

Antonio Carmona Báez ~ After Hurricane Maria We Need To Reconstitute

This summer, the Netherlands and the world came to know Puerto Rico through the all-time most popular music video *Despacito*, which received over 3 billion hits on Youtube. But Puerto Rico has never been mentioned in Dutch news as much as it had throughout the last three weeks. First with Hurricane Irma which -besides depopulating smaller islands, nearly destroyed the Dutch and French territory of neighbouring St. Maarten, bringing 600 refugees to Puerto Rican hospitals and shelters. Another thousand refugees arrived from the Virgin Islands. However, this was only a precursor to a deadlier category 4/5 storm system ravaging the smallest island of the Greater Antilles.

Hurricane María pounded the US territory of Puerto Rico, leaving over 3 million people without electricity and clean running water. The hurricanes came and left, but the height of misery is yet to be experienced. Electricity workers claim that 80 percent of the island's electric cables are insalvable, and hospitals are now totally dependent on diesel generators. While thirteen people have been declared dead to date, the death toll is surely to rise, as 70% of the island is incommunicado.

In a sense, the tropical weather systems have brought us, Puerto Ricans in the Caribbean and in the diaspora, closer to realise what we have in common with other islands: our delicate modernity and dependent vulnerability. Through Irma, we have become more aware of our neighbouring St. Maarten. The similarities of our territorial status in relation to the metropolises have also become more apparent. St. Maarten's territorial status within the Kingdom is very similar to Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States; both territories, just like Curaçao, have a Fiscal Control Board (*College Financiële Toezicht*) running local public expenditures from The Hague and from New York. In Puerto Rico and St. Maarten, it is now the military at the airports, running rescue and reconstruction. But the most striking similarities are those found in how our people back home are presented in the media: helpless, thirsty and prone to "looting", ever moreso dependent on the greatness of those governments under which he have been subordinate for a long time.

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