UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

THE HYBRID FIGHT OF #RICKYRENUNCIA: HOW PUERTO RICANS OCCUPIED THE NETWORKED PUBLIC SPHERE DURING THE "COMBATIVE SUMMER"

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO STUDIES
with an emphasis in LITERATURE

by

Juan C. Dávila Santiago

December 2025

The Dissertation of Juan C. Dávila Santiago is approved:

_____
Professor Jessica Taft, chair

_____
Professor Fernando Leiva

_____
Professor Zac Zimmer

_____
Peter Biehl
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Copyright © by

Juan C. Dávila Santiago

2025

Table of Contents

Introduction *1*

Framework **6**

The Combative Summer in Context **13**

Colonialism and Puerto Rico's Political Parties **17**

Methodology **22**

Chapter Outline **28**

The First Leaks and the Material Conditions of #RickyRenuncia **36**

Organizing Groundwork and the Anti-Austerity Movement **60**

The Snowball **66**

Cultural production to develop #RickyRenuncia common sense *82*

Memes **85**

Illustrators **98**

Reggaeton **118**

The dance: 121

Perreos Combativos: 125

The rhythms: 129

Lyrics: 130

Chapter #3 ..... *133*

#RickyRenuncia Media: How traditional media, digital newspapers, and activists broadcasted the protests *133*

Puerto Rico's national media **138**

Citizen Journalists **155**

Outside of Puerto Rico's traditional media **165**

Chapter #4 ..... *171*

New Electoral Politics After #RickyRenuncia *171*

2020 Election **175**

#LaAlianzaVa **179**

The reappearance of Bad Bunny: Muerte al PNP and the War of the Billboards **193**

The End of the #RickyRenuncia Movement 200

Bibliography*.....*206

FIGURE 1, TWITTER PROFILE OF @SAURONPR (SCREENSHOT)..... 47

FIGURE 2, SIMPSONS MEME: MOE AND BARNEY (SCREENSHOT) 92

FIGURE 3, EMPLOYMENT MEME (SCREENSHOT)..... 93

FIGURE 4, DIET MEME (SCREENSHOT) 93

FIGURE 5, VIDEO MEME: JORDAN PEELE (SCREENSHOT) 95

FIGURE 6, RICKY ROSSELLÓ HOROSCOPE BY @CHECKINMELA (SCREENSHOT) 105

FIGURE 7, JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ CARTOON BY @PLANETAKIKE1 (SCREENSHOT) 111

FIGURE 8, GENERAL STRIKE POSTER BY @TALLERGRAFICO (SCREENSHOT) 116

FIGURE 9, LA RENUNCIA BALL PROMO (SCREENSHOT) 128

FIGURE 10, WAPA LIVE COVERAGE 148

FIGURE 11, WAPA LIVE COVERAGE 148

FIGURE 12, WAPA VANDALIZED SUV..... 150

FIGURE 13, MAN WITH BLACK AND WHIT FLAG BY @LARRYEMIL 188

Abstract

The Hybrid Fight of #RickyRenuncia:
How Puerto Ricans occupied the networked public sphere during the "Combative Summer"

by Juan C. Dávila Santiago

During the Summer of 2019, thousands of people in Puerto Rico protested in the streets to demand the resignation of the governor, Ricardo Rosselló. Rosselló was caught up in a public scandal, after the leak of a chatroom conversation on the Telegram App with his executive team. This dissertation studies how activists, and organizers intervened both the physical space, and the virtual space to force the governor to resign. In this research, I analyze the uses of social media (specially Twitter, and Instagram) by activists to amplify the protests in the streets. I performed a participant hybrid observation, where I place myself both in the streets, and scrolling through social media to document the activities from activists, organizers, and artists. During the observations I coded and decoded: protests in the streets, memes, illustrations, the role of reggaeton music, practices of citizen journalism, among other tactics that were used. I analyze how this two-week event shaped the Puerto Rican common sense, and identify the limitations of social media for social movements. I also make the claim that grassroots organizing is at the root of a successful social movement, and social media cannot replace the power of face-to-face interaction and work on the streets.

Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge the teachings from my mentors and professors to complete this dissertation, starting with my committee: Jessica Taft, Fernando Leiva, Zac Zimmer, and Patricia Pinho. I also want to acknowledge my honorary committee member, friend, and working partner: Sylvanna Falcón. As well as other important professors during my PhD studies: Juan Poblete, Catherine Ramirez, Marcia Ochoa, Cecilia Arredondo, Rebecca Covarrubias, Norma Klhan, and Amanda Smith. I wish to also acknowledge the importance of the graduate advisors: Lorato Anderson, Maya Woolfe, and Eric Sneathen.

Very important, I would not had been able to get through this PhD without the support of my dear friends in Santa Cruz: Emilia, Rafael, Lorena, Valentín, Karla C., Karina, Sheeva, Rana, Liza, Ismael, Carolina, Edher, Ibette, Faya, and others who were in very specific and important moments: Luciana, Jackie, Delio, Ramona, Patria, Karla R., Yaira. It is important to also recognize those whose support endured from the distance: Lemaris, Pedro, Emil, and my family (mom, dad, Lizbeth). And I must also recognize all the Santa Cruz wildlife that served as spiritual, and emotional support in very difficult moments. I want to thank the deers, sea lions, owls, foxes, seagulls, sea otters, pelicans. What would be life without the other species we cohabit spaces with? This includes Oliva who came into my life at the end of this journey, and loved hanging next to my keyboard. My Trek bicycle was also an important companionship through this journey. I also want to thank all the strangers that smiled in the bus, the coffee shop, the library, Colectivo Marcha, and my T.A. Union (UAW

2865). I need to distinguish the Puerto Rican scholars who kept asking, “When are you going to finish?” Yarimar Bonilla, Arturo Massol, and Arlene Dávila.

And finally, I want to specially thank Camila for walking with me to close this cycle. Thanks for making the best version of me.

Dedication

I wish to dedicate this dissertation, effort, and PhD to the people of Palestine. May Israel withdraws from your territory, as Ricardo Rosselló resigned from his governor’s seat.

Free Palestine! Free Sudan! Hands-Off Venezuela!

Introduction

In 2006, I opened an account on MySpace, my first social media account. Since then, I have seen the transformation of social media. What started as a virtual space to share music tastes, and photos with friends, within almost 20 years has transformed into one of the most powerful communication tools in the world.[1] People use social media for a wide-range of purposes, but in this dissertation I am going to focus on how the Puerto Rican people used it as a tool in the protests of Summer 2019, where thousands took to the streets to demand the resignation of governor Ricardo Rosselló. Nevertheless, I do not intend to romanticize social media in this work; social media is a tool of the powerful, and the ruling class. Most recently, we have seen how tech giants have been meeting with president Donald Trump,[2] and how social media has become a tool for the return of extreme right-wing ideologies in the public discourse.[3] The social media platforms that exist today are corporate entities, which are part of Wall Street, and social media tycoons, such as Elon Musk, and Mark Zukerberg are among the richest people in the world. However, in its early development phase, this new media sustained primarily by new mobile technologies, have shown to be a space for dissent. This is changing and will likely continue to

---

[1] Davis, Richard, and David Taras, eds. *Power Shift? Political Leadership and Social Media.* New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020.
[2] Barrett, Brian. "All the President's Tech CEOs." *Wired*. *www.wired.com*, https://www.wired.com/story/tech-ceos-donald-trump-white-house/. Accessed 2 Oct. 2025.
[3] Shaughnessy, Brittany, Eliana DuBosar, Myiah J Hutchens, and Ilyssa Mann. "An Attack on Free Speech? Examining Content Moderation, (de-), and (Re-) Platforming on American Right-Wing Alternative Social Media." *New Media & Society* 27, no. 6 (2025): 3618–36.

change as corporate social media becomes a tool of control, and for the establishment of hegemony. But meanwhile, activists in many parts of the world have turn to social media to bypass the censorship from their own governments, and taken advantage of a system that depends on user-generated content to uplift their voices in moments where they have also been ignored by traditional mainstream media.

Social media has provided an opportunity for those seeking regime and social change.[4] One of the movements most known to have benefited from social media is the Arab Spring, where activists used Twitter (now X) to bypass government censorship, and organize uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, among others.[5] This is not new, as the Zapatistas also made use of Internet, years before social media existed.[6] The difference now is that social media is more mainstream than the World Wide Web (www), and is more accessible than other traditional forms of mass communications (radio, TV, film) for activists to intervene it.[7] The reason for this is that on social media, users (who become producers of content) can publish almost any content without needing to have the greenlight from a publishing editor or a supervisor of content (as it is on traditional media), and they do not need to pass a filter of quality control standards. Although there are some filters within social media's terms and conditions, a content can be easily posted without oversight.

---

[4] Tufekci, Zeynep. *Twitter and Tear Gas : The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest.* 1st ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.
[5] Tufekci, Zeynep. *Twitter and Tear Gas : The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest.* 1st ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300228175.
[6] Cleaver, Harry M. "The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric." *Journal of International Affairs* (New York) 51, no. 2 (1998): 621–40.
[7] Mina, An Xiao. *Memes to Movements : How the World's Most Viral Media Is Changing Social Protest and Power.* Boston: Beacon Press, 2019.

Although, if a post is reported or deemed inappropriate by the platforms own software it might be taken down. Also algorithms may influence the reach of a post. Additionally, distinctively from creating a website on the internet, and publishing content on it, social media is more accessible to the users, as the navigation of the platforms are easier to manage, requiring almost no special technical skills. However, the capacity of posting without an editorial approval is continuously changing, as algorithms develop, and social media platforms develop forms to censor dissident, and silence voices who are against the interests of the social media owners. For example, this has happened recently with Pro-Palestine posts in Instagram, Facebook, and X, which have been censored, deleted or hidden from the users.

In 1988 Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, published the book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media.*[8] This book explains how the mainstream media is a tool of those in power to establish consent among the population for their capitalist agendas, as they profit from Wars, Interventions, and Coup D' Etat's. Herman and Chomsky argue that those in power employ a propaganda model to manufacture the consent of the population through mass media. The book was written in 1988, but the propaganda model described by the authors in this book continues to be relevant to this day. As a Latin American and media scholar, I intend to understand how consent is manufactured on the Internet, and how this is shaping our Latin American societies. Studying the Internet may help

[8] Herman, Edward S, and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent : The Political Economy of the Mass Media.* New York: Pantheon Books, 2002.

us develop new frameworks to analyze new forms of colonialism and neocolonialism that rely on social media to build hegemony through disinformation, algorithms, and manipulation. Therefore, I approach social media as a newer player in the mass communication media, alongside corporate radio, TV, music, and cinema, which the ruling class uses to manufacture consent. Historically, activists have been able to find ways to intervene the corporate media structures to shape the public discourse.[9] Therefore, as mainstream platforms have the capacity of manufacturing consent, they are also a space that activists can use to produce another type of consent, which is not consent to be controlled, but consent to be liberated, such as thousands of protestors did during the Arab Spring. According to Jesús Martín Barbero, consent from the masses to be oppressed has been part of the transformation of capitalism, where the bourgeoise has moved from employing obedience to consensus. Martín Barbero argues that consensus "contains a plurality of movements in which the ones with the most reach would be the ones that dissolve the traditional systems of social differences, the constitutions of the masses in classes, and the development of a new mass culture."[10] Through this process it becomes possible for the masses, and the proletariat to get access the public sphere. When we situate this into the context of social media platforms, social media constitutes a transformation of the capitalist system, as data becomes one of the most desirable commodities of this day in Age. At

[9] Sobieraj, Sarah. *Soundbitten : The Perils of Media-Centered Political Activism*. New York: New York University Press, 2011.
[10] Martín B., Jesús. De los medios a las mediaciones : comunicación, cultura y hegemonía. 6. ed.; 1. ed. en (Anthropos Editorial. Rubí, Barcelona: Anthropos, Editorial, 2010), 133.

the same time, social media is constantly evolving to become a tool of the bourgeoise to produce hegemony through the participation, and interaction with users. In Martín Barbero's terms, social media may function as a place of mediation. Nevertheless, this access also becomes an opportunity for activists, and those who seek to intervene the public sphere today.

On July 2019, an event unfolded in Puerto Rico which reminded me of the Arab Spring. After a scandalous chatroom conversation on the Telegram App (containing hundreds of offensive text messages between the governor of Puerto Rico and his executive team) was leaked to the Puerto Rican public, a two-week protest began in front of the Governor's Mansion to demand his resignation. The calls for these protests started on social media, and the movement later known as #RickyRenuncia quickly took off. Thousands of people took to the streets of Puerto Rico, while also self-broadcasting the protests and producing cultural content.

This also came to be known as the "Combative Summer," and although I cannot trace the exact origin of the term "Combative Summer," it indicates that it was influenced by the Arab Spring. Both movements used climate seasons to describe their movements: Spring and Summer. In the case of Puerto Rico, the word "Combative" is a term frequently used by leftists to describe the spirit of challenging the State in the streets. As a Puerto Rican, I think of the word "combative," and an image of protestors fighting police in the streets comes to mind. Therefore, the term "Combative Summer" acknowledges the struggle of Puerto Ricans, and positions that

struggle within a larger international context by referencing the Arab Spring. [11] Although it is not clear the awareness of other movements by participants of #RickyRenuncia, the use of a seasonal adjective suggests the influence from Left-wing organizations in the movement's narrative. What happened in Puerto Rico in July 2019 serves to expand the existing literature of the use of social media by activists, as well as the limits of social media for achieving political change. I aim to expand the field by understanding how Puerto Ricans repurposed social media tools for dreams of emancipation, but also argue that the reclamation of social media tools itself is not enough to seek political change -- there has to be material conditions and grassroots work in place. The events that transpired allowed me to identify a series of practices that protestors implemented across social media, and how these combined with grassroots activist work to achieve to the governor's resignation.

Framework

This dissertation is divided into four chapters where I study Puerto Rico's Combative Summer through the lenses of media studies, cultural studies, and internet studies. I analyze how activists in the protests of the Combative Summer used social media as a form of alternative communication, which had three main contributions to the movement to demand the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló: outreach supporters, agitate protestors, and broadcast from the frontlines what was happening in the streets

[11] Another examples may be the Autum Uprising (Italy), and Hot Autum (South Korea).

during the two-week protest event. In order to build my analysis, I approach social media as a critical part of the Puerto Rican public sphere in 2019. The public sphere, is simply put the place where society meets to discuss politics. As social animals, human beings participate in spaces where they can have conversations and exchange ideas. The public sphere is dynamic, but has generally taken form in the squares, coffee shops, "By the public sphere we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body"[12] describes Jürgen Habermas, the theorist who coined this concept. Nevertheless, there are certain important critiques of this concept. In the article, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," Nancy Fraser argues that the public sphere as described by Habermas is placed withing a bourgeois or liberal model. Habermas describes the public sphere as a space that operates outside of the state where democracy exists, and everyone is welcomed to discuss matters of public concern and/or common interest, Fraser critiques, "Habermas […] never explicitly problematizes some dubious assumptions that underline the bourgeois model,"[13] additionally Fraser states that Habermas fails to examine other non-liberal, and non-bourgeois model of public spheres, signaling to a plurality of public spheres, "counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating

[12] Habermas, Jürgen, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)." *New German Critique* 1, no. 3 (1974): 49.
[13] Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere." Social Text 8, no. 3 (1990): 58.

alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech."[14] I concur with the critique Fraser makes about Habermas definition of the public sphere; therefore, I use Habermas's concept of the public sphere to understand how hegemony is developed.

I approach to the public sphere as a site of dialogue and deliberation, I take up a Gramscian perspective, understanding that the ruling class will seek to control the public sphere. For Gramsci, the ruling class cannot rely on material or military force alone, but must also produce an ideology among the people it seeks to govern: "the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies."[15] Furthermore, Gramsci observes that in order to produce hegemony, the ruling classes need to develop a shared ideology among the subalterns, in which they have a common understanding of what is right, wrong or logical -- in other words the common sense. But common sense does not have a fixed meaning. Common sense develops out of a persistent tension between the message which hegemonic forces intend to put forward and the lived experiences of people.

Gramsci proposes that we must question what we understand to be common sense. He claims that common sense is an ambiguous and contradictory multimodal concept that homogenizes basic understandings of values and meanings. In his notes, he rejects the notion of a common sense that applies to all human kind, but rather, common senses vary by regions and social groups, plus it is also influenced by

[14] Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere." Social Text 8, no. 3 (1990): 61.
[15] Gramsci, Antonio. *Antonio Gramsci Reader, The.* Edited by David Forgacs. (London, England: Lawrence and Wishart, 2014), 200.

culture, language, religion and historical experiences. Furthermore, even within social groups, each individual person has their own perception of common sense. Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist who adopts Gramsci's work to analyze representation and race, argues that common sense is important because it is the terrain where the consciousness of the masses is formed.[16] In this sense, ruling classes will attempt to influence common sense to establish their hegemony. According to Gramsci, power cannot be exercised just by brutal force, but it must gain consent from the subordinates. Hall explains this in his work: "power also seduces, solicits, induces, wins consent. It cannot be thought of in terms of one group having monopoly of power, simply radiating power downwards on a subordinate group by an exercise of simple domination from above."[17] Although influencing the common sense to establish hegemony is possible, but can never be complete control or absolute, even for the ruling classes that manage the mechanisms that produce hegemony. Hegemony is an ongoing transformative process, which is sometimes strong and other times weak.

According to Gramsci, cultural institutions are material forces used by hegemonic powers to form the common sense. For this reason, the ruling classes will always prioritize control over cultural institutions. Gramsci observes that churches and universities are the principal ones in the formation of common sense: "The

[16] Hall, Stuart and The Open University, editors. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Repr, SAGE, 2012. Culture, Media and Identities.

[17] Hall, Stuart and The Open University, editors. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. (Repr, SAGE, 2012. Culture, Media and Identities), 261.

education system, at all levels and the church, are the two biggest cultural organizations in every country."[18] Constructing common sense requires an "extensive cultural and ideological organization"[19] of society, which is carried out by cultural institutions. However, let me clarify that there are two aspects we need to take in consideration so as to not misinterpret this idea. First, common sense is not produced in an authoritarian manner, but rather is a response to the narratives put forth by the hegemonic institutions. Institutions produce consent, either organically, intentionally or unintentionally. This is why hegemony is never achieved fully; one thing is the message intended and another thing is how people respond to the message.

Hoewever, I approach the public sphere as a space where hegemony is produced. Therefore when I refer to the public sphere, I am refering to what I understand to be an "hegemonic public sphere," I do agree with Fraser that there are also counter public spheres, but that is not the focus of my dissertation, the focus of my disertation is how activists intervene the public sphere to challenge hegemony. To better understand this, its useful to look at the concept of Politics and Policing from Jacques Rancière. According to Rancière the plebs are not guaranteed a space of discussion in society, and this is regulated by what he denominates as the Police. Therefore politics happen when there is a reconfiguration of the system through conflict, Rancière states, "Politics does not exist because men, through the privilege

[18] Hall, Stuart and The Open University, editors. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. (Repr, SAGE, 2012. Culture, Media and Identities), 342.
[19] Hall, Stuart and The Open University, editors. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Repr, SAGE, 2012. Culture, Media and Identities.

of speech, place their interest in common. Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account."[20] Therefore, if we understand the public sphere as a space dominated by the bourgeise, when dissident voices are able to intervene it, they are able to reconfigure the social relations within the public sphere, and as a result engage in a political activity that challenges hegemonic power. This intervention happens working through the common sense. It will require dissident voices to use the conceptual maps of society to expose new conversations, and ideas.

Media has always been part of the public sphere, and now the public sphere also extends to social media. In the article, "The Digital Commons and the Digital Public Sphere: How to Advance Digital Democracy Today," Christian Fuchs talks about the existance of a digital public sphere, which is not separated from society, but an aspect of the public sphere, "The digital public sphere means the publishing of information, critical publicity, and critical public debate mediated by digital information and communication technologies."[21] Fuchs describes that the digital public sphere is essence a "pseudo-digital public sphere" which responds a capitalist system. In this sense, I argue, that it can still be considered part of the hegemonic public sphre. In this digital public sphere exists social media, which has transformed the form that many humans interact, and where political opinions are formed.

---

[20] Rancière, Jacques. Disagreement : Politics and Philosophy. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 30.
[21] Fuchs, Christian. "The Digital Commons and the Digital Public Sphere: How to Advance Digital Democracy Today." Westminster Papers in Communication & Culture 16, no. 1 (2021): 13

Although social media is a space that in large part is mediated by corporate interests, their user-generated model has given the opportunity to many activists to access the public sphere in an unprecedented form in comparisson to traditional media outlets. There are various forms in which activists can intervene the public sphere that I will explain over the chapters of this dissertation by analyzing the Summer 2019. "social media forms an online alternative to the traditional offline public sphere which is more open for participants and is not so much bound by time and place."[22] As social media continues evolving the ruling class is making adjustments in order to use this platform for their benefit, and establish their hegemony in the 21st Century. Politicians are an example of how important social media is for power. Through social media, politicians do not only seek to win elections by using it as a tool for campaigning, but they are also attempting to produce consent in favor their politics. However, the narratives politicians put forward in social media are often confronted by critics and dissidents. Recent censorship of Pro-Palestinian posts, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio's announcement that the U.S. State Department will deny visas to anyone who celebrated the death of Charle Kirk (a right-wing influencer murdered in September 2025) show how important it is for the ruling class to control what is being posted on social media. An analysis of social media is critical to understand how hegemony is constructed in the Internet Age. One way of studying the relationship between social media and hegemony is by studying those who opppose hegemonic

[22] Salikov, Alexey. "Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Rethinking the Public Sphere in the Age of Social Media." *Sotsiologicheskoe Obozrenie / Russian Sociological Review 17*, no. 4 (2018): 89

forces, and how they use of social media to oppose that force. In this dissertation I argue that as social media has become part of the public sphere, it is a space that activists have been able to intervene to shape common sense and expand a social movement. There are various forms in which activists can intervene the public sphere that I will explain over the chapters of this dissertation by analyzing the Summer 2019.

The Combative Summer in Context

The Summer 2019 or Combative Summer took place in a moment of crisis in Puerto Rico. The archipelago was 13 years into an economic crisis and it was still recovering from the impacts of hurricane María (2017). 2019 was a year where Puerto Ricans were struggling both financially and still dealing with the trauma left by a category 4 hurricane. After the hurricane, hundreds of Puerto Ricans lost their homes and thousands had their homes damaged. Thousands also lost loved ones, and further lives were lost to elevated incidents of suicide in the aftermath of the storm. "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."[23] The trauma felt by Puerto Ricans

[23] Bonilla, Yarimar, and Marisol LeBrón, eds. *Aftershocks of Disaster : Puerto Rico before and after the Storm.* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books), 4.

was also exacerbated by years of austerity and privatization agendas that left the country vulnerable in the face of climate change.

Three years before (in 2016), Barack Obama signed into law the Puerto Rican Oversight Management and Economic Stability Act, known as PROMESA. PROMESA was a bill drafted by the U.S. Congress to address Puerto Rico's financial crisis, which is a result of overborrowing by the Puerto Rican government who elevated the public debt to 74 billion.[24] The government lost its capacity to make payments to the debt due to the archipelago's lack of a sustainable economic model, and decades of mismanagement and internal corruption. As a result, Puerto Rico filed for bankruptcy and lost its capacity to keep borrowing money and issuing municipal bonds. This not only affected the building of new infrastructure and the development of the country, but also its capacity to provide maintenance to the public infrastructure of the country. PROMESA sought to re-structure Puerto Rico's debt and find a way for Puerto Rico to access the bond market again.

But PROMESA is far from a solution to Puerto Rico's economic crisis. It is fundamentally an apparatus of colonialism. First of all, PROMESA establishes a seven-member board to control the spending of Puerto Rico's government in order to make sure that the country can continue to pay its debt to Wall Street bondholders. This board enormously reduces the sovereignty of the Puerto Rican government by limiting their operation budgets and controlling the spending. As we say in Puerto

[24] Cabán, Pedro. "PROMESA, Puerto Rico and the American Empire." *Latino Studies* 16, no. 2 (2018): 161–84.

Rico, “la soga parte por lo más finito,” the rope breaks from its most narrow point, and in order to restructure Puerto Rico’s debt, the board (known as the Fiscal Control Board) fueled an austerity agenda that was already in the works, which cut funds to public education, reduced pension obligations, and other essential public services, while also selling off and privatizing public services. All these austerity measures are in service of paying the debt.

These cuts to public services had an effect in all government agencies, from employment to wages, to resources. This means that the government agencies have less employees to work. The employees who remain have their wage increases stagnated, and the resources to operate are scarce. In addition, these cuts also reduce pensions for retirees. It was within this context that hurricane María made landfall in Puerto Rico. Government employees were being robbed of their wages and pensions, the government agencies were performing with a limited labor force, and there was a scarcity of material resources and equipment to do the work. When hurricane María made landfall, the agencies that provide essential services were unable to provide the services needed by the population during a disaster. The worst part is that it was also a category 4 hurricane.

One example of a failed agency is the Puerto Rican Energy and Power Authority (PREPA). PREPA, which was a public company, had been underfunded through the years. Therefore, workers lost the capacity to provide maintenance to the electrical grid. A former PREPA worker, Robert García Cooper, stated at an interview with Professor Yarimar Bonilla, “In the beginning of 2000-2005 you could see a slow

– and then by 2010, 2015 a very rapid decline of our ability to sustain the electric power grid. And the workers were continuously raising the flag trying to tell the population what was going on."[25] When hurricane María made landfall in 2017, the electrical grid in Puerto Rico was already in a precarious condition due to the lack of resources to provide maintenance and repair. This caused the electrical grid to completely collapse, and Puerto Ricans went months without electricity, some even more than a year. And although the power was restored, it continues to operate with continuous interruptions.

The governor of Puerto Rico, Ricardo Rossello, received a lot of criticism for this, and when the chat was leaked in 2019, people were already carrying the collective anger of the collapse of the electrical grid. This was not just an anger for not having power, but the collapse of the electrical system, alongside the healthcare system, triggered the deaths of thousands of Puerto Ricans. An investigation published in the New England Journal of Medicine, shows that a significant proportion of the deaths related to hurricane María, were a direct and indirect consequences of not having electricity, "we found a strong positive association between remoteness and the length of time without electricity, water, or cellular telephone coverage […]inability to access medications (14.4% of households) and the

[25] Robert García Cooper, "Privatized Resilience," interview by Yarimar Bonilla, *Puerto Rican Voices*, Center for Puerto Rican Sudies, November 23, 2022, video, 07:58, https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/media/privatized-resilience/

need for respiratory equipment requiring electricity (9.5%), but many households also reported problems with closed medical facilities (8.6%) or absent doctors (6.1%)."[26]

In summary, during Summer of 2019, Puerto Rico was still recovering from hurricane María. However, the slow recovery that residents of Puerto Rico experienced cannot be only be attributed to the strength of a category 4 hurricane, but also to the poor conditions of the public infraestructure, which had been underfunded, and mismanaged by previous administraions. Austerity policies make people even more vulnerable when it comes to climate change. Therefore, in 2019, residents of Puerto Rico were in the middle of a crisis which had both economic and climate elements. As I'll argue in Chapter #1, this created the material conditions that propelled the activism of Summer 2019.

Colonialism and Puerto Rico's Political Parties

These material conditions and crises have authors. The first author of any Puerto Rican crisis is colonialism, an ongoing condition that provides the structure for all the other ones to exist. Puerto Rico has never been an independent country, although culturally, Puerto Ricans perceive themselves a country. Throughout this dissertation, I refer to Puerto Rico a country, rather than territory or commonwealth,

[26] Kishore, Nishant, et al. "Mortality in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria." *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 379, no. 2, Jul. 2018, pp. 162–70.

as a method of asserting Puerto Rico's cultural independence, especially since I am situating this dissertation within the field of cultural studies.

The only moment we can consider the island was "independent" back when it was called Boriken, and Taíno people inhabited the island. Once it was colonized by the Spaniards, they changed the name of the island to Puerto Rico, which eventually became an archipelago with the addition of Vieques and Culebra. After the Hispano-American War, the United States took possession of the country in 1898 through the Treaty of Paris. Since then, Puerto Rico became a crown jewel of U.S. expansionism, as the archipelago's location was geopolitically important for military purposes. Through the first half of the 20th Century, the U.S. began transforming Puerto Rico's economy from a sugar cane economy to a military economy.[27] In the book, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective*, Ramón Grosfoguel states, "I propose that the United States has made political and economic concessions to popular sectors in Puerto Rico (which have rarely been made to any other colonial or postcolonial peoples) because of the island's military and symbolic value,"[28] Grosfoguel adds, "U.S. interest in seizing Cuba and Puerto Rico from Spain resulted mainly from state security interests."[29]

[27] Meléndez Badillo, Jorell A. Puerto Rico, historia de una nación. Translated by Aurora Lauzardo. Primera edición. (Ciudad de México: Planeta, 2024)
[28] Grosfoguel, Ramón. *Colonial Subjects : Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective.* 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 45.
[29] Grosfoguel, Ramón. *Colonial Subjects : Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective.* 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 50.

At the beginning of the U.S. Occupation, Puerto Rico had a pro-independence movement, which had already begun under the Spanish regime. Many Puerto Rican independence leaders were exiled, and in the diaspora they established solidarity bonds with Cubans also fighting for independence. Independence could represent a limitation to U.S. interests on Puerto Rico, and that is why the U.S. government has historically preferred a colonial territorial status. In order to control dissent, and neutralize Pro-Independence efforts, the U.S. government directed funds into the development of Puerto Rico, seeking the sympathy of the poor and working classes. "The U.S. strategy in Puerto Rico relied on populist-democratic alliance with the working classes and the progressive, liberal faction of the middle classes at the expense of the coffee landowners. The extension of democratic rights to the colony precluded the working classes' sympathizing with a nationalist solution to the colonial question."[30] Regardless of the U.S. efforts to buy the Puerto Rican conscience and to establish their hegemony on the archipelago, the Nationalist Party continued to be a strong voice against imperialism through the figure of Pedro Albizu Campos, who also organized the exploited workers of the Sugar Cane industry. The Nationalist Party was an obstacle for U.S. hegemony, and for this reason many of their leaders (including Albizu Campos) were imprisoned, tortured, and murdered by the U.S. government. Fighting nationalism in Puerto Rico was also a Cultural War, during the

[30] Grosfoguel, Ramón. *Colonial Subjects : Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective.* 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 55.

first-half of the 20th Century that the U.S. passed a Gag-Law to prohibit the display of patriotic symbols, making the Puerto Rican flag and anthem illegal.

The 1952 creation of the Free Sovereign State represented a before and after in Puerto Rico's political history. This annulled the Puerto Rican Gag-Law and co-opted the Puerto Rican identity with a U.S. complacent discourse. The philosophy of the Free Sovereign State is that Puerto Rico could still be its own country, while maintaining a close relationship with the U.S. that would be mutually beneficial. The governor elected by the people was Luis Muñoz Marín, who negotiated the Free Sovereign State with the U.S. government. His party, the Popular Democratic Party are the main advocates in favor of the Free Sovereign State in Puerto Rico. The Nationalist Party did not participate in the elections as it understood the process was rigged to elect Luis Muñoz Marín. The Puerto Rican Independence Party, and Puerto Rican Socialist Party became the main Pro-Independence voices in the electoral arena but they lost to Muñoz Marín.

The Pro-Independence movement continued moving into other factions, such as the armed struggle, and the Puerto Rican Independence Party positioned itself as the sole representative of independence in the electoral arena, which was weakened by each election. Meanwhile a Pro-Statehood movement (which believes that Puerto Rico should become a State of the U.S.) grew and became the main force against the Free Sovereign State, also known as ELA. Muñoz Marín and the Popular Democratic Party held the power for 16 years, until Luis A. Ferré from the New Progressive Party (PNP) won the election in 1968. Since then, the administration of the country has

alternated between the Pro-Commonwealth (Free Sovereign State) and the Pro-Statehood parties.

The rise of the Pro-Statehood party in Puerto Rico comes alongside the rise of neoliberalism in Latin America. Although they had a populist discourse, arguing that becoming a State will guarantee more social benefits to Puerto Ricans, the party catered to U.S. corporations. The PNP favored privatization, in opposition to land reforms, and was against the development of the strong public corporations that Muñoz developed under his administration with the assistance of federal funds in exchange for the islands of Vieques, and Culebra, and other areas of military value. Nevertheless, the neoliberal model was eventually adopted through both parties.

From the 1970s the country began providing tax incentives for manufacturing in Puerto Rico, which mainly attracted pharmaceutical companies. Without a strong source of income, primarily relying on U.S. federal funding and the investment of private corporations through tax incentives, the country also began accruing debt as it continued developing. This debt attracted predatory Wall Street lenders who increased the debt of the country in collaboration with local elites who saw this as an opportunity to get rich. Eventually the debt reached massive proportions. According to Rocío Zambrana, debts are a form of control, "Debt functions as an apparatus of capture, predation, extraction in neoliberal financialized capitalism."[31] Some, like Eva Prados, an activist and lawyer who has campaigned for the auditing of the debt,

[31] Rocío Zambrana. *Colonial Debts : The Case of Puerto Rico.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 10.

argue that certain parts of the debt are illegal because it did not benefit the Puerto Rican people.[32] Now the debt has to be paid and there is a Fiscal Control Board cutting public spending to make sure that Puerto Rico can pay Wall Street banks. In other words, the debt was issued in the name of Puerto Ricans, but Puerto Ricans did not receive the benefit of issuing the debt, and now Puerto Ricans are being asked to repay the debt by stripping away their essential services. This is the situation in which Puerto Rico found itself at the moment of hurricane María, and this is the context in which Ricardo Rosselló was governing both during the hurricane and at the start of the Combative Summer.

Methodology

I performed my research through participant observation of protests, hashtag ethnography, cultural analysis of social media posts and gathering information from primary sources that were reporting or broadcasting through the two-week protesting event. As part of my academic contribution I developed a hybrid methodology, which involved observing both the virtual and physical world. The participant observation I did was through participating in many of the protests that took place during the Combative Summer. I participated in these protests sometimes as an activist and other times as an independent journalist. When I was participating as an activist, I typed the notes of what I experienced at the end of each day, sort of a diary of the protest

[32] Prados Rodríguez, Eva, and Nicole Delgado. "Gender Violence and Debt Auditing." *Critical Times* (Berkeley, Calif.) 4, no. 1 (2021): 170–73.

events. Although, I did not went to every protest, my diaries allow me to trace a very accurate account of events, which I often confirmed with photographs, social media posts, and primary sources. I focused my attention in many of the cultural manifestations that happened such as the banners carried by protestors, songs played "consignas" in Spanish, clothing, among other forms of artistic expression. Distinctively, when I was wearing the independent journalist hat, I focused on the repression by the police, and how activists constantly challenged the authorities. I would play back what I recorded, which funcioned as my form of video diaries. My participant observation was not only performed on the physical space, but also extends to social media, specially when I was not participating in the protests. Everything was moving fast during those days, so often times I was archiving my social media observations by grabbing screenshots, downloading pictures, and saving links. Many dissappeared later, and for my analysis sometimes I rely only on the content I grabbed. As part of my research, I also made use of hashtag etnography developed by Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa. In the article, "#Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States," Bonilla and Rosa explore the possibility of the social media hashtag as a field site. The hashtag, according to Bonilla and Rosa offers a coding system similar to the ones employed by anthropologists.[33] A social media hashtag can help you locate posts within a specific conversation, as well as a quick retrieval system for unfolding

[33] Bonilla, Yarimar, and Jonathan Rosa. "Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States." *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1 (2015): 4–17.

events. The case-study in their article is #Ferguson. As it is well known in 2014, Ferguson, Missouri was ground zero for a series of violent protests after police killed an unarmed young black man named Michael Brown. The "hashtag Ferguson," according to Bonilla and Rosa, helped Twitter users follow the protests developing in Ferguson faster than the press; as it also allowed the protestors in the urban space to classify their tweets within a specific space, or topic in social media. The "hashtag Ferguson" was not only marking the location of the tweet, but also incorporating the conversation in a discourse (if we are to use anthropological terms). In other words, the hashtag served a double function, it located the tweet in a geographical space, as well as including it in a specific conversation. In the case of the Black Lives Matter protests in Furgeson, the hashtag provided a platform for a conversation that was about racial injustice, killings of black bodies, black lives matter, and most importantly demanding justice for Michael Brown. We can see this in other protests movements such as #RickyRenuncia, where the hashtag itself provided a space for conversation, and locating the content of that conversation. However, hashtags provide very inconsistent messages, as the same hashtag may be used to convey different meanings. In regard to this, Bonilla and Rosa argue, "If we are to take hashtag seriously as a field site, we must thus not assume its fixed and stable boundaries".[34]

[34] Bonilla, Yarimar, and Jonathan Rosa. "Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States." *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1 (2015): 7

After the two-week protest, I began using hashtags as a form of locating content from Puerto Rico's Combative Summer. This amplified what I already observed during the two-week protest event, and allowed me to find content I have not seen before. In my coding and research, I looked at the hashtags used through two weeks of intense mobilizations including #RickyRenuncia, #RickyRenunciaYa, #RickyVeteYa, #RickyLeaks, #TelegramGate, as well as a handful of other less popular hashtags. Through the hashtags, I found a variety of content that allowed me to develop an archive of material that became the foundation for my cultural analysis. I looked at memes, videos, pictures, and text under the hashtags that I identified. I developed a table with 130 posts, which were categorized by date, author, form (video, picture, meme), and if they were for outreach, agitation or broadcast. I also registered how many likes, reposts, views or streams each had. These categories allowed me to visualize how the movement evolved and developed through the two-week protest event, and identify the different types of content that activists were publishing, and how it contributed to the development a common sense within Puerto Rico's population in favor of Ricardo Rosselló's resignation. Hashtags not only serve for digital ethnographic purposes, but also as a form to develop a chronology of events. The hashtags were essential for me to trace back the events that occurred, and pair them with the cultural content that was been produced.

I have a particular interest on hashtags because they are used to homogenize a message and work like a slogan. A hashtag like "#RickyRenuncia" homogenized the struggle, because regardless of your political orientation left, center, right, if you

agreed that Ricardo Rosselló should resign, you could rally behind the hashtag, "#RickyRenuncia". It reminds me of the slogan "Fuera la Marina de Vieques," used between 1999 and 2003, to oust the U.S. Navy from the island of Vieques, where thousands of Puerto Ricans regardless of political differences united for one specific cause. During my research I saw many posts that only carried the hashtags. It was common for people to publish a picture, meme or video with just that hashtag. This also helped similar content to find each other, which helped intervene in the common sense. I study primarly two social media platforms – Instagram and Twitter (now X)– with the purpose of tracking online the Puerto Rican movement to oust governor Ricardo Rosselló. Opposite to Facebook and other social media platforms, hashtags are a crucial aspect of the Twitter and Instagram interaction experience. Therefore, it makes sense to practice hashtag ethnography in these platforms. Twitter was very important during the Summer 2019, because information spreaded faster through the platform, specially during protests, and rapid situations. On the other hand, Instagram's role in protest movements has not been studied enough; I have observed that is the prefered social media platforms for creatives and artists, a group that was significant in shaping a common sense in Summer 2019. Although Instagram and Twitter are my main focus, I occasionally look at Facebook in certain moments because the platform is used for livestreams, which are also an important part of my analysis.

Additionally, as part of this dissertation, I observed traditional media outlets who were reporting on the two-week protest event. I consulted both local and

international media outlets, as well as other alternative and independent news sites. Looking at traditional media outlets its important, first, because local journalists were the ones who filtered the documents that triggered the #RickyRenuncia Movement. Also, traditional media outlets or journalists have an important function because these outlets have trained journalists that have a professional form of covering stories. Many times they report on details that citizen journalists posting on social media, and activists would overlook. They are also useful to gather so-called "official" data, the government's official statements. However, as I will discuss in Chapter #3, the main traditional media outlets in Puerto Rico are corporate, and respond to the Puerto Rican elite interests, which consequently reinforce colonial powers. I use traditional media outlets as a form to fill some voids in information I have from social media posts, while being cautious of their editorial perspective and how sentationalism is used to sell news. Additionally, I look at how corporate media uses social media in comparison to how they publish on their traditional platforms.

I compared my findings with what was being reported at the time in both local and international traditional media outlets. This provided me two types of analysis: first, how activists both online and in the streets were able to intervene in the news narrative, and how the mainstream media reported the events in comparison to how activists and their sympathizers broadcasted through their social media accounts. In regards to language, through my chapters I alternate between #RickyRenuncia, Summer 2019, and the Combative Summer to talk about the two-week protest event of July 2019 in Puerto Rico. I alternate between them because there is not a definitive

term to catalogue the protests. I also incorporate usernames with the "@" instead of real names every time I am referencing or quoting someone's post or interaction in social media, as a way of distinguishing between the virtual avatar and the real person.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter titled, "Conditions that Triggered #RickyRenuncia" focuses on how there were two essential elements that triggered the #RickyRenuncia movement: the material conditions of the country, and the social response of anti-austerity groups to those conditions. As I explained earlier in the introduction, Puerto Rico was facing a series of crises that made people sympathetic to social change. I will expand more on this in the first chapter, as I look at how elements from the crisis became also symbols that gave reasons to protest. Beyond this, social movements in Puerto Rico had also been doing grassroots work as part of protesting austerity policies and building community networks in the aftermath of hurricane María. In this chapter I seek to contest what some social movement scholars describe as the "spontaneous" nature of social movements. I argue that they are not "spontaneous" but that material conditions and grassroots organizing efforts are both critical for a movement to grow, even in the Age of Social Media.

In the second chapter, I look at cultural production on social media. Memes, reels, and popular artwork have cultural value that responds to a specific moment in

history and shows how people were reacting to certain events. They are primary sources as well. In order to intervene the common sense, activists must provide a counter-culture that challenges the hegemonic one. In this sense, activists, artists, and supporters of the #RickyRenuncia movement produced cultural content that created a common sense among Puerto Ricans that Ricardo Rosselló must resign immediately. In this chapter, I analyze cultural content produced by activists, and supporters, but also by established artists as well. All these combined were important to establish, develop, and strengthen the idea of #RickyRenuncia.

In the third chapter, I delve into the self-broadcasting aspect of social movements. During Summer 2019, many activists performed as Citizen Journalists to report what was going on in the protests. This served three purposes: first, to provide a different perspective from the Puerto Rican traditional corporate media; second, to report about police abuses in places where journalists were absent; and finally, it helped to continue rallying people to the street, as it also served as a form of agitation.

Finally in my fourth and concluding chapter, I look at the aftermath of the Summer 2019, and how the massive political force that was built by activists and social movements was transferred to *La Alianza*, a Center-Left electoral coalition, who took advantage of a shift in the electorate mindset after the resignation of Ricardo Rosseló, and absorbed the movement. The Coalition was not successful, because it emphasized too much of its focus on social media communications. They reproduced many of the mistakes that social movements in the Internet Age do.

Chapter #1

Conditions that triggered the #RickyRenuncia Movement

During the days of July 8 and July 12, 2019 a series of internal messages between the governor of Puerto Rico, Ricardo Rosselló, and his executive team began to be leaked across the internet. The messages allegedly originated from a chatroom inside the instant message application of Telegram, where the governor sustained daily conversations with public officials and what seem to be very close friends, which made it problematic because non-government officials were having access to privileged information. The messages were leaked through PDF extracts, and filtered on the web by a small group of local journalists from Noticel[35] and Sandra Rodríguez Cotto.[36] Quickly, the messages began to be a theme of discussion in what is defined by internet scholars as the networked public sphere. The concept of the networked public is rooted in Jürgen Habermas theorization of the public sphere: a place where people gather publicly and away from the privacy of their homes or comfort zones. According to Habermas, the public sphere emerged in Europe with urbanization and the development of cities that gave way for the establishment of coffeehouses and saloons in the 18th and 19th century. It is in the public sphere where people will meet

[35] "WhatsApp Gate 2.0: Nuevo chat expone a la Administración Rosselló." *Noticel*. July 13, 2019, https://noticel.com/ultima-hora/20190713/whatsapp-gate-2-0-nuevo-chat-expone-a-la-administracion-rossello/.
[36] Sandra Rodríguez Cotto, "En Blanco y Negro Con Sandra: Nuevas Filtraciones Del Chat deTelegram." *En Blanco y Negro Con Sandra*, July 10, 2019, http://enblancoynegromedia.blogspot.com/2019/07/nuevas-filtraciones-del-chat-detelegram.html.

to discuss current affairs. As Tufecki states, "people gathered together in public, articulating the needs of society with the state."[37] Plazas, squares, and parks are also considered to be part of the public sphere, but our perception of the public sphere should not be limited to what is understood as a "public space," since the public sphere can take many forms and shapes.

In her work, Tufekci discusses the concept of a networked public to describe today's public sphere. "The twenty-first century public sphere is digitally networked and includes mass media and public spaces, such as the squares and parks where many protests are held, as well as the new digital media."[38] Tufecki's theory does not perceive the physical and virtual spaces as opposing concepts, but rather they are inter-connected, so to speak, networked. Tufecki stresses that it is important to understand the public sphere because social movements and activists have historically intended to intervene in the public sphere to influence the public debate in favor of an idea or a cause. Today this intervention takes both an online and offline form, within a networked public sphere. Although, some theorists refute the idea that social media can be considered part of the public sphere, the #RickyRenuncia is an example that social media must be considered as such, as I will show in this and subsequent chapters. However, I must empasize that I do not perceive social media as an autonomous space or place for open dabate, as it is mediated by capitalist forces. But

[37] Zeynep Tufekci*, Twitter and Tear Gas : The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest.* 1st ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 5.
[38] Zeynep Tufekci*, Twitter and Tear Gas : The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest.* 1st ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 6.

in the case of Puerto Rico the local government has little to no control about what is posted on social media, and activists used this as an opportunity that was unique to such moment.

In this chapter, I am going to explore how Puerto Rican activists used the Telegram chatroom scandal as a window of opportunity to build power in the streets to demand the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló from the Governor's office. As I will demonstrate, social media also had an important role in this process. I will argue against the perception that these protests happened spontaneously, which is a narrative often reproduced in the media and in academic articles about the event. The way that this story has been commonly told is that Puerto Ricans felt offended by the content inside the chat, and "spontaneously" began calling for protests in the streets that grew organically, and eventually pressured the governor to resign. In an interview with *Fundación Nacional para la Cultura Popular*, Carlos Rubén Rosario, a journalist who wrote a book about these events, states, "the two instances of the march from the Capitol to Old San Juan and the general strike were spontaneous. In those two events, although the call was spontaneous and one cannot establish who called the protests, is well-known that René Pérez had a main role, although all credit cannot be given to him. In the other was Molusco."[39] The reality is that this journalist did not do a complete job, because through social media you could identify which organization(s) were calling for the protests, such as the Colectiva Feminista en

[39] Carlos Rubén Rosario, "A la luz 'crónicas del verano del 19'," interview by Edgar Torres, *Fundación Nacional para la Cultura Popular*. August 2, 2020. https://prpop.org/2020/08/a-la-luz-cronicas-del-verano-del-19.

Construcción, who played a mayor role in these protests, as I will later explain. Also, this narrative tend to over-emphasize the role of mainstream artists (Residente/@residente, Molusko/@Moluskein). Even leftist media internationally have reproduced this narrative, "The Puerto Rican uprising has a spontaneous characteristic. It wasn't clearly directed, nor had a massive characteristic. As in many democratic revolutions, the most amplified popular sectors combined with other sectors of the political superstructure, which opportunistically and in face of the situation joined demanding the resignation of Rosselló" wrote Gustavo Giménez in the MST Argentina website.[40]

Using the term of "spontaneous" *invisibilizes* two factors that made Ricardo Rosselló resignation possible. First, there were both material conditions and organizing groundwork laid three years earlier that triggered two-weeks of massive protests in Puerto Rico. Second, the 2019 protests needed direction. It was not enough having the material conditions and groundwork in place, but once the catalyst incident happened, activists and organizers directed the rage of many Puerto Ricans to the streets in order to take advantage of this window of opportunity and put forward a new uprising against U.S. colonialism. It is dangerous to validate this "spontaneous rebellion" narrative because it ignores how Summer 2019 is part of the decolonization history of Puerto Rico. I argue that Summer 2019 is the latest Puerto Rican uprising against US Colonialism, and it should be considered alongside the "Grito de Lares"

[40] Gustavo Jímenez, "Puerto Rico: La revolución boricua derribó al corrupto Rosselló" *MST Argentina,* July 31, 2019, https://mst.org.ar/2019/07/31/puerto-rico-revolucion-boricua-derribo-al-corrupto-rossello/.

(1868), Jayuya Uprising (1950), Attack on the US Congress (1952), and the movement against the US Navy in Vieques (1978-1983, 1999-2003), although the Summer 2019 protests have not been categorized as such. The "spontaneous" narrative does not allow for this interpretation, since it says that people were only offended by Ricardo Rosselló's negligence and morality. But Ricardo Rosselló represents more than that. I argue that the struggle was not only against Ricardo Rossello's immoral and negligent character, but even more so what he represented.

This approach of understanding the protests as "spontaneous" is not exclusive to Puerto Rico and the #RickyRenuncia Movement. Jesús Martín Barbero critiques that historically the forms of popular struggles have been projected by historians are disorganized, and with lack of political projection, he argues, "It's necessary to begin to show the prejudice that comes with confusing and labeling "immediateness" something that constitutes a key characteristic of the mass culture." [41] In the 19th Century, according to Martín Barbero, historians have sub estimated the role of the anarchist and libertarian movements in understanding and organizing with the peasants, and artisans. Often historians show that the peasants of uprisings in the 19th Century were a mere consequence of material conditions, however, although material conditions existed, also there has been organization. This is my main argument through this chapter, I argue that similar to the role of anarchists organizing peasant movements, #RickyRenuncia Movement, nurtured from the grassroots work that have

[41] Martín B., Jesús. De los medios a las mediaciones : comunicación, cultura y hegemonía. 6. ed.; 1. ed. en (Anthropos Editorial. Rubí, Barcelona: Anthropos, Editorial, 2010), 102.

been done years prior, and together with the material conditions coming from austerity, and climate disasters, it provided an opportunity to trigger a movement against the Puerto Rican elite class, embodied in the figure of Ricardo Rosselló.

First of all, Ricardo Rosselló represents the Puerto Rican elite. The son of former governor Pedro Rosselló (1992-2000), he was a rich kid from birth. When Ricardo Rosselló was a teenager, he was involved in various scandals, including the apparent death of a mother and a child due to drunk driving, and the killing of endangered turtles when he stole a four-track vehicle from his father's police escort at the governor's beach house in Fajardo.[42] Ricardo Rosselló's reckless behavior as a teenager were seeds for his performance as a governor. In 2014, before he was elected governor of Puerto Rico, Ricardo Rosselló was accused of committing plagiarism by a Bolivian author.[43] However, Ricardo Rosselló's behavior did not limit his access to the highest seat in Puerto Rico's electoral politics.

Second, he represents U.S. imperialism by being a strong advocate of Puerto Rico becoming the 51st State of the United States. Although Ricardo Rosselló has appropriated the term of decolonization as part of his pro-Statehood campaign, and even mislead the NAACP to support Statehood for Puerto Rico, the Statehood project

[42] "Habla sobreviviente de accidente fatal vinculado a Rosselló." *Telemundo Puerto Rico*, July 20, 2019, https://www.telemundopr.com/noticias/puerto-rico/habla-sobreviviente-de-accidente-fatal-vinculado-a-rossello/46086/.

[43] Arys Rodríguez Andino, "Escritora denuncia que Ricky Rosselló la plagió." *Primera Hora*, July 31, 2014, https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/gobierno-politica/notas/escritora-denuncia-que-ricky-rossello-la-plagio/.

represents the final extermination of Puerto Ricans. Ricardo Rosselló is at full service of the Washington Consensus, Wall Street banks, and now Crypto Magnates. During his short tenure he extended tax benefits of US corporations based in Puerto Rico, signed laws that reduced workers' rights, continued implementing an austerity agenda in benefit of Wall Street banks, and opened the door for the crypto billionaires in Puerto Rico. His complacency with the U.S. was such, that even though he is affiliated to the U.S. Democratic Party, he applauded Donald Trump's mediocre relief efforts after hurricane María as it is evidenced in the Donald Trump's press conference in Puerto Rico after the hurricane. [44] It was not until Carmen Yulín Cruz (former mayor of San Juan) began criticizing Donald Trump publicly, that Ricardo Rosselló was forced to change his approach towards the Trump administration politics in Puerto Rico. Ricardo Rosselló is the child of the Puerto Rican elite, who has sided with Washington and U.S. Corporate interests betraying the Puerto Rican people. This is what the Puerto Rican people were fighting against in the Summer of 2019.

The First Leaks and the Material Conditions of #RickyRenuncia

A first document of 11 pages was leaked through social media on the night of July 8th. Omaya Sosa Pascual from Centro de Periodismo Investigativo (Center for

[44] Trump White House Archived, "President Trump and The First Lady Receive a Briefing on Hurricane Maria Relief Efforts," *Youtube*, October 3, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aza-nR5A6DY

Investigative Journalism) stated in a Radio Ambulante interview that the leak was from a trusted source of hers. [45] The document itself revealed that these pages were extracts from a longer document that contained 889 pages. At the bottom of the page it showed the page number and the number of total pages. So, some people were expecting that the entire chatroom conversation was going to be revealed eventually.[46] The Center for Investigative Journalism did not publish at first, because they did not have the entire document, and wanted to fact-check the entire chat before publishing it. Nevertheless, other three journalists like @SRCSandra published extracts it. In these first set of messages there were not any that could be expected to trigger a massive scandal, nor incite significant disapproval from the Puerto Rican people. However, for those of us who study the media, we could catch a glimpse of unethical attempts by Ricardo Rosselló's internal team to manipulate public opinion in favor of the governor and maintain his hegemony as they are discussing communication strategies within the chat. This first leak did not generate widespread outrage, although for some people it generated expectations of what could be found in the other hundreds of pages. Most people dismissed it, because it mostly pertained to comments towards Puerto Rico's Secretary of Justice and President of the Senate. These first series of messages, although they reflected an improper behavior by the

[45] Omaya Sosa Pascual, "El gobernador en su laberinto," interview by Daniel Alarcón, *Radio Ambulante*, December 3, 2019, audio, https://radioambulante.org/transcripcion/gobernador-laberinto-transcripcion

[46] Medina, Natalia Rodríguez. "#TelegramGate: Leaks From a Private Group Chat Leave Rosselló Administration Exposed." *Latino Rebels*, July 19, 2019 https://www.latinorebels.com/2019/07/09/telegramgate/.

Governor and his aides, were not considered as offensive. I think that many people thought that the scandal was going to be over in a couple of days, as soon as the next big story was published. Some of the people who I spoke to that participated in #RickyRenuncia protests, tend to forget the first leak.

It is important to remember that what really outraged people during those first days of leaks, were not the leaks themselves. But rather, public attention was focused on the FBI arrest of the former Secretary of Education, Julia Keleher. Keleher is an American woman who was appointed by Ricardo Rosselló to lead the Department of Education back in 2017. During her very short tenure, she approved the closing of hundreds of schools in Puerto Rico as part of the austerity plan and budget cuts imposed by the Fiscal Control Board and abided by Ricardo Rosselló's administration. The Fiscal Control Board is an expression of the current state of US Colonialism in Puerto Rico. In her book, Colonial Debts, Rocío Zambrana argues, "The institution of the Fiscal Control Board intensifies the operations of colonial power through debt, but it does so by drawing on forms of capture made possible by Puerto Rico's liminality. The board is tasked with achieving fiscal responsibility and access to capital markets irrespective of social costs. It pursues tax and austerity measures that rearticulate the structures of capture already in place."[47] In 2016, seven people were appointed to control the finances of Puerto Rico's government, basically leaving Puerto Ricans without any real authority. The Board approves and/or

[47] Rocío Zambrana. *Colonial Debts : The Case of Puerto Rico.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 63-64.

disapproves Puerto Rico's operational budget, which basically invalidates the standing of any elected official in Puerto Rico, and their administrative capacity. The Board is the great colonial legacy of Barack Obama in Puerto Rico, which was instituted under PROMESA (Puerto Rico Oversight Management and Economic Stability Act). The Board, makes sure that Puerto Rico cuts public funding to pay a debt to Wall Street banks, which has been highly inflated.

Part of the Fiscal Control Board's agenda was closures of schools. This task was undertaken by Julia Keleher. Many of the closed schools were sold to private corporations, and many are now simply abandoned, turning places around the schools into unsafe spaces for the communities. Back when these closings were happening, I spoke to a mother whose son's school was closed in the town of Dorado. She told me in anonymity that since the school closed, there had been shootings around the neighborhood in broad daylight. The mother said that when the school was open, this never happened, because people who dealt drugs in the neighborhood had conduct codes around the school.[48] The closing of schools cannot be seen just as an austerity policy to have liquidity for the payment of an illegal debt. It is a much grander scheme that involves the displacement of Puerto Ricans, the accumulation and speculation of land from American settlers, and the destruction of the education system as a form of controlling the masses in a process of displacing Puerto Ricans from Puerto Rico.

[48] Dorado, August 2018, Mother from Jancinto López Martínez School

Simultaneous with the first leaks, the FBI accused Keleher of steering federal funds assigned to the Department of Education to benefit particular firms and contractors.[49] It was a multi-million-dollar corruption scheme, where five others were involved. Keleher's corruption charges and the leak were separate events, but both showed how Ricardo Rosselló's administration was unfit to govern Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans misfortune in the last 15 years are not entirely Ricardo Rosselló's responsibility; but he represented the continuation of that project.

@ricardorossello was vacationing with his family in Europe at the moment of Keleher's arrest warrant, and he tweeted, "Reconociendo la importancia y la trascendencia de los arrestos ocurridos en el día de hoy, así como su impacto en el quehacer gubernamental, he decidido regresar de inmediato." (Recognizing the importance and transcendence of the arrests that happened today, as well as their governmental impact, I decided to return immediately) [50] The first one who commented to his tweet was @GamelynOduardo, who responded, "¿regresar de inmediato? ¡renuncie!" (Return immediatelly? Resign)[51] and the thread continued with a set of mixed responses between users supporting the governor, and users criticizing @ricardorossello's administration. The governor continued tweeting about this issue throughout the day, and users kept commenting. This shows how Twitter

[49] Patricia Mazzei, "Puerto Rico Ex-Officials Accused of Steering 15.5 Million in Contracts to Counsultants", *The New York Times*, July 10, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/10/us/puerto-rico-corruption.html.
[50] Ricardo Rosselló (@ricardorossello), "Reconociendo la importancia." Twitter (now X), July 10, 2019, https://x.com/ricardorossello/status/1148941436227923968
[51] Gamelyn (GamelynOduardo), "¿regresar de inmediato." Twitter (now X), July, 10, 2019, https://x.com/ricardorossello/status/1148941436227923968

becomes a virtual forum where the conversation can evolve faster than in the physical space. Before people meet or begin organizing protests, Twitter serves as a space to get a glimpse of what people are thinking, or how are they perceiving certain events, a sort or virtual temperature check. Nevertheless as social media defines more its algorithm, it becomes more difficult to get a temperature check, and back then Twitter was still Twitter, and had not been taken by Elon Musk.

That same day, July 10th, @debowler (an anonymous user with only 233 followers) tweeted about this topic: "Oye @ricardorosello hazte un favor a ti y al pueblo de Puerto Rico, pueblo que hemos sufrido tanto por tu incompetencia. Renuncia y quedate por Francia. Es lo menos que deberías hacer. Yo pensaba que Luis Fortuño fue el peor gobernador pero tu le pasaste por eones. ¡Renuncia!" (Hey @ricardorossello make yourself and the people of Puerto Rico a favor, the people have suffered so much for your incompetence. Resign and stay in France. It is the least you can do. I thought Luis Fortuño was the worst governor, but you are far worse)[52] @debowler's tweet consolidates many critical opinions that were circulating around the governor. First, @debowler mentions the suffering of Puerto Ricans due to the governor's negligence, implicitly to his lack of effective response in the aftermath of hurricane María in 2017.

After hurricane María, the archipelago of Puerto Rico was in very bad shape. There was not enough food, water, or medicine. Thousands of houses were destroyed,

[52] Debowler (@debowler), "oye ricardo." Twitter (now X), July 10, 2019, https://twitter.com/debowler/status/1148921795531214848

plus the water, communication, and electrical systems collapsed. Almost a year went by, and people were still suffering. Many were still without access to clean water and electricity. Hurricane María evidenced two main problems in Puerto Rico. First, that the austerity that had been enforced since the late 1990s has left Puerto Ricans without sufficient public resources to attend climate emergencies. This was evidenced when after hurricane María, the workers of PREPA (Puerto Rico Power Authority) didn't have sufficient resources to fix the nationwide electrical grid. An IEFFA article of 2018, states that the cut of public funding, directly impacted the operations of the nationwide electrical system "Budget gaps will mean that less capital will be available for investment in transmission and distribution resiliency."[53] Cutting funds to PREPA helped the privatization agenda of the neoliberal government, as Ricardo Rosselló later privatized the distribution services of the system. Here we can see how the material conditions for #RickyRenuncia had been developing for more than 20 years, with both Ricardo and Pedro Rosselló playing a role in these conditions. Second, hurricane María revealed how the political relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico is detrimental to Puerto Ricans when this type of climate event happens. The colony could not receive any aid from other countries and depended entirely on U.S. imports. This in great part due to the Foraker Act.[54] The Foraker Act according to Zambrana, "established colonial administration under a civil

[53] Tom Sanzillo, and Cathy Kunkel. "The Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority's Flawed Fiscal Plan." *ieefa.org*, https://ieefa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/The-Puerto-Rico-Electric-Power-Authoritys-Flawed-Fiscal-Plan_May-2018.pdf

[54] *Puerto Rico | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives*. https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/HAIC/Historical-Essays/Foreign-Domestic/Puerto-Rico/.

government […] Puerto Rico could not negotiate commercial treaties with other nations; neither could it determine its taxes and duties. The act established structures of free trade between Puerto Rico and the United States, imposing duties on Puerto Rican commodities entering the United States."[55] On September 8th, 2017 the Trump administration temporally waived the Foraker Act to allow aid from other countries to arrive to Puerto Rico after hurricane María[56]. Puerto Ricans relied on Donald Trump's administration to assign funds to Puerto Rico, and Ricardo Rosselló to manage them. With hurricane María, we saw again how little authority and power Puerto Rican governors have, since the federal government was calling the shots. Ricardo Rosselló, instead of demanding more resources from the US government, was very complacent, expressing gratitude to Trump and the federal government. Obviously, his response to US aid even angered many pro-Statehooders. Since all Puerto Ricans are US citizens, pro-statehooders argue that Puerto Ricans deserve to be treated with the same respect as their American compatriots. #RickyRenuncia could not have happened if thousands of pro-Statehooders had not joined the protests also. I argue this because the Left or the Pro-Independence movements do not have one-million supporters (which is the approximate number of people who participated in the protests), if it was like that much more people would participate in many other protests. Therefore, we cannot ignore that there was an outstanding participation from pro-Stahooders and

[55] Rocío Zambrana. *Colonial Debts : The Case of Puerto Rico.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 59.
[56] Niraj Chokshi, "Trump Waives Jones Act for Puerto Rico, Easing Hurricane Aid Shipments", *The New York Times*, September 28, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/28/us/jones-act-waived.html

PNP members who felt disrepected by Ricardo Rosselló's chatroom comments, and in that moment felt identified with the message of leftists activists to call for the immidiate resignation of Ricardo Rosselló. Many people protesting in the streets whom I talked, mentioned that they voted for Ricardo Rosselló, and were members of the PNP Party. There were even PNP militants organizing for protests, such the local celebrity biker Rey Charlie, who I will talk about later on.

Marisel Robles, a former organizer from Jornada se Acabaron las Promesas, states "hurricane María lifted the veil of poverty in Puerto Rico,"[57] and Puerto Ricans started to acknowledge their condition as colonial subjects. Hurricane María revealed the dependance that Puerto Rico had on imports as well as the fragility of the electrical and communications grid and the water system. Residents of Puerto Rico were months without water and electricity, and in some cases more than a year. I argue that hurricane María evidenced the dark side of austerity measures. Since the early 2000s (when Puerto Rico's debt was becoming an issue discussed in the public sphere) the governments began implementing austerity measures. For 15 years the local administrations have been cutting necessary funding to public institutions and abandoning essential services. When hurricane María made landfall, it revealed how necessary these institutions were, and how fragile the country has become. Obviously, we cannot take climate change out of the factors that contributed to this, but this shows is how austerity makes poor countries even more vulnerable under climate

[57] *Simulacros de Liberación*. Documentary. Directed by Juan C. Dávila, República 21 Media, 2021.

change. It is no surprise that less than two years after hurricane María the people found a way to rebel against all of this, and so they did through the figure of Ricardo Rosselló.

Hurricane María thus provided the material conditions for struggle that marked the #RickyRenuncia protests as the latest chapter in Puerto Rico's decolonization struggle. U.S. hegemony in Puerto Rico is sustained by decades of a propaganda machine, and an economic dependency system that has made Puerto Ricans believe that without the US the country does not have resources. This is in large due to a US agenda of developing Puerto Rico during the Cold War Era as a successful capitalist island in opposition to Cuba's communist regime, "the capitalist world-system gains credibility by developing a few successful peripheral cases. These are civilizational and cultural strategies to gain consent and to demonstrate the "superiority of the "West."[58] Most of Puerto Rico's development came after the Cuban Revolution. Once the Cold War ended, Puerto Rico's development stagnated. However, the idea of the US as a protector of Puerto Rico has remained. But, experiences during María and beyond show us the opposite. Looking at #RickyRenuncia, as a response to hurricane María's aftermath, signaled a beginning of the crumbling of the false idea of U.S. benevolence. It is the responsibility of anti-colonial activists to continue producing counter-narratives to the propaganda of U.S. benevolence, because Ricardo Rosselló was not the only one responsible for Puerto

[58] Ramón Grosfoguel. *Colonial Subjects : Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective.* 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 5.

Ricans suffering after hurricane María. The colonial systems in place, and the mismanagement of Ricardo Rosselló were recipes for a post-hurricane disaster that was crucial to prepare the conditions for Summer 2019.

Going back to @debowler, when he mentions Ricardo Rosselló's incompetency, we assume they are referring to the lack of aid distributed in the aftermath of hurricane María. On that same tweet @debowler's asks for his resignation and demands Ricardo Rosselló to remain in France. @debowler continues the tweet stating that he thought Luis Fortuño was the worst governor of Puerto Rico, but now realizes that Ricardo Rosselló is far worse. Luis Fortuño was the governor who consolidated the neoliberal model that was much resisted during the 1990s by workers' unions. Luis Fortuño's administration fired thousands of public employees (approximately 30,000 public employees between 2008-2012),[59] raised tuition at the public university, and violently attacked people who protested these austerity measures. Beyond that Fortuño signed into law Act 20 and Act 22, which provided tax incentives to American corporations establishing in the Puerto Rico. Act 22 is the policy that is displacing Puerto Ricans, and driving gentrification in the islands, "The increase in foreign capital due to the promotion of the Puerto Rican archipelago as a tax haven, the proliferation of short-term rentals, a halt in the construction of low-income housing in the past decade, as well as the remote-work flexibility prompted

[59] "100 Días y 1 Ley: El Plumazo Más Pesado de La Administración Fortuño." *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*, April 13, 2009, https://periodismoinvestigativo.com/2009/04/100-dias-y-1-ley-el-plumazo-mas-pesado-de-la-administracion-fortuno-2/.

by COVID-19, created the perfect storm for the average price of properties for sale to increase 63% between 2012 and 2021."[60] @debowler finalizes his tweet with another call for Ricardo Rosselló's resignation, to which another anonymous user by the handle of @SauronPR responds "#rickyrenuncia." (Ricky Resign) This was the first time that this hashtag reappeared on Twitter after the Telegram leak. @SauronPR takes pride in this, and up to this date they describe himself in their Twitter biography, as the first user to ever tweet "#rickyrenuncia."[61]

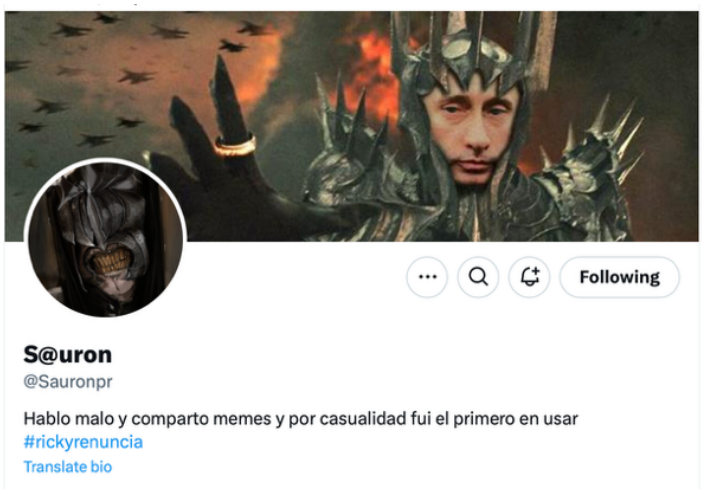


Figure 1, Twitter profile of @Sauronpr (Screenshot)

This is not entirely accurate in that the hashtag appeared on Twitter even before Ricardo Rosselló was governor, used by opponents from within his own party. Even though this was the first time that the hashtag reappeared on Twitter since the

[60] Damaris Suarez, Omaya Sosa Pascual, Víctor Rodríguez Velázquez, "A Nightmare for Puerto Ricans to Find a Home, While Others Accumulate Properties." *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*, December 31, 2024, https://periodismoinvestigativo.com/2022/12/a-nightmare-for-puerto-ricans-to-find-a-home-while-others-accumulate-properties/.
[61] https://x.com/Sauronpr

Telegram pages were released, it is difficult to determine whether or not this instance initiated the trend of "#RickyRenuncia." We need to investigate how a hashtag gets popularized, and in the case of social movements, how it transcends into a tangible action, as well as how people in the street influence the public discourse on social media. I argue that a hashtag cannot be popularized just by writing, but therefore has to be accompanied by content. You can write "#RickyRenuncia" but what will make the hashtag viral is the type of content you post (picture, video, meme, link). Hence, we can consider a hashtag being the last name of a content, and when a large number of users produce content with the same digital last name, then it becomes part of the same discussion, and the discussion expands. In the next two chapters I will take a closer look at this, as I look at how digital cultural production and citizen-media production tied to #RickyRenuncia develops.

More documents containing extracts from the Telegram chatroom continued to be leaked by journalists throughout the next few days. On July 11 and 12, 2019 journalist Sandra Rodríguez Cotto exposed new extracts. This time they contained explicitly misogynist, sexist, and violent language. In the second leak, the governor asks to beat up New York's councilwoman Melissa Mark Viverito, and calls her a "*puta*," after she criticized former DNC president Tom Perez for supporting statehood for Puerto Rico. Ricardo Rosselló has been one of the most active advocates for Puerto Rican statehood in recent years. Then, a third leak revealed a homophobic joke that the governor made against Puerto Rican lawyer Mayra López Mulero. One of the chat members writes, "that moment when you hear the lady López Mulero analyzing

impartially, to which the governor replies “The “lady?”, implying she was lesbian as a form to mock her. The chatroom was filled with extremely homophobic language. This escalated the controversy, and moved feminist and LGBT groups to lead the demands for Ricardo Rosselló’s resignation, “Groups not usually seen at the forefront of political protests were front and center demanding the resignation of Rosselló – such as queer, trans, and nonbinary folks,”[62] writes Aurora Santiago-Ortiz.

In the weeks following these leaks, #RickyRenuncia became both a popular hashtag, and the main chant in the streets moving forward a common demand: the inmediate resignation of Ricardo Rosselló from office. Puerto Rican feminist activists were key in building that popular movement. One of the crucial actors was Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, a decolonial feminist organization led by Black-women. They were the first group who began to begin using the Telegram leaks as a political opportunity to move forward an anti-patriarchal movement. In the last decade, Puerto Rico’s feminist movement has grown. Feminist movements have been one of the main figures opposing austerity and the restructuring of Puerto Rico’s debt to Wall Street Bondholders. On more than one occasion, they have made their International Women’s Day protest in Puerto Rico’s banking district (Milla de Oro).[63] Since their founding in 2013, La Colectiva Feminista has been inserting feminist decolonial

[62] Santiago-Ortiz, Aurora. “Anti-Colonial Feminist Collective « La Cole » Are Leading the Puerto Rican Resistance.” *Centre Tricontinental*, February 10, 2020, https://www.cetri.be/Anti-colonial-feminist-collective.

[63] Sara del Valle Hernández, “Mujeres Protestaron En La Milla de Oro Por Sus Derechos.” *MINH Puerto Rico*, March 8, 2017, https://minhpuertorico.org/index.php/noticias/55-noticias/5815-2017-03-09-01-54-48.

thought into the fight for Puerto Rico's decolonization. "La Cole positions itself as explicitly intersectional – where oppression is understood as interconnected and the struggle for liberation is independent and collective. La Cole draws from black feminist thinkers in the US, such as Angela Davis, bell hooks, Barbara Smith, and Demita Fraiser"[64] "Sin Feminismo no es mi revolución (without feminism it is not my revolution)" is one of the slogans used to state that Puerto Rico's fight for independence is nothing if it does not include an anti-patriarchal focus. Their argument is that Puerto Rico "will become a neocolony if the systems of oppressions are not dismantled."[65] When the first pages of the chat were leaked, La Colective Feminista en Construcción (La Cole) started to demand the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló. This was not the first time that La Cole has organized to remove a misogynist politician from office. A couple of years before, La Cole successfully organized a campaign to remove the mayor of the city of Guaynabo after allegations of sexual harassment towards one of his employees. This time, La Cole was facing the person at the top position in the colonial administration of Puerto Rico.

Sidney Tarrow argues that collective action does not simply occur but happens because certain actors take up the responsibility of organizing a common dissatisfaction across many sectors. Tarrow states that the leadership of a movement

---

[64] Santiago-Ortiz, Aurora. "Anti-Colonial Feminist Collective « La Cole » Are Leading the Puerto Rican Resistance." *Centre Tricontinental*, February 10, 2020, https://www.cetri.be/Anti-colonial-feminist-collective.

[65] Zoán Tanis Dávila "#EstadoDeEmergencia: Organizing to End Gender-based Violence in PR" interview by Juan C. Dávila, *When We Fight We Win! The Podcast.* Agitarte, December 17, 2020, podcast, https://open.spotify.com/episode/6lpWdwwbDxqXtMjiSWXd1m?si=V_j2kxxJQMOUXunWh56vYg

will determine the sets of collective actions that people will follow: “Leaders invent, adapt, and combine various forms of contention to gain support from people who might otherwise stay at home.”[66] La Cole’s leadership thus transformed the Telegram leaks into a window of opportunity to build an archipelago-wide movement. Further, social movement scholars often talk about a catalyst event that triggers a social movement. According to the affective intelligence theory interpreted by Castells, what sparks a social movement is fear and enthusiasm among individuals. Castells writes, “Positive and negative effects are linked to two basic motivational systems that result from human evolution.” [67] Enthusiasm is related to hope and fear to anger. Hope is an essential element to seek a goal and imagine a better future, however in order to do this, people need to overcome anxiety, which leads to fear. Then, Castells explains that overcoming fear triggers anger, and anger is what allows people to engage in risk-taking actions, “Anger increases with the perception of an unjust action and with the identification of the agent responsible for the action.”[68] In this sense, what spurs a social movement according to Castells, is that enough people understand that they share the same condition, so to speak, that they share the same hopes and angers. In order for this to manifest, a communication process is required. Castells argues, “if many individuals feel humiliated, exploited, ignored or misrepresented, they are ready to transform their anger into action, as soon as they

[66] Sidney G. Tarrow. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Revised and Updatd Third Edition. Rev. & Updated 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10.
[67] Manuel Castells. *Networks of Outrage and Hope : Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Second edition. (Cambridge, England ; Polity Press, 2015), 14.
[68] Manuel Castells. *Networks of Outrage and Hope : Social Movements in the Internet Age.* Second edition. (Cambridge, England ; Polity Press, 2015), 14.

overcome their fear." [69] Zeynep Tufecki describes that usually there is a catalyst incident that triggers a social movement.[70] Some of these examples are when Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of the bus and ignited the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, also the death of Mohamed Bouzazi that ignited the Arab Spring, and 20 years back in Puerto Rico the death of David Sanes by the U.S. Navy, which ignited a massive mobilization to demand the exit of the military from the island of Vieques. All these movements had a catalyst event, that provided a window of opportunity to amplify a social movement that was already taking place. However, using the example of #RickyRenuncia, I argue that instead there is not just one catalyst moment, but instead a set of catalyst moments that under the ripe conditions can trigger a social movement. It is the role of organizers to identify these moments and harvest them. If that doesn't happen these political opportunities will fade away. A catalyst is a defining moment in history in which the people seeking social change can use it as a departing point to achieve their objective. I argue that a catalyst incident operates like a snowball, and there needs to be constant catalysts to maintain the development of a movement. In order for this to happen, there needs to be direction from organizers. Activists and organizers played a crucial role in constructing a new shared common sense that Ricardo Rosselló needed to resign, and that it was possible to have this happen immediately by physically putting our bodies

[69] Manuel Castells. *Networks of Outrage and Hope : Social Movements in the Internet Age.* Second edition. (Cambridge, England ; Polity Press, 2015), 15.
[70] Zeynep Tufekci*, Twitter and Tear Gas : The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest.* 1st ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

in the streets. Therefore, catalyst events need to be recurring in the sense of a snowball, as people will not necessarily act upon the first one. It is the work of organizers to identify, which one can transform into a movement. An ideal catalyst moment is one, which can serve as a symbol that galvanizes people around a common issue. This common issue is shared through common sense, which I will elaborate later in the chapter.

La Cole was the first to take the claim of the governor's resignation to the streets, as they called for protests in front of the governor's mansion. Their protests began at Luis Muñoz Marín airport when the governor was up in the air flying back to Puerto Rico from Europe. They wanted to greet him at the airport with a protest demanding his resignation. The afternoon of July 11th, I was checking Twitter, and saw that @ColeFeminista had been rallying people to protest at the airport when Ricardo Rosselló returned from Europe. La Cole arrived at the airport with its core group of militants and supporters, and posted pictures on Twitter asking people to join them.[71] This is an activist practice of self-broadcasting, which I will further discuss in chapter 3. Later they told people that the protest will continue at the Governor's Mansion. There is one tweet though that gets my attention from @MarcosPerezRam[72] that reads, "Si no puedes ir al aeropuerto a las 6:00 a recibir a Ricky o mañana a la vigilia en Puerto Rico a las 7:00, puedes twittear y taguear a @ricardorossello usando

[71] Colectiva Feminista (@ColeFeminista) "Acá estamos." Twitter (now X) July 11, 2019, https://twitter.com/ColeFeminista/status/1149438821060239361
[72] LaÍnsulaAlucinada (@MarcosPerezRam) "Si no puedes" Twitter (now X) July 11, 2019, https://twitter.com/MarcosPerezRam/status/1149411892290605056

el hashtag #RickyRenuncia #Corrupto" (If you cannot get to the airport at 6:00 to welcome Ricky or arrive tomorrow to the vigil at 7:00, you can tweet and tag @ricardorossello using the hashtag #RickyRenuncia). This Tweet was a call to action to the people who could not join the protests, telling them that they could play a part in the protests by tweeting #Renuncia (resign) and #Corrupto (corrupt). This is an example of what I call "sharing activism," and is characteristic of networked social movements, where people can have a significant participation virtually by amplifying the message. Joel Penny and Caroline Dadas argue that a crucial element for activists to intervene in the networked public sphere is having supporters re-tweeting and sharing their posts in social media. They look at how images and videos posted about police brutality in the Occupy Wall Street movement depended on followers boosting their signal. One person that they interview for their study says, "I call myself a signal booster […] I repost live streams, and I quote from live streams to other folks who can't watch or participate."[73] In this sense, the practice of sharing and retweeting content through social media from social movements, becomes a tactic of sharing activism. This practice is crucial for activists in the urban space who are performing and producing content for the online world. Retweets and shares from supporters are key to reach wider publics and amplify the offline reach. Here we see how a street action (the airport protest) became directly linked to the #RickyRenuncia hashtag, which became one of the most popular hashtags on Twitter in July 2019. In an article

[73] Penney, Joel, and Caroline Dadas. "(Re)Tweeting in the Service of Protest: Digital Composition and Circulation in the Occupy Wall Street Movement." *New Media & Society* 16, no. 1 (2014): 82.

written by Adriana De Jesús in Noticel (a local digital newspaper in Puerto Rico), De Jesús explains, "#RickyRenuncia was used more than two million times on Twitter and, during a general strike on a Monday, it was used more than 250,000 times during rush hours (like 2 p.m. or 10 p.m.) Twitter itself was proof of the hashtag's popularity. The #RickyRenuncia became a trending topic locally and internationally and it was even transformed into a Movement."[74] Nkapuchada, one of the activists who participated in the protests, said that at the beginning many protestors did not yet have clarity about the objectives of the protest, and that the hashtag and its call of #RickyRenuncia provided a clear objective to pursue. In this way, the explosion of the hashtag itself eventually shaped the movement's own understanding of its purpose and objective.

According to scholars who study social movements in the "Internet Age," the struggle for change occurs now in a hybrid space that takes place both in cyberspace and the physical space. The action in the airport is an example of this. The Feminist Collective was physically at the airport, alongside many of their supporters, while at the same time occupying the cyberspace. On Twitter, they were self-broadcasting their protest by sharing images of themselves in front of the Luis Muñoz Marín Airport exit terminal. Their posts read, "Acá estamos, listxs para darle la bienvenida a @ricardorossello y exigirle la renuncia #RosselloMacharrán #RickyRenuncia" (Here

[74] Adriana de Jesús. *"#RickyRenuncia: How social media helped take down Puerto Rico's Governor." NotiCel*. July 28, 2019, https://noticel.com/mas/otros/20190728/rickyrenuncia-how-social-media-helped-take-down-puerto-ricos-governor/.

we are, ready to welcome @ricardorossello and demand his resignation #RosselloMacharrán #RickyRenuncia) and "5 "gatxs" en repudio al gobierno macharrán y homofóbico de @ricardorosslló." (5 cats in opposition to the misogonyst and homophobic government of @ricardorosselló." After their rally at the airport, @ColeFeminista used the media coverage and their social media presence to ask people to join them in front of the governor's mansion to continue protesting and demanding his resignation.

The next day, I was one of the people who responded to @ColeFeminista's call. I went to the gates of the governor's mansion and participated in one of the rallies calling for Ricardo Rossello's resignation. During these first days, it was only a few of us, perhaps around 100. Dozens of us knew each other – we have been comrades of many struggles in the past. It was the same people that protested, but there was an indescribable feeling that made it seem as if we were building on something bigger, and it was only a matter of time until the entire country joined us. Workers and residents from Old San Juan were not indifferent or opposed to the protestors coming up Calle Fortaleza, you could feel a sense of admiration from them as many of us headed towards the government's mansion. There was a lot of approval from the people. People asked enthusiastically, "are you heading to the protests?" to which we replied "#RickyReununcia". For the first time, many of us felt that our parents supported our rebel activities. And wherever you went, whichever radio/tv station you listened to, #RickyRenuncia was the main topic of discussion. During those first days we attempted to cross police barricades and reach the doors of the

mansion, but Special Forces responded by pepper-spraying the group, including me. Up to this date the barricades remain in a walkway that used to be transitable by tourists and visitors to take pictures in front of the Governor's Mansion.

After getting off the plane, Ricardo Rosselló held a press conference in which he briefly apologized for his comments in the Telegram application chatroom and dismissed the importance of the early claims calling for his resignation. He also publicly lied by suggesting that everything on the leaked document was not entirely true, and it might have been doctored. Thus, Ricardo Rosselló said he used the chat for stress-relief and to joke around with his team, sort of a virtual locker-room talk. Of course, this enraged the feminist movement even more, and Ricardo Rosselló's approval quickly began to fall. Although there is no official empirical data that evidences Ricardo Rosselló's approval downfall, the amount of people in the streets show that many people who voted for the governor, were demanding his resignation. For example, Rey Charlie (a biker who became popular during the protests, and a passionate militant of Rossello's party) organized a series of "corridas" (motorcycle caravans) to call for the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló. Also Ricardo Rossello's announcement that he will resign the presidency of his party, and that he would not seek re-election, suggests that internally his team was aware that his popularity fell. Whether it was a strategy to calm the protests, and then maintain his career as a politician, this shows that the Rosselló hegemony was weak, and this represented an opportunity to anti-colonial movements.

I argue that the first leaks of the chat, and Ricardo Rossello's unwillingness to assume full responsibility, opened a political opportunity, "political opportunity," which Tarrow explains as "sets of clues that encourage people to engage in contentious politics."[75] But Tarrow also argues that collective action does not simply occur, but happens because certain actors took up the responsibility of organizing a common dissatisfaction across many sectors. Tarrow states that the leadership of a movement will determine the sets of collective actions, which people who share the same dissatisfactions will respond to and within those conditions develop a social movement. "Leaders invent, adapt, and combine various forms of contention to gain support from people who might otherwise stay at home."[76] For this to happen, it is important for social movement organizers to identify the common characteristics that a group of people may have, this way they can construct a movement supported on collective identities that encourages people to mobilize together. In this sense a common sense needs to be built across a certain community to achieve a political goal, it was #RickyRenuncia. According to Antonio Gramsci the principal elements of common sense are provided by religions, "consequently the relationship between common sense and religion is much more intimate than that between common sense and the philosophical systems of the intellectuals."[77] Through religions the ruling class builds its hegemony and attempts to produce a common sense over the

[75] Sidney G. Tarrow. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics.* Rev. & Updated 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 32.
[76] Sidney G. Tarrow. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics.* Rev. & Updated 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 29.
[77] Gramsci, Antonio. *Antonio Gramsci Reader, The.* Edited by David Forgacs. (London, England: Lawrence and Wishart, 2014), 344.

population. Hence, the colonial education system, so-called institutes of culture, and art reinforces produce common sense that helps to establish hegemonic power. Nevertheless, Gramsci describes common sense as a collective noun, "there is not just one common sense, for that is a product of history, and part of the historical process."[78] Meaning that common sense cannot be fabricated, but in this sense, there are many elements in society that produce common sense of a society, and cannot be simply established by the ruling class. There are a lot of moving parts, "Common sense is an ambiguous, contradictory and multiform concept, and that to refer to common sense as a confirmation of truth is a nonsense."[79] What we can learn by placing Gramsci's theory of the common sense within this context, is that a catalyst event that triggers in a social movement is intrinsically tied to common sense. People need to share similar dissatisfactions, which cause them similar reactions. In the case of Puerto Rico people shared similar material conditions, and share the similar cultural codes. For example, if you are not Puerto Rican, you might not be as enraged by @ricardorossello's text messages, because in the chat had mostly local references and topics, that no one outside of Puerto Rican culture will understand their importance, or simply understand many of the offensive material. Therefore, there are shared icons and symbols within the Puerto Rican common sense that are present for the existence of a catalyst event. Later there was a significant catalyst event, that

[78] Gramsci, Antonio. *Antonio Gramsci Reader, The.* Edited by David Forgacs. (London, England: Lawrence and Wishart, 2014), 327.
[79] Gramsci, Antonio. *Antonio Gramsci Reader, The.* Edited by David Forgacs. (London, England: Lawrence and Wishart, 2014), 346.

provided the biggest window of opportunity for the movement to grow. The Center for Investigative Journalism published the entire 889 pages of the Telegram conversation on July 13, 2019. This came to be known as the #TelegramGate.

Organizing Groundwork and the Anti-Austerity Movement

When the protests began on Summer 2019, Ricardo Rosselló had only a year and a half left before the next election. People could have waited to vote him out of office, as usually happens when people are unsatisfied with their first executive of the islands. But this time it became common sense that he needed to resign immediately. Most people in Puerto Rico understood he was too dangerous to remain in office. People were also very sure that the legislature of Puerto Rico would not begin an impeachment process, so in this sense the only way to achieve the objectives of #RickyRenuncia was by occupying the streets, until the governor turned-in his resignation. Social movement organizers were key in communicating this message, but there was also a set of material conditions in place that provided the opportunity for wider support and participation. Historically, the two main parties in Puerto Rico have maintained their hegemony by keeping a big government. The Partido Popular Democrático and later Partido Nuevo Progresista have historically provided government employments in exchange for votes. Keeping a large government labor force has been a strategy from governments to maintain faithful supporters, even if the people hired are not qualified to fulfill their description of duties. In his book

Crónicas del colapso (2014), Emilio Pantojas García defines the government of Puerto Rico as a so-called *madfactor* government, instead of benefactor, "We've transitioned from the benefactor State to the *madfactor* State. A State whose role was to stimulate the economy through public spending and guaranteeing the equity distribution of the wealth through social assistance programs, a State turned into a source of wealth for the political class, and the local corporate elite, which is corrupt and unproductive […] The nepotism, the friendships, and favoritism becomes the operation system of the State."[80] Nevertheless, this helped many families to get out of poverty, especially during the decades of 60s, 70s, and 80s. However, the neoliberal developments of the last 20 years that has promoted downsizing the government has backfired by weakening the hegemony of the local political elite. As the government has less employees in their ranks, they also lose many loyalists. People are not loyal to the parties that have given them a secure government job, because those jobs have been disappearing due to the austerity measures, which are amplified with the presence of the Fiscal Control Board. On top of that you have a very corrupt political class that has lost the loyalty of many supporters across the years. Neoliberal governance of the last two decades has been violent to the working class. Working benefits have been eliminated, and the jobs that a new generation of workers are getting are mostly precarious. Older people also have their pensions under threat, and tuition hikes at the university have eliminated the possibility of good public education

[80] Pantojas-García, Emilio. *Crónicas del colapso : economía, política y sociedad de Puerto Rico en el siglo veintiuno.* Segunda edición aumentada. (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2015), 36.

for thousands of Puerto Ricans. To make things even more difficult for Puerto Ricans, in 2015 Governor Alejandro García Padilla imposed a 11.5 percent Sales Tax (highest in the entire US) to pay Puerto Rico's debt, not for social programs or the development of the islands.

The Fiscal Control Board, beyond attacking workers, has also cut social programs, eliminated resources for government agencies, and implemented a privatization agenda since 2016. "La generación yo no me dejo" (Puerto Rican Millenials and Gen-Z) are the children of the economic crisis that is documented to have started in 2006. This generation does not have what I call the "American Dream in Puerto Rico" of earlier generations, because all they have experienced is a country in decay since birth. Therefore, this generation does not have the same loyalty to the current political class, as their parents and grandparents had with Luis Muñoz Marín, Rafael Hernández Colón or Pedro Rosselló González, because they have inherited a crisis created by Wall Street Banks, executed by the local political elite, and supported by the U.S. Congress. Younger generations have not benefited from government employment, as Baby Boomers and Gen-X, back when the government was the largest employer on the island, and a government job represented good salaty, and benefits. Many of these jobs were provided by the PNP and PPD, seeking to retain loyalty from their voters. However, the neoliberal agenda and privatization of public companies have made the government have less loyalists based on jobs offered, therefore many young people have not benefited from government opportunities as their parents and grandparents. If the government is providing less

good employments, there will be less lloyalists to the government. The thousands of young people who took to the streets in Summer 2019 did not have any attachment to Ricardo Rosselló or the party he represented, even if they would have still voted for him. The conditions where in place for even a larger rebellion, and those conditions remain.

It is important to highlight key moments in recent years, where activists directly challenged the authority of the State. This also prepared the terrain for #RickyRenuncia. As stated earlier, in 2016 the U.S. Congress imposed a Fiscal Control Board to control Puerto Rico's public spending. The imposition of this Fiscal Control Board evidenced that Puerto Ricans had no agency over their internal matters. It also put an end to the long-standing debate of whether Puerto Rico was a colony or not. When PROMESA was approved, a group of activists established a resistance camp in front of the U.S. Federal Court in Puerto Rico, stating that they would not leave until the PROMESA Act was repealed. Eventually this was transformed into the collective "Jornada: Se Acabaron Las Promesas." The group organized a series of direct actions to protest the board, and eventually convened a final action of civil disobedience at an event where the Chamber of Commerce of Puerto Rico aimed to inform entrepreneurs about the benefits of the PROMESA Act. Activists from "Se Acabaron las Promesas" blocked the entrances to the hotel where the meeting was going to be held, and the Conference was a disaster. Afterwards the group continued active, and up to this date they remain, although after undergoing many transformations as an activist collective.

Later in Spring 2017, the University of Puerto Rico students went on strike for months to protest tuition hikes, and budget cuts to the public university as a consequence of the austerity plan of the Fiscal Control Board. The students at UPR led the movement against PROMESA. The feminist movement also played a crucial role with the protests of March 8th (International Women's Day). Feminists were questioning the debt, arguing that who suffered the most from the debt crisis were the women. They started protesting in an unusual place back then, which was Puerto Rico's Financial District (locally known as Milla de Oro). Later, May 1st of 2017, on International Workers Day, thousands of Puerto Ricans took to the streets led in part by both "Se Acabaron Las Promesas" and the student movement who marched to Puerto Rico's financial district. People were outraged at the banks that created Puerto Rico's economic crisis, and what is usually a rally turned into one of the most combative protests in the history of Puerto Rico, and the most combative Worker's Day. The next year (2018), the May 1st protest was as confrontational, but the second time the Police Special Forces were able to disperse the activists by throwing dozens of tear gas canisters to the crowd of protestors. Activism was escalating: it was three years in a row that major protest events happened.

The country saw through social media and news outlets that there were people challenging the State and fighting for change. These events were in the recent collective memory when #RickyRenuncia began. I argue that this had an influence in the common sense of many young people who understood that when the state is oppressive it must be challenged. But this common sense could not have been built if

activists had not also been on the ground for the last three years organizing against austerity measures and engaging in community work in the aftermath of hurricane María. For many people #RickyRenuncia was the first time they participated in a protest, "Mainstay activist groups were joined by those that had not attended marches previously. Many felt compelled to participate because the chats unveiled the neglect of an elite group of white, affluent men towards a population that suffered the brunt of a disaster in the making."[81]

In recent months, some groups have attempted to replicate what happened in Summer 2019 to demand the cancellation of the LUMA contract. As part of the privatization agenda put forward by the Fiscal Board, the Puerto Rican Electrical Power Authority (PREPA) was partially privatized. LUMA (the private company in charge of Puerto Rico's energy distribution) has been incapable of managing the electrical grid, triggering constant blackouts across the island. Many social movement organizations have tried to use the instability of the system as a window of opportunity, and although there have been many possible catalysts, none of them have been able to keep up because not enough grassroot work has been laid out, and there's a lack of direction. Also, the pandemic might have destroyed the momentum for activism in Puerto Rico. This is an aspect of the story that I will analyze in a later chapter. In recent protests, Jocelyn Velázquez Rodríguez (spokesperson of Jornada "Se Acabaron Las Promesas") also emphasized how #RickyRenuncia was not

[81] Santiago-Ortiz, Aurora. "Anti-Colonial Feminist Collective « La Cole » Are Leading the Puerto Rican Resistance." *Centre Tricontinental*, February 10, 2020, https://www.cetri.be/Anti-colonial-feminist-collective.

spontaneous, arguing that if we wish to have another event like this, activists/organizers need to get their hands dirty. On a Facebook post in 2022, she also spoke that the movement to demand the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló was not a spontaneous or isolated event, but it was part of a series of protests against austerity in recent years. Not seeing #RickyRenuncia as part of that wave diminishes the radical importance of such event and ignores the anti-colonial sentiment that drove thousands of people into the streets. [82]

The Snowball

The final catalyst that triggered #RickyRenuncia was the leak of the entire 889 pages of the chatroom conversation, published by Center for Investigave Journalism. On Saturday morning of July 13, 2019 the whole document was published on the Center for Investigative Journalism website. Many people spent the day reading the entire document. The leak revealed that the Telegram chatroom had twelve participants, including the Secretary of State of Puerto Rico, and the Government's Representative on the Fiscal Control Board, both of whom immediately resigned after this major leak. Other members of the chat were cabinet members, including the Secretary of Treasury. The PDF document also revealed the conflict of interests within Ricardo Rosselló's administration as there were also members of the private

[82] Jornada: Se Acabaron las Promesas, untitled, July 22, 2022, *Facebook*, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=754491939230844

sector who could have benefited from the internal communications from government officials.

As mentioned above, I argue that it is helpful to think of the catalyst not as a single event but instead in the form of a snowball, as the catalyzing incident must develop momentum, be pushed forward, and can continue growing depending on the conditions that transpire in the aftermath of each catalyst. In this sense, the window of opportunity, and/or catalyst incident can disappear if there is no direction or intention to take advantage of the possibilities. It is, however, the role of organizers and radical political organizations to make sure that the snowball continues forming, and eventually shift the perspective about an issue in a particular direction. In the days following the final leak, @Cole_Feminista and others made active use of Twitter to try to intervene in the public understanding of the chat.

One of the discussions sustained throughout the chat was the governor's public image and media representation. In the chat, they constantly discussed press releases, and making appearances on the local media. However, what was scandalous about their Public Relations management, is that the chat showed how they literally conspired to manipulate public opinion in favor of Ricardo Rosselló's administration, and the ideology of Statehood. One example about how they did this was by manipulating media polls on a certain topic. Another example is that whenever there was a story trending in local media that wasn't beneficial for Ricardo Rosselló, they intentionally built another story to shift the media's attention. This is what they attempted to do when the 889 pages were released (shift the public's attention

somewhere else), but by then the Puerto Rican people were so outraged that it was impossible for them to shift attention away from the Telegram chat.

Another set of conversations in the chat were misogynist, sexist, and homophobic commentaries. For hundreds of pages, they made sexist remarks to each other, and made fun of other politicians, public figures, and activists. This problematic behavior was often encouraged by Ricardo Rosselló who started many of the conversations. They were obsessed with the Mayor of San Juan, Carnen Yulín Cruz who is mentioned across the chat. There are comments stating that she is crazy and should be shot. By then she was a major contender for the gubernatorial race. Their homophobic jokes were constant too. In one case they joked about a picture of Shariana Ferrer, a Black-feminist leader from the La Cole. The joke was in reference to a purple t-shirt she had that read "Antipatriarcal Feminista Lesbiana Trans Caribeña Latinoamericana" (Antipatriarchal, Feminist, Lesbian, Trans, Caribbean, Latin American).

Chistian Sobrino comments, "This explains so much!"

Ricardo Rosselló responds, "Eso tiene que ser algún tipo de récord no?"

Carlos Bermúdez adds, "Puessss"

This is one of La Cole's protest slogans. Ferrer was wearing this t-shirt at a protest demanding the government to declare a State of Emergency due to gender violence, which has taken the lives of many women and self-identified women. The comments between Rosselló, Christian Sobrino, and Carlos Bermúdez reveal the lack of attention that the administration gave to this urgent issue. After the release of the Telegram chat the @ColeFeminista tweeted what could be read as a sentence to Ricardo Rosselló, "Es sencillo @ricardorossello o renuncias o te renunciamos. Tu comportamiento es inaceptable, no hay excusas ni disculpas que valgan. Aprende de la lección que le dimos a Héctor O'Neill. El pueblo indignado te lo recordará DONDE QUIERA QUE TE PARES." (Is simple @ricardorossello, you resign or we'll make you resign. Your behavior is unacceptable; there are no excuses or apologies that are worth it. Learn about the lesson we gave to Héctor O'Neill. The people are mad and will let it be know any place you go).[83] Previously the group pulled a successful campaign to make the Mayor of the city of Guaynabo (Héctor O'Neill) resign due to sexual harassment accusations. Now it was time to take on a similar campaign, but at the nationwide level: #RickyRenuncia. They were already ahead in this task, since they were demanding the governor's resignation even before the entire chatroom was released.

Not much attention has been given to the role of the whistleblower in this story, and the importance of whistleblowers in exposing the corruption and abuses

[83] Colectiva Feminista (@ColeFeministsa), "Es sencillo." Twitter (now X), July 13, 2019, https://x.com/ColeFeminista/status/1150156705428365314

from governments. The Telegram chat was published by the Center for Investigative Journalism, but the source of the leak is anonymous. According to interviews by NPR's podcast Radio Ambulante to the Center for Investigative Journalism journalists who broke the story, the leak was provided by a reliable source who was very close to Ricardo Rosselló's administration.[84] At the beginning Center for Investigative Journalism called it #Telegramgate in obvious reference to the Watergate scandal. I argue that whistleblowers have an important role in social movements, although they are in many instances not part of any political organization of movement. Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange, and even the group Anonymous are examples of this. To fully understand networked social movements, one must take into consideration what I call "digital civil disobedience," as a form of contention. The failure of this practice is perhaps that it is not coordinated from within the movements, and whistleblowers make their exposé only by themselves or through journalists.

However, in this case there could be another side to the story. We cannot take out of consideration the possibility that leak could have been facilitated by a political opponent of the governor, perhaps someone from the extreme-right. Ricardo Rosselló had several progressive postures towards a handful of issues, including gay marriage, abortion, and legalization of marijuana. He also was showing off force with the

[84] Omaya Sosa Pascual, "El gobernador en su laberinto," interview by Daniel Alarcón, *Radio Ambulante*, December 3, 2019, audio, https://radioambulante.org/transcripcion/gobernador-laberinto-transcripcion

authority of the Fiscal Control Board. The tensions with the Board could be seen in the chat when Rosselló jokes by writing:

"Mis expresiones autorizadas:

Dear Oversight Board –

Go fuck yourself.

Sicerely,

R2"

Of course, Rosselló never challenged the Board in a substantial manner, only engaging in a few Public Relations moves to show that he was fighting against the austerity measures imposed. Nevertheless, he faced a lot of criticism from the most conservative sectors in Puerto Rico, and the US. We cannot rule out the possibility that the leak was made to invalidate the governor from seeking reelection, and it was not in the interest of the Puerto Rican people, but to fulfil an extreme right-wing agenda.

It is for this reason that when a window of opportunity opens, radical activists and organizers must control the narrative before the narrative is controlled by liberal and/or conservative sectors. The snowball needs direction. The weekend of the major leak, more and more people began arriving at the gates of the governor's mansion.

Now it was within the hundreds. However, the crowd of unorganized protestors (many of whom had never participated on a protest before) needed direction. La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción was the first organized group who started giving direction to this particular snowball. Also in the streets, some experienced activists took the megaphone, and led the crowds. I was in the streets the night of Saturday, July 13 when the 889 pages of the chat were released and witnessed first-hand the first protest. This was a protest called by the @ColeFeminista and joined by other leftist groups including the MST (Socialist Movement of Workers). They organized their core of militants, and also posted the calls for protests across social media. Some mainstream artists started agitating too: @sanbenito (Bad Bunny) tweeted to his millions of followers, "yo creo que está hasta de más pedirle una renuncia al gobernador, el sabe que le toca si o si. De lo contrario, creo que llegó el día en que PR suelte el twitter, el facebook, el instagram y salga pa' la calle." (I think that we should not ask for the resignation of the governor, he knows that he has to go. On the contrary, I think that the day arrived when PR needs to put down twitter, facebook, Instagram, and take to the streets).[85] It is important to acknowledge that artists like @sanbenito and @Residente made a massive contribution for rallying people to the streets.

Ricardo Rosselló began a media tour right after the major leak. He started at the church. Puerto Rico is an extremely Christian country, so his Public Relations

[85] "Bad Bunny exhorta al pueblo a tirarse a la calle." *Telemundo Puerto Rico*, July 13, 2019, https://www.telemundopr.com/entretenimiento/bad-bunny-exhorta-al-pueblo-a-tirarse-a-la-calle-telemundo-telenoticias/101585/.

Team attempted to appeal that belief of “forgiveness” within the Puerto Rican people. [86] In the altar Rosselló took a more demagogic approach, there were 889 pages circling now, not a couple of dozens, and people were outraged demanding his resignation. @sanbenito, who continued following the events as they unfolded, tweeted, “la vieja confiable, escudarse con "Papa Dios” (The old one, hiding behind father God) [87] Many people asked @sanbenito to join the upcoming protests and rally his followers for #RickyRenuncia. In a way it was a form of also holding him responsible for the power and access he has as a worldwide known reggaeton and trap artist. For example, @Franquillo replied, “Vente pa la calle con nosotros please, convoca 1 día específico a una hora específica, usa tu plataforma y la gente va a llegar” (Come to the streets with us, call for one day, give an specific time, use your platform, people will arrive). @miguelrios replied, “Benito, convoca... llama a la juventud a protestar en Fortaleza” (Benito call, call the youth to protest in the Governor’s Mansion). And @RobiCamacho replied to @mighelrios, “Le toca, no mucha gente tiene ese poder” (Is he’s duty, not many people have that power).

Another important aspect for creating the conditions in which Ricardo Rosselló’s resignation becomes common sense was broadcasting the protests through social media. This self-broadcast from within the protestors is part of the repertoire of contentions from networked social movements and will be discussed in depth in later

[86] Prescencia PR, “VÍDEO: Reaparece el gobernador.” *Facebook,* July 14, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/presenciapr/videos/vídeo-reaparece-el-gobernador-ricardo-rosselló-en-medio-de-la-crisis-que-enfrent/316753345872943/
[87] Bad Bunny (@sanbenito), “la vieja confiable.” Twitter (now X), July 14, 2019, https://x.com/sanbenito/status/1150419774788132867

chapters. The day that the major leak was released, thousands of people rallied around the gates of the Governor's Mansion. Some of these protestors posted videos of the event that went viral on Twitter. @valdes_bianca posted some of a videos. One of them showed people singing and making music with casseroles, "Ricky batata tu homofobía mata"[88] (Ricky sweet potato, your homophia kills). Batata (meaning sweet potato) is a term often used in the Puerto Rican slang to refer to people that are in public office in debt of favors to the ruling class. *Political batatas* do not perform their jobs well, because like a "sweet potato" they are planted at the soil of the capitalist system only to benefit those who control it.

Another video posted by @valdes_bianca reached almost 50k views.[89] It showed hundreds of protestors singing Puerto Rico's revolutionary anthem, which is in fact the original anthem of Puerto Rico written by poet Lola Rodríguez de Tió. When the U.S. government put into effect the gag law in Puerto Rico, it was illegal to perform any sense of Puerto Rican pride. Displaying the Puerto Rican flag or any other sense of nationalism was punishable by law. Nationalism in Puerto Rico was the anti-colonial expression against U.S. imperialism. But once Puerto Rico was established as a Free Soverign State in 1952, Puerto Rican patriotic symbols were institutionally accepted to sell the idea that Puerto Rico was not a U.S. colony, but instead a territory that gave Puerto Ricans the best of two worlds: freedom and

[88] Bianca N. Valdés Fernández (@valdes_bianca), "Este es el ambiente." Twitter (now X), July 13, 2019, https://x.com/valdes_bianca/status/1150206963973787648
[89] Bianca N. Valdés Fernández (@valdes_bianca), "Cantan el himno." Twitter (now X), July 13, 2019, https://x.com/valdes_bianca/status/1150241336316047361

association with the U.S. – this process produced an institutional reformed sense of Puerto Ricaness or Nationalism, which was not Anti-Imperial. As a consequence patriotic symbols were co-opted. The anthem and the flag were officialized, but they were changed. The celestial blue of the flag was changed to the dark blue of the U.S. flag, and the anthem lyrics were changed to one that had no revolutionary or subversive meaning. To this day, the Lola Rodríguez de Tió's anthem continues to be considered the real anthem by many, although it is not the official one, and it is the song behind which all leftists organizations rally. When @valdes_bianca posted this video, it triggered a response from conservative and pro-annexation sectors: @Mapui4 responds in the comment thread, "La izquierda aprovechándose de la situación!" (The Left taking advantage of the situation) Another was @mjean2, former Puerto Rican senator, and advocate for Puerto Rico's statehood, "Cuando los gobiernos estadistas le fallan al pueblo, los sectores separatistas aumentan sus filas!" (When the pro-Statehood governments fail the people, the separatists grow!). It seems that @Mapui4 and @mjean2 recognize what I have been arguing in this chapter: it is the organizers who mobilized people toward Ricardo Rossello's resignation, alongside the material conditions. It wasn't a spontaneous process but was the culmination of a wave of protests. @DavidRulea also posted a video of the revolutionary anthem from a different angle.[90] The video of this user was viewed almost 60k times, and received comments such as, "vallanse pa cuba" (go to Cuba) by

[90] _____ (@DavidRulea), "Himno Revolucionario." Twitter (now X), July 13, 2019, https://x.com/DavidRulea/status/1150227484933328896

@paulnyj, making a direct connection between the Puerto Rican left and communism. @sanc373 posted "comunismo 101" (communism 101), @BVMVAM7 posted "ridiculos" (ridicules), and @AnaBaralt tweeted, "Los mismos separatistas de siempre. No aportan nada positivo a PR. Si son tan revolucionarios, renuncien a la ciudadania/pasaporte, becas, ayudas federales... Maduro los recibe en Venezuela" (The same separatists. They do not offer anything positive to PR. If they are so revolutionary, leave the citizenship/passport, scholarships, federal grants… Maduro will receive you in Venezuela). These critical responses attempted to situate the #RickyRenunicia protests as the actions of a perpetually dissatisfied small group, but the behavior of people across the country revealed otherwise. One example is how senior citizens began removing the picture of the governor down from governmental offices.[91]

The first massive protest was called for Monday, July 15. Unlike the prior manifestations, where people rallied in front of the governor's mansion; this one was a march. Although sometimes the objective of marches are forgotten, marches are a way of showing how many people are committed to the cause. It was a classical march from the Capitol to the governor's mansion. This protest was mainly organized by a coalition of workers unions. That day Ricardo Rosselló continued his media tour, still without assuming full responsibility for his comments in the chat. Ricardo Rosselló was constantly defending himself and referring to the chatroom as "locker-

[91] "Mujeres remueven cuadro del gobernador en oficina de Cesco." *Primera Hora*, July 16, 2019, https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/gobierno-politica/notas/mujeres-remueven-cuadro-del-gobernador-en-oficina-de-cesco/.

room talk." Meanwhile, in front of the Capitol thousands of people were gathering. The highlight of this demonstration was when Puerto Rican singer Danny Rivera was singing his song "Yo quiero un pueblo," which, like the revolutionary anthem, is another important symbol of the Puerto Rican left. The event had all the clichés of the Puerto Rican left. In one video that journalist @TorresGotay posted on Twitter we can see Danny singing the song, and just next to Danny there's a protestor dressed as Spider Man waving the Puerto Rican flag.[92] This hybrid culturalism iconic of Latin America's colonial legacy is the perfect representation of the intersectional and intergenerational approach that this struggle took, "*Latinamericanity* has always been a hybrid construction […] those fusions amplify with the English-speaking world: it is demonstrated through the large presence of migrants and latino cultural production in the U.S., and the insertion of anglicisms in the journalistic and electronic languages."[93] At this same time there were dozens of other protests in solidarity happening in the diaspora.

But not all protestors attended the march from the Capitol: thousands could not wait for the march and went directly to the gates of the governor's mansion. I was one of those, except this time I was carrying a camera with me, as I was also doing documentary filmmaking work. I could barely work, it was more difficult than walking to the bar in a rock concert. Just walking a couple of feet could take several

[92] Benjamín Torres Gotay (@TorresGotay), "Momento cumbre." Twitter (now X), July 15, 2019, https://x.com/TorresGotay/status/1150900941752868864
[93] Néstor García Canclini. *Latinoamericanos buscando lugar en este siglo.* 1. ed. (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2002), 69

minutes. It was the middle of Summer, so it was hot. It was also very loud. This was the first time at a protest in Puerto Rico where it was difficult for me to find someone that I knew. People were stepping on my feet, screaming next to my ear, and sticking to me with their sweat. However, there was a strong sense of solidarity. At the same time, people were very kind as you walked through the crowd, pushing and crawling through the multitude to get on your destiny.

Trying to get as close as the gates as possible, I experienced the music from Plena Combativa, a feminist band that plays political plena. Plena is a genre of Puerto Rican music, heavily influenced in African rhythms. There was a diversity of artistic expression all through the Fortaleza Street. I also observed many queer manifestations that were reclaiming the word puta (whore), which the governor used contemptuously on the chat. I could only perceive what was happening next to me and did not have a clear way to see everything that was going on. In this sense, researching on Twitter made me discover manifestations that were happening right next to me. One person that I saw photographed more than once on Twitter was a women carrying a banner of Rosaura Roque, although I am not clear who Rosaura is, this women's banner had a picture of Rosaura, which read, "Yo marcho por Rosaura Roque, quien murió en la oscuridad por la falta de necesidades básicas. Recuerda su nombre" (I march because Rosaura Roque died in the darkness because of the lack of basic necessities. Remember her name). What this banner shows is that the Telegram chat was a catalyst for people to protest against a corrupt government and failing state that was not able to manage the emergency in the aftermath of hurricane María. These material

conditions mobilized people to the street. Moving beyond the chat, the protests were not about what the governor said with his friends in the chatroom -- it was much deeper. Rosaura's picture was not only seen by those who attended the protest, but it was immortalized in cyberspace as a clear example of the hybridity of networked social movements.

As night fell, the marchers from the Capitol also arrived, making the concentration of people even thicker. I finally arrived as close as I could the gates of the Governor's Mansion, which were full of SWAT officers and police with riot gear. Then one protestor climbed to a balcony where he could reach an art installation of umbrellas that Ricardo Rosselló inaugurated. He began destroying the umbrellas, and like a rock concert, the crowd went wild cheering. This person was the rock star of the night, long before any of the celebrities started arriving to the scene. After hurricane María, these umbrellas had become a tourist attraction. When visiting Old San Juan, many visitors stopped at the umbrellas for their selfies. However, when this protestor began destroying the umbrellas, I realized how much Puerto Ricans disliked those umbrellas. The crowd began applauding and chanting "Ole, Ole, Ole" as the protestor was destroying the umbrellas. Later in the night, the installation was set on fire by a Molotov cocktail, and the police began attacking the protestors with tear gas and rubber bullets. There were thousands of protestors in the streets, and Puerto Rico

began making international headlines. That night also, Twitter featured #RickyRenuncia as a "Twitter moment."[94]

I think that after that violent night, the commitment to remove Ricardo Rosselló solidified. The police attack on protestors was the last element in the catalyst that triggered the movement against Ricardo Rosselló. Whereas, in some instances arrests and police repression may help to demobilize activists and people in the streets, in colonies police violence fuels the protestors, "The violence of the colonial regime and the counterviolence of the colonized balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity […] Violence among the colonized will spread in proportion to the violence exerted by the colonial regime."[95] Perhaps, that is why in recent protests police are refraining from using excessive force, since it gains the popular support towards protestors. It seems that police forces await the burnout of protestors. But at #RickyRenuncia police attacked protestors in front of the Governor's Mansion. After this, there was no turning back, people would keep coming to the Governor's Mansion every day until Ricardo Rosselló presented his resignation. This was the final catalyst that triggered the #RickyRenuncia movement, after this it was important to maintain the snowball rolling. But perhaps it

[94] "#RickyRenuncia es tendencia en Twitter." *El Vocero de Puerto Rico*, July 15, 2019, https://www.elvocero.com/gobierno/rickyrenuncia-es-tendencia-en-twitter/article_9dc926b8-a74a-11e9-b5e1-8fcf8513d4e2.html.
[95] Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth.* Translated by Richard Philcox. Sixtieth anniversary edition. (New York: Grove Press, 2021), 46.

was so big that it was impossible to stop until Ricardo Rosselló presented his resignation to the country.

#RickyRenuncia movement was an anti-colonial expression, however the claims that it was spontaneous or that people were only outraged because of the chat contents overlooks a much more complex history. People took to the streets because of the economic precarity, the lack of agency after hurricane María, and the long-history of corruption that the Rosselló last name represented. The shape of the country and the individual conditions of Puerto Ricans that were in place when the chat was leaked, sparked this arhipelago-wide outrage. Nevertheless, this was possible due to the groundwork that the anti-austerity movement was doing in the streets for years, and the direction that certain movement leaders gave to the outrage at the beginning. Rage was directed to demand the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló. However, this political opportunity did not developed enough to transform into a revolution (I will discuss this in the final chapter). The next chapter will look at the cultural production that helped produce common sense to keep people in the streets, and maintain the momentum of the movement.

Chapter #2

Cultural production to develop #RickyRenuncia common sense

Once the conditions are ripe, how do you build a popular movement? In many instances people can have consensus about what is beneficial to society, for example, people may agree that there is a waste problem, and there must be better recycling programs. People can also agree that the world must move towards renewable energy, and away from fossil fuels. But what moves people into agency, into demanding a change immediately rather than waiting passively for someone to solve a problem? What builds the sense of urgency and participation? In Puerto Rico, when people are in discontent with a governor, they have historically waited the next election, but in the Summer 2019, the events unfolded different, and Puerto Ricans who wanted Ricardo Rosselló to resign immediately. Since the 2000s no Puerto Rican governor has renewed their term, which evidences the lack of stability that the country has endured for the last 25 years. In the Summer 2019, the majority of Puerto Rican wanted Rosselló to resign immediately, and people understood that the only way to make this happen was by occupying the streets, and creating a political crisis for the government.

In this chapter, I look at how cultural production helped transformed the common sense of Puerto Ricans from being politically passive to becoming politically active. I argue that there was a transformation in the common sense, because thousands were convinced that there was power beyond the voting polls, and

Ricardo Rosselló could resign if enough political pressure continued on the streets, and social media. The common sense among Puerto Ricans is the result of a powerful colonial project that alongside religion, education, and the media has developed an hegemony based on three main pillars to keep the population under control. I argue that these are Christianity, American exceptionalism, and Triage Racial identity. First, Christianity as all other Latin American countries is a key element of colonialism. Puerto Rico is a very Christian nation. Therefore, when Ricardo Rosselló broke from those Christian values, many were offended, and this provided an opportunity for organization against Ricardo Rosselló. Second, as I mentioned in the introduction, the U.S. established their hegemony in Puerto Rico through providing financial support. So, within the Puerto Rican common sense, there exists the believe that without the U.S. Puerto Rico would be poor or bankrupt. But the material conditions of the residents of the Puerto Rico has made this perception slowly fall. Specially after the debt crisis, and hurricane María, many Puerto Ricans have realized that being under the jurisdiction of the U.S. does not guarantees development or a safety net. Regardless, many blame Puerto Rico's crises on the local administration, which is something that also allowed the rage against Rosselló to be boiled. Finally, there is an idea that Puerto Ricans are racially a perfect blend of 1/3 Black, 1/3 Taíno, and 1/3 Spaniards. This idea has helped to hide the institutional racism that exists in Puerto Rico, not acknowledging that Black and racialized communities have been left behind by the State. Since Reggaeton is born from Puerto Rico's Black neighborhoods, the incorporation of Reggaeton in the #RickyRenuncia also represents a rebellion from

Black and racialized communities to the white creole (Rosselló). These are all elements that cultural producers, organizers, and activists navigated to transform the Puerto Rican common sense in the networked public sphere. In the article, "The Dirty Body that Cleans: Representations of Domestic Workers in Brazilian Common Sense" Patricia de Santana Pinho states that Antonio Gramsci's through his concept of common sense show us that "common sense must be challenged in the pursuit of social transformation. Material change requires the engagement in a "cultural battle" where popular mentality is to be questioned, criticized, and ultimately reconstructed."[96] Therefore, I argue that the hegemonic ideas of American exceptionalism and race were challenged by activists as part of the cultural expressions against Ricardo Rosselló.

In this chapter, I delve into how popular art was essential to challenge or intervene the Puerto Rican common sense to build a movement that will have the political force that ousts Rosselló from office. I argue that the production of anti-Rosselló art was instrumental in this. In this chapter, I do not limit myself by looking at just the most popular or famous social media posts. Even if we are looking at the role of social media in a massive wave of protests, the less famous works of art are important as well, as they also produce an important knowledge that also influenced important sectors of the population. I also try to expand what is considered as art, as I analyze memes as mundane art practices, and dancing parties as inclusive forms of

[96] Patricia de Santana Pinho. "The Dirty Body That Cleans: Representations of Domestic Workers in Brazilian Common Sense." *Meridians* (Middletown, Conn.) 13, no. 1 (2015): 104.

corporeal expression away from elitist spaces of the physical theater. The question I explore here is how people became mobilized, instead of waiting for the next election or accepting Rosselló's behavior as a normal characteristic of a Puerto Rican politician. How do movements contribute to producing a common sense of non-conformity? This is the big question here. "Revolution in our lifetime" was one of the main slogans of the Black Panthers, meaning that they will not wait for the next generation to change things, but that change must be immediate. That is the sort of feeling that moved Puerto Ricans for those two weeks: that change was possible and did not need to wait for the next election. To make my analysis I look at the production of memes, the production of illustrations, and the role of reggaeton music during the Summer of 2019 as places that transformed into that challenged the Puerto Rican common sense in the networked public sphere.

Memes

Memes have become an integral part of Puerto Rico's counterculture in recent years. According to Caroline Gil Rodríguez, there has been a wave of what Gil Rodríguez identifies as "Puerto Rico crisis memes" birthed as a response to the economic crisis. In her article, "La Bola de Cristal: Puerto Rican Meme Production in Times of Austerity and Crisis," Gil Rodríguez states: "The fiscal crisis has seen an abundance of meme trends that unveil the frustrations of the citizenry after decades of corruption, react to the recent imposition of a Fiscal Control Board, and draw on the

island's thorny history as a colony of the U.S."[97] Memes find in Puerto Rico's internet culture an engaged audience. People share the memes through social media and WhatsApp groups. "Memes embody how you interact with friends and family from the diaspora, and you wouldn't put it past yourself to utilize memes as a vehicle for flirting with someone."[98]

Gil Rodríguez highlights a batch of memes that became viral during the 2017 referendum on Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States. The referendum was put forward by Ricardo Rosselló's government, during its first year administrating the colony. Rosselló, a strong advocate of Statehood, ran on an anti-corruption platform, as well as promising Puerto Ricans that he would deliver Statehood to Puerto Rico. The referendum consulted if Puerto Ricans preferred becoming part of the US as a State, independence, or if they wanted to maintain the current territorial status as a commonwealth. This would be the 5th status referendum in Puerto Rico's history, and it did not hold much credibility for the Puerto Rican population. This was a plebiscite put forward by Rosselló the first year of his administration. Like I mentioned before, Rosselló didn't have the votes of the majority of the people and won with only 41.8% of the popular vote according to the official results from Comisión Estatal de Elecciones.[99] None of the parties that represented the other two options

[97] Caroline Gil Rodríguez. "'La Bola de Cristal': Puerto Rican Meme Production in Times of Austerity and Crisis." *InVisible Culture*, Mar. 2018: 3

[98] Caroline Gil Rodríguez. "'La Bola de Cristal': Puerto Rican Meme Production in Times of Austerity and Crisis." *InVisible Culture*, Mar. 2018: 11

[99] COMISIÓN ESTATAL DE ELECCIONES - PR. https://ww2.ceepur.org/. Accessed 5 Oct. 2025.

(independence or commonwealth) co-sponsored the plebiscite, and the Puerto Rican people decided to boycott. Not even those who voted for the statehood party in the general elections participated in the referendum in significant numbers. In the 2016 Rosselló received 660,510 votes, while in the referendum the Statehood option received 508,862 votes. The participation of the 2016 general election was 55% of the registered voters, while only 23% of registered voters participated in the pro-Statehood referendum. This was the first major boycott against Rosselló, which was also a response to the material conditions that Puerto Ricans found themselves at the moment when Ricardo Rosselló became governor. There were many people who across the internet posted memes to ridicule the plebiscite and to communicate its lack of credibility since it was designed to make Statehood win. In this plebiscite, the Pro-Statehood party developed their own definitions of what it means to be independent or remain a Free-Sovereign State in Puerto Rico. Therefore, those definitions were biased towards their understanding of those two territorial-political statuses. There was no participation from the Pro-Independence or Pro-Free Sovereign State sectors to define those concepts for the Puerto Rican population.

As Gil Rodríguez describes, there were constant memes being produced about the impact of statehood, and how life would be different in Puerto Rico under statehood versus without statehood. This became great material for sarcasm. Pro-statehood politicians often overhype the benefits of Statehood for Puerto Rico, and do not take into consideration the power dynamics of race, gender, and class that will remain. Therefore, meme producers had a blast comparing the two Puerto Ricos: one

was an exaggeration of the benefits of Statehood, and the other was a country condemned to underdevelopment by not choosing the Statehood option. This made the plebiscite a joke, and although Statehood won for 97%, the credibility of Rossello's plebiscite was minimal. For Puerto Rican statehooders, becoming the 51st state of the United States is a decolonization process. Statehood is a promise of prosperity, and development for Puerto Ricans. In the book titled, *On the Postcolony,* Achille Mbembe argues that after a decolonization process, the State fetishizes the post-colonial life to achieve legitimation and hegemony. Mbembe explains, "the champions of state power invent entire constellations of ideas; they adopt a distinct set of cultural repertoires and powerfully evocative concepts."[100] Therefore, the State in the postcolony produces narratives through images and idioms that are often exaggerated in what Mbembe classifies as *commandments*, "the *commandment* is constantly engaged in projecting an image of itself and the world—a fantasy it presents its subjects as a truth beyond dispute, a truth to be installed into them that they acquire a habit of discipline and obedience."[101] Although, Puerto Rico remains a colony, Mbembe's analysis of cultural production by the ruling class to develop its hegemony in a post-colony serves to understand the projection by statehooders in an arguably post-colonial Puerto Rico. The benefits of being part of the United States are often fetishized by statehooders without taking into consideration the inequalities of race, class, and gender that exist within the United States. What does it mean for a

[100] Achille Mbembe. *On the Postcolony.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 103
[101] Achille Mbembe. *On the Postcolony.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 109

State with most Spanish-speaking people of color to enter the union? These are issues that are not addressed by the Pro-Statehood leadership, therefore this fetishization of Statehood crumbles the image that they are attempting to create. Mbembe argues that the *commandment* often and unintentionally capsizes, and confrontation occurs when the rulers are not able to maintain a stable system of signs and images. The post-colonized subject will use humor to challenge and confront the State. In the case of Puerto Rico memes were an essential part of confronting the Rossello's administration. Of course, humor, mockery, and ridiculing those in power is not enough to bring a political change, they serve to destroy the images that the State has constructed on themselves, "Thise who laugh, whether in the public arena or in the private domain, are not necessarily bringing about the collapse of power or even resisting it."[102] I argue that laughing at Rosselló was an important step in constructing common sense, using humor as a form to collapse the image of Rosselló. Although Puerto Ricans are not post-colonized subjects, the humor used to ridicule the Pro-Statehood Party is a confrontation to theirs view of a supposedly post-colonial Puerto Rico. In the case of Puerto Rico memes are a form of confronting the ruling class through humor.

Like the emergence of both the #RickyRenuncia hashtag and the wider social movement calling for his resignation, the meme wave did not happen spontaneously. In the case of memes, Gil Rodríguez identifies a series of Facebook pages where

[102] Achille Mbembe. *On the Postcolony.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 110.

these memes were generated. According to Gil Rodríguez, memes fill the void in the Puerto Rican mainstream media and may work as a place to produce a counter-narrative: "Memes provide citizens with an emerging way to express themselves outside of traditional media circuits, something that has not existed before."[103]

In the next pages I will describe and analyze a set of memes that went viral during #RickyRenuncia, which, as in the plebiscite, served to subtract credibility from Rosselló's administration. In this sense, memes can be forms of defiance to colonialism, and can serve a purpose in Puerto Rico's liberation movement. An analysis of the memes produced for #RickyRenuncia further demonstrates how the events that transpired in Summer 2019 are part of Puerto Rico's decolonization struggle. Memes, Gil Rodríguez states, "may also operate as a ceremonial purge on the effects of colonialism; a twenty-first century take on cybernetic syncretism."[104] This is not exclusive to Puerto Rico, as in other countries, memes have also been used as a form of activism. During the Bolsonaro years in Brazil, Melanie A. Medeiros, Patrick McCormick, Erika Schmitt, and James Kale argue that "social media and political memes were vehicles through which young adults, even those whose political participation had previously been minimal, could engage with the political and social issues facing Brazil during this precarious time."[105] What this shows is that

[103] Caroline Gil Rodríguez. "'La Bola de Cristal': Puerto Rican Meme Production in Times of Austerity and Crisis." *InVisible Culture*, Mar. 2018: 11
[104] Caroline Gil Rodríguez. "'La Bola de Cristal': Puerto Rican Meme Production in Times of Austerity and Crisis." *InVisible Culture*, Mar. 2018: 11
[105] Medeiros, Melanie A, Patrick McCormick, Erika Schmitt, and James Kale. "'BARBIE E KEN CIDADÃOS DE BEM': Memes and Political Participation among College Students in Brazil." In Precarious Democracy, edited by Benjamin Junge, Alvaro Jarrin, Sean T Mitchell, and Lucia Cantero, 218–32. Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2021.

social media has also served as a place where people can be introduced to activism, this helps in broadening the participation and giving to sympathizers a sense of belonging to a particular struggle, “political memes and other forms of new media are merging as important new forms of political participation” state Medeiros, McCormick, Schmitt and Kale.

Researching the memes during #RickyRenuncia, I have come to classify them in two categories: Memes about Ricardo Rosselló’s non-compliance, and memes about the Fear of Missing Out. Altogether these memes create culture, a counter-culture. And the producers of these memes are part of a counter-hegemonic move that produced common sense in favor of Rosselló’s resignation. Memes focused on Rosselló’s non-compliance revealed that he was ignoring the wishes of the Puerto Rican people regarding his resignation. Memes claimed that Puerto Ricans wanted Rosselló to resign and joked about his obsession to remain in power. These types of memes helped communicate that there was a consensus among the Puerto Rican people in regards to Rosselló resignation. This helped shaped the common-sense of people consuming these memes. One meme in particular shows the Simpsons characters Moe (the bar owner) and Barney (a drunk). In the meme Moe kicks Barney out of the bar, but Barney returns. The meme identifies Moe as Puerto Rico, and Barney as Rosselló. [106]

[106] “¡Pa que te rías! Mira los mejores memes de la semana.” *Primera Hora*, July 19, 2019, https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/puertorico/fotogalerias/pa-que-te-rias-mira-los-mejores-memes-de-la-semana-11/



Figure 2, Simpsons Meme: Moe and Barney (Screenshot)

Another asks Rosselló to not get mad because everyone resigns from their first job. This meme is referencing the class status of the Governor and how being a governor was his first experience in the workplace. And a third shows a weight scale stating "I want to be committed to my diet, as Ricky is committed to the governorship". Here the author of the meme sarcastically communicated Rosselló's refusal to obey the wishes of his people.[107]

[107] "¡Pa que te rías! Mira los mejores memes de la semana." *Primera Hora*, July 19, 2019, https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/puertorico/fotogalerias/pa-que-te-rias-mira-los-mejores-memes-de-la-semana-11/



Figure 4, Diet Meme (Screenshot)



Figure 3, Employment Meme (Screenshot)

Overall, this set of memes are embedded in the conceptual maps of Puerto Rican culture. They are effective, because the symbols in the memes already have a similar meaning for Puerto Ricans who have been raised in Puerto Rico. The Simpsons, for example, were part of the afternoon cartoons block showed in Puerto Rico's local television. For years, The Simpsons have played on TV before the 5pm news, so there is an entire generation that has been raised watching the Latino version of The Simpsons after coming home from school. By repurposing relatable characters, like The Simpsons, producers of memes add another layer of meaning, supported by already familiar icons that Puerto Ricans already see through a similar conceptual map, which as Stuart Hall explains, are "the shared cultural 'space' in which the production of meaning through language – that is, representation – takes place."[108] In

[108] Stuart Hall and The Open University, editors. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. (Repr, SAGE, 2012. Culture, Media and Identities), 10.

that sense, a generation of Puerto Ricans have experienced The Simpsons in a similar form, therefore they share a similar conceptual map in regards to these characters, which allows them to have other kinds of conversations based on these shared meanings. The message does not start from scratch, but starts from symbols that share similar meaning to Puerto Ricans.

The second type of meme, which expressed fear of missing out, had a different social and cultural role: to help maintain the people in the streets. Many people were convinced that their bodies needed to be in the streets to create the necessary pressure to force Ricardo Rosselló to resign. The fear of missing out is a phenomenon that has been studied by Gilroy-Ware in social media. In the book, *Filling the Void: Emotion, Capitalism & Social Media,* the author tries to understand why social media users continue scrolling down the infinite social media timeline, and why some people continue using social media despite of privacy concerns. [109]But in this case, the fear of missing out on what's happening with #RickyRenuncia, also transcended to rallying people to the streets. It was Summer 2019, and people went to the protests for different reasons. These memes ratified that Old San Juan was the place to be during the Summer. It had even a *carnivalesque* element.

There is one video meme from @RadioIndePR where they edit a Barack Obama impersonation scene from the TV Sitcom, Key and Peele, where actor Jordan Peele (playing Obama) is saluting his staff after a public message. In his way to salute

[109] Marcus Gilroy-Ware. *Filling the Void : Emotion, Capitalism and Social Media.* London: Repeater, 2017.

them all he had various interactions with the people. In the editing of the video meme, the meme creators identify Jordan Peele as the regular activist arriving to the protests, and instead is having interactions with different activists and social movement collectives. This funny video made you identify with the activist (Jordan Peele playing Obama) and miss those moments of camaraderie when you were away from the gates of The Governor's Mansion.[110]



Figure 5, Video Meme: Jordan Peele (Screenshot)

Another meme in this category used the popular meme of a person going to sleep, and the brain staying awake. In the meme the cartoon person is going to sleep and thinking "what if Rosselló resigns while you are asleep?" And that is exactly how

[110] Radio Independencia. "Llegando a protestar #RickyRenuncia." Facebook, July 20, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/radioindependenciapr/videos/2135034869941905

many people felt, that he could resign anytime. That made people not only committed to staying on the streets, but glued to the news and social media platforms, not wanting to miss out on sharing that moment with others. When I asked Nkapuchada about what Rosselló's resignation would mean at the moment, she stated that it was going to feel like justice finally was being served. In her view, it was not only the chat, but the deaths after hurricane María, the people that died due to the lack of water. In the article, "We are all the 4,645: Impossible Mourning and the Verano Boricua" Christopher Powers Guimond argues that #RickyRenuncia movement was also a "movement of ghosts." His article states that the movement against Rosselló was fueled by the deaths that the government did not recognize from hurricane María. According to a report from the Center for Investigative Journalism, there were 4,645 deaths as a result of hurricane María, but the government only recognized 64. Rosselló's resignation will mean justice for those 4,645 people that were not even recognized by his administration, "The people of Puerto Rico dramatically reappropriated the ability to mourn through direct action, defending the dignity of the 4,645 victims of Hurricane María collectively by protesting a corrupt government that had profaned on their memory."[111] The number 4,645 is a symbol for Puerto Ricans, and within that collective symbol the rage for the deaths of hurricane became part of the Puerto Rican common sense. Therefore activists like Nkapuchada did not want to

[111] Christopher Powers Guimond. "We Are All the 4,645: Impossible Mourning and the Verano Boricua." *Diálogos*, vol. 52, no. 109, 2021: 61

miss out on the moment that justice might be served with Rosselló resigning humiliated from office.

As earlier discussed by Gil Rodríguez, memes can fill the void of what the media is not covering. With the rise of the internet, Puerto Rico's local corporate media has lost popularity among younger generations. Younger people rely on podcasts, documentaries, and influencers to get informed. These also function as alternative media, as the credibility of the mainstream press has decreased during the last years. Memes in this sense are similar to the comic-strips that accompany newspapers, in the virtual world they provide a humorous commentary about a specific issue. However, in this context, memes do not only comment, but they can also agitate, in part because creators do not have any ties to a Puerto Rican corporate interest: many of them are created by anonymous users. In her book, *Hacker Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous (2015),*[112] Gabriella Coleman explains that the activity of anonymity was at first used for trolling, cyberbullying, and making pranks over the internet, these terms are known as *LULZ* and internet users that engage in this practice, simply do it for the adrenaline of getting popularity and attention. But throughout her ethnography on the hacker group Anonymous, Coleman shows how internet anonymity can transform into a political force. Whether or not many of the users who created these memes had a political objective, the truth is that they have an effect in the networked public sphere.

[112] Gabriella E. Coleman. *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy : The Many Faces of Anonymous*. London (England: Verso, 2014).

Illustrators

While memes are a more accessible and popular form of cultural production, professional illustrators on the other hand may produce a more artistically sophisticated cultural production, but not as quickly as memes get produced. Although memes reproduce and remix images of popular culture, illustrators often produce more sophisticated works in the sense of preparation, and craft. The role of illustrators and cartoonists in newspapers has historically been a critique to those in power, in the article "What Does Society Owe Political Cartoonists" Jenn Burleson Mackay states "Political cartoonists question government policies and mock popular culture. They utilize artistic prowess as a tool to comment on societal flaws. They are journalists who provide the public news and information. Yet they challenge audiences in a unique way. They ask the public to see the irony embedded within current events."[113] I will be looking at how illustrators and cartoonists intervened the virtual space during the two-weeks of #RickyRenuncia, which the people used as an alternative source of getting the news, and as the main space for agitation and knowing when the next protest would happen. In this section, I will analyze the work of three artists whose work was important in rallying people to the streets. I will analyze the work of @checkinmela, @planetakike, @tallergraficopr.

During those two weeks, many artists and political organizations "pasquinaron" social media. "Pásquin" is a form of reclaiming the public space to

[113] Jenn Burleson Mackay. "What Does Society Owe Political Cartoonists?" *Journalism Studies (London, England)* 18, no. 1 (2017): 28.

display counter-hegemonic narratives. “Pásquin” is a paper wheat-pasted to a structure. In Puerto Rico, “pásquin” is often used for radical political campaigns and announcing a protests or strikes. It’s pasted without permission, and that sense reclaims the spaces of the city. The radical “pásquin” has long served a purpose of denouncement, and mobilization. Now, in this hybrid world, it is important to “pásquinar” the virtual public sphere in order to also intervene in the public space. While in the streets people who “pasquinea” runs the risk of being caught by the police, in social media the risk is invisibility. The algorithms can make the “pasquín” invisible, because they decide what people see or do not see in social media, opposite to what happens when one is driving or walking down the street. Although here the hashtag #RickyRenuncia helped, since it was a trending topic and hashtag in all main social media platforms, and at the end social media platforms are craving for people’s attention. Therefore, the hashtag functionality itself became another window of opportunity.

According to Martín Barbero the popular classes are sensible to the symbols of the hegemony. Therefore, the ridiculing of symbols that are part of the hegemonic narrative, (in the case of Puerto Rico the promise of progress based on American culture) makes the people feel identified with the messages from activists. The digital pasquín and memes can also be seen as a modern “Pliego de córdel” or “colportage,” which were small cheap prints that were hanged in wires in Spain, France, and other parts of Europe, where the authors would provide alternative forms of narrating or preserving the story of society from the voices of the masses, often incorporating

pictures, and humor. This form of cultural production, also does not have a set of norms, which is also similar to the multiplicity of formats we see people often posting on social media. Usually the attention goes to the images, and complemented by text. Very similar to the form in users post in social media. Therefore, I argue that memes, and digital posters, function as a form of "Pliego de córdel", which cultural producers in support of the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló incorporated, and adapted to new platforms, which consequently helped to continue developing the common sense for Ricardo Rosselló's resignation.

@checkinmela is a graphic designer, cartoonist, and visual artist who has become a social media influencer in the past seven years. Mainly followed by Millennials, @checkinmela became famous when she introduced a character named Madame Mela who shared the monthly horoscopes with elements of humor and popular culture. Horoscopes tend to have a serious tone, however, @checkinmela has been able to defamiliarize the genre of horoscopes and produce new meanings. According to Viktor Shklovsky, an artist is capable of turning the normal into strange in order to make us feel new emotions, and give new interpretations to ideas. Viktor Sklovski writes in "Art as Technique," "After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it –hence we cannot say anything, significant about it. Art removes objects from the automatism of perception in several ways."[114] @checkinmela defamiliarized the

[114] Shklovskii, Viktor. "Art as Technique." *In From Symbolism to Socialist Realism*, edited by Irene Masing-Delic, 64–81. Boston, USA: Academic Studies Press, 2019.

concept of the horoscope in Puerto Rican culture, and Puerto Ricans responded strongly to her work as evidenced by her large Instagram following even prior to #RickyRenuncia.

The first art that @checkinmela made about #RickyRenuncia was one in which her character (Madame Mela) looks into her crystal ball and the crystal ball revealed "Estás bien pillao," which translates into (you are very much in a corner). The blurb of her post read, "Los astros leyeron esas 900 páginas del chat y Ricky..." (The stars read those 900 pages of the chat, and Ricky…) The drawing was liked by more than 20,000 users on Instagram. Users mostly reacted with laughing emoticons, and often tagged other users. In Puerto Rico saying "estás bien pillao" is like giving an ultimatum or announcing a death sentence. You never want to be "bien pillao" because that is certainly not good news. However, the phrase is very popular.[115] This post states that @ricardorossello has no opportunity to regain the trust of the Puerto Rican people, and therefore his term is over. This post might not be sufficient to rally people into the streets, however it sets the tone that time is up for @ricardorossello, and shifts the public's perspective into that direction. However, it's important to also analyze the subsequent posts from @checkinmela, which can be seen as agitating.

The second cartoon post from @checkinmela during this period shows an interaction between two of her characters. In her cartoons, one of her characters is based on herself, sort of a semi-autobiographic character. The interaction is based on

[115] (@checkinmela), "Los astros." July 12, 2019, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/Bz0qMZ0pOE2/

a person welcoming another to a new job. The welcoming character says, “Welcome to the team. We will add you to the employee chat” to which the welcomed character responds, “No, I resign, bye.”[116] At this moment it was surfaced the annoyance of group chats, particularly group chats with working mates. Although not directly referencing Ricardo Rosselló, the post was in context to the current ongoing situation. Perhaps, it was not the most political post, but it stated that group chats are personally dangerous and risky, especially if you’re in a chat with the governor of Puerto Rico. The Instagram post had over 30,000 likes, and it visibly shows how the people were following the ongoing conversation of the chat.

However, this post could also be read as justifying the chat situation and claiming that the problem is the chat itself. Being that the chat is an unfiltered and unmediated space of communication, one can easily be dragged to a controversy without knowing. But to be clear about her position, @checkinmela published a third post with the character based on her person, which had fire on the eyes. The text that accompanied the art read, “I am not afraid.”[117] During this time there was a popular chant being used in the streets that said, “We are more, and we are not afraid.” The first time I registered this chant was during the protests against the Fiscal Control Board.

---

[116] (@checkinmela), “Lo llevo diciendo.” July 13, 2019, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/Bz3C4XNpAZ0/

[117] (@checkinmela), “Nos tienen miedo.” July 15, 2019, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/Bz8TFcaJ0g8/

"Somos más y no tenemos miedo" (We are more, and we are not afraid) is born from an anti-capitalist claim to dissolve the Fiscal Control Board and repeal the PROMESA Act. This chant has been used in protests at the Milla de Oro (Puerto Rico's Financial District), a place that many activists and organizers have targeted due to the Banks compliance with Puerto Rico's economic crisis, and austerity programs. During 2017 and 2018, the protests at the Financial District have turned into confrontations with the insular police, and SWAT teams. So the chant, "We are more, and we are not afraid," has an anti-capitalist origin in which young people are willing to be on the street, and sacrifice their safety in order to break the current financial system. As with the black and white Puerto Rican flag used in #RickyRenuncia protests, this chant has origins in the anti-austerity movements to repeal PROMESA and dissolve the Fiscal Control Board.

@checkinmela's post thus responds to a recent collective memory, whether or not she does it intentionally. Utilizing the words "I am not afraid," evokes a revolutionary sentiment, where people are willing to sacrifice their safety in order to pursue social change. By including this text, @checkinmela situates her semi-autobiographical character as one of the protestors at #RickyRenuncia. This also appeals to followers of reggaeton music, in which the claim of "not being afraid" resonates within the underground culture that drives reggaeton. For example, in this post @keysivargas replies, "Aquí no hay miedo Lo dejamo en la Gabetaaa." (We have no fear, we left it in the drawer). A popular catch-phrase coming from gangster rapper "Héctor The Father." In the next section, I will delve into the role of reggaeton in the

#RickyRenuncia protests. Here, however, I want to suggest that "I am not afraid," agitates and bridges a common sense between anti-austerity activists and the masses who usually limit their political participation to electoral politics, which the organized left hasn't been able to mobilize since the protests to remove the US Navy from the island of Vieques.

Eventually @checkinmela made a horoscope specifically for @ricardorossello. Her character Madame Mela pronounced herself about Rosselló's future. The cartoon read:

> Los astros están bien alterados por el relajito y abuso que tienes con el país. Se me cae la cara de vergüenza. Te informo que los astros te sacaron del zodiac porque dejaste de ser piscis y te convertiste en pescabish. Lo tuyo va más allá que mercurio retrógado. Tú estás en un nivel de pillaera que no te puedo explicar. Si lloraste ayer, prepárate, porque esto no va a parar hasta que dejes la changuería y renuncies, bebé.[118]
>
> (The stars are unsettled with the joke and abuse you have with this country. My face falls with shame. I inform you that the stars took you out of the zodiac because you stopped being piscis and became a "pescabish." Your thing is worse than Mercury retrograde. You are at a corner level that I cannot

[118] (@checkinmela), "#Rickytebote del zodiaco." July 17, 2019, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/B0BbuMNJ0o4/

explain. If you cried yesterday, prepare yourself, because this is not going to stop until you stop your pettiness and resign baby).



Figure 6, Ricky Rosselló horoscope by @checkinmela (Screenshot)

Through the sense of humor that characterizes @checkinmela, this post gives another ultimatum to Rosselló by stating that this (the protests) won't stop until he resigns. I argue that this is an example where we can see how a politically conscious artist intervenes the public sphere to build common sense in favor of occupying the streets until Rosselló's resignation, and that there's no other way to address this. People must keep protesting, and not wait until the end of Rosselló's term to be voted out. Protesting in the streets produces more immediate change than reform and the electoral process.

In this post Madame Mela also advises Ricardo Rosselló. Madame Mela states that Rosselló's lucky charm is WhatsApp. This is evidently in contrast to the Telegram Application, the virtual platform where the controversial chat conversations between the governor and his executive team took place. Madame Mela also says that Rosselló is so bad that they kick him off the horoscope, and since he is a Piscis, now he turns in to a "pescabish" (a person who fishes for penises), which is an insult in Puerto Rico for people who are worthless. Madame Mela also tells Rosselló that his new anthem is "Te boté remix," is a song from Bad Bunny about a breakup, in which, the protagonist breaks up with the girlfriend. This is another example of the influence of reggaeton culture for young people, and how appealing to this culture is intrinsically tied to the movement of #RickyRenuncia. Madame Mela also advises Rosselló to avoid corruption and resign. Lastly, she advises him to change the background of his cellphone to one with the protests against him happening in Old San Juan.

In addition to drawing on popular cultural references, her posts were also inspiring, which shows us that intervening the common sense is tied to inspiration and intellectual seduction. This is the case of a drawing in which Madame Mela's crystal ball had the flag of Puerto Rico, while the character was saying that "This is just the beginning, and the future feels bad ass." This post is hopeful. @checkinmela and her semi-biographic character could be considered what Jessica Taft categorizes as the *girl activist*, which Taft describes as a "symbol that resolves public anxieties of the

future."[119] Taft argues that girlhood and the girl activist has been assimilated as a figure of hope in the last two decades, which is what many people are desiring within the constant crises, "Girl activists are not just increasingly intelligible –they are also distinctively desirable figures because they represent a brighter, better future."[120] Therefore, @checkinmela as a girl activist, and astrologer specifically addresses this desire of hope with a population facing the uncertainty of hurricanes and the next climate event, plus living under a sixteen-year long economic crisis. Seeing Rosselló outside of office is a sign of hope, or "justice" as Nkapuchada describes. In this sense, hope is another element that contributed to the mobilization of people in the streets, to finally see victory.

The Ricardo Rosselló horoscope had over 40,000 likes, but the most popular post of this series was Madame Mela's special message, which had over 100,000 reproductions.[121] This post, dating July 23, 2019, was an animation in which Madame Mela was speaking from the future, telling Instagram users that Rosselló was going to resign in a matter of hours. This was one day before the announcement of Rosselló's official resignation. Humorous, as all other posts, Madame Mela informed us that Rosselló was crying in a fetal position and taking a shower of warm water. At this stage it was expected that Rosselló was going to resign. The protests at Old San Juan

[119] Jessica K. Taft, "Hopeful, Harmless, and Heroic: Figuring the Girl Activist as Global Savior." *Girlhood Studies* 13, no. 2 (2020): 4
[120] Jessica K. Taft, "Hopeful, Harmless, and Heroic: Figuring the Girl Activist as Global Savior." *Girlhood Studies* 13, no. 2 (2020): 8
[121] (@checkinmela), "Ricky está bajo la ducha." July 23, 2019, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/B0SKrmNnK_L/

had been nonstop through the last two weeks, and the day before this post there was the biggest protest the country had ever seen. About a million protestors occupied the area that connected the three main highways of the country, enacting an unintentional general strike. It is important to also understand that Puerto Rico has less than four million residents, which means that about one-fourth of the population was protesting Rosselló at the same time. By this point, there was a clear common sense that Rosselló needed to resign, and there was also a shared understanding that streets needed to remain occupied, and protests needed to keep happening.

In this animated post, @checkinmela called people out to protest. The post blurb read, "Ricky está bajo la ducha tibia sollozando. Se va y veo o a un piscis (que pueden hacer de todo menos gobernar) o un géminis. OJO. Los veo en el perreo, 7pm en la Fortaleza." Besides what I already explained, @checkinmela was asking her followers to join the "perreo" at 7pm in front of the governor's mansion (Fortaleza). The *perreo* or doggy-style is how we call the action of dancing reggaeton. So a *perreo* party, is a party to dance reggaeton. There were numerous calls on July 24th to join reggaeton parties nearby the protest center. Reggaeton obviously attracts the youth, and this youth extends up to the early forties, since this is now a genre that has been around for more than twenty-years, although it gained international popularity in the 2010s. Many of the calls were called "Perreo combativo" (combative doggy-style), making clear that dancing reggaeton in the streets was an inventive form of continuing to occupy the streets, which were much needed to generate the pressure

that will make Rosselló step down from his seat. I will talk more about reggaeton in the last section of this chapter.

Before moving on to the next artist, it is important to understand that @checkinmela used her platform, outreach, and art to normalize the idea that Rosselló needed to resign, and in that normalization, she contributed to make this idea common sense. Through her unique sense of humor, she transformed the sentiment felt by many to a shared imaginary of real possibility. Then she turned that power into action: she rallied people to the streets.

The next artist I am analyzing is @PlanetaKike1, who is a senior cartoonist at some of Puerto Rico's top newspapers. Nevertheless, @PlanetaKike1 is also very active on social media with a following of around 6k on Instagram, and 12k on Twitter. He often uses his social media platform when his cartoons have been censored in the newspaper. During the two-week period of #RickyRenuncia protests, @PlanetaKike1 sometimes posted more than one cartoon a day. The one I am going to start analyzing is one in which a person is tying their shoe on top of cobblestones. The streets of Old San Juan are paved with cobblestones, and the cartoon read "Today, San Juan, 5pm, #RickyRenuncia." This was a call for the second massive protest of this wave where tens of thousands gathered at the Capitol and marched towards the Totem plaza. This protest was joined by celebrities whose presence attracted a large number of people turned into activists. The art of @PlanetaKike1 as simple as it is says a lot: it agitates, it's an invitation to be in the streets. Come well prepared with the laces of your sneakers tied, and let's march.

Another important art from @PlanetaKike1's repertoire is one based on the person of the Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico, Jennifer González Colón (currently governor of Puerto Rico). Being a United States colony, Puerto Rico has no right to congresspeople, but it has a non-voting member in the US Congress. J-Go, as she is popularly known in Puerto Rico, was that non-voting member. In this cartoon @PlanetaKike1 draws J-Go's cartoon with a dress of the United States flag carrying a sign that read #RickyRenuncia.[122] J-Go is a pro-annexation political leader who is allied to the U.S. Republican Party and is extremely conservative on both social and economic issues. Contrary to what many people in the United States think, Puerto Rico's conservatives are often organized through the ideal of statehood: they want Puerto Rico to become the 51st State of the union. On the other hand, the most liberal, progressive, and radical sectors are allied to independence and Puerto Rican nationalism. Drawing a cartoon of J-Go with the #RickyRenuncia sign says that there's common sense that crosses the political spectrum. This is not only a call from certain leftist sectors, but this is a nationwide call.

[122] Kike Estrada (@planetakike), "Jennifer también." July 19, 2019, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/B0HfdW2Bc3p/



Figure 7, Jennifer González cartoon by @PlanetaKike1 (Screenshot)

Finally, the most outstanding cartoon from @PlanetaKike1 is one in which he portrays the president of the Senate and the president of the Chamber of Representatives (Thomas Rivera Schatz and Johnny Méndez). In this cartoon, the president of the Senate is asking, "There are many people at the march, should we impeach Ricky?" to which the president of the Chamber of Representatives replies, "And what if he reveals our phantom employees?" This cartoon comments on the

corruption within the government.[123] There have been instances in which legislators employ workers who are not real, and then they cash out their salary. This is what is called "phantom employees." The legislature of Puerto Rico never initiated an impeachment process after the chat scandal, and although some politicians from the opposition suggested an impeachment, it was very unlikely. People knew that they could not rely on the legislature if they wanted @ricardorossello to step down from office. When tweeting this art, @PlanetaKike1 wrote, "Impeach Ricky? #RickyRenuncia. We must take him out in the streets. Everything else is just false stories, including the legislative process that mentions it. In the heat of the streets, so that he knows how we feel by crying 4645 lives lost due to his negligence and evilness." @PlanetaKike's tweet shows us two things. First, this is another example of how artists stressed the idea that #RickyRenuncia can only occur by taking to the streets, and in this way, art served as a tool to rally people to the streets. Second, it highlights that the dissatisfaction with Rosselló was not only based on the chat, but an accumulation of a mediocre administration which included the deaths of thousands of Puerto Ricans in the aftermath of hurricane María.

It is difficult to trace where ideas emerge. In this case, how does specifically the sense of occupying the streets as the only option to ensure Rosselló's resignation come about? I do not want to say that artists are the only ones that produce a political idea that will influence others to follow, but they, alongside other communicators,

[123] Kike Estrada (@planetakike), "¿Residenciamos a Ricky?" July 22, 2019, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/B0OaGSQhTy1/

have the capacity of uniting various similar sentiments, and transforming them into one umbrella that covers the distinct ideas that can emerge in a popular massive movement. Therefore, artists and communicators can organize a different set of shared codes to produce meaning, "The meaning is constructed by the system of representation. It is constructed and fixed by the code, which sets up the correlation between our conceptual system and our language system."[124] Hall explains three theories of representation, the reflective approach, the intentional approach, and the constructionist approach. The latter (constructionist approach), which is the theory used for this analysis "acknowledges that neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language."[125] Therefore, the artists can attempt to produce a fixed meaning, but the material conditions, and the groundwork that activists have done in the last set of years need to be taken into consideration when understanding how #RickyRenuncia became common sense among Puerto Ricans, "In common sense it is the 'realistic', materialistic elements which are predominant, the immediate product of crude sensation."[126]

The third artist I am focusing on is @tallergraficopr, which is a collective of graphic artists who produce political art. This group takes on the genre of the cartel (the poster), one of my favorite art genres, perhaps because of its political ancestry.

---

[124] Stuart Hall and The Open University, editors. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. (Repr, SAGE, 2012. Culture, Media and Identities), 21.
[125] Stuart Hall and The Open University, editors. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. (Repr, SAGE, 2012. Culture, Media and Identities), 25.
[126] Gramsci, Antonio. *Antonio Gramsci Reader, The.* Edited by David Forgacs. (London, England: Lawrence and Wishart, 2014), 344.

The genre of the cartel has been crucial in Soviet propaganda, as well as in anti-colonial movements in Latin America. In countries of media censorship, the cartel as well as graffiti in the walls of the city, become a alternative media." In the article, "Political Resistance Posters During Pinochet's Dictatorship in Chile" Nicole Cristi and Javiera Manzi Araneda argue that protest posters are made with a minimal use of resources, and experimenting with silk-printing. Although their article focuses in the Pinochet years, posters today maintain the same printing techniques, though the design has changed, which is often made digitally, even on software as Adobe Illustrator and Canva. The cartel, sometimes turned into pasquín, has been essential in occupying the urban space. Where there has been media censorship, the cartel or pasquín have become tools to break the sound barrier. The street art collective of La Puerta painted once, "If the media lies, the walls belong to us." This subversive and *contestatory* approach to power is a characteristic that the cartel has. I differentiate the cartel, propaganda, and publicity; thus situating the art of the cartel as a form of artistic activism, "… artistic activism tends to thematize politics. But what is truly relevant is how it contributes to "producing" politics: how it constitutes the political in action. The denunciation of the dominant politics (its thematization) coincides with a political exercise whereby a different society is prefigured, based on collective experiences and complicit bonds that realize the experience is another way of doing politics."[127]

[127] Nicole Cristi, and Javiera Manzi Araneda. "Political Resistance Posters During Pinochet's Dictatorship in Chile: Approaching the Graphic Backroom." *Journal of Design History* 32, no. 1 (2019): 69–87.

Although, I never saw @tallergraficopr art inserted in the physical urban space, it certainly occupied the spaces of social media. Here we can see the rearticulation of the cartel into the virtual public sphere. So, although @tallergraficopr's cartels were not occupying the urban public sphere, they were propagating across social media platforms. They were digital cartels occupying spaces destined for leisure, consumption, and superficial happiness. @tallergraficopr made a series of six posters, which I found very powerful. This series of six posters called for the July 22 protest (what became an organic general strike). The first of the series is a based on a person running on top of a hill and waving the Puerto Rican flag. The poster has the star of the Puerto Rican flag on the top middle part of the poster, and it directly calls for a "Paro Nacional" (General Strike) at the Las Américas Highway on July 22 at 9:00am. [128] This protest became the largest in Puerto Rican history with about one-million attendees – as mentioned before about a fourth of all Puerto Ricans on the island were in that protest that day. The image used to develop this cartel inspires. It feels like a warrior rising up from the middle of a battle, as it is overtly patriotic too. This shows that an image that triggers people into protesting, doesn't only need to be an image about injustices, but also an inspiring image that makes people feel part of a larger group that fights for the same issue or in Gramscian terms, have a shared common sense. Art can be used as a device to channel these emotions, as the artists discussed on this chapter have done.

[128] Taller Gráfico PR (@tallergraficopr),"Paro nacional." July 20, 2019, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/B0I7vCvhH4N/

The cartels of @tallergraficopr were widely shared by celebrities, and mainstream artists, including @Residente, @badbunnypr, and @cabralu on Instagram. Although these artists have more massive outreach than @tallergraficopr, they still looked to the independent artists for political direction. Similarly to memes, the work of @tallergrafico, @checkinmela, and @PlanetaKike1 can work as alternative forms of media, since they communicate a message and bring attention to a matter.



Figure 8, General Strike poster by @tallergrafico (Screenshot)

New digital technologies provide social movements and independent artists more channels to spread their message, yet they do not enjoy a total media autonomy and are very much reliant on social media giants, as well as on the more traditional

mainstream media outlets, which now have online presence. Yana Breindl has investigated how activists act as news producers. In regard to this discussion, Breindl comments, "Although a wide variety of news sources exists, only a few – often traditional – media outlets are at the center of the attention economy. Alternative news sites can simply not compete with existing media outlets in terms of readership."[129] Nevertheless, Breidl argues that alternative media can impact the mainstream to change its narrative. In this sense, social movement organizations, and activists will find ways to navigate the networks of the web and new media, as they succeed in intervening the public debate.

Similarly, I argue that independent artists also influence mainstream artists. This is parallel to Breidl's analysis of how independent media may influence the mainstream media narrative. Artists are also communicators, and social movements rely on artists who share the same set of political beliefs to help spread and develop their counter-narratives. I argue that this is not possible by trying to gain the solidarity of the artists in the mainstream, but instead developing their own cultural symbols, that would eventually get filtered into the mainstream by artists who are sensible to this message. In this way, the role of independent artists is crucial in a social movement. These independent artists may influence mainstream artists, which suggests that social media popularity cannot be the only factor taken into consideration when making a cultural analysis about social media dynamics.

[129] Yana Breindl. "Activists as News Producers." (The SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism, 2016), 252.

Reggaeton

Cultural production and expression during this movement took many forms, as Verónica Dávila and Marisol Lebrón write in a Washington Post article, "Puerto Ricans found increasingly creative ways to gather people in the streets to demand this change. They protested on horses, motorcycles, jet skis, kayaks, yoga mats and by banging pots. Yet it was the young people dancing provocatively on the steps of the oldest cathedral in the New World to the […] reggaeton beats that may have finally forced Rosselló out of office." [130] Though memes and illustrations played an important role, I argue that it was through reggaeton that the common sense commitment to enduring protest reached massive proportions.

Reggaeton is not a new genre. Although it has reached international popularity in the last 20 years, in Puerto Rico reggaeton has been around since the early 1990s. Reggaeton began as subversive music but grew into a commercial genre after the hegemonic forces understood that reggaeton was an important language to reach the popular classes. There was a process of transculturation of reggaeton, which similar to the Puerto Rican anthem, when it was accepted by institutional powers or entered the global music industry, the genre as a whole lost its rebel aspect. Vico C, the first Spanish rapper and pioneer of the underground music genre in Puerto Rico, chronicles the transformation on the perspective of Reggaeton in his song Desahogo, "The politicans who killed in their position, had us rappers under harassment,

[130] Verónica Dávila, and Marisol LeBrón. "How Music Took down Puerto Rico's Governor." *The Washington Post*, August 1, 2019.

understanding that the people want *vacilón*, they started making campaigns with *Reggaeton*." This is evidenced in the political campaigns of 2004, where politicians started making jingles with reggaeton rhythms and hiring Reggaetoneros as Héctor y Tito to perform in their campaigns rally, and attract youth to vote for them.

Back in the 1990s Ricardo Rosselló's father, Pedro Rosselló launched Operation Centurium as part of his promise to fight crime in Puerto Rico. This was the local equivalent to Bill Clinton's Crime Bill in the United States, which disproportionally targeted lower-class and African-American communities. Pedro Rossello's administration activated Puerto Rico's Army National Guard to patrol the streets together with local police authorities. They mostly raided *caseríos*, which are historically impoverished and racialized communities. Many of the reggaeton music was produced in the *caseríos*, therefore the government connected rappers to the high-crime rate that Puerto Rico was experiencing at that moment. This is not the first time that Black music has been criminalized by governments. Similar criminalization of African rhythms dates back more than 100 years in places like Salvador in Brasil, "Between 1905 and 1914 several municipal ordinances repeatedly prohibited Africanized clubs and drumming in Salvador."[131] (2011: 6) This colonial legacy was maintained with Pedro Rossello's Operation Centurium, which consisted in cracking-down on reggaeton by shutting down reggaeton parties, and confiscating cassettes and

[131] Osmundo Pinho. "Black Music and Politics In Brazil: From Samba to Funk (2011): 6

CDs. Reggaeton was criminalized by Pedro Rossello's administration, so it's ironic that it was reggaeton that helped bring down his son Ricardo Rosselló.[132]

Reggaeton was music created by poor and working classes in Puerto Rico in connection with the larger African Diaspora in New York, Panama, and Jamaica. Reggaeton DJs were influenced by Hip-Hop, Spanish Reggae, and Dancehall. They mixed records of these rhythms for Puerto Rican underground artists to rap on top. Although scholars have different theses about reggaeton's origins, it's no doubt that it comes from the interchange of oppressed cultures and developed in poor neighborhoods of Puerto Rico by Afro-Puerto Ricans. In the book, Remixing Reggaeton, Petra R. Rivera states that, "Reggaeton's emergence relied on the multiple paths of migration between Jamaica, Panama, and New York, along with transnational circuits of cultural and musical exchange across the circum-Caribbean."[133] As Black and Caribbean music that produces new imaginaries of blackness to Black urban youth in Puerto Rico, I argue that Reggaeton music in essence has three main forms of resistance to colonialism: the dance, the beats, and the lyrics that has been lost through its commercialization, but in its origins remains there. Thus, reggaeton did not just contribute to the common sense of the need for ongoing protest, it also regain its rebellious spirit of young people against the oppressive forces of the State. This also illuminates how #RickyRenuncia became an anti-colonial struggle. An analysis

[132] Verónica Dávila, and Marisol LeBrón. "How Music Took down Puerto Rico's Governor." *The Washington Post*, August 1, 2019.
[133] Petra R. Rivera-Rideau. *Remixing Reggaetón : The Cultural Politics of Race in Puerto Rico.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 33

of reggaeton's role in the protest makes clear that Ricardo Rosselló was the poster child of the Puerto Rican elite and that the movement to demand his resignation went far beyond Puerto Ricans offended by a chat.

The dance:

Many have criticized the dance of reggaeton (*perreo*) by claiming that is misogynist and sexist. In the early 2000s, Senator from Puerto Rico, Velda González attempted to pass legislation to make reggaeton illegal. González also led and Anti-Pornography Campaign that specifically targeted Reggaeton culture, "The Anti-Pornography Campaign also differed from previous censorship attempts because it focused specially on the role of women as music video dancers, as well as the potential effect of videos on young women's self-esteem […] The emphasis on female sexuality that pervaded the Anti-Pornography Campaign sheds light on the intersections of gender, sexuality, and race in the construction of Puerto Rico's so-called racial democracy."[134] However, the dance itself is an act of defiance to hegemonic norms of behavior inherited from Christianism and the Catholic Church, and as stated by Rivera-Rideau, "These women generally expressed a certain "erotic autonomy" in their video performances that was particularly upsetting to the status quo.[135]

[134] Petra R. Rivera-Rideau. *Remixing Reggaetón : The Cultural Politics of Race in Puerto Rico.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 54
[135] Petra R. Rivera-Rideau. *Remixing Reggaetón : The Cultural Politics of Race in Puerto Rico.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 55

Aside from the music videos, reggaeton is danced between two-people, sometimes three, and/or sometimes in a circle. The dance mainly consists of "a woman standing back-to-front with a man as she gyrates her hips provocatively against his; the name *perreo* is derived from the Spanish word *perro*, or dog, as the dance presumably simulated the sexual act between dogs."[136] The dance is not only restricted to heterosexual couples or male-female partners. The Fanonian lens is crucial to understand *perreo* and reggaeton.

The colonized body needs to move. In Wretched of the Earth Franz Fanon writes:

> The colonized's affectivity can be seen when it is drained of energy by the ecstasy of dance. Any study of the colonial world therefore must include an understanding of the phenomena of dance and possession. The colonized way of relaxing is precisely this muscular orgy during which most brutal aggressiveness and impulsive violence are channeled, transformed, and spirited away. The dance circle is a permissive circle. It protects, and empowers. At a fixed time and a fixed date men and women assemble in a given place, and under the solemn gaze of the tribe launch themselves into a seemingly disarticulated, but in fact extremely ritualized, pantomime where exorcism, liberation, and expression of community are grandiosely and

[136] Petra R. Rivera-Rideau. *Remixing Reggaetón : The Cultural Politics of Race in Puerto Rico.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 53

> spontaneously played through shaking of the head, and back and forward thrusts of the body. Everything is permitted in the dance circle.[137]

Another way to understand *perreo* dance is through the concept of "dwelling" described by Osmundo Pinho. In the article "Black Music and Politics in Brazil: From Samba to Funk" explains that Afro-descendants have used the carnival as a form of dwelling. I argue that *perreo* have similar characteristics and is also a form of dwelling for the colonized, referring to the Black carnival Pinho states that "dwelling is a practical way of deconstructing on a sociological basis. In other words, to the extent that cultural processes develop in a social environment structured by relations of power and inequality, production and reproduction of inequality are cohabiting articulated processes."[138] The aggressiveness and explicitness of *perreo* makes the colonizer feel unconformable, therefore through hegemonic institutions they will attempt to police the dance and position it as morally wrong. The colonized, on the other hand, may find in *perreo* a moment of liberation when the beats vibrate through the people's touching bodies. Through *perreo* young people challenge patriarchal structures. They challenge their parents and families who have kept these patriarchal structures alive. Moreover, Dávila and Lebrón state that *perreo* dance has a feminist structure: "Perreo, unlike other Caribbean dances, allows women to lead and control, to determine the intensity of the dance and to select how much or little contact she wants with her partner. It also defies society's respectability politics and breaks

---

[137] Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth.* Translated by Richard Philcox. Sixtieth anniversary edition. (New York: Grove Press, 2021).
[138] Osmundo Pinho. "Black Music and Politics In Brazil: From Samba to Funk ," n.d. (2011): 13

taboos toward sex by allowing people to revel in their sexuality and opening up conversations about consent."[139] *Perreo* is an act of resistance to the system, therefore it's not surprising that it became the main mobilizer at the #RickyRenuncia protests.

Historically the white Puerto Rican Left has been effective in keeping reggaeton away from revolutionary spaces. The white Puerto Rican Left prides itself on defending what they call "Puerto Rican culture," which is basically the white perception of culture based in the trilogy of races, a defense of the Spanish language, and the protection of colonial architecture, such as the Old San Juan built by slaves. In Claridad, a Left-Wing newspaper in Puerto Rico, Fernando Clemente wrote in 1994 that Reggaeton was a form of Cultural Imperialism from the US. "Who benefits from this 'rapper-look' and even worse the rapper conduct? Puerto Rican culture? Definitely NOT! What it does, whether we like it or not, is perpetuate our colonial condition and the vulgar economic power of the United States."[140] This shows how the white Puerto Rican Left has historically based Puerto Rican culture on the legacy from the Spanish Empire, invisibilizing its racist and genocidal history, and leaving a very small space for the contribution of Black people. In this new wave of protests, some members of this more traditional Left even criticized when La Puerta transformed the Puerto Rican flag to monochromatic colors. However, many new generations of activists feel identified with this flag, seeing it as the flag of the new Puerto Rican resistance. This shows that new generations of leftists are not committed

[139] Verónica Dávila, and Marisol LeBrón. "How Music Took down Puerto Rico's Governor." *The Washington Post*, August 1, 2019.
[140] Garcia-Medina, William. "Por Mi Reggae Muero: Why Reggaetón Still Matters," n.d. (2010)

to one form of being Puerto Rican. Rather, they embrace the hybridity of the culture, and the influence of even the U.S. American culture through Hollywood movies, TV shows, music, and a transnational exchange between the island and the diaspora.

In the last decade or so reggaeton has found its place in activist spaces, which are increasingly making reggaeton an integral part of their revolutionary identity. Groups like La Cole made a campaign that said "si no puedo perrear, no es mi revolución" (if I can't dance reggaeton, it is not my revolution). Later also the collective of Hasta Bajo Project popularized the slogan, "Reggaeton es cultura" (Reggaeton is culture) to counter the hegemonic Puerto Rican culture. Being a Black-feminist organization La Cole has been at the forefront of breaking this barrier between the Left and reggaeton, and #RickyRenuncia is an example of how reggaeton can help leftist organizers connect with the masses. Perhaps people do not talk the academic language of Marx or Foucault or share the same conceptual maps of organizers, but the affect produced by the culture of reggaeton can be a more accessible language to share ideas and knowledge. In this case, that included building the common sense to remain in the streets to demand the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló.

Perreos Combativos:

During the protests of #RickyRenuncia, the "*perreos combativos*" (combative perreos) began. The *perreos* consisted in reclaiming the public space at Old San Juan

to dance reggaeton. It was a way to invite young people to Old San Juan to the protests. Since protests were happening every day, there needed to be some activities beyond just chanting "Ricky Renuncia!" According to my research, these *perreos combativos* began with "La Renuncia Ball de Haus of Resistance."[141] This was an event organized by queer activists, where they also performed the ball. Ballroom in LGBTQIA+ communities is historically a form of resistance and community, "Contemporary ballroom culture, sometimes referred as the "house/ball community," is a community and network of Black and Latina/o women, men, and transgender women and men who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, and queer. The Black and Latina/o queer members of this community use performance to create an alternative discursive terrain and a kingship structure that critiques and revises dominant notions of gender, sexuality, family, and community"[142] Since the two-week protest event was being called the Combative Summer, many activities surrounding the protests were being added "Combativo" as a surname: Kayakeada Combativa (Combativa Kayaking), Yoga Combativa (Combative Yoga) were some names of on-going parallel events. Therfore the "perreo," which is the name of the dance of reggaeton was also identified as "combativo." The word combative in this sense, I argue, relates to a challenging of the State, since is not a new word used by activists. Like I mentioned earlier, "combativo" is a term often used to describe protests that usually

[141] La Sombrilla Cuir, "Enviado desde Hause of Resistance." Facebook, July 16, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/lasombrillacuir/posts/enviado-desde-haus-of-resistance-inspiración-por-pose-fxpateríacombativalarenunc/452761665306017/
[142] Marlon M. Bailey,"Gender/Racial Realness: Theorizing the Gender System in Ballroom Culture." *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 367.

have direct confrontation with the authorities. That means that calling something "combativo" it was something that is rebel, subversive, and challenging the State apparatus. This is one example of how language from activists can influence the confrontational spirit of a protest. Puerto Ricans were not calling the protests "peaceful", as it usually happens during other manifestations of civil disobedience, they were calling the protests "combative," which had another connotation in the behavior of protestors. A chant that was frequently heard, which showed this combative spirit was "Somos más y no tenemos miedo" (We are more, and we are not afraid). This means that when the perreo is called "combative" it showed subversive aspect of the activity, which also returns perreo to its origins back when "perreo" parties, and "reggaeton" music was illegal in Puerto Rico, because it promoted criminal activities within the youth. "Combativo" is a term that implies direct confrontation, and by calling it "combative" a deeper meanign was implied.



Figure 9, La Renuncia Ball promo (Screenshot)

The night that Ricardo Rosselló resigned, there were several *perreos combativos* happening around Old San Juan. There were so many people in Old San Juan that not everyone could reach the main spaces, so other *perreos combativos* began to be improvised. The one that became more discussed was the one in the steps of the Catholic Cathedral. The queer community held their "*perreo* combative" at the steps of the oldest Cathedral in the Americas. This is a direct challenge to colonial symbols embed in Puerto Rico's culture: the Catholic Church, the Old San Juan built

by Black slaves. At the *perreo combativo*, people danced as if they were fighting for their decolonization. They were fighting against one of its main perpetuators.

The rhythms:

Reggaeton is music born from the influences of hip-hop, Spanish reggae, and dancehall. "Taking cue from the popularity of dancehall and, especially, reggae en español, Puerto Ricans began mixing dancehall with the hip-hop that had already infiltrated the island and grown popular with artists such as Vico C"[143] These music genres have been created and developed by Black and Caribbean youth that have been using music to reclaim spaces their spaces in society. Rebellious in essence, theses rhythms are Afro-Diasporic, they have been the evolution of the sounds carried by the African diaspora after the trans-Atlantic slave trade. By being influenced by these rhythms, reggaeton beats make the music genre Afro-Diasporic.

The beats of Reggaeton are what makes the dance possible and set the tone for the corporeal expression of the artform. The drums of reggaeton are sounds of battle, and the feeling that inspires are not passive, but confrontational. Young Puerto Ricans will say, "let's listen to reggaeton to activate ourselves," activate meaning energetic motivation. Many reggaeton DJs also combine the rhythm of the drums with guns and rifle sounds, which makes the music explicitly violent, which is another expression of

[143] Petra R. Rivera-Rideau. *Remixing Reggaetón : The Cultural Politics of Race in Puerto Rico.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015),

the colonized body. “At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their confidence” writes Fanon.[144] As a form of expression, the violence implied in Reggaeton music is part of its liberatory characteristics. Reggaeton beats are a sonorous expression of the colonized Puerto Rican body. This form of violent expression is not limited to the beats or the dancing, and it’s even more evident in the lyrics.

Lyrics:

Reggaeton is essentially party music, and that’s part of the reclamation of spaces. But also, in many instances the lyrics of the songs are used to criticize the government, and denounce oppression, “underground artists also addressed the racist and classist policies adversely affecting *caseríos* and other working-class and nonwhite communities in their songs.”[145] Reggaeton artists also speak about the daily struggles of the Black urban youth and reflect the stories of gangs in Puerto Rico.

In #RickyRenuncia many of *maleanteo* songs were used to embody the fight against Ricardo Rosselló as a gang fight between the people and the government. Songs from Ñengo Flow and Héctor “El Father” became iconic parts of the

[144] Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth.* Translated by Richard Philcox. Sixtieth anniversary edition. (New York: Grove Press, 2021), 51.
[145] Petra R. Rivera-Rideau. *Remixing Reggaetón : The Cultural Politics of Race in Puerto Rico.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 23

movement. In this sense these songs that are part of the collective memory and conceptual maps of Puerto Rican millennials, were repurposed with a clear political objective: the resignation of Rosselló. I argue that when a symbol shares approximate meanings in a community, in this case the common sense of reggaeton songs, they can become a cultural object to repurpose or add new meanings. This process of defamiliarization means that messages are not starting from scratch, but new messages can be borne by defamiliarizing a known concept. In this sense these *maleanteo* songs are given new meanings.

Finally, there were also original content that was produced that specifically responded to the current context, such as Residente, iLe, and Bad Bunny's song of "Afilando los cuchillos." This was a song released the same day of the first massive march, and it called for the resignation of @ricardorossello. In this sense, popular artists like Residente, iLe, and Bad Bunny helped amplify and synthetize the feeling of Puerto Ricans protesting in the streets, and in this sense through cultural production helped in the construction of a common sense. In conclusion, I argue that the combination of all these types of cultural production (memes, illustrations, music), which operated independently from the demands of the market, helped build the common sense in #RickyRenuncia. In the case of reggaeton especially, it recovered its underground and subversive aspect for a brief moment.

In summary, there are a series of elements that need to be in place in order to create a successful popular movement. As I have showed so far, material conditions need to be in place, as well as groundwork and direction from movement leaders. I

talk about movement leaders, because I believe that for horizontalism to occur, other sets of political events, and liberation have needed to take place first, especially in a colony as Puerto Rico. Also agitation, sense of belonging, inspiration, which mobilizes people into action. Here counter-hegemonic cultural work is crucial. This may come from not just the artistic-class, but also from the masses who produce popular culture through their means. Nevertheless, there's one more aspect, which is also related to material conditions, but these are the material conditions of communicating with the population, hence, the media. The ruling-class has long sought control of these venues of information in order to produce and maintain hegemony. There's a hoarding of forms of communication in order to repeat colonial narratives, "repetition is the best didactic means from working on popular mentality."[146] Therefore movement leaders and organic movement leaders will need to break this barrier. The next chapter will focus on self-broadcast, and how people in the streets needed to create their own media virtually to inform the rest of the population, and agitate more people into protesting.

[146] Gramsci, Antonio. *Antonio Gramsci Reader, The.* Edited by David Forgacs. (London, England: Lawrence and Wishart, 2014), 340.

Chapter #3

#RickyRenuncia Media: How traditional media, digital newspapers, and activists broadcasted the protests

Social media platforms have unprecedented wealth and power to distribute information, which has exceeded the power of traditional media outlets.[147] In this chapter, I look at how social media has become the main source of news and information, and how the #RickyReununcia movement was able to use it to its advantage. As part of this analysis, I am going to compare the approaches of the story by US mainstream media, Puerto Rico corporate media, independent media, and how activists intervene these three spaces. In the upcoming pages I will look at how #RickyRenuncia was covered by Puerto Rico's national media, where there were differences between trained TV crews, radio journalists, and newspaper journalists who took on the role of live streamers for the websites or social media versions of their media outlet. I will also look at how activists broadcasted the protests or took on the role of citizen journalists. And finally, I will explore how #RickyRenuncia was covered by US mainstream media as well as international media, despite the likelihood that it would be considered an "unworthy" protest. Each of these different forms of journalistic production can help us get a glimpse of how social movements

[147] Andrew Kennis. *Digital-Age Resistance Journalism, Social Movements and the Media Dependence Model*. London: Routledge, 2022.

intervene the networked public sphere by reclaiming spaces in different types of news media.

Before social media, newspapers were the place where most news stories originated, according to McChesney and Nichols. TV news would follow-up the stories on print media as, "broadcast journalism takes its cues on what stories to cover and how to cover them from daily newspapers, as TV news producers rely on print journalists for their hard digging and genuine expert analysis."[148] This meant that in some way or the other, newspapers or print journalists served as a reference to what were the topics to be cover in broadcast journalism. In other words, broadcast journalism looks for news leads in print media. As we know now, many newspapers disappeared through the 21st Century, and local news sources disappeared alongside them. While popular opinion blames that disappearance on globalization and the internet, Andrew Kennis, argues that although that is a factor, it is not the main reason. He writes, "the demise of daily newspapers and how corporate control factored into that decline is as much if not more important than mere technological advances.[149] Kennis argues that the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act triggered the corporate takeover of newspapers, and when the 2008 recession hit,

[148] McChesney, Robert Waterman, and John Nichols. *The Death and Life of American Journalism : The Media Revolution That Will Begin the World Again.* 1st Nation books ed. **(**Philadelphia, PA: Nation Books, 2010), 15-16.
[149] Andrew Kennis. *Digital-Age Resistance Journalism, Social Movements and the Media Dependence Model*. (London: Routledge, 2022), 22.

many regional newspapers declared bankruptcy. So, what fills the void of newspapers? Social media.

Social media created a crisis for professional journalism, as it became the main source of news consumption for many, but also the place that establishes the trends for traditional media outlets to follow. While newspapers gave cues to TV news in the past, now social media gives cues to not only TV news, but also to the remaining newspapers, many of which have become hybrid or entirely digital as well, and which promote their stories on social media creating a sort of symbiotic relationship. In the article "An attention economy trap? An empirical investigation into four news companies' Facebook traffic and social media revenue" Merja Myllyahti states, "social media platforms offer news companies monetary value by providing them attention as a resource: they offer an exposure to the maximum number of 'eyeballs' which can be then sold to advertisers and monetized."[150] This crisis for professional journalism opens the doors (as we have seen recently) for fake news to originate, but it also provides a window of opportunity for activists to act as citizen journalists. In his book, *Digital-Age Resistance*, Kennis argues, "social movements that were in prior epochs completely unworthy in the eyes of mainstream media are now using the age of social media to their own advantage in forcing attention from otherwise unwilling public officials and subsequent mainstream media

[150] Merja Myllylahti. "An Attention Economy Trap? An Empirical Investigation into Four News Companies' Facebook Traffic and Social Media Revenue." *Journal of Media Business Studies* 15, no. 4 (2018): 241.

attention alike."[151] Earl and Kimport also argue that activists can replace traditional media with new technologies: "the Web can be used to eliminate the traditional media as an intermediary and allow organizers to communicate directly with their target audiences" (2013: 25)[152]. In this chapter, I add to these conversations by analyzing how Puerto Rican activists not only took to the streets, but also to social media, eventually influencing the press coverage, and increasing sympathy towards the movement.

In the previous chapters I have explored how social media was used to rally people into the streets, and how cultural production was important to turn the idea of #RickyRenuncia into common sense among the population of Puerto Rico. In the first chapter, I argued that for #RickyRenuncia to have happened, the groundwork was laid out in the previous years, and there were also material conditions that triggered the movement. In the second chapter, I analyzed different cultural productions that were important to convey the desire for Ricardo Rosselló's resignation and inspire people to continue fighting, and in this chapter, I focus on the importance of distributing the information of what was happening in the streets. Although it was important to reclaim the streets and to have cultural productions that helped people to be invested emotionally in the process, it was important to also communicate to those outside and within the protests what was happening in the streets. I say within here because the

[151] Andrew Kennis. *Digital-Age Resistance Journalism, Social Movements and the Media Dependence Model*. (London: Routledge, 2022), 83.
[152] Jennifer Earl, and Katrina Kimport. *Digitally Enabled Social Change : Activism in the Internet Age.* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), 25.

protests were so large that sometimes you learned what happened in another part of the protest through social media. In that sense, social media also served as an internal communication channel for activists who were participating in the entire process.

I argue that social media gives the opportunity to activists to structure a media independence from traditional news media. Earlier activists depended more on news media and TV stations to amplify their messages to larger sectors of the population, and in the 1960s organizations like the Black Panthers and Young Lords created their own media to bypass corporate media's control of information, "As the social protest movements of the 1960s developed, a range of activists seeking a different vision of liberation began to form […] These movements organizations used journalism to frame and network their beliefs and actions." [153]Now, social media serve as these newspapers did back then. It gives the opportunity to broadcast the messages without the need of being featured in the corporate-traditional news media. However, in recent years the extreme-right has taken advantage of this opportunity by riding Donald Trump's wave of calling most traditional news media "fake news", a recent investigation by Media Matters,[154] shows that the right is dominating online media in the United States. Now, social movements face a new challenge to communicate their ideas. It is not enough to bypass the traditional media's influence, but also now they

[153]Frank D Durham and Thomas Patrick Oates. *Forming the Public : A Critical History of Journalism in the United States.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2024), 200.
[154] Kayla Gogarty. "The Right Dominates the Online Media Ecosystem, Seeping into Sports, Comedy, and Other Supposedly Nonpolitical Spaces." *Media Matters for America*, March 14, 2025.

need to compete in social media against algorithms that favor right-wing posts, and a social media space dominated by right-wing influencers.

Being independent from traditional media outlets, and corporate media outlets --although social media platforms are corporate and one needs to understand it is also operating a different capitalist space -- can also help to influence the traditional and corporate media outlets, as it happened in #RickyRenuncia Movement. Social media provided so much information that news media, whose economic model is based on people's attention, get left behind if people move to social media and do not consume the news through their platforms. This means that media independence also pressures traditional media outlets to cover what is happening in social media, especially when it's becoming viral or trending worldwide in platforms such as Twitter. In the case of Puerto Rico, this may have a more direct effect, as online news personalities as @Moluskein and @jayfonsecapr also host programs on local TV and radio. Therefore, their interactions on social media, also influences their narrative in TV and radio.

Puerto Rico's national media

Puerto Rico's national mainstream media is unique. In the book *The News Media in Puerto Rico*, authors Federico Subervi Vélez, Sandra Rodríguez Cotto and Jairo Lugo-Ocando's argue that to understand Puerto Rico's news media, one must

understand Puerto Rico's colonial context.[155] As stated in the introduction of this dissertation, Puerto Rico's electoral politics are constructed around three desired preferences to the relationship with the US. That shows how deep colonialism is inserted in the Puerto Rican imaginary, where the three main ideologies are centered around fixing a relationship or not with the US. There are mainly three ideologies. First, the total annexation to the US as a 51st State; second, to remain within the same territorial status based on the notion of having both the autonomy of independence and the benefits of statehood; and third, independence. Within these three ideologies there are different factions. All three ideologies have conservative and liberal wings. According to Subervi Vélez, Rodríguez Cotto and Lugo-Ocando, Puerto Rican news media has been built around these three ideologies, but the U.S. government, who exerts media control over Puerto Rico, has mainly favored the media outlets connected to the two ideologies that represent a close relationship with the US: statehood or free-sovereign-state. "Since 1898, under the American colonial dominance, all newspapers, magazines, and later the radio and tv stations, and most recently the internet sites and social media have invariably given a special treatment or advocate in favor of some type of relationship with the U.S."[156]

[155] Federico A Subervi-Vélez, Sandra Rodríguez Cotto, and Jairo Lugo-Ocando. *The News Media in Puerto Rico : Journalism in Colonial Settings and in Times of Crises.* Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2021.
[156] Federico A Subervi-Vélez, Sandra Rodríguez Cotto, and Jairo Lugo-Ocando. *The News Media in Puerto Rico : Journalism in Colonial Settings and in Times of Crises.* (Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2021), 68.

The United States has historically repressed Puerto Rican independence movements. The FBI has employed similar tactics to those to repress Black Liberation movements, and Indigenous movements in the U.S., such as COINTELPRO. Puerto Rican independence leaders have been tortured and assassinated to instigate fear among people who may want to follow the pro-independence ideals. The media is not an exception to this anti-independence operation, as it has been used as a tool for pro-U,S. propaganda. As Puerto Rico's colonizer, the U.S. has control over Puerto Rico's media. The Federal Relations Act of 1950, establishes that Puerto Rico's media is regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Therefore, the US government is the authority that approves broadcasting licenses, which they have historically denied to pro-independence media owners or pro-independence media. "[In Puerto Rico] the press censorship is explicit, as well as restrictions to freedom of expression, it has been used to repress dissidence against the government. For example, the opportunity to become TV or radio owners has been denied to pro-independence organizations or the licenses to operate media. Specially, during the decades of the Cold War, pro-independence Puerto Ricans were prohibited of accessing radio or TV airwaves. Therefore, is not surprising that in the last years most talk-shows are of conservative or pro-statehood tendencies."[157] This means that from the beginning of the US occupation, a system was put into place to create pro-colonizer media in Puerto Rico,

[157] Federico A Subervi-Vélez, Sandra Rodríguez Cotto, and Jairo Lugo-Ocando. *The News Media in Puerto Rico : Journalism in Colonial Settings and in Times of Crises.* (Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2021), 71.

where owners supported the two main parties: *Partido Nuevo Progresista* and *Partido Popular Demócratico*. Most recently, this is evidenced in the Telegram Chat, where Ricardo Rosselló's staff used their connections in the media to influence the public opinion in favor of his administration. In page 271 of the chat, Carlos Bermudez brags about the governor's power over the presidents of the four main TV channels, "Los 4 pres de los canales de tv junto al gobernador" attaching a picture of the governor sitting next to them at an event in Puerto Rico's Convention Center.

There are four main TV channels: Telemundo-Puerto Rico, Teleonce, Wapa TV, and WIPR (State channel). In print media, there are four main newspapers: El Nuevo Día, Primera Hora, Metro, and El Vocero. The first two belong to the same company (GFR Media). Despite its geographical size, Puerto has 141 radio stations, mainly dominated by WKAQ in AM Frequency and Reggaeton 94 in FM frequency according to Nielsen media ratings. According to the study on Puerto Rican news media by Subervi Vélez, Rodríguez Cotto and Lugo-Ocando, most Puerto Ricans prefer television as their main source of news media. "Although it may not have many productions of local programs, it continues to be the favorite cultural reference, and as a result, an important medium for the residents of Puerto Rico. The audience study by Gaither indicates that 65% of all Puerto Ricans between the ages of 18 and 34 prefer television as their main form of media, and respectively, 74% between the ages of 35 and 55, and 83% for those older than 55 years-old."[158] These numbers

[158] Federico A Subervi-Vélez, Sandra Rodríguez Cotto, and Jairo Lugo-Ocando. *The News Media in Puerto Rico : Journalism in Colonial Settings and in Times of Crises.* (Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2021), 125.

show the big influence that local television has on the people of Puerto Rico to craft their identities and imaginaries. As the church, universities, and museums, television is also a cultural institution which reinforces coloniality. Therefore, if local TV is the main source of information for most Puerto Ricans, they will largely be influenced by their gatekeepers who respond to the interests of the two main parties, and often criminalize independence movements. There is some independent media outlets in Puerto Rico, but they do not have the reach that local TV and Radio has, therefore local corporate news controls the narrative in Puerto Rico's public sphere.

Although there is not a lot of local programming due to the high cost of television production in comparison to the small market that Puerto Rico represents, most commercial television imports programming from Mexico and the US. The programming is therefore dominated by telenovelas, Hollywood movies dubbed in Spanish, Mexican variety shows, and local productions, which are mainly games and gossiping shows. All of this adds to Puerto Ricans' already hybrid culture. In between this programming, mainstream television inserts "noticieros," and talk show about Puerto Rican politics. In these talk shows, hosts perform as if they are giving the news or providing analysis, while selling their influence to promote privatization and austerity. In these shows, there's always an expert, typically a white male lawyer who goes onto the airwaves criticizing the government and recommending the "best ideas" for Puerto Rico's economic development. Many of these same so-called "experts" are also featured on daily "noticieros," or one-hour news installments of local topics. Two of the most popular analysts in Puerto Rico are Luis Pabón Roca and Carlos Díaz

Olivo who are openly supportive of the Partido Popular Democrático and Partido Nuevo Progresista ideals. Local television plays a huge role in Puerto Rico's public sphere, and local television is crucial to analyze if one aims to understand the complexity of Puerto Rican culture and politics. Not only do the commercial channels exert influence, but also the public TV station (WIPR), which serves the party in power, and a handful of religious stations, which promote conservative ideals and help maintain the colonial hegemony among many Christians. That is why Puerto Rican right-wingers hold their power on traditional media. Regardless of media ownership, there has always been serious professionals working in the news media industry. Journalists such as Daisy Sánchez, Yolanda Vélez Arcelay, Carlos Webber, Millie Gil, and Omaya Sosa Pascual have defended the integrity of their profession, even working inside the corporate media. That's why many of them were laid-off during the administration of Luis Fortuño (2008-2012), which was violently imposing an austerity agenda. Many of these journalists were fired for performing their job as journalists. Some of have been rehired, while others created their own media outlets. But despite a few dissidents, I have observed that most journalists and media personalities in Puerto Rico abide by the rules of the political elite and use the platforms to their own career benefit by perpetuating coloniality and the hegemony of the ruling class.

I argue that even prior to #RickyRenuncia, most Puerto Rican social movement organizations had given up attempting to intervene the public opinion though the use of traditional mainstream media. For example, the during the last two

strikes of the student movement (2010-2011, 2017) the students didn't allow the entering of news media organizations into the campus of Río Piedras, except during press conferences or protests and instead shared their ideas through their own student media organizations, such as Pulso Estudiantil, Díalogo Digital, Estudiantes UPR Informan, and Radio Huelga, and the papers from student political organizations (MST-UJS, OSI). The movement also gave exclusives to independent media outlets such as, *Democracy Now!*, TeleSur, Indymedia, Claridad, and a small number of allied journalists from mainstream media outlets, such as Hermes Ayala (Metro), Carlos Pérez (Univisión), and Humberto Trías (The Daily Sun).

In contrast, some older left-leaning political organizations still rely on traditional news media based on the allies they had in the past, not taking into consideration how the layoff of professional journalists and the corporate takeover of news media changed the landscape. But the younger generations of organizers have taken into social media, reducing the importance of traditional news media. Nevertheless, despite their general disengagement from and skepticism of traditional media, over the course of the life of the #RickyRenuncia movement, activists significantly influenced the local media reporting on #RickyRenuncia, which at the beginning criminalized the activists in front of La Fortaleza demanding the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló.

The protest of July 15th, 2019 and its significance through the upcoming days is an important and generative event for the study of the relationship between the movement and news media. Specifically, we can learn three important things from it.

First, we see how Puerto Rico's corporate media operates when there are anti-government protests, primarily deploying a narrative that criminalizes protestors. Second, an analysis of this event shows how the activists used social media as a mass communication tool. And third, we can track how the posts on social media eventually influenced the mainstream narrative, leading to a more sympathetic coverage of the protests, which help develop the common sense towards the demand calling for Rosselló's resignation. By engaging in an analysis of influence of these posts, I show how this day is more important than what it has been credited for. After this day, figures like Bad Bunny, Residente, and Ricky Martin joined the protest which helped the movement continue. But without the critical media work of those who held it at the beginning, #RickyRenuncia would not have been able to able to reach the massive proportions it later achieved.

The night of July 15th, which I described in Chapter #1 as the final catalyst, ended in repression by the police forces. Thousands of protestors gathered in front of the governor's mansion during late hours of the afternoon and through the night to call for the resignation of Rosselló. During the night police fired tear gas canisters towards the roaring crowds who remained protesting. For many protestors, this was the first time that they experienced this chemically toxic solution that cuts your breath short, does not allow you to see, and itches you through your entire body. This experience is part of the radicalization process of many, as one is peacefully protesting, and the police attack you with such torturous technology. Every time I have gotten tear gassed in Puerto Rico, I think about the hypocrisy of the Puerto

Rican State who prides itself in being a democratic society, but when activists oppose the government, they are met with violence.

During that night I remember young protestors often stating that this was a peaceful protest, and that police were our friends, but after the first tear cannisters were unjustly shot to the crowds, they changed their perception and began defending themselves by throwing rocks and cobblestones from San Juan's colonial historic roads back to the police in self-defense. One example is one woman protestor yelling to the other protestors and saying, "don't throw things, neither from one side or the other." She was mad at protestors for throwing rocks and bottles to the police, only to find herself being shot by a tear gas canister at an extremely close distance.[159] Although the tear gas was successful in dispersing a large percent of the crowd, many recovered and came back. This created a confrontation between police special forces and activists all through the night, as they waited to recover from the tear gas attacks to go back into the governor's mansion. Throughout this confrontation, graffiti was spray painted over Old San Juan's wall, fires were ignited, rocks and cobblestones were thrown at the police. This event is an example of the "combative" spirit of the protests. Although there were many big marches featuring celebrities, many posts in social media calling for the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló, these confrontations were the ones that really put pressure on the government. The Puerto Rican TV broadcasts were antagonistic to the protestors, but social media livestreams, posts on

[159] Luis Bayrón (@labm42) "¿Y ahora que tienen que decir." July 16, 2019, Twitter (now X), https://twitter.com/labm42/status/1151126778171285505

social media, and reports on international news created a public relations crisis in the Rosselló administration, and situated the public opinion in favor of those protesting, which eventually was an enormous factor in achieving the resignation of Rosselló.

Most of the Puerto Rican mainstream media was absent from the scene that was taking place. Therefore, the police did not hesitate in continuously repressing the protestors, as there were not any mainstream media reporting on the abuses. Noticentro was the exception for a few hours, and editorially they sided with the police, and criminalized the protestors. During Noticentro's broadcast a journalist was injured. Noticentro's news headline was titled, "Manifestantes se acercan a la Fortaleza" (Protestors get close to Fortaleza) as they showed footage of their journalist hurting on the ground without putting into context how the police provoked the confrontation and protestors acted in self-defense. They also published another headline titled, "Policía se prepara nuevamente" (Police prepare themselves again), showing footage from behind the police officers as they marched to confront the protestors. When a cameraperson chooses to frame from behind police officers it communicates to the viewers sympathy towards the authorities, losing its objectivity in the story, as it delivers the police point of view showing the repressive authorities as the ones who provide protection.



Figure 10, WAPA live coverage



Figure 11, WAPA live coverage

Noticentro's camerapersons never made another angle, never filming from the point of view of protestors. Noticentro's journalists also followed police instructions while being escorted by them. This evidences the long-standing relationship between journalists of the corporate media and the authorities. This relationship, which is

based on the corporate-news organizations' perceived need to maintain access to the official voices, is detrimental when such events happen, as the journalists lose the capacity to question the abuse of power exerted by the police. This is despite the fact that a journalist from that outlet, Tatiana Pérez Ramos, was pepper-sprayed the day before this coverage when she was confused for an activist, immediately, they (the Police) announced to her that she was under arrest, and she explained that she couldn't talk because she was affected, but they just realized that she was a journalist and began helping her. This shows the relationship that the Police has with the media that Pérez Ramos works for, which is one of the main TV stations of the country, and as I explained earlier holds close ties to the two main parties. For this reason, a Noticentro SUV was vandalized that night. Protesters spray painted the SUV of Noticentro (Wapa TV news program) with the words, "Nos mean y Noticentro dice que llueve" (They pee on us and Noticentro says that it's raining). These words show the lack of trust in mainstream media and journalist by activists who prefer to distribute their messages through social media platforms.

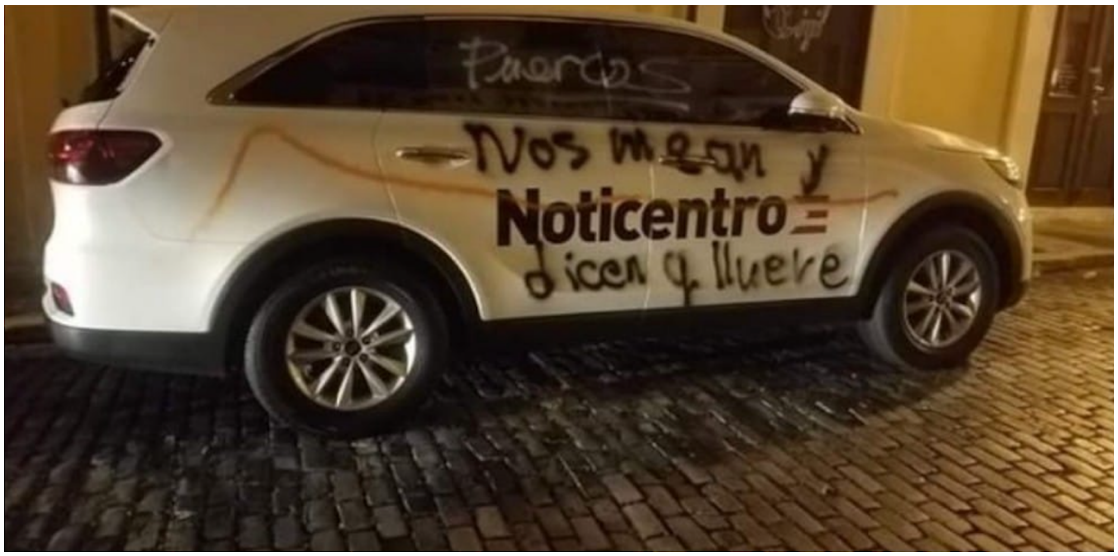


Figure 12, WAPA Vandalized SUV

Some newspapers in their digital versions livestreamed the July 15th protest. This supports part of the argument about the role of the newspaper giving cues to the rest of the media. However, the stories now originate in digital newspapers more quickly than before, as many news websites and social media accounts belonging to newspapers may livestream an event before they print a story about it. Such is the case of Metro Puerto Rico, which livestreamed certain instances of the protests via Facebook live.[160] Journalists who were livestreaming, however, were not as protected or escorted by the Police as those from the main TV channels, Telemundo or Wapa. The fact that they were livestreaming from a cellphone made them less noticeable than camera crews. In this sense, many of these streamer journalists were

[160]Metro Puerto Rico, July 15, 2019, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=499659367510880&t=2

livestreaming from the frontlines. I argue that since they were not trained cameramen from TV stations, they did not have a protocol of where to place themselves in a protest event like this, distinct from camera crews from TV stations who understood that their place was behind the police. Trained camera crews from TV stations have a standardized form of placing the cameras. They have standardized practices of where to place their cameras at a news conference, political rally, or protest, all depending on the event. Any cameraperson who does not follow the standardized practices of camera placement is often seen as an amateur. There is a standardized practice among the camera men in the news industry, but this standardized practice by news industries protects the people in power, as the standardized industry practices have been established by the corporate news. But live streamers are not perceived as camera people, therefore they move more freely and it is not expected for them to follow the rules, even if they are working with corporate newspapers. As a result, they revealed footage that TV crews kept under the sheets.

Primera Hora and El Nuevo Día are part of the largest media conglomerate in Puerto Rico (GFR Media). They jointly livestreamed part of the protests over the weekend[161] and during Monday, July 15th. However, when the police began attacking the protestors with tear gas, they began cutting off their livestreams, as did TV media outlets like Telemundo – Puerto Rico. Many of these livestreams were later deleted

[161] Primera Hora, July 15, 2019 Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/primerahora/videos/462357824566170

from their social media and websites.[162] In a Facebook post titled, "Manifestaciones en el Viejo San Juan" (Manifestations in Old San Juan).[163] Primera Hora showed protestors burning down trash cans during the night of July 15th , which I argue is an editorial approach that criminalizes protestors. This was after the police attacked the protestors with tear gas, but they took down the livestream of the attacks. In their Facebook post, a user by the name of Barbara Rodríguez commented, "Qué pasó con la transmisión?? Los policías andan dando palos y ustedes cortaron! Están con la corrupción o con el pueblo!!!??" (What happened with the transmisión?? Police began attacking with batons, and you cut it! Are you with the corruption or with the people!!!???). The original post was very antagonistic towards protestors and shows the (contested) power of media to shape public opinion. Showing this image out of context inspired comments like, "Por que llegar al vandalismo?! Esa área es turística e histórica! Siempre al unos dos o tres que dañan todo! Es indignante!" (Why vandalize?! This is a touristic and historic area! Always two or three who damage everything! This an indignation!) from Facebook user Tania Garcia Iglesias. However, user José de Jesús replied, "Tania Garcia Iglesias históricamente Viejo San Juan fue un lugar de guerra y de venta de esclavos. Desde días se lleva algo pacifico y no reacciona al reclamo del pueblo. Ahora mismo es historia, nos han robado; lo material roto es reemplazable, el pueblo no." (Tania Garcia Iglesias historically Old

[162] "EN VIVO: Manifestantes llegan a San Juan para reclamar renuncia del gobernador." *Primera Hora*, 16 Jul. 2019, https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/gobierno-politica/notas/en-vivo-manifestantes-llegan-a-san-juan-para-reclamar-renuncia-del-gobernador/.
[163] Primera Hora, "Manifestaciones en el Viejo San Juan", July 15, 2019, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=905904509762602

San Juan was a place of war and market of slaves. A few days ago the protests have been peaceful, but he [Rosselló] doesn't react to the demands of the people. Now this is history, they have robbed us; material things broken are replaceable, but the people are not). Another user, Angel Castro posted, "De verdad que esto es un horror, ustedes están hablando del que gobierno ha faltado pero estos turbas lo hacen peor destruyendo propiedades y amenazando la seguridad de las personas que viven allí. Este tipo de gente a mi no me representa." (This is really a horror, you are talking about how the government has disrespected us, but these agitators are worse by destroying property and threatening the security of the people that live there. These types of people do not represent us). And one user with the name of Algenis Reyes Correa, wrote "Quemen todo si es necesario" (Burn everything if it's necessary). The 16 second video post has over 682 comments with, as I show here, a mix of opinions. This is another example of how social media becomes the public sphere -- the space where people gathered to discuss politics and current affairs. It is this public sphere that activists need to intervene in to shift the public opinion and rally popular support around their cause. The shift of the public opinion comes before a transformation of the common sense. The public opinion can shift, so it is important to maintain control of the narrative in the public opinion that circulates in the public sphere to eventually transform the common sense. Through consistency of a counter-narrative, activists were able to shift a public opinion that transformed the Puerto Rican common sense.

As we can see, while the corporate media constructed a criminalizing narrative, the social media accounts of the mainstream media can still be a site of

activist intervention because the audience can comment. This is unlike being a passive audience watching television. In this sense, social media provides an unprecedented opportunity for activists and organizers to intervene in the journalistic public sphere. The strategy of the hegemonic power was to try to reduce the space for commentary by limiting their livestream showing police brutality and the tear gas attack towards protestors. But police did not know that there were journalists from US major media outlets reporting on this event from the other side, such as Erika P. Rodríguez (photo-journalist from the New York Times), Gabriella Báez from Bloomberg, and myself reporting for the Washington Post. The headlines on the New York Times and Washington Post were important to get more media attention, as I will discuss in the last section of this chapter. There were also journalists from Puerto Rico's independent media outlets (Noticel and Todas PR) who reported about what happened. But the coverage from Puerto Rico's traditional media was either biased or absent.

The traditional corporate news outlets attempted to control the story as they always do, however one of the ways activists found to intervene the networked public sphere was by taking advantage of social media's interactive tools. Pro #RickyRenuncia users found a way to intervene the public opinion within the outlet's own social media pages that use events like this to gather attention and build traffic to their websites. Primera Hora and El Nuevo Día each has over 2 million followers on their Facebook page. Therefore, there's a mass that in an event like this turns to news outlets to get the information and this represents an opportunity for activists who also

must take on the digital world. In addition to intervening in the social media spaces of the mainstream media, as we will see in the next section, activists also found alternative ways of communicating information to the masses without relying on traditional news outlets. Social media gives them what I call media independence, where people do not rely on traditional media to reach their audiences. Instead, they can build their own audiences and speak to them directly through their social media pages.

Citizen Journalists

In order to intervene in the public space, activists have always relied on mass communications and now, one of the ways that social movements benefit from technology and wireless networks is the capacity of having more control over their story. In this sense, activists in the Internet Age consistently act as content producers, even if they do not acknowledge it. Just posting a selfie at a protest is a way of broadcasting yourself and broadcasting a social movement. So, activists now can self-publish and self-broadcast with the minimum amount of resources and equipment. Just a smartphone and an internet connection are enough to start a livestream, publish a video, and post pictures. Networked social movements thus rely less on newspapers and TV stations to tell their story. Self-publishing and self-broadcasting are an activity that activists actively engage to advance their cause. Breindl, who has done research on this topic, argues in her piece *Activists as News Producers (2016)*,

"Communication is central to all forms of collective and connective action. To bring about political change, activists need to monitor, produce and distribute political information that is often neglected by traditional media outlets."[164] Furthermore, Breindl claims that contrary to the so-called objectivity that professional journalism prides itself on, activists have always engaged critically with news production. Historically, protestors have found three ways of engaging with mass communications. Breindl describes one to be adapting their media strategies to fit the logic of commercial media by turning a collective action into a media spectacle. Secondly, they have openly criticized mainstream media and their coverage of movement-related news stories. And a thirdly, movements have turned to alternative and radical media, sometimes developed by activists themselves and other times run by communicators independent from the commercial media matrix. In this sense, internet technologies have opened new opportunities for activists to engage with mass communications, Breindl describes:

> Activists are diversifying their communication strategies and they try not only to reach mainstream and alternative media, but they also self-publish online and offline. The multiplication of channels to publish activist voices leads to a 'centrifugal diversification, in which, contrary to the centripetal tendency of

[164] Yana Breindl. "Activists as News Producers." *The SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism*, 2016: 254.

> communication in the period dominated by national public TV broadcasting channels, media recipients have more media options on offer.[165]

During #RickyRenuncia many activists became citizen journalists, providing first-hand accounts of what was happening in the protests, which subsequently inspired more people to join the protests or participate in other forms. This self-broadcasting practice was essential to amplify the event beyond San Juan or even Puerto Rico. During the afternoon of July 15th, images and videos were broadcast of a march that began in Puerto Rico's capitol building and which ended in front of the gates of the governor's mansion. Activists and activist media producers such as @AbayardeRojo posted content which showed the thousands of people marching and the other thousands that gathered in front of the Governors' Mansion. This was important because it showed to other Puerto Ricans the amount of people that were joining the call for Ricardo Rosselló's resignation. This helped people see that it was not a few people calling for the governor's resignation, but it was thousands of Puerto Ricans. This is important to build common sense, as large crowds validate a claim, as it was later demonstrated with Rosselló's resignation. To realize that most Puerto Ricans were against Rosselló, it was not necessary to make a referendum or survey. Watching the amount of people who were taking into the streets was enough to make the political elite understand that most Puerto Ricans wanted Rosselló to resign. In this sense, marches are important to showcase the number of people who sympathize with

[165] Yana Breindl. "Activists as News Producers." *The SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism*, 2016: 251.

a cause. Therefore, it was important to broadcast the large crowds, because it would otherwise go unnoticed for the Puerto Ricans as local corporate media was providing very superficial coverage of the protest, mostly focusing on Rosselló's apology tour, and featuring the so-called political analysts giving an uniform opinion about the protests.

Protestors eventually arrived in the front gates of the Governor's Mansion, where the large crowd couldn't fit in Old San Juan's narrow streets. Thousands of protestors spent hours in front of the Governor's Mansion where you could barely move. As @profanostra[166] posted, "By now lost track of my friends, too many people in Fortaleza Street very difficult to reach the gates from here." The large crowds in front of Fortaleza made the crowds seem even more impressive, as everyone was shoulder to shoulder next to each other, the personal space didn't exist there, everything was communal space. It is also the physical public sphere. Many activists carrying cellphones broadcast the large crowds that were in front of the Governor's Mansion.

An iconic event broadcast through the night by activists, but not by the mainstream media, was the umbrella vandalizing. In front of the governor's mansion, there was an art installation consisting of umbrellas of different colors. This was an initiative of the First Lady, and throughout Rosselló's term the umbrella installation was visited by tourists and locals to take pictures. During that night a young man

[166] Profana prosa (@profanostra), "Mood." Twitter (now X), July 15, 2019, https://twitter.com/profanostra/status/1150913699160440833

climbed to a balcony in Old San Juan where he was able to reach the umbrella installation and began breaking some of them. The crowd was excited and cheered the destruction of the umbrellas. The vandalization was broadcast through social media, and there are dozens of pictures and videos of the action.

For someone outside of Puerto Rico the vandalization of these umbrellas might hold no significance, but for Puerto Ricans who shared a common sense about what those umbrellas meant and the people they represent, they signified an attack on Rosselló's administration. In this sense, this act was symbolic and broadcasting it is an example of reproducing the idea of #rickyrenuncia through a group of people that share a similar common sense about what those umbrellas mean. Many people celebrated in social media the "downfall" of the umbrellas, as a monument of Rosselló's administration, but others condemned the action.[167] Therefore internet activists took on the role of defending the action as a response to what I can interpret it was what they were reading in their own social media feeds or heard in the streets. This is also another important aspect of social media activism, where an activist uses the space to defend a posture. Throughout the upcoming days, the umbrellas became a symbol of the struggle, and people chanted, "We took the umbrellas out, now we're going for your chair"[168]

[167] Twitter, https://twitter.com/search?q=(sombrillas)%20until%3A2019-07-16%20since%3A2019-07-14&src=typed_query
[168] Lizmarie Quintana (@LizmarieQ) "Te sacamos las." Twitter (now X), July 21, 2019, sombrillashttps://twitter.com/LizmarieQ/status/1153091237538390017

Through the night of July 15th, as tensions between the police and protestors began to build, people stopped posting or did not post as frequently. I think that many people got scared away when the police shot the first round of tear gas, and the number of protestors began to shrink. However, for those who stayed through the night (hundreds), it seems that self-broadcasting or posting about the confrontations on social media was not a priority. Given this reduction in streams during the night of July 15th, the notorious livestream titled "San Juan 15J #rickyrenuncia" by Alvin R Couto de Jesus stands out. Alvin, who I half-jokingly call the "Influencer of the Left," has become part of the scenery of any Puerto Rican protest at the moment, as Alvin has livestreamed almost every protest that happened since 2016 (year the Fiscal Control Board was instituted) on his Facebook page,[169] and narrated the events while streaming in his smartphone. Puerto Rican activists know if you're not at a protest and want to check how the protests is developing, your best bet is entering Alvin's Facebook profile and watching his livestream. Alvin had previously been a political strategist for the People's Working Party, is also a lawyer, and has been present in many social movements in Puerto Rico. Therefore, protestors trust Alvin, and he has access to shoot livestreams without the threat of protestors breaking his smartphone.

During the night of July 15th, or as Alvin calls it "15J", Alvin livestreamed the protest for more than two hours straight and was able to capture many of the instances in which police attacked protestors, continuing to stream when mainstream media

[169] Alvin Couto, Facebook, July 15, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/alvincouto/videos/10157350792429941/

coverage stopped. Alvin's coverage was watched by 196 thousand users, with over 14 thousand comments. Many of these comments were written during the transmission time itself, with people reacting in real time to the situations taking place in the streets. In Alvin's livestream you can see that there Is rarely a cameraman from Puerto Rico's corporate media, evidencing what I argued in the previous section. At the end of his livestream, and after protestors ended up being entirely removed from the area by Police special forces, Alvin makes a call to continue protesting, saying "Mañana volvemos" (Tomorrow we return). This was an agitation and call to action for all the people who watched the broadcast. Like I said earlier, activists rallied people into the streets, and the self-broadcasting that they were doing to counter the invisibility of the mainstream media was also an opportunity to call people to action. Therefore, the attention to the protest which the self-broadcasting was gaining provided another platform to rally people to the streets. In this sense, activists also marketed a product in the news they broadcasted: it was the product of a better country, a country without Ricardo Rosselló, but for that to happen they argued that people must join the protestors in the streets.

Puerto Ricans in the diaspora also organized protests during that day, inspired by the protests that were happening in Puerto Rico, which they followed on social media. This is another important aspect of networked social movements in that that social media can help globalize an idea and inspire people in other places to show solidarity. But Puerto Ricans in the diaspora also self-broadcast what they were doing, especially since traditional media in the places that they were protesting might not

have been interested in their protest. On Twitter, @kevtopo posted "PUERTO RICO CANTANDO EL HIMNO REVOLUCIONARIO EN NUEVA YORK. UNIDOS SOMOS MÁS PUÑETA. RICKY NAIE TE QUIERE, MASTURBA BURRO" (Puerto Rico singing the revolutionary Anthem in New York. United we are more. Ricky, no one wants you, donkey jerker)[170] attached with a video on Puerto Ricans and allies singing Puerto Rico's Revolutionary Anthem at Union Square in New York, where a #RickyRenuncia protest was taking place. By self-broadcasting their own local actions to show solidarity with Puerto Ricans on the island, they helped create a sense of momentum for the movement. Solidarity becomes stronger when people share a similar common sense through icons and symbols. Puerto Rico's revolutionary anthem is the unofficial anthem of Puerto Rico, because the government changed its words because it was too subversive. So when people sign it together, they are openly challenging the colonial hegemony. The self-broadcasts helped to share the same emotion through social media, one user based in Puerto Rico (@Supervimo) replied to @kevtopo, "Que hermoso. Aquí también la cantaron. @iLe estuvo en el micrófono" (How beautiful. Here they also sang it. @iLe was in the microphone). In the response @Supervimo was sharing the emotion with @kevtopo as also informing that they did the same in Puerto Rico, becoming an exchange of information, which can be considered as another aspect of self-broadcasting, where the consumer of the content is active. In Atlanta, another group did a similar thing. In

[170] Kevtopo, bb (@kevtopo), "PUERTO RICO SIGNING." Twitter (now X), July 17, 2019, https://x.com/kevtopo/status/1151645672145346561

a post from @DrNicole_[171] activists rally in square to demand Rosselló's resignation. In the post the same user tags Puerto Rican journalists and traditional news organizations, looking to spread the news in Puerto Rico. This is also an example on how activists use social media to try to impact traditional media.

Beyond self-broadcasting, citizen journalist activists also took on the role of questioning those in power. The same night as the major protest at the Governor's mansion, a woman posted a video of her confronting Ricardo Rossello's father, Pedro Rosselló, who was the Puerto Rican governor from 1992-2000. In this video she approaches the ex-governor at what it seems to be sort of a country club, and demands he respond to his son's chat.[172] In the video, you can visibly watch the how the former governor is disturbed, as he's using the legal term that he has a "perception of privacy" therefore she cannot film him, although he was a public servant. As she questions Pedro Rosselló, he defends his son by saying that everyone curses and that it was a private chat. "He hasn't done any illegal or immoral act" claims the father in the video. The woman accuses Ricardo Rosselló also of stealing. Although the woman is not a trained journalist, and her questions may be easily refuted by a politically savvy person like Pedro, what is important here is that she was able to get expressions from the ex-governor, when he had been hiding from the press. Seeing Pedro Rosselló so uncomfortable in this video, while he was being questioned by a

[171] (@DrNicole_) "Boricuas desde Atlanta." Twitter (now X), July 16, 2019, https://x.com/DrNicole__/status/1151286082786537472
[172] (@Fernando7PR) "El exgobernador." Twitter (now X), July 15, 2019, https://twitter.com/Fernando7PR/status/1150916908419559425

citizen, shows the world how uncomfortable the family was with the events that transpired.

The internet and social media now provide an opportunity to break with the hijacking of information that corporate, public, and religious media have over local politics. For decades traditional media has been the main source of news for Puerto Ricans, but recently more people are shifting into online media as their main source of information. "The demographic characteristics of the people who use social media for entertainment, news or to find other information, tend to be similar to the ones observed in other places, that is, that younger audiences continue migrating towards new electronic options"[173] This aspect is changing the media landscape, and it provides a new opportunity for social movements whom in the past century relied mainly on grassroots work, informational bulletins, and a few left-leaning newspapers to get their information across. Internet and social media now provide an unprecedented opportunity to reach the masses. I am not advocating for abandoning any of the other forms of alternative communications that have worked in the past, such as face-to-face interactions, bulletins or wheat-pasting, but instead want to suggest that social media and the internet can help amplify counter-hegemonic messages. I believe that in many instances social movements have abandoned

[173] Federico A Subervi-Vélez, Sandra Rodríguez Cotto, and Jairo Lugo-Ocando. *The News Media in Puerto Rico : Journalism in Colonial Settings and in Times of Crises.* (Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2021), 125.

traditional means of communications, which have been detrimental to sustain a social movement in the long-term. I will discuss this in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Outside of Puerto Rico's traditional media

The next day (July 16th) there were two major U.S. media outlets that published on their websites the story of the tear gas attacks to protestors: the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Other media outlets quickly followed. The pieces at the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* reported what transpired during the night with more detail than any Puerto Rican media outlet. This was beneficial to the movement, because if it provided international attention to what was happening in Puerto Rico, and ultimately pressured Puerto Rican outlets to start reporting on the confrontations happening at night during the subsequent protests.

Why were these major U.S. media outlets motivated to report on what was happening in Puerto Rico? One possibility is exclusivity in the attention economy, which Michael Goldhaber defines as a "system that revolves primarily around paying, receiving, and seeking what is most intrinsically limited and not replaceable by anything else, namely the attention of other human begins."[174] In the book *Manufacturing Consent* Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman describe what U.S. media classifies as a "worthy" vs "unworthy" protest, which they name

[174] Michael Goldhaber. "The Value of Openness in an Attention Economy." First Monday, 2006.

accordingly.[175] Kennis uses this framework for his study about the protest movement in Puerto Rico, and argues that the #RickyRenuncia protest was an unworthy protest, because it did not benefit US interests. A contrasting example is when Venezuelans protested Nicolás Maduro's government, ultimately serving U.S. interests in the region by facilitating a media campaign against socialism. Puerto Rico's protest, in comparison, is "unworthy," because it is a capitalist colony under the U.S. empire and showing protests in Puerto Rico perhaps is not within the strategic political interests of Washington. Beyond that, Puerto Rico is a U.S. colony, so it doesn't benefit the U.S. to have unrest in one of their so-called territories. Plus, the governor being protested was a fierce defender of the U.S. occupation in Puerto Rico. Kennis therefore argues that Puerto Rico was an exceptional case – that it is surprising that it received the attention it did and therefore required pressure on major elite outlets in order to gain that attention. He writes, "this is what I call, *press exceptionalism*, which is most often caused when otherwise unworthy social movements manage to organize and obtain critical levels of mass resistance and popular opposition to the point where leading public officials, and in turn the elite mainstream news media have no choice but to pay attention and respond to them."[176] Building on Kennis, my argument is that this is where social media presents an opportunity that would not have existed in the past, increasing media independence of social movements. News outlets like the *New*

[175] Edward S Herman, and Noam Chomsky. Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. New York: Pantheon Books, 2002.
[176] Andrew Kennis. *Digital-Age Resistance Journalism, Social Movements and the Media Dependence Model*. (London: Routledge, 2022), 54

York Times and the *Washington Post* were able to witness what was happening in the streets through social media, and in this case, social media gave the cues to the newspapers that then established the trend for other media to follow. The protests broadcast in social media created a hype of expectations, since the large numbers of people and continuity of the protest were unprecedented in Puerto Rico. The archipelago had also just received a lot of attention after the economic crisis, hurricane María, and Trump's commentary about Puerto Rico, which the liberal media enjoyed to create antagonism towards Donald Trump.

During the next protests, the U.S. mainstream media had their correspondents on the ground in Puerto Rico: CNN, MSNBC, Univision, and other international media. They came to report on the protest called for July 17th 2023 by La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, where celebrities like @sanbenito (Bad Bunny), @Residente, and Ricky Martin lead a parade from the Puerto Rican Capitol to El Morro (Spanish Fortress). This was the largest march to ever happen in Puerto Rico. That night there were thousands of protestors in front of the Governor's Mansion and the police attacked with tear gas for a second time. These elements helped the movement to gain sympathy worldwide. "When the resistance combined the largest on-the-ground protests the island had ever had with far-flung and viral spread of online-based opposition activity, it managed to slowly but surely capture the attention

and even sympathies of the New York Times […] This increased the amount of US news coverage beyond what it would normally be expected."[177]

According to Kennis, internet-based organizing can achieve two important results, which are evidenced in the #RickyRenuncia movement: achieve mainstream news reporting, and pressure public officials to pay attention. "The increased frequency of said resistance of this digital epoch has been evident in two important senses: mainstream news reporting and public officials being forced to pay attention in instances they otherwise and previously have been able to ignore; this has in turn produced exceptions in content patterns that simply were not present as much in previous eras."[178] But, as I have stated in this dissertation previously, this Interned-based organizing also requires a lot of on-the-ground organizing and agitation in order to be effective. Without this, it would not have been as effective, as happened in the future with other movements in Puerto Rico that tried to emulate the power of Summer 2019.

Although I have distinguished between US mainstream media and Puerto Rico's National Media, one can also treat Puerto Rico's media as foreign. The main three TV stations that I've mentioned here do not have Puerto Rican owners. "After the deregulation of the telecommunications in 1996, the number of television stations increased from 12 to 24 channels in July 2017. Most of the owners, which are now

[177] Andrew Kennis. *Digital-Age Resistance Journalism, Social Movements and the Media Dependence Model*. (London: Routledge, 2022), 79.
[178] Andrew Kennis. *Digital-Age Resistance Journalism, Social Movements and the Media Dependence Model*. (London: Routledge, 2022), 307.

US corporations, have included the local channels in their corporate Hispanic structure in the US, as it is the case of WKAQ-TV Telemundo (part of NBCUniversal) and WLII-TV (part of Univision Communications)."[179] This means that although the news media in Puerto Rico has historically being tied to the main two parties, the changes and corporate takeover of 1996 changed the landscape, and I argue it has diminished the power that the pollical elite has over the local media. This may represent a new window of opportunity to social movements intervening the mainstream local media, which might have been one of the reasons they were ultimately able to shift the narrative of the mainstream media under #RickyRenuncia. Local politics might not be as important to media owners of local stations as they had been in the past. Also, one must take into consideration the progressive or liberal approaches that Ricardo Rosselló was taking into politics, as he was framing Statehood as a decolonization process, attempted to unite the struggle for Statehood with African-Americans by making alliances with the NAACP, and was a supporter of abortion, decriminalization of marihuana, among other issues that are unpopular within the current rise of Extreme Right-Wing politics in the United States. Therefore, Rosselló could not count on the support of US conservatives either, which is surprising why he decided to give an exclusive interview to Fox News two days before announcing his resignation. As an affiliate of the U.S. Democratic Party,

[179] Federico A Subervi-Vélez, Sandra Rodríguez Cotto, and Jairo Lugo-Ocando. *The News Media in Puerto Rico : Journalism in Colonial Settings and in Times of Crises.* (Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2021), 113.

Rosselló was met with even greater hostility from a *Fox News* journalist who basically made Rosselló look in its worst shape.

Chapter #4

New Electoral Politics After #RickyRenuncia

After two weeks of protests, Ricardo Rosselló resigned from his position as governor of Puerto Rico via Facebook live the night of July 24, 2019. The streets of Old-San Juan jumped into celebration, which felt like a carnival.[180] At the government level, what followed was a chaotic uncertainty about who was going to be the next governor of Puerto Rico. The Secretary of State, who would be next in line for the position, also resigned, and in his last days of office, Rosselló appointed Pedro Pierluisi as a new Secretary of State, so he could take the governorship after he departed. Pierluisi was governor for three days, because the Puerto Rican Senate determined that Pierluisi's appointment was unconstitutional, ruling that the governor should be the Secretary of Justice (Wanda Vázquez) according to the constitutional line of succession.

At the social movement level, there was also uncertainty. After this huge victory, many activists and social movement organizations were questioning where they should direct their energies next, and what should be the focus of the Left. *The Promises Are Over movement* proposed People's Assemblies to begin discussing a new plan of action, and these assemblies happened all around the archipelago. There were roughly 50 People's Assemblies, across 20 cities and towns in Puerto Rico. In an

[180] Patricia Mazzei, and Frances Robles. "Ricardo Rosselló, Puerto Rico's Governor, Resigns After Protests." The New York Times, July 24, 2019.

interview with *the Indypendent*, in September 2019 Jennifer Mota Castillo, one of the organizers of the Hato Rey assembly stated, "From here, within the next years or the next decade, is going to emerge the Puerto Rico that we want and are going to design together, from the people, from below."[181] At the beginning there was a lot of hope in these assembies, but eventually they lost momentum and dissappeared. There are many factors to take into consideration.

In this chapter, I am going to analyze why the #RickyRenuncia movement did not transform into a strong political force, and why social movements were not able to seize the opportunity to build a larger movement at a moment when the people were receptive for social change. Although there are material reasons to take into consideration, such as the continued migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States, the Earthquakes that happened early in 2020, and the pandemic, I will focus specifically on how *La Alianza* (an electoral coalition of two center-left parties) resulted in demobilizing the people. A lot of resources were used to take people to the ballot box, rather than building a strong popular movement. *La Alianza* had many activists on their ranks, many of whom participated in #RickyRenuncia, including in some of the movements that laid the ground for #RickyRenuncia. For example, Manuel Natal, one of the main voices of *La Alianza* was part of the student movement in 2010-11. Other vocal voices were Mariana Nogales, and Professor Rafael Bernabe, both long-time activists, and members of the Pro-Independence Party who have

[181] Juan C. Dávila. "As 'Puerto Rican Summer' Draws to a Close" People's Assemblies Spring Up Across the Island." The Indypendent, September 7, 2019, https://indypendent.org/2019/09/as-puerto-rican-summer-draws-to-a-close-peoples-assemblies-spring-up-across-the-island/

historically supported social movements and accompany activists in the streets. Beyond the main figures of the party, many of the volunteers and members of the party came from different aspects of social movements. I observed that *La Alianza's* electoral campaign adopted many of the tactics that have been used by networked social movements. Therefore, it is important to analyze *La Alianza*, because although it may seem like a continuation or transformation of the #RickyRenuncia movement, I argue that it absorbed and demobilized a political force that was ready to fight for real change in Puerto Rico. As quick as networked social movements may arise, they could also sucumb to other temptations. #RickyRenuncia was a movement that was too wide ideologically, and, as I mentioned in the introduction, the hashtag creates homogenity across sectors, but it also threatened the continuation of the movement, because it did not have a defined aspiration beyond the inmediate one. Although, I argue #RickyRenuncia was the latest in anti-colonial manifestations in Puerto Rico, it was not able to evolve into a bigger movement, and I argue that it was because many activists understood that the next step to take was to seek electoral power. I have two main issues with moving towards electoral power, first, I understand that Puerto Rico is a colony, and any electoral process is just electing whomever is going to administer the colony with so much limitations that would not allow Puerto Ricans to really determine our future. So, I write from the perspective of someone who argues that in order to have fair elections, Puerto Rico must be either an independent nation or a US State. Second, the electoral colonial machinery is too powerful to topple, and if new electoral parties have not developed strong leaders or what we call in Spanish

"cuadros políticos" it is a waste of resources to run for elections. For me *La Alianza* began aspiring for electoral power too soon, without first building enough leaders. To make matters more complicated, they aspired for the top positions in the country, and I understand that if that was the route they shoud have first try to win municipal elections, and begin consolidating power at the municipal level rather than archipelago-wide. I will get more into depth about this in this chapter.

Through this chapter, I am going to talk about the creation of *La Alianza* and the shrinking of street protests after #RickyRenuncia. I look at how people saw *La Alianza* as the culmination point of the #RickyRenuncia movment. Then, I will analyze the organizing parallels between #RickyRenuncia and the campaign of *La Alianza*. As I already mentioned, there were very similar tactics. The most notable was using social media to shift the voting common sense by ridiculing members of the Pro-Statehood Party, similar to the memes, and other cultural production that was characteristic of the ridiculization of Ricardo Rosselló during the #RickyRenucia movement. Also social media was used to mobilize supporters to the voting booth, similar to the strategies used to rally people to the streets during the Combative Summer. And finally, there was a strong presence of Puerto Rico's most famous celebrities, such as Bad Bunny and Residente who contributed in expanding the message of dissident voices. But in order to understand all of this, we need to begin with the 2020 election.

2020 Election

After the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló in 2019, the next elections of 2020 in Puerto Rico showed that there was the start of a shift in the thinking of the Puerto Rican electorate. A new electoral option emerged during the administration of Rosselló, called the Citizen's Victory Movement (Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana), and many voters, especially new voters, turned towards this party for hope. According to an article in Time magazine, "Smaller parties are gaining popularity with younger Puerto Ricans who have watched multiple bungled federal responses to disasters and aren't necessarily interested in becoming the 51st state. They're touting alternate visions for the island that could bring greater autonomy and improve economic conditions."[182] Also, the Pro-Independence Party (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño) tripled the support they usually get in a general election.

The Citizen's Victory Party is a center-left party, which ran on a progressive narrative in the 2020 election. The party ran with a woman for governor, Alexandra Lúgaro, who ran independently in 2016 and received 11.13% of the vote that year according to the official numbers of Puerto Rico's Electoral Commission.[183] The young woman became a social media sensation, directly criticizing the government and exposing corruption scandals through her platform. The next election year she

[182] Mariah Espada. "We're Literally Fighting for Our Lives: A New Political Movement Emerges Outside Puerto Rico's Two-Party System." TIME, November 18, 2020, https://time.com/5913496/puerto-rico-elections/
[183] *Comisión Estatal de Elecciones*. https://www.ceepur.org/. Accessed 6 Oct. 2025.

helped create the Citizen's Victory Movement to run on the governor's platform. The Party also ran with a number of Senators, Representatives, and Mayors, and during the 2020 election won four seats in the Puerto Rican legislature, among them Ana Irma Rivera Lassen, the first Black Woman Senator who is also openly LGBTQ. Lúgaro did not get elected but received 13.95% of the vote. Her partner at the time, Manuel Natal, who was running for Mayor of San Juan, came in a close second place in a race that he has argued was rigged. Miguel Romero, a member of Rosselló's party, was elected as mayor of San Juan. Although Natal didn't become San Juan's Mayor, the election results gave hope to the sympathizers of the Citizen's Victory Party, as their candidate displaced the candidate of the Popular Democratic Party. Usually, the first and second place in an electoral race in Puerto Rico is fought between the Popular Democratic Party and the New Progressive Party. So San Juan's mayoral race showed how Puerto Rican electorate (especially the one in the metropolitan area) is exploring options beyond the two-party system.[184]

The support to the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), the party that seeks independence from the United States, grew exponentially, from the 3-5% of the votes they used to receive to an almost 14% in the 2020 election. Juan Dalmau was a senator during Rosselló's term and ran for the second time in 2020. The first time he ran for governor in 2012, Dalmau only received 2.5% of the vote. Although the

[184] Manuel De Jesús González. "Elecciones: Crónica de un país que cambió." *Claridad*, November 20, 2020, https://claridadpuertorico.com/elecciones-cronica-de-un-pais-que-cambio/.

Independence Party is the only party that advocates for Puerto Rican independence from the U.S., not necessarily all pro-independence sympathizers participate in the elections. For decades, many leftist organizations have argued that the electoral system in Puerto Rico is rigged, and while Puerto Rico remains a colony of the United States, there will not be clean elections, and that is why it's important for the left to build popular power, and take arms to liberate Puerto Rico. "La urna es el ataúd" (The voting booth is a coffin) is the saying from nationalist icon, Pedro Albizu Campos, made in one of his speeches where he also criticized the Puerto Rican Independence Party's insistence on the electoral system. Therefore, for many decades the Puerto Rico Independence Party has been the only Pro-Independence faction in the electoral system.

This phenomenon in the shift of the electorate towards Third-Party options doesn't necessarily mean that the thinking is moving to the left, but rather it's a disappointment with the two major parties. In the 2020 election a new Extreme-Right party also managed to win two seats in the legislature. The candidates of Proyecto Dignidad who won were among the legislators with the most votes. In their first electoral participation, Proyecto Dignidad showed that it was a political force and were filling a void in the conservative sector.

According to an article published on Centro Journal, this shift was due to a low-turnout of voters from the two main parties (PNP and PPD). "Our central hypothesis was that voter turnout was the main independent variable explaining the outcome of the election. Turnout was affected by an enthusiasm gap between third

party voters and PNP and PPD voters, and by party mobilization. PIP, MVC, and PD voters were more enthusiastic than PPD and PNP voters."[185] The article also recognizes the role that the internet played in favor of Dalmau and Lúgaro: "Juan Dalmau was the second senator with the second most Twitter interactions in 2020. For her 2016 campaign as an independent candidate, Lúgaro was the strongest user of social media. She had more than 50,000 additional Facebook followers than her closest rival."[186] Similar to activists, these candidates from outside the two main parties that possess electoral control and a level of hegemony rooted in control over the media narrative, have found in social media an alternate form to reach supporters, and a way to have a voice in the public sphere of Puerto Rican politics.

The results of the 2020 elections excited the Puerto Rican liberals and discussions began forming about the possibilities of merging the Citizen's Victory Movement and the Puerto Rican Independence Party into an electoral coalition. Pedro Pierluisi, a member of the New Progressive Party, won the 2020 election with just 33% of the vote. Their math was simple: if Lugaro's 14% and Dalmau's 14% were combined, one of them will have the chance of winning the 2024 election, since in Puerto Rico a candidate doesn't need 50% + 1 of the vote to get elected.

[185] Ivelisse Cuevas-Molina, Luis Raul Camara-Fuertes, Gabriel A Negron-Torres, and Ma. "Turnout Decline, Mobilization, and Third-Party Surge: The 2020 Puerto Rico General Election." Centro Journal 36, no. 3 (2024): 64
[186] Ivelisse Cuevas-Molina, Luis Raul Camara-Fuertes, Gabriel A Negron-Torres, and Ma. "Turnout Decline, Mobilization, and Third-Party Surge: The 2020 Puerto Rico General Election." Centro Journal 36, no. 3 (2024): 50

#LaAlianzaVa

A year before the 2024 election, Juan Dalmau and Manuel Natal announced that they would make an alliance to support each other in the 2024 elections.[187] Although, they are from different parties, Manuel Natal (Citizen's Victory) would support Juan Dalmau (Puerto Rican Independence) for governor of Puerto Rico, and in exchange Dalmau would support Natal for mayor of San Juan. Their support was not limited to these two candidacies, but the parties would also cross-support other candidacies.

As part of what became to be known as *La Alianza*, "The Alliance," the PIP beyond supporting Manuel Natal for mayor of San Juan, was also going to support Ana Irma Rivera Lassén for resident commissioner (Puerto Rico's non-voting congressmember). The PIP and MVC would also split the candidacies for mayoral and legislature races to not compete with each other. For example, in San Juan, which has 5 representative districts, PIP would run candidates for districts 4 and 5, while MVC would run candidates for districts 1, 2 and 3. In the Senate they would each run 1 candidate of 2 for the San Juan district. They used the same model for mayors, splitting who would run in which race. Nevertheless, there were some exceptions. Although, these "alliance splits" were more defined in the metropolitan area of Puerto

[187] Nydia Bauzá. "Juan Dalmau y Manuel Natal anuncian que la 'alianza va para hacer frente al bipartidismo.'" *Primera Hora*, July 15, 2024, https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/gobierno-politica/notas/juan-dalmau-y-manuel-natal-anuncian-que-la-alianza-va-para-hacer-frente-al-bipartidismo/.

Rico, in the rural areas it was more confusing, and there was not necessarily consensus on races outside of the San Juan metropolitan area. I argue that this is an example of the Alliance's citycentric structure, something that ultimately cost them the election later on.

One of the main challenges that *La Alianza* faced with this structure is that electoral coalitions in Puerto Rico are illegal, and in order to do this, each party would still need to run candidates for governor and resident commissioner, even if did not intend to win. For example, for governor of Puerto Rico, although Citizen's Victory was supporting Dalmau, they still needed to have someone to run for governor within their own party. Javier Córdova Iturregui was their proxy or sacrifice candidate. Even though they had him on the ballot, they told their supporters to vote for Dalmau. The Independence Party did the same, running Roberto Karlo Velázquez Corea for resident commissioner, but requesting their supporters vote for Ana Irma Rivera Lassén. This was confusing to people; I remember explaining to some friends how they should vote, and they needed to do crosses all over the ballot if they wanted to vote for *La Alianza*. La Alianza needed to work around this technical challenge in an electoral commission controlled by the two main parties.

The second challenge is that *La Alianza* did not have its own strong political base like those that right-wing parties have built over decades. *La Alianza* was instead fed from the base that social movements built and mobilized from 2016 to 2020, including via #RickyRenuncia. I argue that *La Alianza* was an interruption in the progress of Puerto Rico's liberation in that rather than building a strong political

movement after #RickyRenuncia that could organize around the issues of housing, healthcare, education, and workers' rights, most sectors of the left delivered the energy of #RickyRenuncia to two candidates: Juan Dalmau and Manuel Natal. Even Juan Dalmau admitted this during his speech at the campaign closing activities of *La Alianza*. Juan Dalmau said, "this movement is yours; I just put my name." Although Dalmau was being modest, there is a certain truth in his claim. This means that *La Alianza* didn't have an organic base; Dalmau and Natal were not figures that were in front of social movements, they have not been in the communities either. In contrast to the two main parties which have spent decades doing grassroots work and developing community leaders to achieve their hegemony, *La Alianza* did not have these community relationships, except with a few candidates, like Eva Prados, and Adriana Gutiérrez. It was not something coalition-wide, so, in response to this relational gap, they relied heavily on support from people who have been discontent with the two-main parties, but have historically voted for either PNP or PPD, and they took advantage of the material conditions in the 2020 election, but I argue *La Alianza* was not able to make that number grow from the 2020 election, especially, because they did not do enough grassroots work. Instead, the candidate for governor, Juan Dalmau focused his campaign on appearing in local talk shows, podcasts, and having a strong presence on social media. However, they failed on working the campaign that met the people face to face, where they occupied not only the traditional media, and social media, but the physical space as well. This aspect of grassroots work (ex.

Community kitchens) that movements did prior to #RickyRenuncia could have benefited *La Alianza* campaign if they employed it more actively.

The third challenge of *La Alianza* was the strong electoral structure that the two main parties had in place, especially the New Progressive Party (PNP). As the party in power, the PNP has dominion over the Electoral Commission of Puerto Rico, which legislates in their favor. One example of this is the prohibition of electoral coalitions. The PNP also dominates the inscription process and was able to invalidate two important candidates of the Citizen's Victory Party (Senator and Representative-at-Large). As a result, Citizen's Victory ran two of their candidates via write-in. This made voting for *La Alianza* even more complicated. Not only did the supporters of *La Alianza* needed to put crosses all around the ballot, but they also had to write-in the names of the candidates of the Citizen's Victory Party if they wanted to vote for them.

Also, the PNP (as well as the PPD) has enough party militants to have observers in each electoral college across the archipelago, which *La Alianza* does not. As a former electoral observer, this is an issue of many years within liberal parties. They always struggle with having enough observers, especially outside of the San Juan area. *La Alianza* does not have enough people to monitor the voting process, especially in the rural areas. *La Alianza* attempted to address this issue by posting calls on social media for supporters to register as election observers. This is another example where *La Alianza* used social media to call people to action, similar to the calls to action for #RickyRenuncia. However, the weak response to this call made it clear that people will be more inclined to mobilize for a protest action than to

mobilize to work at an election. *La Alianza* faced two major challenges in mobilizing people as observers: first, they made people believe in the electoral system, and did not bring up this issue from the start. Observers are crucial in Puerto Rico's election, as it the irregularities in the election process are denounced in every election. For example in 2020, Manuel Natal was winning the San Juan mayoral race, but at the very last minute the absentee, sick votes, and early-votes came in, and shifted the election results. What are the odds that all absentee, sick, and early votes are primary for the PNP candidate? This definitely shows how the PNP electoral officials manipulate the results. Second, the as a new party *La Alianza* did not have the mobilizing power of the deeper loyalty that PNP uses for this particular task, engaging the thousands of militants that they have provided with jobs or contracts through the government agencies and municipalities they control. *La Alianza* made the mistake of treating these calls to register as observers as the calls to join a protest during #RickyRenuncia. While weak ties and social media can sometimes bring people out to a protest, these so-called spontaneous calls does not necessarily help win an election which requires a stronger relations.

And finally, the PNP passed legislation that literally allows them to steal the elections. Through the flexibilization of absentee and early voting, the PNP allows each candidate to collect their own votes, creating the possibility of tampering with them. Some candidates of PNP, like representative Georgie Navarro, have been unapologetic about this. Prior to the 2024 elections, Georgie posted videos of him delivering the absentee and early votes of his district to the State Electoral

Commission, making sure that he has enough votes to win the election, days before the election. In a video that went viral Georgie is seem smelling the early and absentee ballots, while saying on Twitter, "these are votes for the PNP, those who don't have this kind of working team that's able to call, go in-person to the houses, getting the signatures of each voter, being authorized to bring the ballots here are suffering. So suffer."[188] *La Alianza* denounced these types of practices and other instances where the PNP was asking for electoral numbers at elderly retirement centers to assist seniors citizens in early voting with an obvious intent of influencing their choices. This strong electoral structure of the PNP was a big challenge that *La Alianza* needed to overcome. Nevertheless, the PNP practices, although shady, were legal according to the electoral code. The PNP also keeps dead voters active and uses the registry to steal votes. This has been documented in an investigation by the Center of Investigative Journalism. "The dead votes are just one of the modalities of electoral fraud, which many militants, organizers and political coordinators have been executing over two decades in Puerto Rico, falsifying endorsements, votes, and using the personal information at the General Registry of Voters to benefit their candidates, and empty the voting lists at the polls the same day of the electoral event."[189]

[188] Molusco (@Moluskein) "El representante Georgie Navarro." X, September 5, 2019, https://x.com/Moluskein/status/1831802089460081031/video/1

[189] Wilma Maldonado, Omaya Sosa Pascual. "Amplio Esquema de Robo de Votos Corrompe El Sistema Electoral En Puerto Rico." *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*, September 24, 2024, https://periodismoinvestigativo.com/2024/09/robo-votos-corrompe-elecciones-puerto-rico/.

In summary, *La Alianza* faced three mayor challenges: First, they had difficulty educating people on a confusing form of voting, which included voting for two different parties, and writing-in names. Second, *La Alianza* didn't have a large organic base – it was essentially borrowed from the social movements and the celebrities. Third it was up against the powerful electoral machinery of the PNP. Nevertheless, *La Alianza* dreamt of an electoral victory, and put forward an internet campaign that compares to a networked social movement.

In the article, *Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements*, Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow state that the Obama Campaign in 2008 was pivotal in showing how the internet can mobilize movement activists into electoral politics. "Technological innovations linking offline and online activism migrated from MoveOn's movement activities into the electoral arena […] Internet is not only an innovative form of communication but a new form of social movement organization, which is easily transferable to the electoral arena."[190] For *La Alianza*, the internet was instrumental to connecting with those who participated in #RickyRenuncia and sympathized with a different government for the island, especially those who opposed the two-party system.

Five years after the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló, the Summer of 2019 had become a cultural symbol for many Puerto Ricans who dream of a new and independent country. Summer of 2019 was a historical moment, which I argue is now

[190] Doug McAdam, and Sidney Tarrow. "Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements." *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010): 538.

part of the sets of shared symbols that form the Puerto Rican identity, and therefore the Puerto Rican common sense. The massive marches in Old San Juan, the Puerto Rican flags in front of the Governor's Mansion, and the riot police throwing tear gas in Old San Juan have become symbols used to reference #RickyRenucia. Candidates from *La Alianza* tapped into these symbols to reach their supporters. On an X post months before the election, @juandalmauPR posted a picture of a march of the Summer 2019,[191] in which activists hold banners reading, "#RickyRenuncia" and "#NiCorruptosNiCobardes." In the post @juandalmauPR wrote, "El Verano del 19 marcó un antes y un después en nuestra historia. Nos dimos a respetar como pueblo. Ahora toca el turno a la Esperanza. Hagamos que triunfe en noviembre 5." (Summer of 19 marked a before and after in our history. We fought for respect as People. Now it's the turn of hope. Let's make it triumph on November 5th.). With this post @juandalmauPR was claiming a connection between Summer 2019 and the elections of 2024, proposing that *La Alianza's* electoral program was part of the continuation of Summer 2019. This idea has been around since the 2020 election but sectors of the Left rarely criticized this and mainly came on-board with this idea. This, I argue, had demobilized the grassroots work and street protests since 2020/2021. But despite this gap in time and the generalized demobilization since 2020, the idea of the 2024 elections being the culmination of #RickyRenuncia found many sympathizers through the Puerto Rican networked public sphere.

[191] Juan Dalmau (@juandalmauPR) "El Verano del 19." X, July 23, 2024, https://x.com/juandalmauPR/status/1815814138817347916

On X (formerly Twitter), I searched for the hashtag #PatriaNueva and #LaAlianzaVa, and found posts from *La Alianza* supporters that were aligned with @juandalmauPR's claim. User @larryemil posted a picture he took in Summer 2019 of an activist carrying Puerto Rico's black and white flag on top of an Old San Juan wall. The blurb of the post read, "I took this photograph in the historic manifestation of July 17th of the Combative Summer. Today, I evoke it. #PatriaNueva. We are more and are not afraid. Let's vote for @juandalmauPR @manuelnatal and the alliance" (Tomé esta foto en la histórica manifestación del 17 de julio del verano del 19. Hoy la evoco. #PatriaNueva. Somos más y no tenemos miedo. A votar por @juandalmauPR, @manuelnatal y la Alianza). As with @juandalmauPR, this user referenced a couple of symbols that are intrinsically tied to Puerto Rico's recent resistance movement and the #RickyRenuncia movement. He uses the Black and White Flag, which I have talked about it before. He also uses the slogan "We are more and are not afraid,"[192] which is a slogan that has been used when activists faced the riot police in protests. But this user was using it to inspire people to go into the voting booth. Another user, @dulcinea_linda posted what could be an image of people at a #RickyRenuncia march, which said, "Boricua: Aprendiste a Defenderte, ¡Ahora aprende a votar!" (Boricua: You learned how to defend yourself. Now, learn to vote!). In the post, she included the hashtag #LaAlianzaVa.[193] Similarly, @Yrene_pr posted a very common

[192] Larry Emil Alicea-Rodríguez (@larryemil), "Tomé esta foto." X, November 5, 2024, https://x.com/larryemil/status/1853831218254483457/photo/1
[193] Linda dulcinea (@dulcinea_linda), "#LaAlianzaVa." X, November 2, 2024, https://x.com/dulcinea_linda/status/1852841260501086451/photo/1

image of the #RickyRenuncia protests, in which activists hold Puerto Rican flags in front of the Governor's Mansion with a text inside the image that reads. "El 5 de noviembre no hay otra opción; finalizaremos la lucha del Verano 2019" (The 5th of November, there's no other option; we'll finalize the struggle of the Summer 2019).[194] However, this user was skeptical of the electoral process, writing in the post, "The fraud with the early voting continues in the courts. The people don't trust the PNP courts. The people will need to resolve this in the streets." This last post acknowledges the third challenge of *La Alianza* that I described.



Figure 13, Man with Black and Whit Flag by @larryemil

Despite of their differences in the content, these three examples I have showcased highlight that for those who participated in or identified with the struggle

[194] @Yrene_pr, X

of #RickyRenuncia, it became common sense that the 2024 elections were part of a movement that took-off in Summer 2019. I was also able to see these types of messages in other social media platforms as well, like in Instagram stories, where Puerto Rican theater actor, @sofritopr posted the day before the election a story that said, "Mañana temenos la responsabilidad colectiva de terminar lo que comenzamos en el verano del 2019" (Tomorrow we have the collective responsibility of finishing what we stared in Summer 2019).[195] while including emojis of a green heart (green being the color of the Independence Party), a fist up, and the Puerto Rican flag.

In summary, Summer 2019 or #RickyRenuncia produced a series of cultural symbols that are now shared within the Puerto Rican common sense and the candidates of *La Alianza* tapped into these symbols in order to mobilize people to participate in their electoral project. I argue that the electoral project of *La Alianza* co-opted these symbols, washed away their subversive significance, and transformed them to serve a reformist agenda. However, these symbols were so strong that it served them to build their electoral support, which would have been less if these symbols have not existed. Not only did *La Alianza* absorb the base of social movements, but it also absorbed the symbols that have being identified with the social movements, and in a sense diminished their subversive and radical significance.

Different from the previous election, TikTok played an important role in mobilizing the young voters to the polls. From the observations I made on TikTok, *La*

[195] @sofritopr, Instagram

Alianza was more effective using TikTok than the other main two parties. In the article, "The Influence of Political Communication On TikTok On Gen Z Support in the 2024 Election" Nevy Rusmarina Dewi analyzes the use of TikTok in Indonesia's 2024 election. Her analysis of the use of TikTok as a form of political communication media can be productively compared to its use in Puerto Rico's 2024 election. Dewi describes how "the popularity of Tik Tok in recent years has succeeded in attracting young consumers. It has succeeded in reaching the youth market through its features such as music, video effects and sticker filters, voice changers, dance, or lip-syncing."[196] Through her article Dewi argues that Gen Z are not as concerned with history and the past and politically respond to what entertains them in the present:

> "They are a generation that grew up with the internet and cellphones. According to Alvara Strategic data, Generation Z's reception of information is more visual than narrative, so it is nor surprising that Tik Tok with a visual base is more in demand. Because of their light thinking, they don't really need serious things like on more serious Facebook or Instagram content. Based on Gen Z criteria, the preferred political campaign model is one that entertains Gen Z."[197]

In the case of Puerto Rico, I would not agree that Gen Z overlooks the history and the past, since they are a generation that is well aware of the decay of the country, and

---

[196] Dewi, Nevy Rusmarina. "The Influence of Political Communication on TikTok on Gen Z's Support in the 2024 Election." *JPW (Jurnal Politik Walisongo)* 7, no. 1 (2025): 26.

[197] Dewi, Nevy Rusmarina. "The Influence of Political Communication on TikTok on Gen Z's Support in the 2024 Election." *JPW (Jurnal Politik Walisongo)* 7, no. 1 (2025): 25–40.

how the development of the county has been regressing. According to an NPR report, "the island's youngest voters have come of age during a recession that has driven an exodus of half-a-million people — largely young adults — to the mainland United States. The past four years alone have arguably been the most tumultuous in Puerto Rico's modern history. It has declared bankruptcy, lost control of its own finances to a federal board appointed to resolve its debt, faced massive cuts to education and pensions, muddled through the recovery from two major hurricanes, faced earthquakes, corruption scandals, and a pandemic."[198] This is why PNP and PPD are struggling to keep young voters enthusiastic, as they are the ones blamed for lack of opportunities by younger generations. However, a certain aspect of what Dewi argues applies to Gen Z enthusiastic for *La Alianza*, in that they do not necessarily understand Puerto Rico's colonial legacy. All blame falls on the PNP and PPD parties rather than identifying how they are tools of US imperialism in Puerto Rico. This misunderstanding limits the extent to which many young supporters of *La Alianza* question and have a critical view of the electoral process, as generations before them did. Historically, the young people in Puerto Rico who sympathize with leftist ideals have not seen the electoral system as a vehicle for change. For example, in 2008, the theater group "Papel Machete" made an anti-electoral campaign, called "Ninguno" calling for boycotting the elections with the view that any elections made in a colony are illegitimate. "We ran a candidate for governor during the 2008 elections to protest

[198] Adrian Florido. "In Puerto Rico, Young Voters Are Trying To Shake Up Traditional Party Politics." *NPR*, November 2, 2020. Elections. *NPR*, https://www.npr.org/2020/11/02/930323316/in-puerto-rico-young-voters-are-trying-to-shake-up-traditional-party-politics

the colonial politics in PR and motivate folks to organize instead of voting in colonial elections."[199] In an interview on Latinx Project, Jorge Díaz, one of the founders of Papel Machete details that in a colony, the only option is for the working class to organize. "An invitation to organize in the streets and communities as the only real option for the working class."[200] Back in 2008, none of the leftist student organizations supported participating in the elections, except the Youth of the Pro-Independence Party. This has shifted through last ten years, perhaps because of the dissappearance of many leftists organizations at the universities. Now, many young people that seek social change have joined the ranks of the Pro-Independence Party and the Citizen's Victory Party.

The organized youth of the Citizen's Victory Party (La Jota) was very smart in the use of the TikTok platform. One successful trend that they set on TikTok was mobilizing young people to register to vote. Using a 20 year-old reggaeton song from Héctor "El Father," where he raps about getting his gun out and using it without fear, the youth of Citizen's Victory re-purposed the song as to "take your electoral card out and use it without fear," while dancing to the beat of the reggaeton. This trend became viral, as many TikTok users posted videos of themselves dancing this song, while showing their new electoral card. Although, I cannot confirm that it was the

---

[199] "Campaña de Ninguno Pa' Gobernador (2008)." *Papel Machete*, November 1, 2008, https://papelmachete.com/announcement/ninguno-pa-gobernador/.
[200] José A. Laguarta Ramírez. "Crisis Projects: 25 Years of AgitArte in Puerto Rico and The Global Diaspora." *The Latinx Project at NYU*, April 11, 2023, https://www.latinxproject.nyu.edu/intervenxions/crisis-projects-25-years-of-agitarte-in-puerto-rico-and-the-global-diaspora.

Citizen's Victory youth that began this trend, it is palpable that they were instrumental in making it viral.[201] As Dewi observes on Indonesia's election, TikTok was essential to reach young generation of voters, specially Gen Z, who definitely felt more identified with young candidates like @manuelnatal and the charisma of @juandalmauPR. It is important to also note that as in the Summer of 2019, reggaeton music was a tool for mobilizing young people. The song "Sácala" is a classic of reggaeton in Puerto Rico and therefore remains in the Puerto Rican common sense. *La Alianza* was effective using the symbol of this song to inspire young people to register to vote and vote for *La Alianza*.

The reappearance of Bad Bunny: Muerte al PNP and the War of the Billboards

Another similarity of the 2024 elections and Summer 2019 was the involvement of internationally renowned Puerto Rican celebrities, like Residente, Ricky Martin, and Bad Bunny who demanded the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló before, and were now using their platforms to mobilize Puerto Ricans to vote for *La Alianza's* candidates. Months before the election I heard activists in Puerto Rico saying, "if Bad Bunny said something…" or "if he expressed himself about the ongoing crisis in Puerto Rico…" hoping that he would endorse the candidates of the left for the election. This for me raised a red flag, as I felt it was defeatist, and the

[201] VictoriaPorPR (@victoriaporpr), "Sácala." *TikTok*, September, 2024, https://www.tiktok.com/@victoriaporpr/video/7412683422923001118.

activists who sympathized with the electoral strategy were counting on a celebrity to build popular support. Although Bad Bunny could bring a boost to the movement, electoral activists and militants of *La Alianza* needed to do the grassroots work to build a base that was strong enough when a boost came along. As I argued in the first chapter of this dissertation, what gave the force for #RickyRenuncia to transform into a strong social movement was that during the past three years activists had been protesting in the streets and developing community projects, which combined with the material conditions of the moment provided the substance for a movement of such proportions to develop. The effect of the Snowball, which I describe in chapter one, is something that I did not see developed during *La Alianza* Campaign. During 2020 and 2024, protests in Puerto Rico diminished significantly, which I argue is what also helped the shift in the electorate back in 2020. Also, material conditions were in place, and they were not as harsh as in 2019. Puerto Rico benefited from Biden's pandemic funds, and FEMA Emergency funds after hurricane María, therefore people were not as desperate for the 2024 election, as they were in 2020. Although the crisis was felt by most Puerto Ricans, there had been a very small economic improvement for Puerto Ricans, which presented a challenge for *La Alianza*. However, there was still the issue of electricity, inflation, and housing, and I argue that *La Alianza* only addressed the first narratively.

In a podcast interview[202] weeks before the election with Puerto Rican influencer, "El Tony," Bad Bunny talked about a variety of topics, including his career, politics, and the importance of registering to vote. But perhaps what made this interview more memorable was that towards the end Bad Bunny talks about his artistic process, and future projects, where he jokingly says that he's mad at the current government, and he wishes he didn't have to make songs that sound – and Bad Bunny sings, "Jennifer mentirosa, no seas embustera, Muerte al PNP, a todos los corruptos. Puerto Rico se merece algo mejor" (Jennifer liar, don't be a liar, death to the PNP, to all the corrupts. Puerto Rico deserves something better). Jennifer was the candidate for governor of the PNP and was leading the polls. This moment of the interview quickly became viral, and its message reached a lot of young people. Somebody later added music to that part of the interview, and TikTok dances were also made. The youth of Citizens Victory also did a TikTok video with this.[203] In the video @manuelnatal, the millennial candidate of San Juan, appears dancing the remix. The phrase "Muerte al PNP" (Death to the PNP) also became a catchphrase that many supporters of *La Alianza* identified with and used.

Historically, politically conscious celebrities have used their power to support social issues (ex. Harry Belafonte, Jane Fonda, Roger Waters). And although Bad Bunny hasn't been known internationally for taking positions in regards to

---

[202] El Tony. "Yo quiero que mi gente viva feliz." *Youtube*, September 2, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zw7bLZOn0u4,

[203] VictoriaPorPR (@victoriaporpr), "No seas mentirosa." *TikTok*, September 8 ,204, https://www.tiktok.com/@victoriaporpr/video/7412309125486431519?q=manuel%20natal&t=1751815254559.

international social issues, he has done so locally, at the Puerto Rican level. In the article, "The Power of Celebrities in Global Politics" Lena Partzsch writes about how celebrities have the power. "What is crucial about celebrity power is that it is mainly exercised invisibly and often in very emotional and spiritual rather than rational terms."[204] Earlier in this chapter I explained that *La Alianza* supporters saw this election as a continuation of the Summer 2019, which was not only a movement against governor Rosselló, but also the political party he represented. The PNP has been the architect of the worst economic policies of the last 30 years for the Puerto Rican working class, such as the privatization of public companies, and the massive layoffs of government employees. The PNP also was the party administering the colony during hurricane María's landfall.

"Death to PNP" began creating a confrontation in the public sphere between the leaders of the PNP party and Bad Bunny. Leaders of the PNP started posting social media attacks of Bad Bunny and challenging him in the local media. For example, the electoral commissioner of the PNP, @EdwinMundo2, posted a picture of himself eating rabbit stew at a local restaurant. He wrote, "Aquí comiéndome un #BadBunnySpecial (Fricase de Conejo) en L'Olivo en preparación para el 5 de noviembre" (Here eating a #BadBunnySpecial (rabbit stew) at L'Olivo in preparation for November 5th).[205] In these and similar messages, it seemed like Bad Bunny was

[204] Partzsch, Lena. "The Power of Celebrities in Global Politics." *Celebrity Studies* 6, no. 2 (2015): 189.
[205] Edwin Mundo (@EdwinMundo2), "Aquí comiendome." X, October 7, 2024 https://x.com/EdwinMundo2/status/1843343705870348554

the one that they needed to defeat to win the elections, rather than *La Alianza*. The Puerto Rican right-wing was very effective in shifting the attention away from the candidates of *La Alianza*, towards Bad Bunny, and this is why depending so much on the celebrities (as *La Alianza* did) was detrimental for their campaign. It was not about convincing the electorate about having better policies than *La Alianza*, but about defeating Bad Bunny.

The political battle between the PNP and Bad Bunny transcended the virtual space and also occupied the urban space. Weeks before the election the digital billboards in Puerto Rico, which are mainly located on highways, started showing a series of messages for the voters that consisted of white text over a black background that read, "Votar PNP es votar por la corrupción," "Quien vota PNP no ama a Puerto Rico" (Voting for the PNP is voting for corruption), (Anyone who votes PNP, doesn't love Puerto Rico). At the beginning these messages were anonymous, but it had to be someone with a lot of wealth, since billboard messages are expensive. Later the government demanded for it to be revealed who was paying for the billboards, per electoral and campaign laws, and it was revealed that @sanbenito was the person behind the billboards.[206] As part of this revelation, @sanbenito/Bad Bunny confirmed on "X" that he was the person who paid for these billboards, by posting pictures of the billboards displaying the messages.[207]

---

[206] María Luis. "Bad Bunny Launches Billboard Campaign against Puerto Rico's Ruling Party." *The Washington Post,* September 28, 2024

[207] Erica G. for Class President (@EG10029), "#BadBunny is buying." X, September 24, 2024, https://x.com/EG10029/status/1838707438242947581

In response to these billboards, the president of the Senate and member of the PNP party, Thomas Rivera Schatz/@trschatz51, paid for a series of response billboards that read, “El 5 de noviembre, ¡Barremos! ¡Para que Benito _ame!” (The fifth of November, we’ll sweep them! So that Benito s*cks it!) The right-wing shifted the attention of the electorate towards @sanbenito/Bad Bunny and was effective in moving away from discussing the real issues that affect Puerto Ricans. Instead, it was a spectacle. This spectacle took place in a hybrid place, where the billboards that occupied the urban space were also broadcast through social media. I call this the *networked electoral debate*, where the debate between politicians is not limited to the traditional media outlets, and the debates hosted by news organizations, but rather takes on another form in the hybrid space, as pictures from political advertisements in the physical space get uploaded to social media, where they generate debate beyond politicians, and each post becomes a place of discussion, which at-large becomes part of the networked public sphere.

The problem with this is that the speed in which this debate takes place can undermine the discussion of ideas, real issues, and the truth. In his article, “Post-Truth, the Future of Democracy and the Public Sphere,” Silke Van Dyk states, “what is new in the age of digitization and its rapid channels of dissemination is the sheer number of lies and the speed at which they spread. In addition, it is striking that proven lies and false statements no longer seem to harm those transmitting them and

that cover-ups play a secondary role compared to earlier times."[208] This is something that it has been well evidenced in the U.S. 2024 election, where the lies spread by Donald Trump were irrelevant for many voters in the U.S. Living in a post-truth era also allows right-wing politicians to concentrate on personal attacks, winning on the base of false information, which also spark hate. For example, in an X post, @trschatz51 posted a picture of @sanbenito at the MET Gala, where @sanbenito is showing his back. Here @trschatz51 says that @sanbenito "always turns his back on Puerto Rico." Although one can argue about his approaches, it is undeniable that despite his international fame, @sanbenito has always been present in Puerto Rico, using his platform to highlight the issues of Puerto Rico, and making projects that support the Puerto Rican economy. In the post @trshatz51 also writes that @sanbenito doesn't live in Puerto Rico, which is something that Bad Bunny has denied publicly in several instances. Social media allows for the more rapid spread of false information and this is something that the right-wing has been using to its advantage within the last decade, encouraging their voters to take up antagonistic relationships with liberals based on false information.

[208] Silke Van Dyk. "Post-Truth, the Future of Democracy and the Public Sphere." *Theory, Culture & Society* 39, no. 4 (2022): 39.

The End of the #RickyRenuncia Movement

If the elections of 2024 were the continuation of Summer 19 and the #RickyRenuncia Movement, then they were also the end of the movement. *La Alianza* lost the elections, practically getting the same results as the elections of 2020. Although there was a shift in the behavior of the electorate, *La Alianza* was unable to expand that turnout in four years. Juan Dalmau received 30% of the votes, which if combined his last 14%, and the 14% of Alexandra Lúgaro in 2020; *La Alianza* only went up 2%. Manuel Natal also lost in San Juan for the second time against Miguel Romero. Natal received 34% in 2020, and 40% in 2024, and although he received more votes, the incumbent of San Juan received more votes as well, increasing from a 36% to a 46% in 2024. What this shows is the weakness of the Popular Democratic Party in San Juan, more than the success of *La Alianza*. In the case of legislative representatives, Citizen's Victory Party lost their 4 seats in the Puerto Rican legislature, while the Puerto Rican Independence Party gained 3 seats in the legislature per minority law, since they were second place in the governor's race. If you analyze these results within the context of *La Alianza*, they lost 1 seat in the legislature.

My critique is that *La Alianza* made the mistake of assuming that having the most influential Puerto Rican influencers and celebrities on their side (ex. Bad Bunny, Rawn Alejandro, Ricky Martin, Jowell y Randy) would translate into votes from all the fans/followers of those celebrities. In this sense, the liberal elite that pushed La Alianza underestimated the Puerto Rican voters by assuming that they would blindly

follow the celebrities, while ignoring a much bigger colonial structure that is operated by the PNP. When we see the results of the 2024 election, the celebrities did not add much in terms of votes for *La Alianza*, even if they had the most packed campaign closing activity (Festival de la Esperanza). La Alianza voters might be more militant and active, but the PNP has a lot of passive voters that vote for them. We also have to factor in the fact that the PNP has total control over the Electoral Commission, as well as a strong island-wide structure of Pro-Statehood community leaders, and an long-time knowledge of electoral campaigns.[209]

What this shows is that the shift of the Puerto Rican electorate in 2020 (which remained in 2024, but did not expand) was due to the work that social movements did between 2016 and 2020 fighting the austerity policies of the Fiscal Control Board, plus the material conditions that were in place. The trauma from hurricane María and the Earthquakes was still fresh in the collective memory, and on top of that it was the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the material conditions and the grassroots work done by social movement organizations, not only triggered #RickyRenuncia, but it organically produced a shift in the Puerto Rican electorate in 2020.

The popular power that made the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló possible, rather than be used to strengthen the labor movement, the student movement, or the environmental movement, was absorbed by *La Alianza* and the liberal-elite to

[209] Thomas Rivera Schatz (@trschatz51), X, November 4, 2024https://x.com/trschatz51/status/1853436437057638423/photo/1

mobilize people to the polls. I argue that if that power would have transformed into active militants of social movements, rather than a passive electoral force, there would have been a stronger structure to win in the electoral arena later on. It also would have created a strong popular force to confront austerity policies and repression, even within the most conservative governments. At the end, Puerto Rico is a United States colony, and no matter who wins the elections, the power of Puerto Ricans is limited. Only through popular power, can Puerto Ricans create real change.

In the book, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, Zeynep Tufecki describes that the networked social movements face a challenge that they rise up too quick.[210] Tufecki describes that is like riding a bike versus driving a car, you get faster to your destination with a car, but with the bicycle you build muscle. Although #RickyRenuncia and Summer 2019, were possible thanks to the grassroots work and protests that were happening through the years (the bicycle), still the movement grew very fast, and although it was a good opportunity, the follow-up to the movement is something that those of us who seek social change in Puerto Rico, must continue reflecting upon. I argue that many leftist sectors in Puerto Rico made the mistake of prioritizing winning an election too soon, for that next step to happen, the left needed to continue pedaling, and biking more. The electoral arena is dominated by the Puerto Rican right-wing, but the streets are the Left's home court, and must not be abandoned. Winning elections is not necessarily progress for the Left, we have seen

[210] Zeynep Tufekci. *Twitter and Tear Gas : The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. 1st ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

examples in Chile[211] and Greece,[212] where the center-left has won the elections, and then betray their ideals by siding or providing concessions to neoliberalism. Moving from the streets to the polls, may result in getting social movements demobilized, and the left-wing sectors in Puerto Rico lost perspective of the importance of being in the streets, and working with communities, even if they were supporting an electoral process. The center-left did not win the elections in Puerto Rico, but still they demobilized the opportunity of developing a mass popular movement of workers, students, environmentalists, feminists, and other progressive groups after #RickyRenuncia.

Finally, I think future networked social movements do not only face the challenge of being absorbed by an electoral or any other reformist/liberal project, but are now facing the challenge of the control that the right-wing has advanced on social media, and the internet, through right-wing influencers, podcasters, and algorithms that favor the conservative narrative. Social movements in the next years need to remain "networked," which means reclaiming both the virtual and physical space, but for the virtual they will need to find ways to bypass the algorithms, which can be misleading, and manipulative.

In the present state of social media, I argue that it only helps to keep in touch with your supporters/base, but not expanding it, as it was during the Combative

---

[211] Fernando Ignacio Leiva. *The Left Hand of Capital : Neoliberalism and the Left in Chile*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2021.
[212] Yanis Varoufakis. *Adults in the Room : My Battle with the European and American Deep Establishment*. First American edition. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.

Summer, and through earlier examples, like the Arab Spring. Therefore, the only way that social movements can build their base, and expand their support is by being present in the streets, not only protesting, but engaging with communities, and doing a lot of in-person education. Otherwise, social media maintains your message within an algorithmic bubble. Beyond that, as social media continues being developed by capitalist corporations, which collaborate with oppressive governments as well, more and more, social media will become a tool for surveillance.

In conclusion, there is no way to escape the need of being present in the virtual space, but activists, and social movements need to find creative ways to keep intervening it, because what worked during the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, #RickyRenuncia, or other social movements in the last 15 years, is not the same that will work post-2025. Regardless of the way social media is incorporated, I argue that what makes a networked social movement successful is its capacity of using virtual tools in an effective, and creative manner, which will constantly evolve. And finally, that the effectiveness of social movements is directly linked to the grassroots work done by activists and social movement organizations, and finally that the material conditions always need to be in place. Material conditions are always there within the capitalist system, people have hundreds of material reasons to protest, it is the job of those who seek social change to show it to them. Justice will not be won by just voting, the struggle is won with work and fight!

Bibliography

"¡Pa que te rías! Mira los mejores memes de la semana." *Primera Hora*. July 19, 2019. https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/puertorico/fotogalerias/pa-que-te-rias-mira-los-mejores-memes-de-la-semana-11/

Achille Mbembe. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Adriana de Jesús. "#RickyRenuncia: How Social Media Helped Take Down Puerto Rico's Governor." *NotiCel*. July 28, 2019. https://noticel.com/mas/otros/20190728/rickyrenuncia-how-social-media-helped-take-down-puerto-ricos-governor/

Arys Rodríguez Andino. "Escritora denuncia que Ricky Rosselló la plagió." *Primera Hora*. July 31, 2014. https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/gobierno-politica/notas/escritora-denuncia-que-ricky-rossello-la-plagio/

Bailey, Marlon M. "Gender/Racial Realness: Theorizing the Gender System in Ballroom Culture." *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011).

Barrett, Brian. "All the President's Tech CEOs." *Wired*. Accessed October 2, 2025. https://www.wired.com/story/tech-ceos-donald-trump-white-house/

Bonilla, Yarimar, and Jonathan Rosa. "Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States." *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1 (2015).

Bonilla, Yarimar, and Marisol LeBrón, eds. *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico before and after the Storm*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

Cabán, Pedro. "PROMESA, Puerto Rico and the American Empire." *Latino Studies* 16, no. 2 (2018).

Carlos Rubén Rosario. "A la luz 'crónicas del verano del 19'." Interview by Edgar Torres. Fundación Nacional para la Cultura Popular. August 2, 2020. https://prpop.org/2020/08/a-la-luz-cronicas-del-verano-del-19

Castells, Manuel. *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015.

Chokshi, Niraj. “Trump Waives Jones Act for Puerto Rico, Easing Hurricane Aid Shipments.” *The New York Times*. September 28, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/28/us/jones-act-waived.html

Cleaver, Harry M. “The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric.” *Journal of International Affairs* 51, no. 2 (1998): 621–40.

COMISIÓN ESTATAL DE ELECCIONES – PR. Accessed October 5, 2025. https://ww2.ceepur.org/

Comisión Estatal de Elecciones. Accessed October 6, 2025. https://www.ceepur.org/

Cristi, Nicole, and Javiera Manzi Araneda. “Political Resistance Posters During Pinochet’s Dictatorship in Chile: Approaching the Graphic Backroom.” *Journal of Design History* 32, no. 1 (2019).

Cuevas-Molina, Ivelisse, Luis Raul Camara-Fuertes, Gabriel A. Negron-Torres, and Ma. “Turnout Decline, Mobilization, and Third-Party Surge: The 2020 Puerto Rico General Election.” *Centro Journal* 36, no. 3 (2024).

Davis, Richard, and David Taras, eds. *Power Shift? Political Leadership and Social Media*. New York: Routledge, 2020.

Dávila, Juan C. “‘As ‘Puerto Rican Summer’ Draws to a Close’ People’s Assemblies Spring Up Across the Island.” *The Indypendent*. September 7, 2019. https://indypendent.org/2019/09/as-puerto-rican-summer-draws-to-a-close-peoples-assemblies-spring-up-across-the-island/

Dávila, Zoán Tanis. “#EstadoDeEmergencia: Organizing to End Gender-based Violence in PR.” Interview by Juan C. Dávila. *When We Fight We Win! The Podcast*. Agitarte. December 17, 2020. Podcast. https://open.spotify.com/episode/6lpWdwwbDxqXtMjiSWXd1m

De Jesús González, Manuel. “Elecciones: Crónica de un país que cambió.” *Claridad*. November 20, 2020. https://claridadpuertorico.com/elecciones-cronica-de-un-pais-que-cambio/

Dewi, Nevy Rusmarina. “The Influence of Political Communication on TikTok on Gen Z’s Support in the 2024 Election.” *JPW (Jurnal Politik Walisongo)* 7, no. 1 (2025).

Durham, Frank D., and Thomas Patrick Oates. *Forming the Public: A Critical History of Journalism in the United States*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2024.

Earl, Jennifer, and Katrina Kimport. *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011.

"EN VIVO: Manifestantes llegan a San Juan para reclamar renuncia del gobernador." *Primera Hora*. July 16, 2019. https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/gobierno-politica/notas/en-vivo-manifestantes-llegan-a-san-juan-para-reclamar-renuncia-del-gobernador/

Espada, Mariah. "'We're Literally Fighting for Our Lives': A New Political Movement Emerges Outside Puerto Rico's Two-Party System." *TIME*. November 18, 2020. https://time.com/5913496/puerto-rico-elections/

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. 60th anniversary edition. New York: Grove Press, 2021.

Florido, Adrian. "In Puerto Rico, Young Voters Are Trying To Shake Up Traditional Party Politics." *NPR*. November 2, 2020. https://www.npr.org/2020/11/02/930323316/in-puerto-rico-young-voters-are-trying-to-shake-up-traditional-party-politics

Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere." *Social Text* 8, no. 3 (1990).

Fuchs, Christian. "The Digital Commons and the Digital Public Sphere: How to Advance Digital Democracy Today." *Westminster Papers in Communication & Culture* 16, no. 1 (2021).

García Canclini, Néstor. *Latinoamericanos buscando lugar en este siglo*. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2002.

García Cooper, Robert. "Privatized Resilience." Interview by Yarimar Bonilla. *Puerto Rican Voices*. Center for Puerto Rican Studies. November 23, 2022. Video. https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/media/privatized-resilience/

García-Medina, William. "Por Mi Reggae Muero: Why Reggaetón Still Matters." 2010.

Gil Rodríguez, Caroline. "'La Bola de Cristal': Puerto Rican Meme Production in Times of Austerity and Crisis." *InVisible Culture*. March 2018.

Gilroy-Ware, Marcus. *Filling the Void: Emotion, Capitalism and Social Media*. London: Repeater, 2017.

Goldhaber, Michael. "The Value of Openness in an Attention Economy." *First Monday* (2006).

Gogarty, Kayla. “The Right Dominates the Online Media Ecosystem…” *Media Matters for America*. March 14, 2025.

Grosfoguel, Ramón. *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Guimond, Christopher Powers. “We Are All the 4,645: Impossible Mourning and the Verano Boricua.” *Diálogos* 52, no. 109 (2021).

Habermas, Jürgen, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox. “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964).” *New German Critique* 1, no. 3 (1974).

Hall, Stuart, and The Open University, eds. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. SAGE, 2012.

Herman, Edward S., and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2002.

Hernández, Sara del Valle. “Mujeres Protestaron En La Milla de Oro Por Sus Derechos.” *MINH Puerto Rico*. March 8, 2017. https://minhpuertorico.org/index.php/noticias/55-noticias/5815-2017-03-09-01-54-48

Jímenez, Gustavo. “Puerto Rico: La revolución boricua derribó al corrupto Rosselló.” *MST Argentina*. July 31, 2019. https://mst.org.ar/2019/07/31/puerto-rico-revolucion-boricua-derribo-al-corrupto-rossello/

Kennis, Andrew. *Digital-Age Resistance Journalism, Social Movements and the Media Dependence Model*. London: Routledge, 2022.

Kishore, Nishant, et al. “Mortality in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria.” *New England Journal of Medicine* 379, no. 2 (2018): 162–70.

Laguarta Ramírez, José A. “Crisis Projects: 25 Years of AgitArte…” *The Latinx Project at NYU*. April 11, 2023.

Leiva, Fernando Ignacio. *The Left Hand of Capital: Neoliberalism and the Left in Chile*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2021.

Luis, María. “Bad Bunny Launches Billboard Campaign against Puerto Rico’s Ruling Party.” *The Washington Post*. September 28, 2024.

Mackay, Jenn Burleson. “What Does Society Owe Political Cartoonists?” *Journalism Studies* 18, no. 1 (2017).

Maldonado, Wilma, and Omaya Sosa Pascual. “Amplio Esquema de Robo de Votos…” *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*. September 24, 2024.

Martín-Barbero, Jesús. *De los medios a las mediaciones*. Barcelona: Anthropos, 2010.

Mazzei, Patricia. “Puerto Rico Ex-Officials Accused of Steering $15.5 Million…” *The New York Times*. July 10, 2019.

Mazzei, Patricia, and Frances Robles. “Ricardo Rosselló, Puerto Rico’s Governor, Resigns…” *The New York Times*. July 24, 2019.

McAdam, Doug, and Sidney Tarrow. “Ballots and Barricades…” *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010).

McChesney, Robert Waterman, and John Nichols. *The Death and Life of American Journalism*. Philadelphia: Nation Books, 2010.

Medeiros, Melanie A., et al. “‘BARBIE E KEN CIDADÃOS DE BEM’…” In *Precarious Democracy*, 218–32. Rutgers University Press, 2021.

Medina, Natalia Rodríguez. “#TelegramGate…” *Latino Rebels*. July 19, 2019. https://www.latinorebels.com/2019/07/09/telegramgate/

Meléndez Badillo, Jorell A. *Puerto Rico, historia de una nación*. Trans. Aurora Lauzardo. Ciudad de México: Planeta, 2024.

Mina, An Xiao. *Memes to Movements*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2019.

Myllylahti, Merja. “An Attention Economy Trap?” *Journal of Media Business Studies* 15, no. 4 (2018).

“Mujeres remueven cuadro del gobernador en oficina de Cesco.” *Primera Hora*. July 16, 2019.

Noticel. “WhatsApp Gate 2.0: Nuevo chat expone a la Administración Rosselló.” *Noticel*. July 13, 2019.

Pantojas-García, Emilio. *Crónicas del colapso*. 2nd ed. San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2015.

Partzsch, Lena. “The Power of Celebrities in Global Politics.” *Celebrity Studies* 6, no. 2 (2015).

Pinho, Osmundo. “Black Music and Politics in Brazil: From Samba to Funk.” 2011.

Prados Rodríguez, Eva, and Nicole Delgado. “Gender Violence and Debt Auditing.” *Critical Times* 4, no. 1 (2021).

Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Rivera-Rideau, Petra R. *Remixing Reggaetón*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

Rodríguez Cotto, Sandra. “En Blanco y Negro Con Sandra…” July 10, 2019.

Salikov, Alexey. “Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Rethinking the Public Sphere…” *Russian Sociological Review* 17, no. 4 (2018).

Santiago-Ortiz, Aurora. “Anti-Colonial Feminist Collective ‘La Cole’…” *Centre Tricontinental*. February 10, 2020.

Sanzillo, Tom, and Cathy Kunkel. “The Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority’s Flawed Fiscal Plan.” IEEFA, 2018.

Simulacros de Liberación. Directed by Juan C. Dávila. República 21 Media, 2021. *Documentary.*

Shaughnessy, Brittany, et al. “An Attack on Free Speech?” *New Media & Society* 27, no. 6 (2025): 3618–36.

Shklovskii, Viktor. “Art as Technique.” In *From Symbolism to Socialist Realism*. Academic Studies Press, 2019.

Sobieraj, Sarah. *Soundbitten*. New York: NYU Press, 2011.

Sosa Pascual, Omaya. “El gobernador en su laberinto.” *Radio Ambulante*. December 3, 2019.

Suarez, Damaris, Omaya Sosa Pascual, and Víctor Rodríguez Velázquez. “A Nightmare for Puerto Ricans to Find a Home…” *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*. December 31, 2024.

Subervi-Vélez, Federico A., Sandra Rodríguez Cotto, and Jairo Lugo-Ocando. *The News Media in Puerto Rico*. Routledge, 2021.

Tarrow, Sidney G. *Power in Movement*. 3rd ed. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Taft, Jessica K. “Hopeful, Harmless, and Heroic: Figuring the Girl Activist as Global Savior.” *Girlhood Studies* 13, no. 2 (2020).

Telemundo Puerto Rico. “Habla sobreviviente de accidente fatal…” July 20, 2019.

Telemundo Puerto Rico. “Bad Bunny exhorta al pueblo a tirarse a la calle.” July 13, 2019.

Tufekci, Zeynep. *Twitter and Tear Gas*. 1st ed. Yale University Press, 2017.

Van Dyk, Silke. “Post-Truth, the Future of Democracy and the Public Sphere.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 39, no. 4 (2022).

Varoufakis, Yanis. *Adults in the Room*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.

Verónica Dávila and Marisol LeBrón. “How Music Took Down Puerto Rico’s Governor.” *The Washington Post*. August 1, 2019.

YouTube (Trump White House Archive). “President Trump and The First Lady Receive a Briefing on Hurricane Maria Relief Efforts.” October 3, 2017.

Zambrana, Rocío. *Colonial Debts: The Case of Puerto Rico*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.