

# Recovery process for puerto rico post- hurricane maría



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## Question 1: The Problem

Hurricane María was a Category 5 hurricane that devastated the Caribbean region in 2017. On September 20, 2017, Hurricane María wreaked havoc in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, putting the island's 3.5 million citizens' lives at risk (López, Pascual, Rogers 2018). Traveling 155-miles-per-hour, the storm wiped out the electric grid for the entire island. Further, the high-speed winds of the hurricane demolished homes, infrastructures, roads, and bridges, all over the island. The detrimental effects of the hurricane ultimately induced the displacement of over 183,000 citizens who had to leave the island, and left 90,000 families without a roof over their heads (López *et al.* 2018). Additionally, the hurricane resulted in a death toll that exceeded 1,000 casualties. For four months, most of the population had limited access to survival essentials: shelter, water, fire, and food. Many were exposed to health hazards, such as contaminated water and insufficient hospital care (López *et al.* 2018). Nearly six months after María, 50,000 households and businesses still had no electricity. Furthermore, power outages and limited access to non-contaminated water were prevalent (López *et al.* 2018).

Prior to the hurricane, media gaze towards Puerto Rico was minimal, imperceptibly focusing on the island's ongoing economic and fiscal crisis (Caban 2015; López *et al.* 2018). However, post-Hurricane María, mainstream media representation of the island increased significantly. While researching disaster relief for Puerto Rico, it became evident that media outlets glorified both federal and nonfederal distribution of aid across the island manifested through the white savior complex (Begnaud 2018). Merely <https://assignbuster.com/recovery-process-for-puerto-rico-post-hurricane-mara/>

focusing on the governmental and nongovernmental distribution of aid during disaster relief obscures the realities of the recovery process because it does not prioritize the ongoing relationships of colonialism that produce the permanent state of emergency of Puerto Rico (Begnaud 2018). Further, it becomes challenging to situate the ways in which Hurricane María exposed the colonial condition of Puerto Rico (Ficek 2018; Heron 2018; Lloréns 2018). Understanding mass media's role in framing the politics of recovery in Puerto Rico is crucial in order to challenge cultural hegemonic views towards Puerto Rico as a colonial state and its citizens.

Due to the existing gap between media portrayal of disaster relief and what actually occurs on the ground, my research aims to unmask the realities of the recovery process of Puerto Rico. This will be executed by primarily focusing on a nongovernmental organization (NGO) currently located in Puerto Rico. Through an ethnographic analysis, I seek to answer the following inquiries: (1) What is the impact of development cooperation on the NGO and its relationship with the local Puerto Rican community? (2) In what ways do donor policies shape the goals of NGOs?

## Question 2: Relation to Literature

In relation to this research, there have been two prominent debates that surfaced and have been the topic of discussion for decades. These debates include the ongoing relations of colonialism that are rendered invisible or insignificant and the role of NGOs and the work they achieve (or do not achieve) on the ground.

## Ongoing Relations of Colonialism

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The enduring relations of colonialism that produce the permanent state of emergency for many communities tend to never be discussed extensively (Ficek 2018). However, various scholars have been disrupting the silence, highlighting that it is imperative to understand the role of disasters in the midst of the ongoing fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico and other places that are in a permanent state of normalized emergency (Ficek 2018; Heron 2018; Lloréns 2018). While some scholars accentuated governmental neglect and the effects it had on individuals of the Puerto Rican Diaspora (Ficek 2018; Lloréns 2018), others focused on how individuals navigate their lives after catastrophes such as Hurricane María (Heron 2018). In her article, “Infrastructure and Colonial Difference in Puerto Rico after Hurricane María,” Rosa Ficek (2018) emphasizes the infrastructures that sustained life in Puerto Rico were demolished and the lack of federal government aid provided to the people of Puerto Rico shed light on the role of colonialism and the evolution of political violence. Media representation of Puerto Rico after the hurricane further highlighted the re-entrenchment of discrimination and inequity towards Puerto Ricans (Lloréns 2018). Lack of federal governmental neglect and proper support after the events of Hurricane María only made the island’s extant economic and fiscal calamity worse (Ficek 2018; Lloréns 2018). Further, media portrayal of the disaster shaped Puerto Ricans and other individuals affected by the storm as helpless, not promoting ways the “ ambivalent routes that people take to reassemble their lives (Heron 2018, 118). This research will unmask the truth behind the proceeding colonialism associated with Puerto Rico, underlining that the island’s toxic relationship with the United States has existed for the past 3 centuries and has only worsened.

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## NGOs

Various scholars have underscored the need to focus on the accomplishments of organizational development interventions, in lieu of automatically accepting the assertions made by an organization: whether it be policy claims or project management (Fisher 1997; Gill 1997; Li 2007; Schuller 2012). NGOs tend to emanate a positive image given their determination to address social and political issues and continuous service and volunteer work towards various communities. However, scholars like William Fisher (1997), Mark Schuller (2012), and critique the role of NGOs, questioning whether the claims they make on paper are actually sustained. In his book, *Killing With Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs*, Schuller focuses on the impact of development assistance on NGOs and their relations with local Haitian communities in after an earthquake that devastated the Caribbean country in 2010 (2012, ). Seeking to understand NGOs' failed attempts to develop and improve the Haitian community, Schuller asks: " Do NGOs democratize development, being closer to the people they serve and offering a better system of governance, as some people believe? Or are NGOs a tool of imperialism, ' gentle invasions' of the South by the North?" (2012, 9). While NGOs do a proficient job at demanding transparency, they tend to struggle at administering it (Fisher 1997; Li 2007; Schuller 2012). It becomes more challenging to see the potential NGOs have in altering governance, political structures, and policies when the relationship between NGOs and governments is miscellaneous (Fisher 1997). As Fisher puts it, " there is no simple or consistent story good NGOs confronting evil governments. Just as the NGO field is a heterogeneous one

encompassing a wide range of groups with different ideological agendas” (1997, 452). Thus, it soon becomes clear that what NGOs promote, in regard to achievement in development interventions, as compared to what they actually accomplish on the ground is not equivalent. Furthermore, NGOs immerse themselves in communities, unaware of the reasons the communities are facing the various issues they encounter: poverty and environmental protection (Dietrich 2011). NGOs and other organizations, such as grassroots organizations (GROs), are constantly in disagreement, which makes it even more difficult for NGOs to implement the change in a community (Dietrich 2011). Given the debates about the role of NGOs, this research will help bridge the gap between the help NGOs claim to extend to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and other countries and the actual development interventions that do or do not supervene on the ground.

### Question 3: Methods

The research will take place in Puerto Rico during the summer for a total of 3 months. Specifically, I want to focus my research on the southeast region of the island. This study will utilize an ethnographic approach; thus, I seek to engage in informal conversations, participant observation, and aim to administer in-depth semi-structured interviews. Influenced by Schuller (2011) and his work, I am committed to examining the nongovernmental politics in Puerto Rico in relation to disaster recovery. I will monitor relationships between various individuals of diverse backgrounds: recipients of services, NGO staff and directors, and the Puerto Rican government. In doing so, I seek to understand the role that the regional NGO plays in disaster relief in Puerto Rico. Going to Puerto Rico to conduct this research <https://assignbuster.com/recovery-process-for-puerto-rico-post-hurricane-mara/>

will help me better understand what happens on the ground in the midst of disaster relief.

### Informal Conversations

Engaging in informal conversations will grant me access to reliable, valid, and holistic perspectives from various individuals, whether they are NGO staff members and directors or recipients of service. In Julian M. Murchison's chapter, "Interviews," from *Ethnography Essentials: Designing, Conducting, and Presenting Your Research*, he underlines that, "Because the [informal] conversations tend to take place in more relaxed circumstances and because they are less orchestrated by the ethnographer, informants can be more candid and less likely to provide idealized versions" (2010, 104). Thus, it is evident that partaking in informal conversations allows for informants to feel less inclined to alter their ideologies or perspectives for the benefit of my research or to polish the representation of the NGO. I plan to engage in informal conversations outside of disaster relief productivity. Additionally, participating in casual conversations will allow me to establish rapport with research subjects and participants. Participant Observation

I plan to conduct participant observation during disaster recovery production. I will participate in the daily operations of the organization as a trained volunteer. My objective is to assist the NGO in the performance of any tasks that need to be fulfilled. As a volunteer, I will support and observe the staff in their work, which, in turn, allows me to get a first-hand experience of the help that the NGO extends to the surrounding community post-Hurricane María.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

After engaging in informal conversations and participant observation, I will have gained a sense of the organization and developed rapport with staff members and individuals residing in the region. Thus, I will be able to conduct semi-structured interviews with various staff members of different positions and with some recipients of service. I plan to interview a total of 25 key respondents: 10 NGO staff members and volunteers, 10 recipients of service, 5 government officials. The questions I ask will be centered on the role the NGO plays in the overall recovery process. I will ask the NGO staff members and volunteers, for example, to describe their *true* mission, how long their organization has been around, how long have they worked with the organization and why, their successes and failures of the organization prior to working in Puerto Rico, and their short-term and long-term goals. On the other hand, I will ask the recipients of service and Puerto Rican government officials to reflect on the service that has been provided to them. I plan to record each and every one of the interviews if given permission to do so.

#### Question 4: Qualifications

As a sociology major, self-identified Puerto Rican, and a native speaker of Spanish, I believe that I am the ideal candidate for carrying out this research project.

For one, I am extremely passionate about the research topic. As emphasized earlier, I am a self-identified Puerto Rican. Though I reside in the southwest side of Chicago, Illinois, the majority of my mother's side of the family lives

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in Yabucoa, Puerto Rico. Yabucoa, Puerto Rico is one of the cities in the southeast region of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico that was devastated by the hurricane. Thus, as an individual whose family members reside on the island and were directly impacted by the storm, I have an ethnographic in. I have visited the southeast region of the island a numerous amount of times; therefore, navigating the area will not be difficult for me. Additionally, being a native speaker of Spanish — and having taken courses throughout high school and throughout my 3 years at Colgate thus far — I will be able to effectively communicate both with native Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans and Puerto Ricans who are also proficient in English.

As a sociology major, I have taken two methods courses for Sociology and Anthropology, having conducted multimethod research and qualitative research, respectively. For instance, in the methods course I took for Sociology, I did a multimethod research project focusing on the relationship between peer influence and academic achievement. In conducting this project, I incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Qualitative work included conducting semi-structured interviews with students on Colgate's campus. In the methods course for Anthropology, I conducted research on an all-male acapella group, incorporating qualitative methodology. In sum, both courses allowed me to extensively exercise qualitative research methods in my projects. In doing so, I understand and have obtained the skill set needed to conduct research that requires proficiency in incorporating qualitative methods.

Though I have never carried out research specifically focusing on disaster relief in Puerto Rico, I have taken various courses where I have dedicated a <https://assignbuster.com/recovery-process-for-puerto-rico-post-hurricane-mara/>

great amount of effort in bringing awareness to the continuous relationships of colonialism that produce the permanent state of emergency of Puerto Rico, whether it be a Spanish course or a communities and identities course.

#### Question 5: Why Does this Research Matter?

As highlighted earlier, this research is crucial given that it accentuates the need to bridge the gap between media representation of disaster recovery and what currently happens on the ground in the context of disasters and their aftermath. Most importantly, this research explicitly focuses on Puerto Rico post-Hurricane María, underscoring how the effects of Hurricane María on Puerto Rico added onto the island's extant economic crisis, which is often rendered invisible or insignificant in mainstream media. Additionally, the research results will shed further light on the role of colonialism, the evolution of political violence, and the re-entrenchment of discrimination and inequity towards Puerto Ricans prior to and after the hurricane devastated the Caribbean island and unincorporated U. S. territory (Ficek 2018; Heron 2018; Lloréns 2018). As a rising senior, I would like to conduct a senior thesis centralized on this research topic. In doing so, I will be able to contextualize the local and federal response to disasters and the disaster recovery process. Though primarily focusing on Puerto Rico, this research will elucidate the relations between the lack of local and federal distribution of aid and proper NGO assistance and colonialism and imperialism (Ficek 2018; Heron 2018; Lloréns 2018; Schuller 2012). Keen on unmasking the realities of disaster response and the disaster recovery process that is not being promoted through various media outlets, my research will to broader anthropological discussions on leadership, strategy, and development in <https://assignbuster.com/recovery-process-for-puerto-rico-post-hurricane-mara/>

NGOs and the ongoing relations of colonialism (Ficek 2018; Heron 2018; Lloréns 2018; Schuller 2012).

## Budget

### TravelUS\$US\$

#### Domestic Travel

1 x round trip airfare Chicago – Puerto Rico – Chicago\*\*1 433. 00

#### Transportation and lodging while traveling\*\*2

Uber from San Juan Airport, Carolina to Yabucoa 75. 00

Uber from Yabucoa to San Juan Airport, Carolina 70. 00

#### Local Travel/Transportation requirements

Vehicle Rental (98 days @ \$29. 95/day)\*\*3 3, 925. 00

Sub-total for Travel4, 503. 00

#### Living Expenses

Per Diem at Field Site (\$500/month x 3 months)\*\*4 1, 500. 00

Sub-total for Living Expenses1, 500. 00

#### Other Costs Associated with Research

Gifts for Informants (\$20 gift card/informant) 500. 00

Sub-total for Other Costs 500.00

### Supplies and Equipment

#### Equipment\*\*5

Digital Camera	200.00
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Audio Recorder	20.00
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Sub-total for Supplies and Equipment 220.00

Total Research Budget 6,723.00

1. This quoted price is according to Southwest Airlines as of May 7, 2019.
2. This quoted price is according to the Uber Moves estimate on Uber.com as of May 7, 2019.
3. This quoted price is according to VIAS Car Rental of Puerto Rico as of May 7, 2019. It is necessary to rent a vehicle to access the field site. Price includes rental, maintenance, and fuel cost.
4. I plan to stay at my grandmother's house in Yabucoa, Puerto Rico; thus, per diem at the field site consists of food expenses and utilities for the 3 month period.
5. I do not personally own a digital camera or an audio recorder. Quoted prices are based off of general digital camera and audio recorder prices at Walmart.

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## Colgate Institutional Review Board

### Anticipated Risk and Potential Benefits to Participants

There are no direct benefits for the participants. While this is a low-risk procedure, there is some potential risk. For instance, some participants may feel uncomfortable or emotionally distressed as they recount the events of Hurricane María. However, the risks involved with participation are “ no greater than the risk of everyday life” (CITE). If this is the case, participants will be given the option to take a break, decline to respond, or they may withdraw from the study at any time. This chance of risk will decrease

because I will be able to warn participants in advance that they may feel uncomfortable or anxious as they recount the events of the storm and the disaster recovery process. In general, I will take the necessary steps to ensure the well-being of the participants.

### Steps Taken to Protect the Participants

There will be several steps taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants. One of the first steps includes asking participants to sign the Certificate of Informed Consent. As noted in *Statement in Ethnography and Institutional Review Boards*, the three components of informed consent are, “communication of information, comprehension of information, and voluntary participation” (2004, 4). Consent, as the AAA emphasizes, is an interactive process, where I should remain as transparent as possible about the objectives and procedure of the research project, the potential risks and benefits associated with the study, and how the data provided by informants will be both secured and reserved (2004, 4). Furthermore, I will ensure participants that any of the information they share with me will remain confidential. Should the data from this study ever be published, their name and identity will be kept confidential. If at any point participants seek to obtain the results of the study, they are guaranteed access to the information.

### Manner of Obtaining Participants

Any recipient of service, NGO staff member and volunteer, and Puerto Rican government official will be eligible to participate in this study. Each participant will receive a \$20 gift card after the completion of the interview.  
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In general, I intend to talk to and interview a total of 25 adults. Besides the Puerto Rican government officials, each informant I interview will be currently residing in the southeast region of the island. All of the participants will read and sign the Certificate of Informed Consent before beginning the interview process. After the participants complete the interview, or once they voluntarily withdraw from the project, they will be given both a verbal and written debriefing statement regarding the research project.

### Certificate of Informed Consent

Overview and Procedure. The purpose of this research is to bridge the existing gap between media portrayal of disaster relief and what actually occurs on the ground. My research seeks to disclose the realities of the recovery process of Puerto Rico post-Hurricane María. By giving your consent to be a part of this research, you agree to participate in a semi-structured interview, lasting between 30-45 minutes. If given permission, I will audio-record the interview in order to better engage with the conversation, look back at the interview, and get a fresh look at the interview data.

Risks and Benefits. There are no direct benefits or risks to you as a participant.

Confidentiality. Your privacy will be protected. At no time will identifying information be attached to your responses. Any of the information obtained during the course of your participation will remain confidential and will be used solely for research purposes. Should the data from this study ever be published, your name and identity will be kept confidential. You will only be identified by the pseudonym that you choose prior to the interview. Within <https://assignbuster.com/recovery-process-for-puerto-rico-post-hurricane-mara/>



these restrictions, the results of this project will be made available to you upon your request.

Compensation. You will receive a \$20 gift card for participating.

Your Rights. As with any research project, your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, or decline to answer any questions with no penalty. Whether or not you withdraw, you will still receive the \$20 gift card.

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Participant Name (please print)  
(please print)

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Participant Signature

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Date

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Researcher Name

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Researcher Signature

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Date