, and we just made all our documents for the IRS and for the government of Puerto Rico to become an NGO. People have seen our work via our Facebook page, so they realize that we're a serious group and that their money is arriving where [it] is needed, so people kept donating. The last donation was a cargo van that we really needed because we were using [volunteers'] cars to transport everything, materials, tools, everything. People donate tools,

people donate building materials, and it's been a wonderful journey. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

This narrative showcases an example of a transnational assemblage that formed thanks to donations from networks outside of Puerto Rico, where the participant received tarps from Australia. However, to continue this work, the participant formalized that assemblage by registering it as a nonprofit organization so that they could continue to support the community. Thus, as a result of formal US aid distribution and support not reaching the community, community members established and formalized their own network so they could continue to do the work that the government failed to do. This narrative further demonstrates how Facebook was used as a platform for donations and for showcasing accountability. It also highlights how people in Puerto Rico were not networking exclusively among each other within the vicinity of their own country or region. Instead, Puerto Ricans were creating connections beyond their borders. In doing so, they formed transnational assemblages by using personal connections. Puerto Ricans encouraged donations, and for one participant their transnational assemblage helped in creating a formal organization. People depended on their respective diaspora, and people who identified as members of the diaspora also became involved via social media. Thanks to my participants' recollections, it has become clear that, when responding to compounding crisis, actors exercised rhetorical agency in the form of activism and responsibility to the community by establishing transnational assemblages. The participants stated that the massive destruction created by the hurricane made them feel responsible toward the communities that were suffering throughout the island, which is very similar to the Nepali community. Social media platforms became excellent tools used to invite donations from people within and outside of Puerto Rico and the United States. Therefore, such transnational assemblages were driven by anger, empathy, and emotions that made them feel affective responsibility toward their community.

To further address Puerto Ricans' tendency to formalize their assemblages due to government shortcomings, participants recognized a need for coalitional action premised on their own community traditions that were against the formal government officials' normative standard—*autogestión,* loosely translated as *self-management*.

The participants and other actors were able to establish transnational assemblages by prioritizing the voices and needs of the people and by creating flexible protocols that continued to evolve as the crisis unfolded. Soto Vega cites this "autogestión," where Puerto Ricans and people in the diaspora responded to the needs of their fellow countrymen through a coalitional counter-praxis of survival (40–41). Such counter-praxis meant that people were not waiting for governments in Puerto Rico or the United States to follow their protocols; instead, actors were actively responding to the needs of the people by forming connections and by using digital media platforms. Walton et al. state that "fundamentally, it is multiple marginalized groups that have demonstrated the need for coalitional action, and their voices and priorities should centrally inform those actions" (134). For example, the Puerto Rico Somos Gente group, which began as an informal group that formed as a result of a Facebook callout requesting people to join the relief efforts after the hurricane, is now established as an NGO. Today, Puerto Rico Somos Gente continues to reconstruct and rebuild communities that were devastated by Hurricane Maria. The registration of Puerto Rico Somos Gente as an organization makes it a formal transnational assemblage as it moved out from Facebook and informal disaster response work to a formalized response. The formation of multiple networks like Puerto Rico Somos Gente demonstrates that there was a need for aid after the calamity that the government and other official channels were simply unable to provide; thus, it fell on the people to work together to formalize an organization to respond to the disaster according to the suffering community's needs.

Sometimes, it was not necessary for such transnational assemblages to formalize. This is because there were already other international organizations that engaged with community-based organizations in Puerto Rico to help and support the communities, such as Doctors Without Borders or the Catholic Church. Like the diaspora, my participants' international connections were very important in creating transnational assemblages for post-hurricane relief and reconstruction. A participant recounted:

> About two or three months after the hurricane, we did see a couple of different international groups that would come in to help. We assigned them to different jobs. So, for example, we rescued a park that was completely destroyed by the hurricane.

> The kids obviously don't have any way to sort of clear their mind of this disaster that's going around, so we decided to restore that park. And we also received construction materials, and so those international volunteers were also there helping us unload the trucks. But we also had volunteers, and we still have volunteers that go directly to different houses to help reconstruct houses. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

Likewise, a participant from Puerto Rico representing an international private organization explained how his company collaborated with his church to provide relief. In Puerto Rico, various churches are tied to the community, which means that they know who needs the most help and what is happening with which family. This type of community knowledge was very helpful in supporting people in need during the hurricane. The participant recounts:

> At that moment, we put all our merchandise in a church that the city told us to take it to, a [specific] church because they were taking care of . . . giving it away to everybody. It was an excellent opportunity to serve all the people because even though we as employees had hard times, the company was making it easier for us. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

As the participant noted, the company wanted to serve the people in need and provided relief materials to the church that helped them support the community. Other participants have also articulated that they were working with the church or using that space for relief distribution. Some mentioned that people representing the church networks from Latin America came to Puerto Rico to support the communities. This is an excellent example of how religious networks with other countries came to support Puerto Rico in its time of need. Thus, community members who had transnational connections either via their job or via their personal or religious networks were able to connect to these networks and help in the formation of transnational assemblages that supported the community in Puerto Rico.

In responding to compounding crises, Puerto Ricans necessarily developed compounding solutions. In addition to formalizing assemblages and using their connections to official organizations outside of the country, Puerto Ricans also created their own disaster relief mobile application which became a space where people could come together

to volunteer and gather data. Connect Relief, a mobile-based application, was created in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria because Puerto Ricans could not rely on the larger technology giants, whose services were spotty while communication lines were down. The application invited hundreds of people to join a transnational assemblage that helped in deconstructing aid distribution by involving people in the community, volunteers, and donors. This application helped collect data, identify community needs, and match donors and volunteers with needy communities. A participant who was part of development of the app and used Connect Relief and trained others in using it shared the following:

> We develop these apps where we collect the information. When the person that is collecting the information through the app is in an area that has internet, like Burger King . . . it goes into our cloud and then it gets categorized in a database, and then we can make it public through maps, through Excel tables. We recruited them through friends of friends of friends, through the diaspora. A lot of people came to Puerto Rico to help. Most of them were college students. The universities in Puerto Rico were closed. Everybody had an urge to go out and help. They were helping us collect data and helping in any way that we needed. It was a monumental effort. It was like me, and like four volunteers, and then 600 volunteers in the streets. We would train groups of 10 to 20, 50, 100 people. We did a couple of trainings via Facebook Live. We would train pastors in churches, and then they would train their congregation. We trained nurses, and they trained other nurses. We trained, you name it, social workers. We've trained psychologists. Nobody had work, so everybody was wanting to go out and help. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

The use of mobile applications like Connect Relief disrupted the traditional way of disaster response and decolonized aid distribution, volunteer management, and disaster relief. The Connect Relief application created an alternate channel of communication and gathering people to conduct disaster response as opposed to the formal disaster response being organized by the government. The app was able to help many volunteers, relief providers, and survivors of Hurricane Maria as data and information are always crucial during a disaster.

Since the application was grassroots-based, it was made available to diverse actors who could help just by uploading the data that they could find in the community. This application and the network of people who used it helped volunteers understand the extent of the damage caused by the hurricane and also provided a better picture of what the needs of the community were. It provided aid where aid wasn't reaching and provided information for volunteers to access the community, which is an example of how the app was able to decolonize the aid distribution and disaster management. This relief effort was managed through a network of networks, including the diaspora who went to serve the communities and not to gain any benefits from them. Through this application, there were fewer protocols that hindered official aid distribution. The transnational assemblages this application created allowed many volunteers from within the community, diaspora, and other parts of the world that were previously unable to help due to government restrictions to participate in the relief effort.

As I discussed above, the decolonial disaster response showcases challenging of the colonial terms and conditions in Puerto Rico that hinder the community's access to disaster relief materials. The decolonial disaster response was grounded in autogestión, whereas with the Nepalis, it was *swa-byapasthapan*. Puerto Rican disaster responders created networks and coalitions with diaspora and within themselves to challenge the disparities in disaster response. They relied on themselves and transnational assemblages to launch their disaster response in an equitable and socially just manner. In both cases, however, the transnational assemblages were linked to community traditions grounded in their own practices that helped to develop resistant practices to highlight injustices perpetuated by Western-based relief efforts.

VISUALIZING TRANSNATIONAL ASSEMBLAGES DURING HURRICANE MARIA

The transnational assemblages that emerged during Hurricane Maria were extraordinary because they formed even though there was a lack of reliable electricity or telecommunication services. Puerto Ricans were versatile enough to work around such obstacles and still connect with people not just in the United States but also across the globe, particularly in Latin American countries. As discussed above, Puerto

Ricans created their transnational assemblages due to the inaction of the US government, Puerto Rico government, and their own political leaders. To visualize these transnational assemblages, I conducted a social network analysis (SNA) of tweets that were posted in response to Hurricane Maria.

To conduct this analysis, I collected a total of 20 million tweets that reacted to Hurricane Maria. To narrow the scope of my analysis, tweets or users who were not geotagged were removed from the sample. Hence, I used 2,089,701 tweets for my analysis. In the sample, there was a total of 889,670 users. With my analysis, I examined how transnational assemblages were structured. I explored the dynamics and the relationships within each node to understand how such relations affect the outcome, which, in this context, is disaster response. In analyzing these networks via each node, I conducted a similar examination of networks within various countries and Puerto Rico and what those relationship formations entailed. Figure 3.3 visualizes the users in various countries who engaged with tweets by replying to or retweeting the original post. Countries and continents from where the tweets were sent act as nodes. The larger nodes represent Asia (red), Africa (green), South America (light blue), Oceania (yellow), North America (purple), and Europe (dark blue), and the smaller nodes represent the countries within these continents. These nodes are connected by lines that represent the replies and retweets that were sent among the users. The thickness of the lines represents the strength of the relationships among the nodes. The thicker the lines, the more interactions occurred among users residing in these countries.

The SNA of the Twitter data reveals that the Nepal earthquake received more worldwide attention than Hurricane Maria. The strongest network existed between users from Europe and the United States. There was also a network between users from the US and South America. There is a weaker network between users from Asia and the US. Even though people around the world tweeted, retweeted, or replied, it seems the relationships among various continents and Puerto Rico were weaker than the relationships Nepal had forged in the wake of the earthquake. As might be expected, the United States seems to be the major actor and the most prominent node, which resulted in the United States becoming Puerto Rico's primary connection to the outer world.

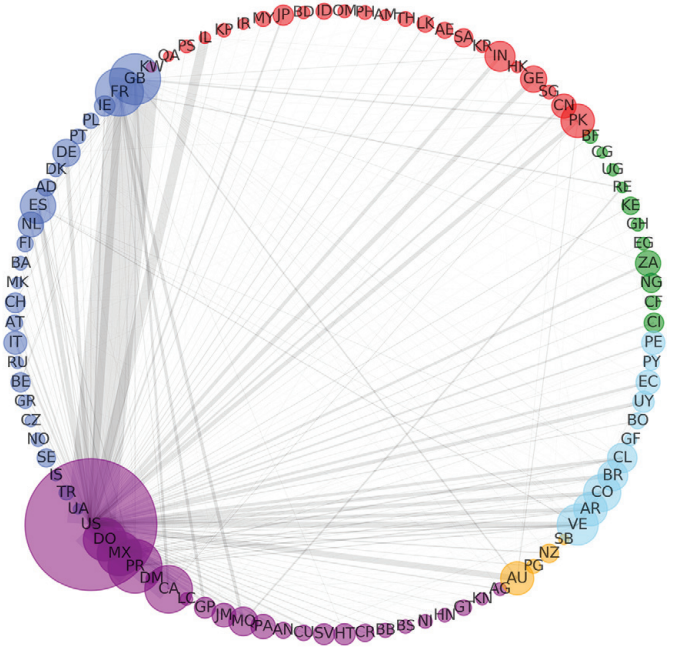

Figure 3.3. SNA of the Twitter users residing in various countries in the world during and immediately after Hurricane Maria.

The reason for these weak networked actions seen among replies and retweets could be due to the rest of the world having less knowledge about Puerto Rico or a lack of concern for the country as Puerto Rico is a US territory. Nevertheless, the US seemed to be the prominent actor during Hurricane Maria, and the Puerto Rican population in the US could be the reason for the US being visualized as the major actor. Another reason why Puerto Rico lacked relationships with other continents may also be due to the lack of electricity that resulted from the hurricane. Regardless, as the figure reveals, there were still interactions from around the globe during Hurricane Maria, with all continents having used the hashtag #HurricaneMaria or mentioning Hurricane Maria and Puerto Rico to some degree.

The establishment of transnational assemblages on Twitter was not as prominent as it had been after the Nepal earthquake. Again, this goes back to the argument of how difficult it was for the transnational communities to send aid or even to interact with the communities in Puerto Rico. I would argue that this data showcases how colonial

control in the form of policies and protocols did not allow for outside interactions and engagements and the engagements were mostly within the United States and Puerto Rico. Despite such control, however, Puerto Ricans still managed to establish many relationships throughout the globe, relationships that were weaker than Nepal's, but relationships nonetheless. Thus, even though Puerto Rico received less global attention than Nepal, and despite the colonial control, transnational assemblages still materialized and responded to the catastrophe left by Hurricane Maria.

AGAINST COLONIAL ATTITUDE: TRANSNATIONAL ASSEMBLAGES IN ACTION

The disaster response efforts that took place because of Hurricane Maria would not have been possible without the transnational assemblages functioning as social coalitions formed beyond Puerto Rican boundaries. These coalitions resisted norms and continued to advocate for justice for Puerto Ricans. Such transnational assemblages functioned to take action against the colonial practices in disaster response and to aid delivery. As such, transnational assemblages created affective energy among the people that went beyond emotions and feelings, allowing people to respond to the politics of colonialism. Their decolonial actions were represented in the digital media, and such representations allowed the transnational assemblages to expand and go beyond boundaries and work toward social justice for the communities in Puerto Rico.

Indeed, as has been shown throughout this project, technology use (especially social media platforms) in disaster response situations and other political crises is prominent. During a disaster, people rely on available technologies to seek, share, and validate information (Potts). Just as in Nepal, Puerto Ricans used social media to form social coalitions that allowed them to amplify their voices by engaging with assorted multimodal content and organizing disaster relief efforts. Internet-based fundraising platforms like GoFundMe, collaborative platforms like Google Docs, and other social media spaces like WhatsApp and Amazon Wishlist constituted some of the platforms used in the hurricane's aftermath. Similar to Nepal, social media platforms not only became a space for people to express empathy toward suffering individuals, but they also acted as a place where people could create coalitions across the world and help in organizing disaster relief efforts.

Furthermore, the crisis publics, a major part of transnational assemblages, play the role of an active audience who can talk back to the dominant narratives shared by the government and highlight any discrepancies that emerge during a disaster while also sharing their voices via social media platforms. This act of raising awareness via social media platforms displays the autonomous characteristics of an assemblage (Delanda). Social media platforms create the possibility for understanding the public reaction to a disaster in real time, including the possibility to recognize an emergent crisis public for disaster management (Murthy and Gross; Subba). My participants communicated and performed various kinds of communication practices, such as gathering data and information, taking pictures and posting them, curating videos and sharing them, or creating webpages for donations. These kinds of practices not only helped in responding to the disaster, but they also helped in creating a transnational assemblage where a socially just, decolonial discourse about the disaster could take place. Hence, the crisis communications performed within transnational assemblages created various flows, helping to create the transnational assemblages.

Social media was also a space for people to stand up to colonialism. For example, the tweet shown in Figure 3.4 highlights Puerto Rico's colonial history and brings attention to how 70 percent of the island was still without power 100 days after Hurricane Maria had struck. The colonial rules and regulations upheld by the United States made it very difficult for the Puerto Ricans to receive and distribute aid and also address the issues such as electricity, which is a basic necessity of the people. Hence, it was organizations that have networks all across the island, such as Food Bank, that stepped in to distribute food throughout the island when official means failed.

My participant who represented Food Bank shared their frustration with colonial rules that made it very difficult for people on the island to get disaster-related aid:

> The biggest firm was FEMA. FEMA took over the ports and suddenly, they decided that everything that was coming in, you know, they were going to establish priorities. We had trailers in the ports, sitting there for days waiting for someone to release them to the distribution field. At the beginning, it was disastrous, and it was basically because FEMA took over, it was

very difficult. And then the governor took over and the governor started making distribution, but the distribution was full of trailers for the bank and a couple trailers for people. The politics got involved in the whole process, so their people were getting several trailers, but they didn't have the capacity. They started storing these trailers on farms all over the place, and there they stood for almost a year. You know, until a reporter found out there were trailers all over the place and a lot of food was wasted because it expired. I don't know if there's still thousands of packs of water in Ceiba. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

Figure 3.4. Example of decolonialism on Twitter.

While dealing with the reality of undistributed food and aid, the participant's organization, which already had a network of 125 other organizations in Puerto Rico, started distributing food to the people throughout the island. Importantly, Blanca Ortiz Torres argues that "autonomous organizing does not imply removing the state's responsibility to guarantee the basic rights of all citizens. In fact, it implies the opposite, to promote the empowerment/strengthening of citizens and communities to demand what they deserve, when they need it" (363). While there were official disaster response efforts that were not able to reach out to the communities who were the most vulnerable, Puerto Ricans who were capable of supporting their communities were empowering each other, supporting each other by going against the colonial power.

In another narrative, my participant shares their experience of establishing an organization after Hurricane Maria as a spontaneous reaction to the lack of aid and support that the government was able to provide to the communities. They showcase how such coalitions were formed in a moment of chaos:

> Well, the organization began three weeks after the . . . hurricane. Actually, we never thought about making an organization. We thought about helping our neighbors, immediate neighbors at the moment because we noticed that three weeks later, they were living in very difficult conditions. We saw this elder couple every morning pulling out their mattresses, wringing their clothes because they had no roof. So, in the middle of, let's say, in the middle of a feeling of empathy and frustration I wrote in my social media that if I had tarps I would install those [on] my own. People out of the island began reacting like, "I can send you tarps. Where do I send the tarps?" And a couple of weeks later, I had hundreds of tarps in my home. So, I spoke to my neighbors, and we began, we got organized. I have a neighbor that is a social worker, so he prepared these needs assessment forms and we asked for volunteers via Facebook, and people arrived, and we began well, searching, searching for houses without a roof. And this is how everything began. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

My participant noticed how government aid had yet to arrive in their neighborhood. Instead of waiting, as they had already waited for three weeks, they took matters into their own hands and began

gathering materials to help their neighbors. This gathering, like for many other organizations that were formed and formalized during Hurricane Maria, began with a social media post.

Indeed, a lot of the participants showcase rhetorical agency against the unreliable government and colonial rules. Going against colonial practices, Puerto Rican communities were motivated to serve and help themselves, which led to the creation of spaces and coalitions in which new "articulations were being forged," thus "constituting a new assemblage or territory" (Slack and Wise 158). Some newer forms of articulations were seen in hashtags, such as #PuertoRicowillRise, or common expressions shared by Puerto Rican participants, such as "something for my people." Another participant shared:

> We told everybody, "Okay, let's go back to our homes, let's sleep through the night, cool it down. Seven AM tomorrow, let's go out with whatever machine, power machine, tools you've got or anything, machetes, whatever you have, we're going to start cleaning the road." Because we couldn't wait for the government. It was so devastating that if we would have waited for the government party, we wouldn't be leaving our homes. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

Likewise, another participant recounted:

> After we formed officially, we started then being able to get volunteers from churches, from friends, and other types of volunteers, and we were able to bring aid and help to 21 towns in Puerto Rico. So, we impacted about 8,000 families, bringing them food, supplies, solar cells, solar lamps, also the tarps for the roofs.
>
> So, we did a GoFundMe, but we've done it now. We didn't do it at that time. So, all this was money that was being given to us by people who were donating for getting all these supplies. And then we also had to rent all the transportations, so all the vans and whatnot, to go to all these places. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

These two narratives are examples of how the participants and their community did not intend to wait for the government to come to their rescue because they knew that they were mostly invisible to both the local and the US government, thus not a priority. These two are some

of the many examples of people coming together due to an affective response of "we need to do something," which in turn is responding to the politics that left many marginalized people neglected.

The disaster responder community perceived that the need for relief was immediate. They were motivated to act against the inaction of the governments, a sentiment that was shared by the Nepali people in the wake of the Nepal earthquake. As discussed previously, the desire to act right in the moment is affective, which represents actors' agency that led toward the formation of a transnational assemblage within that specific community for tasks such as cleaning the road or helping people get medicine. Affect helps human beings act, react, or not act in certain situations. Brian Massumi characterizes affect by recognizing the importance of intensity. Events, incidents, and disasters create spontaneous moments where situations are intense and draw global attention, and this intensity makes people act. In transnational assemblages, affect helps bodies form new ties or relationships across the globe or enact new habits and rituals via intercultural understanding and communications, disrupting the established norms and creating a coalition. Affect, as an element of transnational assemblages, could be the perception of a situation that leads to a modification of the body, which then triggers the emotion of consciousness of the mind (Deleuze and Guattari, as cited in Papacharissi). Such consciousness triggered by the need to go against the colonial rule created a political response in Puerto Rican communities.

Sometimes, the desire to act immediately in response to affect and to stand up to ineffective practices comes in the form of a social media post. One participant shared that she used her Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts to share news, her opinions on politics, and so on. In using these mediums, she would criticize the governmental disaster aid practices and the US government. Not only did this space became a source of information for people, this space also became a space for people to come together to share similar anger and resentment toward the malpractices that were occurring in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. During the disaster, this participant's social media accounts became a source of information for people who followed her. Through her social media accounts and her work on the radio, the participant was able to create a network of journalists around Puerto Rico that helped to provide accurate and instant information to their viewers and listeners. Using their writing and information-gathering

capacities, some participants who were journalists took to their social media accounts to communicate with the diaspora that wanted to communicate, receive updates about the situation, and help. This meant that through personal social media accounts, journalists were creating transnational assemblages with people outside of Puerto Rico and inviting them to respond to the disaster or participate in the discourse of disaster. Much of those conversations were about coloniality and criticizing the governments.

Social media platforms additionally provided Puerto Ricans with an assortment of tools to further their disaster response goals. Another participant, for example, noted the innovative use of Facebook in his university class that led him and his students to organize a relief campaign on the platform. The participant shared that while he was organizing the relief, he used Facebook Live, the platform's livestreaming feature, to showcase accountability, and he used WhatsApp's group chat function to communicate with his relief team. Yet another participant described how they used their Facebook accounts and GoFundMe pages to fundraise, and they used Amazon's Wish List feature, which allows users to create a virtual shopping list of items they need, to request the necessary relief materials. These fundraising activities requested housing materials such as solar panels and lamps, food, and immediate relief materials. Many other participants also mentioned that they used the Amazon Wish List feature to collect donations that helped people. Various smaller organizations, local people, and members of the Puerto Rican diaspora were involved in the relief efforts. Two participants, who initiated their relief actions via Facebook, received a great amount of support and donations, allowing them to formally establish a nonprofit organization that provides reconstruction supplies and other support to people who were affected by the calamity. In this way, various technologies and their affordances were being used to organize social actions via transnational assemblages. The use of very private spaces to do public work and to do a better job than the government showcases disaster response as a political act that was not just disaster response but also an action against the colonial ignorance of the US government and the Puerto Rican local government.

To further illustrate how private spaces are used to complete public work during a crisis, a participant representing a very popular community-based organization in Puerto Rico shared that their organization

was able to help people communicate with their loved ones by providing community members with access to their satellite phones, internet services, and local radio station. This showcases self-sufficiency and non-reliance on the technologies of larger organizations or the government to satisfy the needs of the people, another decolonial action which aims at creating an equitable society. One of the needs of the people during Hurricane Maria was the need to communicate with their loved ones and to know that they were okay. The participant recounts:

> So there were sometimes 200 people making a line to use the phone to communicate with the people in the state, outside [of] Puerto Rico, and also from other parts of the island. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

My participant's organization was also able to raise the funds necessary to provide alternative sources of energy to people living in very geographically secluded locations. The participant recalled that people from many countries pledged monetary and material support (like satellite phones) to the organization because they trusted it.

While addressing inequalities in disaster response efforts and challenging colonial practices and local government inaction, Puerto Rican participants formed transnational assemblages by relying on various social media platforms and technologies. Such actions decolonized disaster response by decentering the relief from the local and the US government's control and focusing on social justice for the community. The participants used assorted technological mediums that ranged from their mobile phones and laptops to the internet to create space, channels, and transnational assemblages that supported suffering communities via a decolonial praxis motivated by a sense of responsibility. Puerto Ricans' use of social media was significant because it became an outlet for people to express their frustrations, curate information, join existing networks or form their own networks, and, most important, discuss social injustices and come together to face such injustices. Soto Vega believes that this use of social media acts as a resistance against the governmental norms. Such resistance was seen through how Puerto Ricans mobilized the technologies at their disposal to assert themselves, to conduct disaster response, and to challenge the governmental aid distribution practices and the indifference of the US government. Hence, the formation of

the transnational assemblages was a way that not only represented rhetorical agency, but it also represented resistance, both of which constitute the decolonial praxis of disaster response.

ENACTING CRISIS COMMUNICATION WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE DURING HURRICANE MARIA

Social media platforms became a place where Puerto Ricans could control their own narratives. Such narratives helped in the enactment of crisis communication with a social justice framework during Hurricane Maria. Participants shared that they curated the information on their respective Facebook accounts and websites and shared it with their community to help them. Social media became an important platform where crisis publics could seek, share, interpret, and disperse information to their networks to create a real-time awareness of what is going on and inviting people to join forces together for socially just disaster response. In seeking and gathering the information, crisis publics become part of various transnational assemblages. This variety of flows of crisis communications played an important part in the formation of transnational assemblage. In performing these crisis communications during the emergency within their assemblages and beyond, the actors responded to the disaster. As articulated by the participants who did not represent any organizations, their communication was not moderated by any organizational protocol. However, crisis communications within transnational assemblages were oriented toward gathering truthful information, verifying that information with the community, and using it to work toward providing disaster relief to the community with grounding on social justice. An activist participant from Puerto Rico shared:

> We're not going to manipulate the information. We're not going to make it look better or worse, so somebody gets the money. We are completely transparent, completely, like I said before, for the people, by the people. We have no agenda. Our only agenda is to give a voice to those people that don't have a voice. That's different. I didn't know this, but humanitarian relief is very profitable, extremely profitable. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

As the participant noted, Puerto Ricans decolonized knowledge production and dissemination. The activists and disaster responders demanded transparency in information, and local community-based

organizations were the ones who were strongly advocating for such information, which the colonial rulers were either hiding or not sharing.

Local community-based organizations and activists served as a communication channel between local advocates and Puerto Ricans in the diaspora. They used the internet and physical spaces to collect donations while also serving as a hub for building community and ensuring survival (Soto Vega). Platforms like Facebook were used by various Puerto Ricans in the United States and around the globe to respond to Hurricane Maria in a truthful and real manner and in a way that challenged the traditional or official ways of disaster response. As my participant suggests, there was a lot of information manipulation that occurred during the crisis. According to the participants, the honesty of the people using these platforms is what made them become the reliable source of information within their community, and that allowed them to become a powerful voice to challenge the colonial consequences and disparities. Participants recognized their use of social media, journalism, or organizational platforms to perform crisis communication. They articulated the need for and importance of communication during the time of disaster not only to decentralize aid, but also to speak out against injustices, very similar to the Nepali community. A representative of a community-based organization shared that, to collect data and information about the community, they had to conduct interviews with the community members by talking to them one-on-one. This was because the resilient culture of the Puerto Rican community would prevent the survivors from sharing their difficulties. Actors therefore needed to change their practices because community members who were in shock were not opening up and were hiding their emotions and feelings due to the psychological trauma of the hurricane.

Participants who were journalists mainly working through official news channels and who were involved in writing, reporting, photographing, and broadcasting 24/7 during Hurricane Maria articulated how the disaster allowed them to think and act differently. They expressed how they wanted to highlight more marginalized voices, the governmental atrocities, and how colonial practices had impacted the community. They moved beyond their jobs and started using their social media platforms to emphasize photographs and videos that created awareness of what was really happening as opposed to solely reporting what the government was presenting. It was important for

all these journalists to write, publish, and share factual stories about what was going on in Puerto Rico, specifically in US-based media. These journalists needed to rethink communication during a crisis, and they needed to think about how they could write in a way that put people's needs above all else while also sharing truthful information. The journalists' affective response of sharing information and equally criticizing the government, dismantling misinformation, and providing a space for marginalized voices in the written or audio-video communication they created moved them from being regular journalists to being an outlet for political decolonial action against common Western media practices.

One of the most amazing works done to decolonize information while all systems of communication were down in Puerto Rico was that accomplished by a radio station called WAPA Radio. This was the only radio station that was functioning throughout the island after the hurricane made landfall, and the station owners themselves continued to broadcast 24/7, relaying news and information as much as they could. One of my journalist participants shared that they were listening to this radio station. When they recognized that the same people were constantly broadcasting, they decided to go to the radio station with coffee and sandwiches. When the broadcasters saw my participant, they invited my participant to broadcast the news. Aside from being the major source of information for much of Puerto Rico, this station eventually became a relief hub that people relied on during and after Hurricane Maria. My participant shared:

> I said on air, "All the reporters, I know there's not going to be any newspapers or any television or radio stations working. So, if you have nothing to do, please come. We need your help. This is the only network that is operating, and we need to help them. They don't have any employees, and this is the only way. . . . . We have to do our community service." So, about 70 reporters and former reporters showed up, and we created a schedule. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

This announcement was crucial because it was a call that evoked emotions, an affective call that drove 70 reporters to show up and do what they could. Rather than a cry *for* help, this was an invitation for people *to* help. Through the radio, the participant was able to project the voices of people who were suffering and help them connect to the appropriate

disaster responders. While working at WAPA Radio, the participant also used her social media accounts to make the communication process more dynamic and to reach people outside of Puerto Rico.

In Hurricane Maria's case, smaller community-based organizations, churches, private organizations, and organizations like the American Red Cross were more active than larger international humanitarian organizations. The role of the community-based organizations was larger in that they knew the needs and requirements of the community they were working for, and they understood their audiences well. As in Nepal, larger humanitarian organizations in Puerto Rico were also criticized for manipulating information and not being held accountable for spreading misinformation. Because having accurate information was very crucial during the disaster, participants articulated that they relied on information shared on Facebook by friends and family members as opposed to that shared by official organizations. One participant who represented a community-based organization that worked in disaster response shared the following:

> The one thing that I've found is that information is power, and people don't want to give up their power. Bigger humanitarian relief organizations feel threatened by open platforms like ours because, I'm not saying the Red Cross, but somebody like the Red Cross that has its platform. They have private platforms, and they have access and power. After all, they have the numbers, and they'll get money because they have this information that nobody else has. What we're doing is we're democratizing, or whatever the word is, the information so the government cannot manipulate the data. It's completely transparent. If there are 20 sick people, it's going to be on our website. (Participant from Puerto Rico)

Grassroots organizations and community organizers challenged the national narrative shared by the government and by other large humanitarian organizations. This decolonial act of challenge further supported the community because it sought out factual information from the community and, in turn, provided the community with accurate information regarding aid and its distribution. This also helped a lot of volunteers and donors to serve the community in need. Grassroots organizations therefore challenged governmental narratives and provided accurate information for people. This decentralizing

of information was one of the major aspects of decolonial disaster response as information is power and that power can be used to challenge the government norms.

CONCLUSION: DECOLONIAL DISASTER RESPONSE

During Hurricane Maria, Puerto Ricans created alternative processes for giving and receiving aid. Puerto Ricans also developed cross-diasporic communicative opportunities, a situation significant for supporting vulnerable communities to survive. Using social media for decolonial activism is not a new thing in Puerto Rico (Soto Vega). Hurricane Maria caused a lot of communication disruptions. But when the US government was very silent on disaster aid and relief, and the protocols, rules, and regulations established to respond to calamities created circumstances where the disaster aids were stuck at the ports and people were losing their lives, Puerto Ricans still responded. My participants shared that they invested themselves, their time, and their energy in a way that allowed them to respond to the catastrophe by creating their own disaster response mechanism, by gathering resources from their communities across the world, and by communicating Puerto Ricans' needs despite the communication disruption created by the disaster. The decolonial ways of communication and disaster response, as opposed to Western aid practices, had the purpose of serving the community, providing access to aid, and acting as a voice for the marginalized populations who were suffering. There was a display of distrust in the US government and the Puerto Rican government as it lacked community care or knowledge of how people's lives had been affected by the hurricane. Moreover, the colonial practices that involved protocols and delay in decision-making were not helpful for the Puerto Rican community. Puerto Ricans were voicing their displeasure against the US government's colonial rhetoric. The decolonial disaster response described by the Puerto Rican participants could be summarized as such:

- **Autogestión:** The Puerto Rican community displayed *autogestión* as a coalitional counter-praxis of survival (Soto Vega) where people were creating spaces for healing and communal support when the state had not provided one. By displaying this survival praxis, Puerto Ricans were building community across the borders via transnational assemblages and ensuring that those who needed support got that support.

- **Community Values:** A lot of Puerto Rican participants displayed values of courage and dedication to their community during the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. They were empathetic toward their community and had a sense of responsibility toward their people, which motivated them to become involved in disaster response efforts. Community-level actions were fundamental to restoring access to neighborhoods and, ultimately, saving lives (Rodríguez-Díaz).
- **Resistance and Agency:** The participants shared their resistance against the governmental system and agency. Lloréns and Santiago argue that a lot of women were involved in the disaster response efforts (a conclusion that I reached as well). Through their solidarity, mutual help, and support, these women were involved in community initiatives which could be argued to be forms of resistance and agency (Lloréns and Santiago 402). Such strategies of resistance countered the governmental mismanagement, thus resulting in "radical forms of decentralized resistance to state disinvestment and resource extraction" (Soto Vega 45). These forms of resistance were supported by actors engaging with whatever the community needed the very moment it was needed.
- **Disaster Activism:** The decolonial approach to disaster response in Puerto Rico was also characterized by activism and equity. This activism/decolonial approach was focused on making sure that the disaster response was conducted with dignity and put the community needs first, while the US and Puerto Rican government ignored these needs. Furthermore, such activism also showcased courage, empathy, and motivation toward supporting the community. Some examples of activism included reaching out to the community to understand what aid was needed, providing immediate relief, and clearing blocked roads. The disaster activism was not limited to Puerto Rico itself; it also expanded across national and geographical boundaries.

In this chapter, I showcased autógestion as a praxis used by Puerto Ricans to respond to and resist the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Maria and the response by the US government. Like the Nepalis, Puerto Ricans created transnational connections and formed various transnational assemblages motivated by autógestion. As articulated previously, the decolonial disaster response was displayed by the

intersection of the following: a sense of community, resistance and agency, disaster activism, and autógestion. With this autógestion as a praxis, the participants launched multiple disaster response efforts via transnational assemblages that helped and supported the community when they were in need. Such assemblages were created to raise funds, send materials, organize relief, and create connections with the people. Finally, as with the Nepal earthquake, the disaster response by Puerto Ricans demonstrates that local disasters are global concerns and handling and responding to such disasters requires a larger transnational network that is grounded in social justice actions.