

# Connectingmess



## Design Statement

This visualization is a literal representation of Puerto Rico's chaotic electricity delivery after Hurricane María. It also works metaphorically, conveying the dangerous tangle of things that continues to undermine life on the island. Seen metaphorically, this image suggests how histories of colonialism and racism, law, and under investment in infrastructure both produced and perpetuate the disaster of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

## Project Statement

On September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria struck the island of Puerto Rico. The consequences were disastrous: no water, no electricity and no communication within the island or with the outside world. Although almost two years later, precarious conditions continue. The hurricane triggered a massive relief response from governments, NGOs and individuals. In many ways, however, the disaster response was a second disaster -- exposing the continuing effects of colonial relations with the United States, Wall Street interests, and a historically top-down mode of island governance. This photo essay explores this second disaster, highlighting how disaster response can itself become toxic, both literally and figuratively.

## Caption

Hurricane María left the island of Puerto Rico in total blackout. Almost two years later, there are still places that have no electricity. Electricity is vital for the island; no electricity means no food in the fridge, exposure to vector-borne diseases, no school, and the failure of medical equipment. For some, no electricity means the difference between life and death. The failed state forced residents in many areas to engage in high-risk actions trying to connect the power lines back to their houses without government consent. When crews to reestablish the power grid did show up, some did such an absurd job that it forced the local authority to go back and fix it again -- to make it safe as well as functional. This tangle of events -- reflective of the overall disaster response -- situated residents in dangerous paradoxes: actions they undertook to protect themselves (rigging their own electricity connections, for example) themselves could lead to injury or death (especially when the systems they tried to rig were doubly damaged -- by the storm and by inept government follow-up).

Perez-Figueroa, Omar. 2019. "Connectingmess."

In "Trapped in the Toxic lens of Hurricane María." In Visualizing Toxic Subjects, curated by James Adams and Kim Fortun. The Center for Ethnography. May.

<https://tinyurl.com/y4d9kpd1>



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Trapped in the  
Toxic lens of  
Hurricane María

Gabriel Matos Quiñones Reina  
"Super brigada en el parking del  
Aeropuerto (2018). Copyright  
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