AFTERSHOCKS OF DISASTER

Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm

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INTRODUCTION

Aftershocks of Disaster

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"There's no way to win. Those who stayed are suffering because of the situation back home. But those who left are suffering because of the circumstances under which they were forced to flee," explained Isabel, a thirty-year-old woman, to journalist Andrea González-Ramírez six months after Hurricane María devastated Puerto Rico.[1] The flooding caused by the hurricane's intense rainfalls forced Isabel, her husband, and her two young children to take refuge in a local shelter. Isabel and her family spent the next ten days in that shelter in Toa Baja with others whose homes had been severely damaged or destroyed during the storm. After spending more than a week in the emergency shelter, Isabel and her family, like thousands of others in the coming weeks and months, decided to relocate to the United States. They didn't step foot in their house again before migrating to Florida, leaving all their belongings behind. Although the family hoped that getting away from the storm's devastation would make their lives easier, Isabel soon started to experience serious bouts of depression. The family moved a second time, this time to Arizona, hoping that Isabel's depression might improve in a new location. But things only worsened for Isabel as she started to experience panic attacks. The thought of never being able to return to Puerto Rico seemed to be the biggest trigger for Isabel's growing anxiety. "I left thinking that we would be able to return. But there

is no power, there are no jobs, so the exodus keeps extending. Accepting that I will never go back is one of the reasons that I'm facing issues with my mental health. We had the unrealistic expectation that life would normalize in the island, but that's not the case," Isabel said.[2]

Isabel's story provides a poignant example of how natural disasters do more than just mar the landscape; they upend people's lives, lingering and reverberating long after the winds have died down and the waters have calmed. In Isabel's story, we see that the trauma she describes only worsened with time. Her story complicates a linear timeline of disaster and recovery and points instead to natural disasters as cumulative and ongoing. Isabel's anxiety stems from a realization that her life will never be the same—that the Puerto Rico she knew will never be the same—but the storm accounts only in part for that feeling of loss. Isabel laments that there are no jobs and that more and more Puerto Ricans are leaving the island. These are realities that long predated the storm but were worsened by its impact. Isabel suggests that her expectation that things would get back to normal soon after the storm was unrealistic, but this only raises the question whether the social problems that plagued Puerto Rico before María aren't also part of the disaster causing Isabel's breath to shorten and her chest to tighten.

The concept of aftershocks is mostly used in the context of earthquakes to describe the jolts felt after the initial quake. Aftershocks can continue for days, weeks, months, and even years after the "mainshock." The bigger the earthquake, the more numerous and long-lasting the aftershocks will be. Although aftershocks are often smaller, their effects can compound the damage of the initial shock and create new urgencies that complicate recovery efforts.

Most of what is discussed in this book examines the aftershocks of Hurricane María, not just the effects of the wind or rain but also what followed: state failure, social abandonment, capitalization on human misery, and the collective trauma produced by the botched response. In the nearly two years since Hurricane María made landfall, Puerto Ricans have found themselves relentlessly jolted by the storm's aftershocks. This happens every time systemic failures are

revealed, death and damages are denied, aid is refused, profiteering is discovered, and officials who were not elected by local residents make drastic decisions about the island's future. Much as we see in Isabel's case, these small but ongoing blows can have major repercussions that are worse and potentially more destructive than the initial event.

Aftershocks remind us that disasters are not singular events but ongoing processes. Building on this idea, *Aftershocks of Disaster* examines both Hurricane María's aftershocks and its foreshocks—the sociohistorical context of debt crisis, migration, and coloniality in which the storm took place. Indeed, we ask whether Hurricane María should be considered the "mainshock" at all, or whether the storm and its effects are best understood as the compounded results of a longer colonial history.

On September 20, 2017, Hurricane María sliced through Puerto Rico, producing one of the deadliest natural disasters in US history and bringing unprecedented attention to this colonial territory. For many in Puerto Rico, as well as for those following the news from afar, one of the most searing memories of the storm's immediate aftermath is the press conference held by US president Donald Trump in which he bragged about the storm's low death count. According to Trump, Hurricane María was not a "real catastrophe" like Hurricane Katrina, which battered Louisiana and the Gulf Coast in 2005 and left eighteen hundred people dead. He boasted that in the case of María only sixteen people had died thanks to the preparation and performance of both the local and federal government. The official death tally began creeping up immediately after his visit, eventually stalling at sixty-four. But reporters, public health officials, funeral home directors, and Puerto Ricans who had lost someone as a result of the storm all maintained that the true number had to be much higher, given what they had witnessed and experienced. As Carla Minet documents in her contribution to this volume, journalists from both local and national outlets partnered together and, along with lawyers and independent researchers, began revealing the truth of María's fatal consequences. In the end, the local government accepted 2,975 as

the official death toll, even though some studies place it much higher and there has yet to be a definitive accounting.

On September 12, 2018, only a few days before the first anniversary of the storm's landfall in Puerto Rico, Trump tweeted that the revised death toll was little more than a partisan conspiracy theory. Local politicians, for their part, have accepted the higher numbers but refuse to account for their mishandling of death certifications, reported cremations without autopsies, and the broader forms of structural negligence that caused the deaths in the first place. We now know that the great majority of those who lost their lives to María perished not because of the storm but because of the structural failures that followed it: uncleared roads that did not allow ambulances to arrive, lack of water distribution that led residents to contaminated water sources, lack of generators in hospitals, and more than half a year without electricity to power medical equipment, refrigerate lifesaving medications such as insulin, and provide public lighting and traffic lights to prevent deadly accidents. Lives were not lost to the wind and the rain, or even to Trump's disrespect; instead, residents drowned in bureaucracy and institutional neglect.

Further, in the weeks and months spent waiting for the power to come back on, or worrying about whether the water they were giving their children was safe to consume, or wondering if they were going to be able to go back to work or school, many Puerto Ricans were stricken with anxiety, fear, and a deep feeling of abandonment, which exacerbated an often hidden mental health crisis on the island. Suicides spiked after the storm, as did cases of domestic and intimate partner violence. Suicides increased 28 percent in 2017, while calls to suicide prevention hotlines doubled from September 2017 to March 2018.[3] Groups working with women and families experiencing domestic violence and intimate abuse also reported a surge in requests for services and preventive educational programs.[4] As journalist and activist Mari Mari Narváez notes in her interview with Marisol LeBrón in this volume, marginalized populations only found their vulnerability intensified as the state struggled to provide even the most basic resources and protections.

In this context, it is difficult to predict when the disaster associated with Hurricane María will actually end since each aftershock creates a new series of problems that ripple out far and wide. Nor is it even clear when this disaster began. Long before María, Puerto Rico was already suffering the effects of a prolonged economic recession, spiraling levels of debt, and deep austerity cuts to public resources. This was preceded by over five centuries of colonialism (first Spanish, then American) and a long history of structural vulnerability and forced dependency. For example, Puerto Rico's weakened local government is subject to the whims of Washington and thus unable to chart political and economic policy centered around local needs (a case in point being the inability to repeal the Jones Act, which requires all consumer goods to arrive on US vessels, drastically raising the cost of basic need items). Moreover, its social safety nets are constrained by the structural inequalities between the United States and its territories. All of this results in depressed wages, restricted social security and Medicare benefits, and a poverty rate that is more than twice the national average. These structural vulnerabilities, as contributors to this volume demonstrate, set the stage for María's impact.

COLONIAL DEBT AND DISASTER

Long before the hurricane, Puerto Rico felt to many like a society in ruin—financially and politically. During the past two decades, this US territory was plunged into a deep economic recession as tax incentives for foreign companies were phased out. Companies left in droves in search of less regulation and greater corporate welfare. Almost immediately unemployment started to increase, public coffers dwindled, residents were told to tighten their belts, and many began migrating in greater numbers in search of economic stability and opportunity.

Puerto Rico's public debt, which eventually grew to more than $72 billion, helped lay the groundwork that made Hurricane María so devastating and the recovery so slow. The debt ballooned as Puerto Rican officials turned to Wall Street to address the economic stagnation that followed corporate flight, increasingly taking on greater debt in an attempt to stay afloat.

Puerto Rico's debt crisis was also fueled by the particular financial apparatus of Puerto Rican bonds. In addition to having repayment guaranteed in the constitution, bonds issued by the Puerto Rican government also have the unique and singular quality (unavailable within any of the fifty states) of being triple tax-exempt—free of tax obligations at the state, federal, or local level. This made them irresistible to Wall Street financiers. When debt levels pushed beyond constitutional limits, new mechanisms of economic capture were created. A sales tax suggested by financial strategists at Lehman Brothers was implemented in 2006 to guarantee new loans. Meanwhile, public infrastructure (such as airports, bridges, and hospitals) was increasingly sold to the highest bidder, further eroding public coffers.[5] As a result about one-third of Puerto Rico's budget is now funneled toward servicing a debt that many believe is both unconstitutional and unsustainable.[6] Puerto Rico's contemporary debt crisis, however, is a symptom of a much deeper economic and political malaise stemming from its unresolved colonial status. After the establishment in 1952 of the Estado Libre Asociado (Freely Associated State, often glossed in English as the "commonwealth"), Puerto Rico was imagined to have "the best of both worlds": it had a semblance of local sovereignty, backed by the economic and political protections that came with ties to the United States.

During the mid-twentieth century, Puerto Rico went from being the "poorhouse of the Caribbean" to the "shining star" of US democracy in the region, as the island was rapidly industrialized and the standard of living increased for many Puerto Ricans. The gains seemingly achieved through Puerto Rico's commonwealth status caused many to ignore fundamental flaws in this political-economic arrangement. Puerto Rico's territorial status prevents the local government from shaping and implementing many of its own policies, encourages an overdependence on US capital investment, and hampers long-term and sustainable economic growth that would benefit the local population. This makes Puerto Rico particularly vulnerable during periods of economic contraction, and, indeed, for the past two decades, many residents have felt that they were already living in a state of crisis. By the time the debt crisis hit, local and

federal policy makers had seemingly run out of options for staving off collapse.

In an effort to stop Puerto Rico's debt "death spiral," the local government declared the debt "unpayable" in 2016 and signed an emergency bill placing a moratorium on debt payments.[7] When the local government sought to declare bankruptcy, the real nature of Puerto Rico's limited sovereignty became clear. With the legal status of neither a state nor an independent nation, Puerto Rico could not refinance or default on its debt. The US Congress denied Puerto Rico not only the right to bankruptcy but also any kind of financial bailout or meaningful redress. Instead, Congress "assisted" Puerto Rico by imposing the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act, or PROMESA bill, which established an unelected Fiscal Control Board to manage local finances and renegotiate the debt. The board is colloquially referred to as "la Junta" by locals, which signals many Puerto Ricans' perception of the board as a dictatorial body that has seized power from the local government.

The members of the Fiscal Control Board were appointed by the US Congress with virtually no local input and no form of local accountability, yet all costs are paid directly by Puerto Rican taxpayers to the tune of $200 million a year.[8] According to the current president of the Fiscal Control Board, José B. Carrión III, the fact that the board does not have to answer to either the Puerto Rican government or to local citizens is precisely what allows it to make unpopular choices that are necessary to improve Puerto Rico's economy.[9]

The board has no vision for the island's future other than restoring its ability to continue borrowing and generating profit for investors. It has focused solely on imposing structural-adjustment-style austerity measures, even after many international monetary institutions, including the International Monetary Fund, have admitted that these policies are shortsighted and doomed to fail.[10] The board's failure to invest in the well-being and livelihoods of local Puerto Ricans is evident in its initial targeting of public education—including the University of Puerto Rico, as Rima Brusi and Isar Godreau detail in their essay—and the imposition of drastic cuts to pensions and wages.

Given all this, Puerto Rico was already in a state of political and social crisis long before the winds of María arrived. Protests against PROMESA were taking place across the territory, student strikes had shut down the university for months, abandoned schools and foreclosed buildings were being taken over as community centers, and across the urban landscape new street art appeared calling for a reimagining of what decolonization and self-determination might look like for a bankrupt colony. Activists had already come together to tell the government "se acabaron las promesas" (the time for promises is over), a slogan that evokes both the PROMESA law and the decades of false promises that had followed the establishment of Puerto Rico's commonwealth status.

For young people in particular, the economic advancement and social freedoms promised by the commonwealth arrangement proved to be empty promises as insecurity, precarity, and vulnerability marked their lives and increasingly constrained their futures. They worried that their lives were essentially being mortgaged to service the debt and generate profits for vulture capitalists. Education, well-paying jobs, affordable housing, and the ability to build one's life in Puerto Rico were increasingly out of grasp for many Puerto Rican youth, who faced a stark choice: either migrate to the United States or deal with dwindling opportunities on the island. Raquel Salas Rivera captures this uncertainty and frustration in her poem "sinverguenza with no nation"; evoking the rage of Allen Ginsburg's epic poem "Howl," she tells us, "i saw the best souls of my generation /swallowed by colonialism."

While current residents feel increasingly pushed towards exile, the government has focused on attracting new "stakeholders" to come to Puerto Rico under Act 20/22, a pivotal piece of legislation that allows wealthy elites from the United States to use Puerto Rico as a tax haven. Passed in 2012, the legislation was created to bring capital investment to the island once it was barred from borrowing. Government officials promised that these newcomers, lured by seductive tax breaks, would invest in the local economy and create jobs. Under the statute, transplants from the United States who spend half the year on the island can receive exemptions from federal and local taxes, capital

gains tax, and taxes on passive income until the year 2035, regardless of whether they generate employment or invest in the local economy. This makes Puerto Rico the only place under US jurisdiction where such income can go untaxed.[11] Of course, this is available only to "new arrivals," not current residents or those originally born in the territory who migrated and might wish to return. The trickle-down logic of Act 20/22, however, failed to make any positive impact on the lives of the majority of Puerto Ricans and only fueled the growth of hyper-segregated elite foreign enclaves around the island.

The economic crisis had thus already set the stage for what Puerto Ricans could and would come to expect after María. The public services and infrastructure that failed with deadly results during and after Hurricane María were already severely weakened after being deprived of the funds necessary to perform even minimal maintenance, let alone desperately needed upgrades. While public infrastructure continued to deteriorate, these forms of state abandonment normalized the idea of individual responsibility in the face of state retreat. As a result, in the days after María—while the local government was MIA, the power grid collapsed, and communication systems all failed—local residents fended for themselves. As Ana Portnoy Brimmer puts it in her poem "If a Tree Falls in an Island: The Metaphysics of Colonialism," there was a feeling that while Puerto Ricans struggled to make themselves heard, "only the ocean responds/with a swallow."

Refusing to be swallowed up and disappeared by inaction and silence, Puerto Ricans continued to shout their truth and take recovery into their own hands. Families, neighbors, coworkers, congregations, and groups that were already working together on social issues, as well as others who weren't, began coming together into self-described "brigades" to clear out roads, bring food and water to the forgotten and the vulnerable, distribute tarps, and eventually build roofs and homes. All the while state aid, both local and federal, refused to arrive.

Activists' efforts in the wake of María drew from and amplified grassroots organizing that predated the storm. This organizing was already focused on supporting individuals and communities in the

face of prolonged economic and social crises. The notion that only the people would and could save the people—that the state could not meaningfully improve the lives of Puerto Ricans under the current political and economic structure—was already guiding the work of many activists and organizations, as poignantly demonstrated in the contributions by Giovanni Roberto, Arturo Massol, Mari Mari Narváez, and Sarah Molinari. These grassroots efforts have taken on a new urgency and necessity after Hurricane María as Puerto Ricans are forced to deal with not only the physical destruction caused by the storm but also the further destabilization of many communities as the government failed to act or acted in ways that only exacerbated vulnerability.

Two years after the storm, local residents continue to mend their society. They have come together to deal with the long-term issues of the slow recovery—lack of public lighting, unrepaired infrastructure, denials of FEMA assistance and insurance claims, and the loss of thousands of jobs—that have forced many to reimagine their lives, often beyond the geographic bounds of the Puerto Rican territory. Meanwhile, the local government claims it is open for business and continues to lure new arrivals with the promise of tax incentives, government contracts from emergency funds, and the assurance of a "resilient" population that can continue to adapt to the challenges that lie ahead. While the local government is working to sell post-María Puerto Rico as a blank slate onto which millionaire investors can project their wildest fantasies of unrestricted capital growth, Puerto Ricans on the island and in the diaspora are drawing from a rich history of resistance to construct a Puerto Rico for Puerto Ricans and deal with the storm's continuing aftershocks.

FROM DISASTER TO DECOLONIAL FUTURES

Building from the premise that Hurricane María is not a singular event, the contributors to this volume document the many shocks that Puerto Ricans have endured before and after the storm. Through reportage, poetry, personal narrative, and scholarly investigation, they show that the effects of Hurricane María are best understood

as the product of a long-standing colonial disaster. The events unfolding in Puerto Rico appear to be following the familiar scripts of "disaster capitalism," for-profit recovery, and economic austerity that have been deployed in other parts of the world. Yet, as Yarimar Bonilla and Naomi Klein discuss in the dialogue that opens the volume, these policies take on a particular hue in the context of Puerto Rico. As Klein argues, in most disaster-struck societies, moments of crisis are viewed as opportunities for social and economic engineering. In the case of Puerto Rico, however, there was no need for elites to scramble to take advantage of new opportunities because there was already an infrastructure of dispossession and displacement firmly in place. Because of the financial crisis, a Fiscal Control Board had already been instituted by Congress to expedite economic transformation. Moreover, given Puerto Rico's colonial history, the board easily wielded neoliberal technologies—such as tax loopholes and financial incentives for foreign capital along with the fast-tracked privatization of local resources—characteristic of an economic system geared toward extracting wealth and catering to foreigners. For Klein and Bonilla, this is why since María the government has shown such little interest in creating new social and economic models for Puerto Rico, turning instead to the well-trodden paths of extractive Caribbean economies, with mere cosmetic updates for the digital age.

It is partly for this reason that Nelson Maldonado-Torres closes the book by asking us to consider whether María is truly a crisis, which he describes as a moment that requires a critical decision, or a disaster: a moment when decisions seem to have already been made and fates tragically cast. Maldonado-Torres is not the only one to point to the deep historical roots of María's disaster and the role of colonialism in defining its outcomes.

Several of the contributors in the volume describe what can be called the *coloniality of disaster*, that is, the way the structures and enduring legacies of colonialism set the stage for María's impact and its aftermath. For example, Frances Negrón-Muntaner examines how a liberal rhetoric of inclusion in which Puerto Ricans are framed as "fellow Americans" sought to make Puerto Rican suffering legible and worthy of moral outrage by the American public. Yet these

accounts ultimately entrench the divisions between Puerto Ricans as a minoritized group and those "real" Americans called upon to care.

Similarly, Hilda Lloréns shows how deep-seated racio-colonial tropes shape the way Puerto Ricans are depicted as "climate refugees" in the midst of a massive exodus from the island. Lloréns argues that these depictions play on the long-standing idea of Puerto Rico as part of the "disastrous tropics," an idea that functions not only to occlude the role of US colonialism in shaping and creating disasters but also to position migration to the United States as a salvation for Puerto Ricans rather than another form of disastrous uncertainty. Both Chris Gregory and Erika Rodríguez discuss how local photojournalists tried to push back against these representations by using different photographic techniques, refusing to reproduce the traditional visual scripts of victimhood in disaster reportage. Rodríguez, who was working on a photo series exploring how the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico has shaped Puerto Rican identity, addresses how this thread remained in her work while covering the storm. She says she felt a responsibility to document the dignity of Puerto Ricans "beyond the loudness of the disaster," in order to combat precisely the kinds of historical tropes that Lloréns traces. Similarly, Gregory's use of portraiture, his compositions, and his choice of subjects contest representations of Puerto Ricans as mere hapless victims of nature. At the same time, the palpable sorrow evident in his representations—conveyed through not just portraiture but also landscapes and still lifes—hints at the complex emotional fabric of post-María Puerto Rico.

As many contributors demonstrate, the particular trauma experienced in Puerto Rico after María is deeply tied to a longer preexisting colonial trauma. Several of the contributors point to how María's impact on the local psyche pushes us to think more critically about questions of dependency, self-sufficiency, sustainability, and sovereignty. Both Benjamín Torres Gotay and Eduardo Lalo suggest that Puerto Ricans' feelings of abandonment and the trauma experienced in the face of governmental and imperial neglect are rooted so deeply in colonial logics that they become "unnameable," as Lalo puts it. Torres Gotay describes how local residents seemed almost incapable

of recognizing and assimilating the abandonment they experienced. In the face of FEMA's denials and the state's retreat, residents offered up narratives of resignation, repeatedly asserting that things "could be worse" and that, all things considered, they were OK. Torres Gotay roots this dissonance in the contradictory imperial narratives that Puerto Ricans have been fed about their place within a US empire.

Recognizing the long-standing and historically informed nature of trauma in different Puerto Rican communities, activists and scholars such as Patricia Noboa stress the importance of providing not only economic and legal assistance but also psychotherapeutic accompaniment. Noboa offers a compelling ethnographic description of how marginalized communities, long accustomed to state abandonment, deal with losses that extend far beyond the material. She shows that while some mental health professionals focus solely on the specific trauma of María, the storm triggered connections to past traumas that remain unmentioned and unrecognized for many. Noboa also challenges the discourse of "Puerto Rico se levanta" (Puerto Rico will rise) that emerged after the storm. She notes that such rhetoric pathologizes the difficulties of overcoming trauma as a result of individual shortcomings and a lack of resilience while failing to hold the state accountable for the structural violence that predated the storm.

Many contributors point to the difficulty of narrating this trauma. As Lalo suggests, some writers can only point toward what cannot be put into words. We see this absence of language throughout the texts. For example, Beatriz Llenin Figueroa's contribution is a Hurricane diary that never was, a chronicle that remains unwritten. Sofia Gallisá offers a series of lists that seek to take inventory of what was lost; as fragmented shards of testimony, they cannot be fully sutured into a narrative whole. In her contribution, Carla Minet discusses how local journalists dealt with the lack of transparency and accountability, particularly in regards to the death count, which for many remains an unforgivable act of government deception. While the dedicated work of journalists, lawyers, and activists has helped us start to grasp the scope of the storm's human impact, Minet reminds us that a total accounting of the storm's effects remains painfully elusive. Noboa suggests that even in the face of

these unnameable experiences, it is important to listen, to witness, and to create spaces of narration. Rather than promoting a frenzied rush toward "recovery" without assessing what was experienced, what was lost, and what was transformed, these contributors encourage us to dwell in fractured narratives that emerged from Hurricane María and its aftermath, suggesting that even in their incompleteness these fragmented tales reveal powerful, if difficult, truths.

In the face of these silences and dissimulations, the arts take on a role of central importance in helping us understand the effects of the storm and its aftershocks. The play *¡Ay María!*, which was performed around the island in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane, was produced by a group of independent actors as a way of coping with their own personal experiences of the storm. It showcases the full range of human experiences that characterized everyday life during the storm, from the poignant to the absurd. Marianne Ramírez and Carlos Rivera Santana also provide chronicles of artistic efforts that emerged after María both in the island and the diaspora. Rivera Santana details how visual art has become an important site of catharsis as Puerto Ricans confront the effects of both natural and man-made disaster. In her essay, Ramírez discusses how visual artists have been engaging with the *longue durée* of colonialism in Puerto Rico and using their art to assert a decolonial aesthetic and cultural sovereignty. Meanwhile, Richard Santiago offers a firsthand account of the pain and difficulty of becoming an artist in exile. Santiago also shows the importance of the arts in revealing ugly and painful truths that the government seeks to keep invisible, such as the death and human devastation that occurred in the storm's aftermath. Lastly, Adrian Roman describes his experience as an artist from the diaspora traveling to his family's hometown in order to gather and preserve the discarded pieces of broken lives. These artworks once again point to a collective experience that cannot be fully expressed in words, much less in a political program.

Multiple contributors show that María is not just about economic exploitation and social inequalities, but also about a deepening crisis of imagination. In the face of immediate matters of life and death it can be difficult to think beyond the current political binds

toward new collective possibilities. In her essay, historian Mónica Jiménez encourages us to look to the past in order to rediscover revolutionary impulses that can help us think about solutions to the problems confronting contemporary Puerto Rico. Jiménez examines how the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and its leader, Pedro Albizu Campos, when confronted with economic instability and natural disaster during the early twentieth century, warned against relying on the United States to provide solutions. Instead, they argued that Puerto Ricans needed to assert an economic and political sovereignty in the face of colonial immiserization. Indeed, we see in Jiménez's contribution as well as others' in this collection that the past is prologue not only to the current crisis but also to the kinds of radical political thinking needed to build new futures.

Throughout the volume, contributors demand something more than a mere recovery, if by recovery we are to understand a return to a previous state of affairs. In a number of pieces we see bold calls to break with the reigning social, political, and economic structures that produce disasters and that continue to rock Puerto Rican society. In the contributions by Ed Morales, Natasha Brannana, and Eva Prado we see how local activists are pushing to reimagine the ties of obligation and debt that bind Puerto Rico to the United States through a critical interrogation of the fiscal crisis. Sarah Molinari describes how residents came together to feed their communities, clean up their surroundings, and lend each other support in the face of bureaucratic violence. Sandra Rodríguez Cotto narrates how in the face of both a governmental and telecommunications collapse, a small community radio station was able to provide comfort and community to those who were left alone in the dark. Mari Mari Narváez calls on Puerto Ricans to apply relentless pressure on both the local and federal governments to act in more accountable and transparent ways. She argues that only by centering the needs and desires of Puerto Ricans will Puerto Rico be able to meaningfully function as a free and democratic society. Both Arturo Massol and Giovanni Roberto examine how the search for new social relations in Puerto Rico is about not just self-sufficiency but also moving from mutual support toward new forms of collective self-determination. This shift requires healing the many traumas and

shocks that Puerto Ricans have faced, including the displacement and dispossession felt by the millions of Puerto Ricans who have found themselves, by choice or circumstance, forging their lives beyond the geographic confines of the Puerto Rican archipelago.

Overall, the contributors to this volume ask us to consider what it would truly mean for Puerto Rico to recover from the devastation of Hurricane María. Is recovery simply measured by a return to the conditions that marked life in Puerto Rico before the storm? If so, that would mean a return to the status quo of extraction and exploitation necessary for colonial capitalism to function. The essays that follow suggest that this would represent not a recovery but simply the continuation of a colonial disaster. Ultimately, Hurricane María forces us to reckon with not only the disastrous effects of climate change, particularly on already vulnerable people, but also the need for decolonization to serve as the centerpiece of a just recovery for Puerto Rico and the Caribbean as a whole.

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