Seizing the Memes of Production: *Political memes in Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican Diaspora.*

by

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Abstract:

This thesis seeks to understand how different groups of people in Puerto Rico and the diaspora deploy internet memes for political critique. In this work, I analyze three case studies focused on how Puerto Rican groups and individuals use internet memes to express political discontent, make calls to action, engage in catharsis, and seek political change. The cases explore critical political meme production under varying circumstances on the island. The first case study, *La Junta de Control Fiscal*, is a group that uses Facebook to satirize the fiscal control board that was imposed on the island by the US Congress; they do this by making use of satirical socialist realist meme aesthetics, and visual vocabulary. The second case study, *Puerto Rican vaporwave*, explores the local deployment of an ironic, anti-capitalist aesthetic form of meme production and its transformation into a method of critique of colonialism and recovery of national identity. The third case study, *Huracan María memes*, focuses on how people use internet memes with varying aesthetics to express their frustrations and anger towards federal and state governmental disaster response before, during, and after the 2017 hurricane event. In each case, I gathered an archive of relevant internet memes, conducted content analysis, and interviewed key meme culture participants to get insight into the development process.Together, these case studies showcase the ways that Puerto Rican people make use of memes to tackle issues like climate change, colonialism, disaster response, and austerity measures. This thesis also develops new insights into the collective meme production process. In particular, the work demonstrates that participation within internet meme culture takes different forms. Meme culture participants perform four different types of engagement: original creation, remixing, curation and sharing. Furthermore, this work proves that internet meme production should be seen as a collective storytelling process where the distinct participation patterns shown above play a major role in expressing catharsis, ideas, sensations, and feelings. I conclude with thoughts about how to extend the communicative capabilities of political memes through new media technologies, and suggest new avenues for meme research.

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Acknowledgments

Quien iba a pensar que una jíbara de Juncos, llegaría a graduarse en Junio 8, 2018 de las "altas esferas" de MIT… Ciertamente yo (Aziria D. Rodríguez Arce) no lo pensé, pero hay *cuchusientas* mil personas que si. Estas personas me ayudaron a llegar exactamente a donde estoy y por esto les estoy eternamente agradecida.

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A mis amistades: Ana Main, Martha, Arisinga, Josefina y Baby Liori; aparte de las Ejecutivas del Jangueo (Cristina, Hazel y Angie). #sinustedesjamashuiberatenidosanidad

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Introduction

Why Study Political Memes?

In 2017 in Puerto Rico, a seemingly innocuous meme of an ex-public official started making the rounds on various social media platforms. It involved Anibal Acevedo Vila, one of Puerto Rico's ex-governors from the Popular Democratic Party (PPD), and a red plastic cup.

Image 1: Anibal Solo Cup
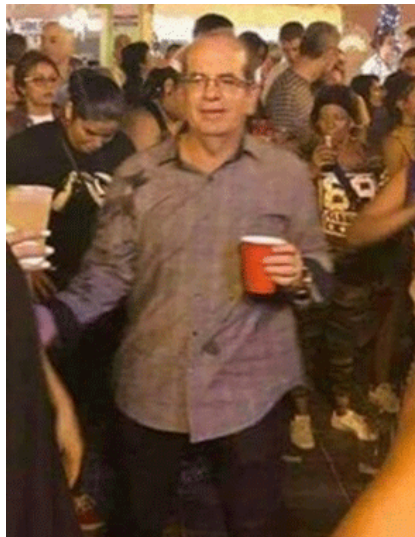
Source: Primera Hora

The photo was taken while he was attending *Las Calles de San Sebastián (San Sebastián Street Festival)* a popular Puerto Rican festival. He was seen drinking, walking alone, mingling with people, and a without bodyguard -- a behavior that is unusual for an ex-governor in the island. A picture was snapped, and suddenly, social media was inundated with photos of the ex-governor and his cup in iconic photographs and religious paraphernalia. He was depicted as the patron saint of all heavy drinkers, walking on Abbey road with the beatles, and participating in the V-J Day parade of 1945.

Image 2: Anibal Solo Cup as Patron Saint of Drinkers

Image 3: Anibal Solo Cup on Abbey Road

Image 4: Anibal Solo Cup on V-J Day Aug. 14, 1945

Source: El Vaso Rojo de Anibal Facebook Page

Source: El Vaso de Anibal Twitter Page

Source: El Calce

Afterwards, the meme became so important that television and print media had to dedicate news segments to discussing its creation (Bauzá, 2017). The meme gained so much attention because it changed the public's perception of the ex-governor. While he was in office, Anibal Acevedo Vila was involved in an enormous scandal. He was accused of nine counts of corruption due to irregularities with his campaign funding (Rivera, 2008). While he was ultimately found not guilty on all counts, his reputation as a public official was tarnished. The development of the meme not only helped him partly restore his public image, it also helped him develop a campaign to boycott a statehood referendum by the opposing New Progressive Party (PNP) in 2017. He used the popular culture visibility developed around the meme to make a call to action to boycott the referendum. The call to action involved people signaling their boycott by displaying a red cup on their pictures and adding the hashtag #anibalselfiesunday (Metro Puerto Rico, 2017). The hashtag and meme became a trending topic, and many people chose to stay home, go to the beach, or do alternative activities instead of voting in the political referendum

(Metro Puerto Rico, 2017). A combination of his individual status, traditional media, social media, and memes enabled such political mobilization; it might look like magic but it was in fact his communicative creativity, people's participation, and political strategy which made an event like that possible.

As Anibal's solo cup meme illustrates, memes can be deployed as compelling political communication tools. Understanding how memes are created and shared in particular political contexts might help us come up with ways to use them in the future. In this thesis, I seek to understand how people deploy memes for political critique in Puerto Rico. I argue that memes can be used as successful political rhetorical tools. I shall now elaborate the structure of the thesis making this argument.

In the first chapter, I contextualize internet memes within the larger scope of historical forms of humorous cultural production and cultural dissent. Then, I explain the theoretical debates surrounding memes' conceptual definition, circulation processes, and how those relate to political meme production. Finally, I place meme production within the Puerto Rican socio-economic and political context as it relates to social movement and communication strategies for protest and critique.

Next, I explore three cases studies that showcase the development of memes for political critique. Each chapter concentrates on a particular case as it illustrates how people relate to, share, and create memes while using varying aesthetic, distribution, and content creation formats. In order to further understand the role that creators and people play in meme development, each chapter presents in-depth interviews with content creators and content 'sharers'; as well as content analysis that seeks to understand user's curation and remixing efforts. These interviews

with producers/creators/sharers allow us to understand the process of content creation for political aims.

In the second chapter, I examine the case of *Domino's vs. La Junta de Control Fiscal: satire & impersonating authority*. The case study demonstrates how centralized content creation, the use of impersonation, and the use of niche socialist realist aesthetics in meme production were leveraged to guide public opinion and to pressure government officials on labor reform issues on the island in 2017.

In the third chapter, *Puerto Rican Vaporwave: Political Irony*, I explore how a niche group of content creators united by a common aesthetic meme style called vaporwave developed a new countercultural understanding of the aesthetic form they practice, while they use all of its affordances to make pointed political critiques of the construction of national identity and colonialism in Puerto Rico.

In the fourth chapter, *Huracan Maria: climate crisis, colonial aid, and diasporic resistance,* I study how the meme production and sharing process works in a decentralized context, where content generation is not curated or created by any central page but by a plethora of users. In this case, users employed varying aesthetic forms but have the main shared political goal of criticizing disaster preparedness and disaster response in the wake of the one of the worst disasters in Puerto Rican history.

I conclude by presenting ways in which the production and sharing of political memes is similar to a collective storytelling process where humour, ineffability, and catharsis are major rhetorical tropes. Furthermore, I propose new tactical applications within meme production by taking into consideration new media technologies like virtual reality and the role of "content

curation" in the meme landscape. Finally, I suggest new avenues of meme research that incorporate examination of the technical systems (social media platforms, AI, algorithms) that mediate their creation.

Chapter 1: Humor, Memes and everything in between

Humor as Critique and Protest

Humor is rarely taken seriously. Some on the political left see humor as a frivolous activity that occupies a space that could be best used to challenge our current political system (Hart, 2007). Who can blame them? After all, humor works in a seemingly contradictory way; it is simultaneously critical and conservative. For example: many humorous cultural products can critique but at the same time strengthen and reify cultural and political stereotypes by showing them as inevitable or unimportant(Davis, 1993). On the other hand, while humor alone never changes policy or transforms oppressive systems, social historical studies have shown us that humor has instrumentally served social protest and critique (Hart, 2007). To name just a few well known historical examples that have inspired this work, ritual charivari practices in 18th century France[1] to the playful use of humor in non-violent protest by the 1960's student movement, humor has been used to critique and disarm authorities throughout history (Hart, 2007). Humor fits into what James Scott calls "everyday forms of resistance," where contestation and rebelliousness are performed subtly but effectively (Scott, 2000).

This thesis examines three case studies, each focused on a particular deployment of humor as a form of political critique in the 21st century. I frame these deployments within a tradition of cultural creation that goes back many years. The historical examples from which I draw productive connections, certainly come from an eurocentric perspective. They explore

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[1] Charivari is mock serenade using pots and pans, meant to shame someone or institutions.From the traditional British skimmington to contemporary versions in such places as Buenos Aires (cacerolada), Montréal, and New York City (where they were a feature of the Occupy Movement). Charivaris go beyond partisan politics to unite communities in protecting themselves and expressing outrage against economic and political powers.

concepts of appropriation and remix within an expressively political environment, using satire and irony as the cornerstone to deliver their message. I chose them because I believe the characteristics I mentioned above --when observed together-- provide a conceptual stepping stone from which to understand the case studies this thesis explores.

Even though I start off with these examples, throughout this work I also make a point of referencing work in the Caribbean, particularly Puerto Rico, where humor was used to push forward political critique.

Situationists

For example, in the late 1950's the Situationist International[2] used *détournement* as humorous form of political critique. They defined détournement as the reuse of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble. Détournement's power stemmed from the creation of double meanings and the devaluation of formal cultural production (Knabb, 2007). Members of the Situationist International developed humorous literary and audiovisual projects in order to negate and challenge dominant cultural production. Since their inception in the late 50's they recognized that capitalism had changed since Karl Marx's early depiction. Their goal was to critique mid twenty century capitalism by rearticulating several marxist concepts and developing artistic tactics and theory that would allow them to re-contextualize existing works of art in order to shift their meanings (Plant, 1992). They played an important theoretical and organizing role on the May 1968 French uprisings. They joined workers unions, students organizers, and the general citizenship in general strikes and factory occupations protesting capitalism, consumerism, and

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[2] Situationist International: european avant-garde group created in 1957 that critiqued modern society and developed methods of agitations political agitation.

american imperialism (Clark & Nicholson-Smith, 1997). Their use of détournement, spectacle, and irony was connected to artistic, political, and academic movements of the time in an effort to combat the developments of capitalism and capitalistic culture (Plant, 1992).

Culture Jamming

Another example of the use of humor as a political tool can be found within culture jamming practices. The term culture jamming was first introduced by the collective Negativland to describe the practice of billboard hacking and other forms of media sabotage in 1984 (Dery, 1993). Nevertheless, the practice is rooted in historical practices like the Russian samizdat[3] or the subcultural bricolage[4] were the political goal was to defy state censorship or corporate consumerist messaging by developing underground publishing strategies and appropriating dominant consumerist culture (Dery,1993).

Like its historical ancestors, the goal of culture jamming is to joyfully demolish oppressive ideologies by intercepting mediated messages, critiquing them, and fostering new interpretations of cultural content (Dery, 1993). In a nutshell, culture jamming is "anything that mixes art, media, parody and the outsider stance" to subvert oppressive ideological messages (Klein, 2005).

In his 1993 theorization of culture jamming, Mark Dery defines some of the typical manifestations of culture jamming:

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[3] The Russian samizdat is a practice of underground publishing in defiance of official censorship by the Soviet State.
[4] Subcultural bricolage is the appropriation of corporate attire and Vogue model poses by poor, gay, and largely non-white drag queens

- *Sniping and Subvertising* is the production and dissemination of anti-ads that deflect spatial attempts to turn the consumer's attention in a given direction.

- *Media Hoaxing* is the fine art of hoodwinking journalists into covering exhaustively researched, elaborately staged deceptions.

- *Audio Agitprop* is the use of digital samplers to deconstruct media culture and challenge copyright law.

- *Billboard Banditry* is the defacing and anti-promotion of billboard ads.

The Yes Men are an interesting example of this sort of practice. Founded by Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos, The Yes Men infiltrate conferences, create fake newspapers, and impersonate officials in order to expose corporate wrongdoings (Servin & Vamos). For one of their stunts, The Yes Men impersonated Dow Chemical representatives and announced the liquidation of Union Carbide - a company subsidiary - in order to pay for the medical care, clean up, and research of the hazards produced by Dow products in the chemical incident of Bhopal (razorfoundation, 2007). The stunt made Dow Chemicals share price fall 4.23 percent, temporarily costing them 2 billion dollars in market value (CNN, 2004). These examples show how humor serves as concrete discursive and practical tool for political resistance.

Nevertheless, many scholars have questioned the utility of these tools. Primarily, most claim that the techniques developed by culture jamming practitioners are easily co-opted by dominant forms of power, which leaves them useless to promote meaningful cultural critique. Nevertheless, to paraphrase Megan Boler in her book *Digital Media and Democracy*, "even though we live in an age of spectacle and complicity, where tactical interventions are often recuperated by dominant power, they simultaneously function to shift and modulate perceptions

and representations within the dominant culture" (Boler, 2008). To put it simply, just because the cultural practice has been co-opted does not mean that it is rendered useless or purposeless for political defiance and resistance.

Internet Memes

Influenced by the artistic, political, and cultural movements before them, current deployments of humorous political critique also happen in the context of our innovative use of new media technologies (for example, the internet, virtual reality, and augmented reality). Although there is a plethora of transgressive cultural products being developed within this context, the case studies in this work focus on *internet memes;* particularly image macros.[5]

Why focus on internet memes? First, internet memes have become a new vernacular form that permeates many spheres of digital and nondigital expression (Shifman, 2014). Anyone with an internet connection participates in meme culture in one way or the other. Second, internet memes are a good way to get attention. In the context of an information society, it is not information itself but the attention people pay to it that is important (Shifman, 2014). Third, internet memes allow individuals to practice 'network individuality,' memes are able to simultaneously create an 'individual brand' and a sense of self, while also participating in a community practice (Shifman, 2014). Finally, internet memes are often "shaped by cultural norms and expectations, often rooted in popular culture and fan culture" (Shifman, 2014). Given their popularity and consistently participatory mode of production, I believe researching internet

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[5] An **Image Macro** is a broad term used to describe captioned images that typically consist of a picture and a witty message or a catchphrase.

memes, their creators, and their development process - as they relate to political critique - can help us understand contemporary protest culture.

The study of memes and internet memes is part of a heated debate within academia. Many scholars argue that the concept fails to explain anything substantial about culture (Shifman, 2014). This incendiary dispute has two root causes: 1) the theoretical implications of the *meme* concept and 2) its slippery definition.

Meme Theory

The term meme was first coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene.* Dawkins defined memes as units of culture, that were transmitted from person to person through imitation. He equated these units of culture to genes, in an effort to apply conceptualizations of evolutionary biology to cultural change. His biological analogy went so far as to ascribe them properties of competition, variation, retention, and selection (Dawkins, 1989). After some years, his perspective on cultural change became popular and the field of memetics emerged. The goal of this field of study was to empirically understand the replication, spread, and evolution of memes (Meyers, 2009).

Nevertheless, this theoretical understanding of cultural change through a biological lens drew a lot of criticism. Integrating an epidemiology-based vocabulary to explain memes equated them to diseases. Furthermore, it developed a new conceptualization of cultural production where culture is seen as a "viral" element. This theoretical approach is problematic because it reduces the role of human agency in the development, distribution, and adoption of cultural production. It casts people as passive victims who become "infected" by culture and media rather than seeing

them as actors who are participants in culture (Jenkins, Xiaochang, Domb, & Green, 2009). It furthermore reduces culture to a biological conceptualization that "narrows and simplifies complex human behaviors" (Shifman, 2014).

Scholars like Jenkins, Xiaochang, Domb, & Green suggest seeing the production and adoption of cultural ideas as a mediated human decision making process that transforms and reworks cultural products to make meaning of the world. Likewise, they propose that internet memes should be seen as artifacts that allow participatory meaning making. Moreover, they argue that internet meme success in the cultural landscape strictly depends on the possibility of adaptation by human subjects (Jenkins, Xiaochang, Domb, & Green, 2009).

For these reasons in this thesis, I follow the steps of researchers like Ryan Milner, Jean Burgess, and Limor Shifman who understand and have adopted Jenkin's et. al cultural perspectives into their researcher of internet memes. I use the internet meme concept to understand societal behaviors within participatory cultural production without embracing the biological analogies or passive roles given to people, espoused by memetics theory.

Definition

Regardless of the theoretical debate that surrounds them, the term meme has been adopted by the internet community to describe "the rapid uptake and spread of a particular idea presented as written text, images, or some other unit of cultural stuff" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). This definition is starkly different from the one developed in the field of memetics. The internet community is describing "tangible" and short lasting fads, when memetics is all about abstract ideas and longstanding cultural survival (Shifman, 2014).

I believe Limor Shifman's definition of internet memes best encapsulates a critical understanding of these artifacts and how they are useful tools to understand cultural phenomena. Shifman defines internet memes as "a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance; that are created with awareness of each other; and are circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the internet by many users."

This definition goes hand in hand with Ryan Milner's definition of internet memes. In his article "Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement," Milner defines internet memes as multimodal artifacts that are remixed by countless participants, employing popular culture for public commentary (Milner, 2013). Milner's definition adds the element of public commentary. This is important because it acknowledges that this form of participatory production is done within the public sphere and thus could be useful to push forward political discussion.

Given their discursive and cultural potentiality, it is critical that we understand internet memes' general characteristics. Through his work on online communities and internet memes, Ryan Milner was able to point out some common characteristics within internet meme production. First, internet meme communities often use irony as an antagonistic rhetorical form to foster critique and spark public discussion (Milner, 2013). Second, internet meme production is heavily dependent on the creation, circulation, and transformation of artifacts outside of traditional media gatekeepers (Milner, 2013). Finally, Milner noticed that even though these communities produce content outside of the traditional media landscape, they still engage in gatekeeping and limiting participation. Some of the limitations for participatory engagement have to do with technological literacy, for instance users being unable to understand the editing

programs, social network structure, and media literacy necessary to participate within the internet meme community. Other participation limitations arise out of subcultural gatekeeping that privileges some forms of participation and marginalizes others. 'Trollish meme creators' are not always going to be critically aware of their representations of others which in turn affects ethnic, racial, and gender minorities participation in certain spaces. Minorities are often disproportionately affected by this subcultural gatekeeping by being met with gender or racial violence or denied "entry" to certain spaces because of their background. This is not to say that they do not create content or participate 'less' in internet meme culture but that they are sometimes prevented participation because their minority status is 'discovered'. This led Milner to describe internet meme culture as a mix of old inequalities and new forms of participation (Milner, 2012).

Understanding these characteristics enables us to realistically gauge the role that internet memes and their creators play within humorous political discourse and how they might be relevant to contemporary protest culture and political critique.

Circulation

Other important aspects of internet memes include diffusion, circulation, and spreadability. An internet meme is not a meme if its not shared, remixed, or transformed by a number of people. Many communication professionals, marketers, and scholars are intrigued by the widespread adoption of some internet memes versus others (Jenkins, Xiaochang, Domb Krauskopf, & Green, 2009).

The truth of the matter is that, when it comes to spreadability, there is no recipe for successful adoption. There are certains schools of thought within the management, marketing, advertising, and public relations disciplines that believe there are ways to design 'viral products' to provoke peer 'contagion'. They believe that by understanding peer behavior adoption in online environments we can identify specific ways in which to deploy actions and create designs that increase online behavior adoption(Aral & Walker, 2011). Of course, these ideas can be implemented to the study of internet memes but somehow they fall short to completely explain internet memes spreading process.

I believe the reason this experiments can not completely explain internet meme circulation has to do with the fact that multiple extraneous variables influence internet meme diffusion. In his work *Towards a Model for Meme Diffusion,* Brian Spitzberg creates a complex model of internet meme diffusion where he incorporates many possibly influential variables that might predict spreadability. His model shows that a huge variety of elements can affect how far an internet meme spreads. Some of the elements that could affect spreadability include: societal context, social network affordances and structure, internet meme characteristics, and well as individual sharing characteristics just to name a few(Spitzberg, 2014).

Even though there is a variety of external elements that could influence meme adoption; cultural practices like humor, parody, and information seeking are common characteristics in popularly disseminated memes. Likewise, formal structural and aesthetic decisions like producing seemingly unfinished content with an angle on nostalgia and a developing sense of community, are some recurring internal characteristics of popular internet meme content (Jenkins, Xiaochang, Domb Krauskopf, & Green, 2009).

Recognizing both the external and internal influences of participatory content sharing and production is incredibly important if we are to consider internet memes as tools for political engagement and discussion.

Political Internet Memes

Given the participatory, rhetorical, and contextual characteristics explained above, it should not be a surprise that there is a growing body of internet meme work that is highly political (Haddow, 2016). In an effort to understand this political work, scholars have taken an interest in internet meme production and its implications for social organization. in his article: *"Obama Trolling: Memes, Salutes and an Agonistic Politics in the 2012 Presidential Election"* Benjamin Burroughs explains the discursive possibilities that sharing and creating internet memes bring to the public sphere. He believes that the "Mimetic political communication spread through social networks provides a shared symbolic world that can potentially transform antagonism into a constructive" discussion process (Burroughs, 2013).

Furthermore, people from across the political spectrum have taken an interest in internet memes as political discourse artifacts. For example, *Adbusters*- the Canadian based non-profit organization responsible for sparking the Occupy Wall Street Movement through the use of an iconic ballerina poster (image 5, below) and a call for the peaceful occupation of wall street- has emphasized the importance of memes as cultural tools for political dissent (Lasn, 2012).

Image 5: #OCCUPYAWALSTREET

Source: Adbusters

Former *Adbusters* editor Micha White has stated that internet memes should be framed within the larger context of culture jamming and cultural resistance practices. He argues that *meme warfare* is in fact "cultural warfare" and that the "war's" main objective is "re-coding the brands of the biggest corporations so that they carry the people's truth." He believes that internet meme performance will allow us to collectively "weaken the psychological hold of entrenched corporations to awaken and enliven people." He is convinced that internet memes will allow activists to "leverage a culture war into a geopolitical struggle for world governance" (White, 2013).

Likewise, people on the far right also consider internet memes strong discursive political tools (Wilson, 2017). In a report developed by the Data & Society Institute, internet memes

figured as one of the discursive tools used by the alt-right to "spread white supremacist thought, Islamophobia, and misogyny" (Marwick & Lewis, 2017) Conservative thought leaders believe 'meme magic' is responsible for Donald Trump's rise to power (Spencer, 2016). Meme magic is the practice of sharing a symbol or content so much that it becomes embedded in the subconscious of the population, ultimately having real life effects. Most alt-right supporters believed that by sharing an internet meme called Pepe the Frog(which has been tied to anti semitic and racist messaging) they would be able to make Donald Trump president. Then he was elected president, which sort of validated the ideas they had about the power of meme magic(Spencer, 2016).

Image 6: Pepe the Frog

Source Business Insider

Nevertheless, the jury is still out when it comes to understanding the 'real' effects that internet memes have in political processes. Donald Trump's winning of the presidency can be

explained by a huge variety of factors but the alt right's faith on internet memes as effective political tools will ultimately give internet memes political validation (Spencer, 2016). That why now even after the election is over, DIY internet memes and user generated content continue to be part of the conservative 'anti-establishment' culture (Nagle, 2017).

In contrast with the academic perspective, assertions made about the power of memes by both ends of the political spectrum might seem overly ambitious. It is possible that the importance of internet memes within the media ecology is overhyped. Nevertheless, it is important to underscore the attention and seriousness that people in different sectors of civil society put on these multimodal artifacts. They have become an important part of public discourse because people believe they are important. By understanding how they're used within the context of political discourse, we can think of ways of deploying memes as tools to push political resistance forward.

Puerto Rico, ICT's and Humorous Protest

Historical and Socio-Economic Context

Puerto Rico has been a colony of the United States since 1898. The United State requested that Puerto Rico be removed from the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories once it reached its "commonwealth" agreement with Puerto Rico in 1953 (United Nations, 2006).   However, according to the United Nations Decolonization Committee, the United States should be working towards a resolution that grants Puerto Rico self-determination and independence which is not granted in its current relationship with the island (Delgado, 2017).

The initial form of government instituted by the United States in Puerto Rico was military rule. This ended with the institution of the Foraker Law in 1900. The Foraker Law required that all laws passed by the Puerto Rican legislature had to be submitted to the United States for approval, there were hard restriction on voting rights, and Puerto Rico could not have commercial treaties with other countries or set tax tariffs. Pressure from different political sectors and the independence movement in Puerto Rico forced the United States to ultimately pass the Jones act in 1917 which substituted the dispositions established in the Foraker Law (Dietz, 1976). The Jones act did not provide the island with dispositions for self rule, but it did impose U.S.citizenship on Puerto Ricans, this made Puerto Rican men eligible for the compulsory military service draft just in time for World War I. Nevertheless, the United States ruled that even though Puerto Ricans were american citizens the status of the island was unchanged. Puerto Rico "belonged to but was not a part of" the United States of America (Birbrair, 2014).

The island's political status has changed slightly since the inception of the Jones act 1917. The fight for true political self-determination has continued amongst the Puerto Rican populace to this day. In the late 1940's there were two main political sides asking for different forms of self determination. The struggled for independence was led by The Nationalist Party and its most prominent leader Pedro Albizu Campos. Throughout Puerto Rican history, pro independence supporters have been targeted by the U.S. government and its policing institutions. Violent suppression, targeted assassinations, and arrests were common during early 20th century. The FBI with its COINTELPRO program surveilled around 75,000 Puerto Ricans particularly targeting the pro independence movement supporters (Denis, 2015). On the other hand, since its inception to this day, the Popular Democratic Party supported the development of local

self-governance within a commonwealth (colonial)status with center-left ideas.The party was first led by Luis Muñoz Marin and now its supporters have become part of one of the major political parties in the island (Partido Popular Democratico, 2018).

Puerto Rico's internal political struggle and external pleading with the United State Congress led to the creation of the Public Law 600 which allowed Puerto Ricans to create their own constitutional government if they voted for its creation on a national referendum. One caveat of Public Law 600 was that any constitution written and adopted by the islands residents needed to have the final approval of the U.S. Congress. The adoption of the law allowed Puerto Rico to select its own local government but is decision making power were severely limited and it did not have representation in Congress. (Dietz, 1976).

Puerto Rico's colonial constitution and self-determinations limits soon led the island to develop economically dependant colonial characteristics. To this day provisions within the Foraker Act established in 1900, prohibit Puerto Rico from engaging in commercial trade with foreign countries and forces the island to abide by U.S. tariffs and shipping lines. This means that Puerto Rico exclusively trades with the United States. What is produced in the island is geared for export to the U.S. economy while food and mass consumption good are imported. The island usually provides tax exemptions that allow U.S. investors to set up shop in Puerto Rico without paying in state taxes, which often results in the market monopolization of the Puerto Rican exports. That market monopolization has changed through the years; it started with sugar plantation in the 1930's, manufacturing in the 50's, pharmaceuticals in the 70's and 80's (Dietz, 1976), and now that the pharmaceutical market is dying is not clear what will replace it.

Furthermore, the Puerto Rican government has historically fostered "massive penetration of U.S. capital" and it has given huge tax breaks to multinational corporations that have expanded their wealth by being there (Dietz, 1976). The imperialist form of development of Puerto Rico as an outpost of the United States capitalist economy has not -to this day- trickled down to widespread development for the majority of the Puerto Ricans. If Puerto Rico were a state it would be one of the poorest states in the Mainland with over 46% of its population living below the poverty line.[6]

Protest & ICT

Given Puerto Rico's political and economic context, social movement organizations, humor, and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have played an important role in political organization to ensure some semblance of quality of life. Puerto Rico has a long standing culture of political organization and decolonization has been one of the longest issues of political struggle. From *El Grito de Lares,* a revolutionary independence attempt against the colonialist spanish government, to the assassination attempts of Harry S. Truman, sections of the Puerto Rican population have always found ways to organize and resist oppression (Denis, 2015).

Another powerful historical example of the resilience of political organization in Puerto Rico can be seen in the *Paz para Vieques* Movement. After the killing of the civilian David Sanes Rodriguez by two 500 pound bombs in a military practice exercise in the island of Vieques (one of the islands that is part of the archipelago of Puerto Rico) the movement *Paz para Vieques* demanded the immediate departure of the United States Marine of Vieques, the demilitarization

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[6] https://datausa.io/profile/geo/puerto-rico/

and decontamination of the territory (Bannan, 2015). The movement made use of various social movement and political strategies to force both the Puerto Rican and the United States governments to acknowledge the precarious living situations in Vieques. From establishing campsites and promoting civil disobedience, to lobbying exercises in congress and organized web strikes that resulted in national media coverage, people organized to get the results they wanted (Costanza-Chock, 2001). One example of the use of political humor within the *Paz Para Viques Movement* were the web strikes organized by the Electronic Disturbance Theater(EDT) and the Rescue and Development of Vieques (Comite Pro Rescate y Desarollo de Vieques, or CPRDV). The strikes worked by enlisting participants to use EDT developed software to flood the United States Navy enlistment website. They flooded the website by using the Navy's own enlistment form to send out funny and political protest messages. The action was incredibly successful; it go the attention of the Navy's website administrator who condemned the actions and threatened protesters with federal charges and it got National news coverage that ultimately drew attention to the struggle in the island (Costanza-Chock, 2001.

The movement won the closure of the base, but still struggles today for environmental cleanup. Meanwhile, two military additional bases remain in the island (Melo, 2013).

One of the most recent and interesting examples of how elements of social movement organization, humor, and ICT work together in Puerto Rico can be observed in the University of Puerto Rico's student movement of 2010. The 2010 student movement arose out of the threat of government imposed austerity measures to the state's public university in 2009. The New Progressive Party (PNP) proposed an $800 dollar increase in tuition costs for the whole student body. Students organized and occupied all state public campuses in the island, and conducted a

62 day occupation of the state university main campus. The occupation was meant to pressure the government into listening to student demands against tuition cost hikes and government-wide austerity measures. During the occupation, art and ICTs were used strategically to push the movement forward. Students and movement supporters made use of street theater, visual arts, music, and radio to produce content that kept people engaged and informed. One of the organization that made use of art to drive engagement was the The Tactical Operations Unit of Police Clowns (Everhart, 2012).

Image 7: The Tactical Operations Unit of Police Clowns   Image 8: Police Clowns Logo

Source: The Tactical Operations Unit of Police Clowns Facebook

Source: The Tactical Operations Unit of Police Clowns Facebook

The Tactical Operations Unit is literally a clown police group that made fun of the anti riot police units sent to the occupied sites. Their goal was to criticize the excessive use of force and violence by state institutions; particularly the anti riot police. They wanted to showcase the ridiculousness of their display of strength/violence towards peaceful protestors (Everhart, 2012).

Another organization, Papel Machete, developed life size puppets and performed street theater, drawing from Puerto Rican (often satirical) forms of song and storytelling known as *cantahistoria*. *Cantahistoria* or *Cantastoria* is an italian theater performance where the storytellers tell a story that is accompanied by banners or placards that exemplify it. This form of storytelling has been done all over the world and its roots can be traced from China to the Middle East (Bell, 1991). Papel Machete, developed a 'criollo'/ Puerto Rican version of this centuries old tradition.Their goal was to denounce social injustice and provide aid to the struggles pushed forward by the working class, students, and marginalized communities. The use of satire is central to the development of their storytelling process. The life size puppets and the structure of their storytelling process often seeks to caricature people in power, institutions or systems. For the 2010's student strike they created interventions and puppets that seek to agitate and empower the students throughout their political and organization struggle. They did so by creating character like Bosti whose job was to impersonate and represent every policy idea and decision that the students opposed (Papel Machete, 2010). They have been a part of Puerto Rican resistance culture since 2006 and have become a contending force in the use of art and humor to push forward the island's political struggle (Papel Machete, 2010).

Image 9: Augusto Bustamante, alias "Bosti"   Image 10: Militant Student

Source: Papel Machete Website   Source: Papel Machete Website

Finally, another interesting example of the use of ICTs and humor is *Radio Huelga*. *Radio Huelga* was a student created radio station that was used to entertain but also notify student leaders and occupation participants of the events happening throughout the university (Everhart, 2012). The students developed the radio station using borrowed equipment, with little to no technical knowledge of how to use it, and it was incredibly successful (Primera Hora, 2010). The station had some interesting radio segments like: *The Negotiation Committee informs*, where people could learn about negotiation processes with administration officials ; *The Beaver*, a show about political satire and *Love in times of the Occupation*, where drama students perform a radio style novela (Primera Hora, 2010). The Beaver segment, was led by Reverend Beaver who gave "sermons" about politics and also answered questions about lifestyle choices, sex, and religion (Radio Huelga, 2011). Taking into consideration the traditional as well as artistically innovative tactics used in Puerto Rico to engage and advance civil society organizing, I believe is important

to also document how resistances also make use of new media technologies for protest in the 2017 context.

The strike ended and the students kept fighting to ensure that the tuition increase did not take place. Nevertheless, they were unsuccessful in changing the government's and university administrators' policy decision in that moment. The tuition increase was implemented for the remaining two years were the New Progressive Party was in power. When election time came in 2012 it became an important point of discussion. Alejandro García Padilla the governamental candidate for one of the opposing political party (Popular Democratic Party), made it part of his campaign promises (Primera Hora, 2012). As soon as he got to power student started demanding he deliver on his promises of allocating money for the university so that the tuition hike could be reversed. Legislation approving money allocation was approved within 4 months of his governorship and the tuition increase was eliminated three months after (El Nuevo Día, 2013).

Methods

This research deep dives into three case studies of the use of internet memes for political critique in the Puerto Rican context. The case studies were chosen for three main reasons. First, their content creation process was related to Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican political context. Second, all of the case studies have a specific political critique goal within the larger political context. And third, they all occurred on the same social media platform: Facebook. Facebook was chosen as platform of study for two main reason. First, all of the case study participants talked about Facebook, as their primary distribution platform. Second, Facebook has usually been understudied when it comes to meme production --particularly when it comes to image macros-- because it is harder to scrape for images and content unlike platforms like reddit, twitter or 4chang. Furthermore, even though these case studies have all of this elements in common, they have different approaches to their content production processes. They make varying aesthetic and rhetorical choices, they are concerned with different political issues, and they have different content creation and distribution patterns.

For example: *Domino's vs. La Junta de Control Fiscal* has a stylistic internet meme production process that resembles socialist realist art. They had a main content distribution page administered by two people and their goal was satirizing an imposed institution of power, the fiscal control board. On the other hand, *Puerto Rican Vaporwave* has a more decentralized content production process were there are a couple of pages run by various individuals creating content. These individuals subscribed to vaporwave and retro cultural Puerto Rican aesthetics as the connective tissue to discuss colonialism and current political issues in the island. Finally, in

the *Huracan Maria Memes* case study the content production process was incredibly decentralized, there was not a main page creating all of the content but multitudes of users. That decentralization was reflected in the aesthetic choices by the users, which meant there was no main aesthetic reference but a multitude of referential and popular culture stylistic memes. Nevertheless, the content creation goal was to showcase two main topics of discussion: disaster preparedness and disaster response as they related to hurricane María disaster.

The analysis of each case study starts with a detailed contextualized background of the cultural, political, social, and economic landscape that preceded any internet meme content generation. Then it is followed by a description of the case study that is being explored, which allows me to illustrate the process, circumstances, and goals of the creation and distribution of content.

I take a unique approach to gathering data for the analysis of these caste studies. Most internet meme research focuses on mainly doing content and/or comment analysis in social media platforms to understand internet meme usage and deployment. In turn, in this thesis, I will reach out and interview meme creators and internet meme culture participants to understand their motivations and creation processes. To develop the interview instrument, I create a timeline of the content that was generated on their Facebook pages. Then, I perform a close reading analysis of that content in order to identify themes and aesthetic styles; as well as forms of participation, that would allow me to ask pointed questions about the development of their work.

I believe being able to actually talk to internet meme culture participant gives us insight about the development and deployment process of internet memes that could be then applied in other political communication tools.

Chapter Two: Domino's vs. La Junta de Control Fiscal:

Satire & Impersonating Authority

Context

The real fiscal control board and the Puerto Rican Government

In the introduction, we saw how the colonial history of Puerto Rico left the island dependent on the U.S economy and political decisions. This dependency, combined with government unaccountability and unmeasured public spending, led the island into an economic crisis that resulted in the acquisition of a 70 billion dollars debt. Puerto Rico is not able to manage its debt like a sstate of the United States would because its territorial status prevents it from being able declare a Chapter 9 bankruptcy, which worsens an already problematic situation (Walsh & Moyer, 2016). Understanding this situation, the United State Congress drafted the *Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act* a bipartisan bill whose acronym ironically spells PROMESA ('promise') to help the island. Nevertheless, the bill has been criticized for its obvious colonial connotations, like the institution of a Presidentially appointed, non-democratically elected Federal Control Board to manage Puerto Rico's budget, perform investigations, demand governmental reforms, and enforce fiscal plans without any form of civilian or institutional oversight. Furthermore, the bill does not allow Puerto Rico to declare a Chapter 9 bankruptcy but it does allow the island to put a stop to lawsuits from creditors so that it

can renegotiate its debt. Unlike Chapter 9, PROMESA reassures creditors that the debt will be paid, when under Chapter 9 conditions that could not be ensured (Walsh, 2016).

Puerto Rico's political situation became more uncertain when Congress' imposition of the Fiscal Control Board coincided with the island's national election which resulted in a change of political power. The newly elected government is led by the pro-statehood/conservative New Progressive Party which holds control of both the executive and legislative branches of government. Even though the newly elected government had criticized the territorial premise of the Fiscal Control Board and how that could hurt the islands chances of becoming part of the union, they bowed to work with the Board and to comply with its ordinances. The government's willingness to collaborate with the Fiscal Control Board has resulted in the imposition of various austerity measures. One of the most prominent measures deals with labor reform. The government passed a transformation and labor flexibility Law that eliminated major benefits and workers rights.

Description

This case study directly relates to the the implementation of this labor reform law and the way a corporation (Domino's Pizza) tried to take advantage of its approval to leave their workers without appropriate benefits by registering a new corporation, then re-interviewing and re-hiring the same employees under the new labor law.

Image 11: La Junta de Control Fiscal

Source: La Junta de Control Fiscal Facebook Page

While the PROMESA bill was being voted for on the floor of the House of Representatives, two cousins decided to create a Twitter and Facebook pretending to be the Fiscal Control Board. They named the page after the spanish translation of Fiscal Control Board, *La Junta de Control Fiscal.* Also, they appropriated United States official logos and symbols, as well as the images of some of the members of the control board. From September 2016 until January 2018 they posted in relation to political, economic, and colonial issues in Puerto Rico, from the all-ruling fictitious perspective of *La Junta de Control Fiscal*.

As was customary with the satirical FB page, when the government started their plans to implement the labor reform bill, *La Junta de Control Fiscal* got involved and started to make fun of the matter. Things took another turn when a Domino's Pizza Memo started circulating online after the reform bill was passed, saying that they would re-interview and re-hire all employees from four Domino's Pizza franchises. This would effectively mean that when re-hired, the new labor laws would apply and the workers would lose their hard-earned benefits.

The next section is a Timeline of the events that transpired, content generated by La Junta de Control Fiscal, followed by my analysis and concluding remarks.

Timeline of Events

Table I

Event	Date
Primera Hora a national newspaper published an article titled: *"Conoce los cambios más relevantes de la reforma laboral"* ("Get to know the most relevant changes in the Labor Reform") The article described what the labour reforms mean for workers rights and benefits (Pérez, 2017).	January 10, 2017
"No a la Reforma Laboral" ("No to the labor reform") FB page was created. Today they amass around around 40,000 likes/followers (No a la Reforma Laboral, 2017).	January 10, 2017
The Nuevo Día newspaper reports *"La Cámara de representantes aprueba la reforma laboral."* (The House of Representatives approve the labor reform bill) (Banuchi, 2017).	January 14, 2017
The Nuevo Dia newspaper publishes an article "El senado aprueba el Proyecto de reforma laboral" In which it details the Senate approval of the Labor Reform bill (Banuchi, 2017).	January 19, 2017
Labor Reform bill is signed in to a law under the title: "Ley de Transformación y flexibilidad laboral" "The transformation and labor flexibility Law" The article states that the law will take effect immediately after its approval (Gobierno de Puerto Rico, 2018).	January 26, 2017
The Nuevo Dia published "Gobernador convierte en ley la reforma laboral" "Governor turns labor reform bill into law" (Pérez, 2017)	January 26, 2017
The website Nuevo Herald published an article with the title: "Puerto Rico aprueba reforma laboral para estimular economía". "Puerto Rico approves labor reform to stimulate economy" (Coto, 2017).	January 26, 2017
-"Amanecen en la calle lápidas de la Reforma Laboral" people manifest by putting up banners with black tombstones with the rights and benefits that the Labor reform has cut out. (Torres, 2017).	January 26, 2017
The restaurant chain Domino's Pizza send out a memo to their employees where it stated that their active employees will need to re-interview for their position due to the	January 27, 2017.

approval of the Labor Reform.	
The memo went viral in social media because of a Facebook page called "La Junta de Control Fiscal" who shared the picture of the meme and their post reached FB stats: 1.4K likes, 6,384 shares and 543 comments (La Junta de Control Fiscal, 2017).	January 29,2017
Indice newspaper shares an article "Empleados de algunas tiendas Domino's serán re-contratados" "Domino's will rehire employees from some stores." (Gracia, 2017)	January 29, 2017
Facebook page " No a la Reforma Laboral" shared the memo from Domino's and got 434 likes and 25 comments (No a la Reforma Laboral, 2017)	January 30, 2017
Jay Fonseca a journalist, did a Facebook live segment called "De frente con Jay". Where he talked about the Labor Reform and what happened with Domino's. He interviewed Labor & Human Resources Secretary Carlos Saavedra, where he states that he saw the post on social media and decided to take action on the matter. FB stats: 77k views, 1.5k likes, 357 shares and 623 comments on the Facebook live (Fonseca, 2017).	January 30, 2017
Caribbean Business releases an article titled: "Domino's Puerto Rico adopts 'successor employer' (Caribbean Business, 2017).	January 30, 2017
El Nuevo Dia reports "Empleados de Domino's pizza mantendrán sus derechos", Domino's Pizza employees will keep their rights. (Figueroa, 2017)	January 30, 2017
La Junta de Control Fiscal Facebook Pages publishes: Do you believe them? It doesn't matter. What matters is that now we can be sure these workers will maintain their rights. Some people think if Domino's hadn't been called out publicly, they would have fired some of their current employees. We may never know. What we do know is that the power of a united Puerto Rican people still exists. In less than 24 hours, all of you banded together to defend these unnamed workers' rights. Never forget the strength you have when you come together as a "pueblo." Kudos Puerto Rico, not all is lost. We are pretty impressed. #respect#todossomosnelson #juntaout (La Junta de Control Fiscal, 2017).	January 30, 2017

Timeline Analysis

This timeline demonstrates how the current government tried to expedite the process of

a labor reform bill that would effectively change labor rights on the island by showcasing the

control that the New Progressive Party had in the executive and legislative branches of

government (Pérez, 2017). The bill was turned into law 16 days after its conception in the House

of Representatives and it was titled "The transformation and labor flexibility Law" in an attempt by the government to frame the bills' implementation as an opportunity for economic development and growth (Minelli, 2017). According to mainstream media outlets the introduction of the bill would completely transform Puerto Rican working class rights. Workers would get paid less for working extra hours, they would accumulate less paid vacation and sick leave, the private industry could pay less in christmas bonuses, and workers would have less time to claim unemployment, among other changes. Civil society organization and massive demonstrations during the sixteen day process of the bill's approval were incredibly scarce. Nevertheless, countless public figures condemned the bill (Saker, 2017). A day after the bill was approved by the governor, major avenues were surrounded by signs (pasquines) that had tombstones inscribed for every worker' right that had "died" because of the bill (Torres, 2017).

Moreover, the day after the labor reform law was passed, some unnamed Domino's Pizza employee uploaded a Domino's Pizza franchise official memo to social media that explained that their employer was going to re-interview and re-hire all of the stores employees. The franchise claimed that it was being acquired by another corporation and that the sale just happened to coincide with the approval of the labor reform. That franchise acquisition process would mean that the re-hired employees would not be protected by old labor laws and their new contracts would adhere to the new labor law that spripped aways most of their benefits. After seeing this injustice, the satirical Facebook page *La Junta de Control Fiscal* showcased the employee memo on their page on January 29th. They called the meme an act of evil genius by Domino's Pizza and the post quickly got traction, gaining six thousand shares, 1.4k likes, and over 500 comments. Furthermore, *La Junta's* FB page honed in on their momentum by making a call to

action, urging their followers to let them know if any other employer tried to use the new labor reform law to treat them unfairly. The online uproar provoked immediate mainstream media coverage of what was happening to Domino's Pizza workers. National newspapers, and television stations were scrambling to understand what was happening and at the center of it all was *La Junta de Control Fiscal.*

La Junta de Control Fiscal became a satirical platform that was used to demand, amplify, and fight for the rights of those Domino's Pizza workers. If those workers had not put the information online demanding respect, nothing would have happened; however, it was through the satirical intervention of the *Junta de Control Fiscal* that the issue became national news (Gracia, 2017).

Labor & Human Resources Secretary Carlos Saavedra had to go on national television and explain the situation. He declared that because of what the government had seen on social media, they were in conversation with the Domino's Pizza franchise in question. Throughout the video you could hear him say: "Once we saw that appear on social media, we [the government] intervened and contacted [the enterprize] to inquire as to why we were seeing that memo" (Fonseca, 2017). Furthermore, he made a point of making it clear that if Domino's intention was to fire and rehire their workers their actions were illegal, and that the Labor law had provisions to protect workers from those sorts of actions (Fonseca, 2017).

Thanks to the press coverage, Domino's Pizza Puerto Rico had to release a statement clarifying that no workers would lose their jobs or benefits. They went to far as to say that it had all been a big misunderstanding, that it had never been their intention to jeopardize their workers' jobs, and that they would ensure that the franchise change was developed in compliance with the
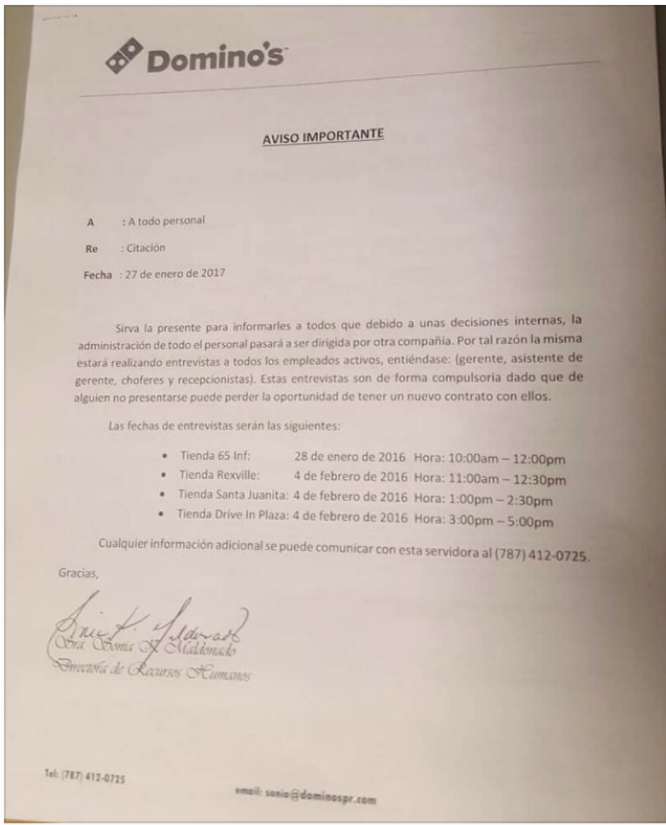
law (La Junta de Control Fiscal, 2017).

The satirical deployment of memes made by *La Junta de Control Fiscal* principaly contributed to the immediate retention of the workers' jobs on the island, which is an amazing outcome considering the precarious political and economic situation Puerto Rico is currently in. Even though the deployment did not result in policy change, it did demonstrate the flaws of the bill's implementation. Puerto Ricans could no longer ignore the exploitative nature of the bill, since within a day of its approval it was already obvious how it could be used against workers. Another interesting aspect of this case is that the government needed to prove the legitimacy of their actions against the pressure of a satirical facebook page. It is ironic that an otherwise unresponsive government would respond to a seemingly irrelevant event like this. There could be many factors that influenced governmental response aside from the tactical media action, but I believe there is political power in this form of opposition. The process of shame, satire, and wide dissemination of information puts pressure on a government that is not used to being challenged through the media.

Content & Interviews

The content produced by *La Junta de Control Fiscal* sparked the development of all sort of media content by other social media users. In Table II, I have gathered 5 pictures of some of the content that was created during the three days of *La Junta de Control Fiscal's* meme deployment. The table contains information about the post makes like: the image number, the posted date, a brief description, and the source of the content.

Table II

Content	Image Number/Date/ Description/Source
A big round of applause for Domino's Pizza Puerto Rico. They are using the Labor Reform in very smart ways by re-interviewing and re-hiring their current staff under new contracts so they fall under the recently adopted labor laws. Genius. Almost evil genius. **Domino's** **AVISO IMPORTANTE** A : A todo personal Re : Citación Fecha : 27 de enero de 2017 Sirva la presente para informarles a todos que debido a unas decisiones internas, la administración de todo el personal pasará a ser dirigida por otra compañía. Por tal razón la misma estará realizando entrevistas a todos los empleados activos, entiéndase: (gerente, asistente de gerente, choferes y recepcionistas). Estas entrevistas son de forma compulsoria dado que de alguien no presentarse puede perder la oportunidad de tener un nuevo contrato con ellos. Las fechas de entrevistas serán las siguientes: • Tienda 65 Inf: 28 de enero de 2016 Hora: 10:00am – 12:00pm • Tienda Rexville: 4 de febrero de 2016 Hora: 11:00am – 12:30pm • Tienda Santa Juanita: 4 de febrero de 2016 Hora: 1:00pm – 2:30pm • Tienda Drive In Plaza: 4 de febrero de 2016 Hora: 3:00pm – 5:00pm Cualquier información adicional se puede comunicar con esta servidora al (787) 412-0725. Gracias, Sra. Sonia I. Maldonado Directora de Recursos Humanos Tel: (787) 412-0725 email: sonia@dominospr.com	Image 11: Domino's Pizza Memo Date: January 29,2017 Description: La Junta de Control Fiscal sarcastically gives Domino's Pizza a round of applause for threatening to fire and rehire all employees. Source: La Junta de Control Fiscal Facebook Page

January 30 · ⊘ BOICOT A DOMINOS PIZZA. No la patrocinen por favor!! **Corporación registrada por Eddie Liberman** **Boicot a Domino's Pizza** **Al Rescate De Puerto Rico** with Gabriel Alejandro. January 30 · ⊘ 👍 Like Page Vamos a los hechos: 1. Jueves 26 de enero gobernador Ricardo Rosselló convierte en ley Reforma Laboral. 2. La carta con Fecha: 27 de enero de 2017 dice: "Sirva la presente para informarle a todos que debido a unas decisiones INTERNAS, la administración de todo el personal pasará a ser dirigida por otra compañía". 3. Según el comunicado de prensa que emitió su portavoz Carmen Cedré valida la carta que circula en las redes. 4. Carmen Cedré asegura que hay 4 establecimientos que pasarán a ser operados por la empresa local FOT LLC. 5. Viernes 27 de enero de 2017, Eddie Liberman director de Domino's Pizza Puerto Rico registra en el Departamento de Estado la Corporación FOT LLC #Registro 390473.	Image 12: Boicot Domino's Pizza. Date: January 30, 2017 Description: Screenshots of the State Department's corporation registration web page that demonstrate that Domino's had created a new corporation to re-hire its employees after the labor reform law passed. Source: Al Rescate de Puerto Rico
Fake news! Don't believe anything from the false and failing El Nuevo Día. They represent the socialist, neo-liberal Popular Democratic Party. They have less subscribers everyday because of their bad reporting. Sad! **Cambian de dueño cuatro locales de Domino's Pizza** Portavoces de la cadena aseguran que evitan despedir los empleados afectados WWW.ELNUEVODIA.COM	Image 13: Fake News! Date: January 29, 2017 Description: Post made by *La Junta de Control Fiscal* where they use Donald Trump's tweeting style to they denounce El Nuevo Día newspaper for supporting the government's anti worker agenda because the published an apologist article defending Domino's actions as misunderstanding. Source: La Junta de Control Fiscal Facebook Page

A new national hero none of you will ever be as brave as has risen. Your new Supreme Leader and King, Nelson. Use as your profile picture in solidarity with him and fight for workers rights like Nelson did...before there are no jobs to fight for. #todossomosnelson	Image 14: National Hero Date: January 30, 2017 Description: A picture of a Domino's Pizza employee who gave an interview condemning their employer's actions. The *Junta de Control Fiscal* declares him a national hero because of his courage to defend his job. The profile image they chose to showcase depicts the employee as a revolutionary hero, in the same way socialist realist artist did during the Russian Socialist Revolution. Source: La Junta de Control Fiscal Facebook Page
La Junta de Control Fiscal January 29 · 🌐 Dear employees of Puerto Rico, if your employer tries to use the Labor Reform in creative and unfair ways, let us know and we will let everyone know by sharing it on our page. Dear employers of Puerto Rico, don't piss off your employees, because they have La Junta de Control Fiscal on their side. #lajuntacares 👍 Like 💬 Comment ➡ Share	Image 15: Dear Employees Date: January 29, 2017 Description: A post by La Junta de Control Fiscal urging their followers to denounce labor reform law injustices from their employers. Source: La Junta de Control Fiscal

Content analysis

The images above are evidence of the visual elements that were created as a result of the deployment of memes driven by *La Junta de Control Fiscal.* Image 11, exemplifies the types of posts made by *La Junta de Control Fiscal.* The image show *La Junta*, 'calling out' Domino's Pizza on the injustices they are perpetrating, but they do so by calling them "evil geniuses" and sarcastically urging their followers to give them big round of applause.The pages's primary rhetorical tool is sarcasm. That can be seen in Image 13, where they accuse the national newspaper El Nuevo Día of trying to report on the Domino's Pizza issue from a pro-corporation,

pro-government perspective. The accuse the newspaper of being apologist for Domino's by labeling their actions as a "misunderstanding" without providing a satisfactory explanation of what had happened. *La Junta* rejected the story line being pushed by El Nuevo Día and redacted a post complaining about it. The post imitates Donald Trump's rhetorical tweeting style by accusing the newspaper being "fake news." Their goal was to shame El Nuevo Día for being complicit in a state and corporate narrative that they felt nobody should believe. They double down on their critiques of the newspaper by accusing them of representing the "socialist/neoliberal Popular Democratic Party(PDP)" which is one of Puerto Rico's major political parties. The description of the Popular Democratic Party as a "socialist/neoliberal" institution might seem like a contradiction but *La Junta de Control Fiscal* coins both therms to exemplify the contradictions within the party's platform. In Puerto Rico, the PDP is usually know for masquerading as pro-people and pro social programs ('socialist') to gain votes but then implementing neoliberal policy when in power.

Image 12, shows screenshots taken by citizens-- and uploaded to social media-- from the State Department's corporation registration web page. The screenshots demonstrate that Eddie Lieberman (Master Franchisee of Domino's Pizza Puerto Rico) had registered the new franchise corporation the 27 of January of 2017, a day after the labor reform law was approved. Just like *La Junta* social media users did not believe that the registration of this new corporation and the firing and rehiring of employees just happened to coincide with the labor reform law approval. The screenshots were meant to prove that what happened was not a coincidence. Social media users wanted to dispel the idea portrayed by el Nuevo Día, that the 'incident' was a simple misunderstanding.

Image 14 is another demonstration of how *La Junta de Control Fiscal* makes use of humor for political purposes. Here, they make fun of the artistic Socialist Realism obsession with creating political figures and depicting them like gods and ultimate authority figures by designating an image of Domino's pizza worker that denounce the company in national TV as their profile picture and declaring him a national hero. They call him a "Supreme Leader" and "King" and by making fun of the myth and figure creating process of socialist realism they are in fact engaging in that same process although ironically. This gave a face to the demands of the workers and ignited a comment conversation around the role that Domino's had as an employer or if in fact they did all this process intentionally (La Junta de Control Fiscal, 2017).

Image 15 is surprising because in this post, *La Junta de Control Fiscal* breaks the fourth wall. Without sarcasm or irony, they urge their followers to denounce their employers if they are engaging in illegal or problematic practices. In an ironic twist of events, *La Junta de Control Fiscal Facebook Page* is defending Puerto Rican workers and labor rights when in fact they are the digital embodiment of an undemocratically imposed institution that seeks to implement austerity measures and control the government's finances.

I believe that all content generated was a mixture of humorous rhetoric and online political action, as well as a citizen process of corporate and government accountability done in a novel and interesting way. The development of this content was helpful in tracing back all the intersecting collective and individual actions that occurred in a short period of time.

Interview analysis

As a second part of my research process, I wanted to understand how the facebook page *La Junta de Control Fiscal* saw the role that they and the content they create play in the bigger activism arena. They agreed to a short interview via e-mail. I asked them about their motivations to start the page, their involvement with the Domino's debacle, the role they feel they play in social justice, their moderation process, and the role that memes play in political discourse.

They started by clarifying that the Facebook Page *La Junta de Control Fiscal* was a natural progression from the twitter presence they created when the PROMESA bill was being voted on in the House of Representatives. Apparently, the House of Representatives is very active on Twitter and they thought it would be fun to tweet back to them as *La Junta de Control Fiscal* was being turned into law. When in fact the law was put into place, they congratulated Congress and warned Puerto Rico about the doomsday that approached. The trending hashtag #PROMESA helped them reach and engage more people.

Their moderation process is pretty straightforward. Two people run the page and take turns posting content. One of them studies in the University of Puerto Rico Mayagüez, and the other works in advertising and studied Marketing. They have a policy of never deleting comments, because is "instant death" in social media to do that. They either deflect the negative comment or have a good comeback, and engage in the controversy around the comment.

They believe their content mostly brings attention to things that are disregarded by mainstream media and the hypocrisy that surrounds what they call the Puerto Rican "doble moral," or double morality in English. They define the "doble moral" as a black and white understanding of the world, and they feel that their interventions provide a more critical approach to hot button topics as to engage in discussion and provide fresh perspectives.

Being involved in the Domino's Pizza incident was a deliberate attempt to bring attention to the situation that was happening with the Domino's Pizza workers. One of *La Junta de Control Fiscal* creators saw the Domino's Pizza re-hiring memo doing the rounds on social media but not getting enough traction. At the moment, their page had thousands of shares and likes, and they decided to "use the megaphone" to spread the message to more people. Understanding that their power lies in the amount of people that follow their page, they knew that putting the content there would make it reach a wider public. They wanted to show people that we should not be afraid of big corporations, and that corporations should be afraid of people because people hold the power.

While they did get involved this time in a social justice endeavor, and they see the potential in getting involved, they do not see it as their mission. They do like nudging people, making them look and think differently about issues through satire. One creator put it this way: "Satire always helps people see how silly they sound when they say certain things, and we love being silly" (La Junta de Control Fiscal, personal communication, May 21, 2017).

Finally, when asked about the role that memes had in politics and economic discourses they said that memes serve to "simplify an extremely complicated world". They believe memes can be used to communicate ideas in a succinct way, and that in that quality lays their shareability. At the same time, they see that they can also be used to spread disinformation and oversimplifications. Even though their group is not about direct impact or action, they believe there is a power in letting people know about the circus-like features of the world we live in (La Junta de Control Fiscal, personal communication, May 21, 2017).

La Junta de Control Fiscal take on the tactical media moment that happened is really interesting. Understanding that shaping discourse is their main goal and that it would never be possible if it were not for their followers is important because it speaks to the powers of collective conversation. Furthermore, the role that they believe satire and memes play a role in igniting and starting conversations, but they are also self-critical enough to understand that other kinds of action are needed to achieve other social justice goals. When they intervened in the Domino's Pizza worker situation, the Memo was already public online; they intervened because they had a platform that they understood could help distribute the message in the hopes for accountability and calling out the people responsible without being afraid.

I believe that the concept of silliness and carnival performance that they ascribe to political and discourse affairs is politically powerful. Understanding the performative aspect of our systemic organizational structures allows us to understand that they are not immovable, but collectively performed and therefore able to change. Bhatkin's asserts that carnivalesque is able to create an alternative space, characterized by freedom where performance has no boundaries and voices are heard in order to engage in genuine dialogue that could result in political change(Robinson, 2011). The administrators of La Junta de Control Fiscal were able to implement those ideas of performance and carnival in a digital space with pretty interesting results.

Conclusion #Case Study 1

I believe the creation of a satirical profile that had a clear relation with the political struggles of the island gave *La Junta de Control Fiscal* a rapport and trust that takes years to cultivate for professional journalists in PR. They became an alternative critical medium against

the current Puerto Rican government, and against the pro- congress, anti-worker narrative

delivered by most of the mainstream media outlets. This is particularly important because, even

though in recent years there has been a resurgence of independent news sources that take

advantage of digital media to deliver their news (Coss, 2017). Puerto Rico's media ecology has

been historically dominated by right wing leaning mass media publications. For example, since

its inception in 1970 El Nuevo Día- Puerto Rico's highest circulation newspaper- has benefited

economically and politically from its connections to Puerto Rico's conservative New Progressive

Party (Coss, 2017).

La Junta de Control Fiscal's commitment to continually (comedically) address their

followers with regards to the islands political issues allowed them to build a strong following that

led to an effective mobilization for corporate and government accountability. Through their page

La Junta de Control Fiscal partook in meme culture by remixing popular memes with Puerto

Rican political culture and curating a space that was solely dedicated to 'inform' about the real

Fiscal Control Board. Both the content analysis and interviews developed in this case study,

demonstrate that the page administrators served two interesting functions in the process of

participatory production of memes. First, they mainly remixed and creolized ongoing internet

meme content by integrating *La Junta de Control Fiscal* imagery to the running jokes. Second,

they created a curated space that discussed the real La Junta de Control Fiscal measures and the

effect it had on Puerto Rican politics. This functions were fundamental to advance the rapport

and trust they built with their community which ultimately lead to the event explored on this case

study.

Nevertheless, is important to make clear, as *La Junta de Control Fiscal* did in their

interview, that their efforts were not developed in a contextual void. It was a combination of political context, workers willing to put themselves on the line, and people being engaged with the content and distributing it to their own networks. It was the power of collective engagement and stakeholder action that in the end made the government and corporations accountable. Social media and *La Junta de Control Fiscal* served as an amplifier of the issues that people already found relevant and important to discuss. The aesthetic and rhetorical form chosen by La Junta de Control Fiscal bore an interesting tone of transgression, even if it was made for the fun of it. It was incredibly ironic to make a Twitter and Facebook page, new media artifacts that are often praised for allowing democratization and accessibility, for a governmental body that was imposed by the United States government on their colonial territory. In the feigned governmental discourse adopted by *La Junta de Control Fiscal*, the satirization of officiality is important to dismantle understandings of the respectability that often permeate any political discussion.

Moreover, the aesthetic choice of socialist realism permitted a meaningful satirical critique of the authoritarian stance that the United States is more than willing to critique in other countries, but not in its own actions. We can say with all certainty that *La Junta de Control Fiscal* did not change the course of the labor reform law, but I believe they are a stepping stone towards changing how we discuss politics, accountability and reform.

Chapter 3: Puerto Rican Vaporwave: Political Irony

Context

Image 16: What the Fuck is this aesthetic anyways?

Source: La Marginal

Vaporwave Origin and History

Vaporwave supposedly emerged the 1st of July of 2011 when Texas producer Will Burnett coined the term to describe the album New Dreams LTD by artist Laserdisc Visions (Know Your Meme, 2015). Nevertheless, the earliest known use of the word was recorded in the music blog Weed Temple on October 13th 2011(Know Your Meme, 2015). Both Will Burnet and the blog Weed Temple used the term vaporwave to describe a music genre that

> "has often been described as a satire of corporate and consumerist culture and modern
>
> capitalism, specifically as a critique of mainstream Electronic Dance Music (EDM). It
>
> highly samples and repeats music sounds to create a distorted music experience"(Know
>
> Your Meme, 2015).

This genre is inspired by a variety of computer based musical genres which include: EDM, New Age Music, Seapunk, and 70's funk. It also is characterized by having Japanese characters in the song titles and 80's smooth jazz and Muzak samples (Jones, 2012). Moreover, vaporwave creators heavily base their developments on the concept of appropriation and retromania; where the goal of artistic development depends on the appropriation of a myriad of sonic and visual elements to create something new (Segovia & Cerezo, 2016). The figure below demonstrates the growth in popularity for the vaporwave term since it was first coined in 2011.

Image 17: Vaporwave Interest

Search Interest

Source: Google Trends

A e s t h e t i c

The growth of the genre led to various blogs and internet community groups to produce unique visual, graphical, artistic, collage, and fashion content that expressed the core identity of

the genre. In 2013, the Tumblr blog "Vaporwave Album covers" was launched to showcase vaporwave album art. The art usually displayed bright colors and a seapunk vibe. (Know Your Meme, 2015).

Image 18: Vaporwave Album Cover

Source: Know Your Meme

The aesthetic style that often accompanies vaporwave albums is called "aesthetic" often stylized as **a e s t h e t i c** on web spaces. The term "aesthetic" is also a reference to the actual meaning of the the philosophical term aesthetics.[7] This use of the term manages to change the semantic meaning of the original word and create a new ironic association to the subcultural artistic and musical genre. Even though the style had its origins with vaporwave, it is now its own cultural phenomena that generates original content. The **A e s t h e t i c** of vaporwave :

> "typically include Japanese lettering and nostalgic themes, as well as late 80's colors, early 1990s computer operating systems and video game consoles" (Jones, 2012). It often also "incorporates early internet imagery, late 1990s web design, glitch art, and cyberpunk tropes, as well as anime, Greco-Roman statues, and 3D objects.(Jurgens, 2016)

---

[7] the branch of philosophy dealing with such notions as the beautiful,the ugly, the sublime, the comic, etc., as applicable to the fine arts,with a view to establishing the meaning and validity of critical judgments concerning works of art, and the principles underlying or justifying such judgments

The artistic concept was popularized by Vaporwave artist like Macintosh Plus and Youtuber Remiendoche and it has become a style of internet meme making. People have often satirized the use of the concept. For example: YouTuber FrankJavCee pokes fun at the development of vaporwave and calls **a e s t h e t i c** just a "pretentious hipster way of saying beautiful'(Know Your Meme, 2015).

The logic of the aesthetic style of the vaporwave is the same as the logic of its music. It's an ambiguous satirical take on consumer capitalism and popular culture by matching together seemingly unmatchable things. The goal of the style is to integrate what would be considered high art and low art creating a *pastiche* that is metacritic of cultural production in itself (Goméz, 2016).

Description

Puerto Rican Vaporwave

Puerto Rican vaporwave is the integration of **a e s t h e t i c** vaporwave styles and concepts into Puerto Rican popular culture. According to Puerto Rican blog La Marginal, in a post titled *De seguro te gusta el Vaporwave y ni lo sabes*[8] ("You definitely like Vaporwave and you don't even know it")*,* Puerto Rican artists have been engaging with vaporwave as early as 2014. Artists like La Bajura, Furry Vowels, Turista, Los Walters y Buscabulla are only some of the musician that directly identify with vaporwave or at least some of its aspects (Goméz, 2016).

According to La Marginal, vaporwave aesthetics resemble current Puerto Rican contemporary art movements that seek to re-appropriate "tropical-ness"(Goméz, 2016). Even though "tropical imagery" (beaches, dolphins, and sunsets) is often used in vaporwave around

---

[8] "Surely you like Vaporwave and you don't even know it"

the world to represent escapism, in Puerto Rico those representations take on a whole new

meaning (Gomez, 2016). Since Puerto Ricans already problematically live where people desire to

escape to, is very difficult to sell the idea of paradise escape. The concept of neo-tropicalism that

is conveyed through aesthetic manipulations in Puerto Rican Vaporwave meme culture certainly

adds another level of irony to what it means to live in an island that is far from being (at least for

Puerto Ricans) a tropical escape.

Radical Cowry & Ｂｏｒｉｗａｖｅ ボーリ

This case study focuses on the deployment of Puerto Rican Vaporwave aesthetics through

internet meme production for political critique by two prominent social media Facebook pages:

Radical Cowry and ｂｏｒｉｗａｖｅ ボーリ. Both Puerto Rican Vaporwave page successfully

integrate "classic" vaporwave aesthetics with Puerto Rican popular culture in order to make

ironic public commentary.

Image 19: Alejandro el explorel

Source: Radical Cowry

The picture shown above is a great example of the double meaning and ironic take often

portrayed by these vaporwave internet memes. The first picture showcases Puerto Rico's

ex-governor Alejandro Garía Padilla, as an overlay of the internet explorer and windows 95

operating system. Puerto Rico's ex-governor was often ridiculed as being "dumb" and "slow", so

the internet explorer/windows 95 backgrounds is not accidental. It is actually a visual play on a

common internet joke that makes fun of both internet explorer and windows for being poorly

functioning software. The picture effectively creates an association without being explicit. This

association intelligently employs recurrent tropes in internet meme production like: remix,

information seeking, and irony to convey a message.

According to a Facebook search the earliest post for both pages dates back to January of

2016, although b o r i w a v e ボーリ claims to have started the page in 2011. They are fairly

young content pages, nevertheless they have amassed huge numbers of followers and likes. To

this day Radical Cowry is liked by more than fifty six thousand people, while b o r i w a v e ボー

リ is liked by more than sixteen thousand people. Furthermore, both pages have set up and are

community administrators of four private Facebook groups: lloripari 🍒 , BORIWAVE 🌴 , Sopla

Cassette 🕹 and RICH PORT 🚀 . These Facebook groups have 4,921, 4,199, 1087, and 601

members, respectively. Even accounting for the fact that some people might follow multiple

pages, the scale of the platform for discussion developed by these content creators cannot be

doubted. For example, Radical Cowry has more followers that there are people in some

municipalities of the island.

Interestingly enough, both pages have used their recognition to address political topics

like colonialism, ownership of artistic content, and the critical understanding and promotion of

Puerto Rican popular culture. Radical Cowry has been covered by U.S. media outlets like

Remezcla (Jackson, 2018) and Pero Like (Pero Like, 2018) as well as local news outlets like

Metro (Metro Puerto Rico, 2018). Likewise, b o r i w a v e ボーリ has been covered by blogs

like La Marginal and is a prominent sponsor of the Puerto Rican indie music, art, and movie

scene. Moreover, they have created an official website were they showcase their work and sense

of humor: http://lloripari.com/.

Content & Interviews

In this section I will recount the times in which both Radical Cowry and b o r i w a v e

ボーリ made use of Puerto Rican Vaporwave aesthetic internet memes to engage in political

critique through their 2 years of activity. Although both pages perform interesting political

critiques, they also engage in producing internet memes and content just for the fun of it.

Furthermore, they actively participate in the closed groups and Facebook pages they administer

by asking question and by sharing their opinions.

The following tables present some of the highlights of the content generated by both

pages:

Table III

Radical Cowry	
Content	Image Number/ Date/ Description/ Source
Pokémon: La Durota Ortiz vs. Alejandro García Padilla feat. Alexandra Lúgaro Alejandro La Durota Alejandro quiere una batalla 2:06 343K Views	Image 20- Pokemon La Durota Ortiz vs. Alejandro García Padilla Date: January 29, 2016 Description: Pokemón fight between Alejandro García Padilla (ex-governor) and La Durota (woman involved in racist scandal in an airplane). For the fight the ex-governor's weapons were austerity measures and poverty and La Durota's weapons were low-class slang, racism, etc. Topics: Racism, Austerity Measures, Poverty, Protest, Gender Issues Source: Radical Cowry
quiero la estadidad... ...por donde sea para: de: Radical Cowry Like Comment Share 207 Top Comments ▾	Image 21- Romero Statehood Date: February 7, 2016 Description: Pro Statehood ex governor advocating for under any circumstance.He is shown taken statehood even by his nether regions. Topic: Statehood, Colonialism, Political Representatives Source: Radical Cowry
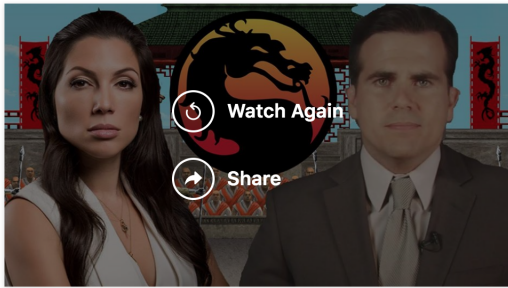
Mortal Kombat: Alexandra Lúgaro vs. Ricardo Rosselló 264K Views	Image 22- Mortal Kombat: Alexandra Lúgaro vs. Ricardo Rosselló Date: February 13, 2016 Description: Mortal Combat game of opposing political candidate for the PR 2016 election. Alexandra Lugaro's weapons: feminism, a critique of the two party system, and professional acumen. Ricky Rosello's weapons were: nepotism, media backing, and partidism. Topics: Media Bias, Feminism, Critique to the Two party system Soure: Radical Cowry
Pokémon: Wanda Rolón vs. Pedro Julio Serrano feat. Shirley ''La Atea'' 	Image 23- Pokémon: Wanda Rolón vs. Pedro Julio Serrano feat. Shirley "La Atea" Date: February 26, 2016 Description: Pedro Julio Serrano a pro LGBT activist and Wanda Rolón pro-church conservative figure fight as pokemons and there is a special appearance from Shirley a prominent atheist advocate. The weapons used by Pedro Julio are the gay flag and LGTBQ rhetoric. Wanda uses homophobia, fait, profit, and conservatism. Topics: Conservatism, Homophobia, Faith, and Profit Source: Radical Cowry
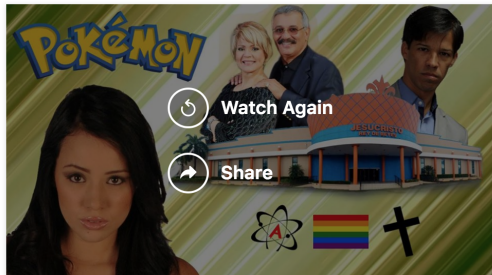
One like, one prayer.

DESASTRES NATURALES

USA
ICELAND
INDIA
PUERTO RICO

Image 24- One like, one prayer

Date: February 26, 2016

Description: 4 image frames that represents various natural disasters in different countries. PR's natural disaster is its congress.

Topic: Government mismanagement, political discontent

Source: Radical Cowry

Do you want to have a rad summer vacation? The city of Bayamón has a lot to offer. #VacationGoals

Bayamón, Puerto Rico 😍

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ↪ Share

Image 25- Do you want to have a rad summer vacation? The city of Bayamón has a lot to offer. #VacationGoals

Date: April 22, 2016

Description: 4 image frames describing the Bayamón municipality but in reality they are showcasing Las Vegas. The meme is mocking the idea of selling PR as something is not to bring in tourism.

Topics: Critique to Development, and Tourism

Source: Radical Cowry

This is legitness. Los puertorriqueños cuando una banda ranchera le gana a un Boricua en los Latin Grammys. 👍 Like 💬 Comment ↪ Share	Imagine 26- The Ligitness Date: May 9, 2016 Description: 4 image frames of how Puerto Ricans that Turn into Donald Trump when they lose to Mexicans on Music categories of the Latin Grammys. It makes reference to Trumps xenophobia towards Mexican people as the punchline of the joke. Topic: Racism, Xenophobia Source: Radical Cowry
Toñita ya se registró. ¿Qué esperas? **¿Ya te registraste para votar?** **No permitas que Toñita decida tu futuro.** **¡Regístrate!**	Image 27- Toñita ya se registró. ¿Qué esperas? Date: June 7, 2016 Description: The meme make reference to a woman name Toñita that gave no legitimate reason to vote along party lines and it urges millenials to register to vote. Topics: Politics, Voting, Registering to Vote Source: Radical Cowry

Uh oh! Sostén mi orgullo independentista y comebacks anti-estadounidenses. Secretaria ¿Cómo es que hubo un problema con mi FAFSA?	Image 28- Uh oh! Date: August 17, 2016 Description: It makes a reference to a white chicks scene that where the character engage in a verbal fight. It criticizes Puerto Rican independence supporters for criticizing the U.S. while receiving U.S. scholarship aids. Topics: Independence, USA Higher Education Aid Source: Radical Cowry
Delet dis rn. **Muere Familia** Accidentes / 12 / 07 / 94 - Rosselló Nevares, de 15 años de edad y Molinari Such, de 21 años de edad, acusados por dos cargos por imprudencia crasa o temeraria al conducir un vehículo de motor (artículo 87 del Código Penal). Los hechos por los que se juzgan a los jóvenes ocurrieron el 25 de junio pasado. A consecuencia del accidente automovilístico fallecieron la licenciada Lillian Alfonso Nogales y su hijo de once años, Julio Antonio Arroyo	Image 29- Delete this rn Date: Novembre 3, 2016 Describe: A picture of an article that describes Ricky Rosello's (Puerto Rico's current governor) involvement in a traffic accident that involved the death of two people form which he was later acquitted. Topic: Political Corruption, Death, Injustice, Legal System Source: Radical Cowry

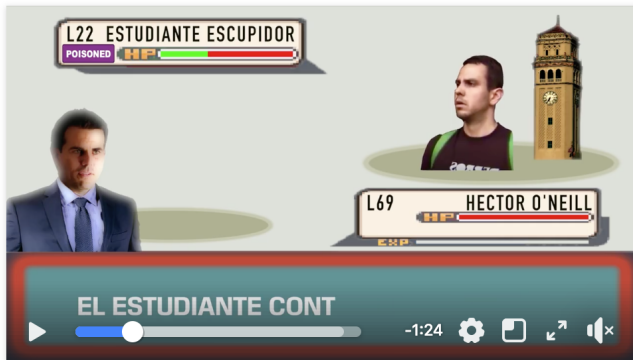|	
Puerto Rico se levanta. ''Me quité y me va cabrón'' Starter Pack DOLLAR TREE · Español · SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY CLAIM APPROVED · PUERTO RICO · Roku 👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share	Image 30- Puerto Rico se Levanta Date: December 18, 2016 Description: The meme takes on satirical take on the life of many people in the diaspora that "flex" about being in a better economic and social position because they left the island but in reality they still live in poverty. Topic: Diaspora, Poorness, Puerto Rican Pride Source: Radical Cowry
Ricardo Rosselló vs. University of Puerto Rico L22 ESTUDIANTE ESCUPIDOR POISONED HP L69 HECTOR O'NEILL HP EL ESTUDIANTE CONT -1:24 334K Views	Image 31- Ricardo Rosselló vs. University of Puerto Rico Date: April 2017 Description: Pokemón fight between Ricardo Rosselló and a the UPR. Weapons UPR Student: Striking and Spitting. Weapons Rosselló: Austerity Measure and privatization. Topic: Fiscal Control Board, Privatization of Education, Protest, Government Cuts, Sexual Assault Source: Radical Cowry
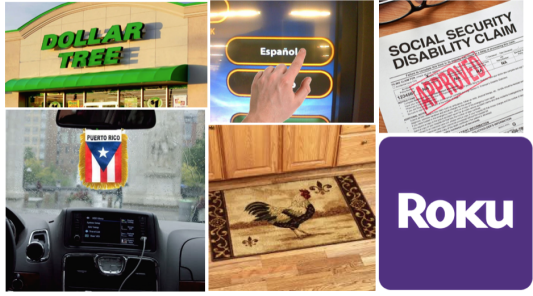
America's Next Top State is getting intense.

Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands take a step forward. Two beautiful colonies stand before me, but only one photo is in my hands. The name I call represents the colony who still in the running towards becoming the 51st state.

Like   Comment   Share

t h e   5 1 s t   s t a t e

Rich Port, USA

Like   Comment   Share

Radical Cowry
June 6, 2017 · 🌐

🇵🇷 Puerto Rico? That's so last week! 💅 I'm Rich Portian. 🏈 From Rich Port, USA! 💖 The 51st State of the United States of America. 🇺🇸 The most powerful nation on Earth. 🏝 I love being an American. 😍 Proud of it! 💃 Don't be a peasant, elegance is key. 🔑 Vote Statehood, stop being poor! 👑 FOLLOW ME! 🐦 @RadicalCowry 💸 No peasants pls. 🤢 High class followers only! 💎 k ta ta for now x

Like   Comment   Share

😂👍❤ Clarisa Arlene, Francisco López and 1K others   Top Comments ▾

1,284 Shares

Image 32- America's Next Top State is getting intense.

Date: May 23, 2017

Description:
Meme makes reference to America's Next top model process for selecting top models. The meme pretends that Puerto Rico is running to be a state and the the U.S. will select PR like if the island was a model.

Image 33- the 51th state

Date: June 6, 2017

Description: After a national referendum for statehood in Puerto Rico were people voted to become a state. This meme came up to represent what Statehood would mean for PR with Americana Iconography.

Image 34- Rich Port

Date: June 15, 2017

Description: Because Puerto Rico is now a state of the U.S. everything has to be written in English. Puerto Ricans are no longer Puerto Ricans they are Rich Portians and all that they didn't have before now they have it because of statehood. [sarcasm]

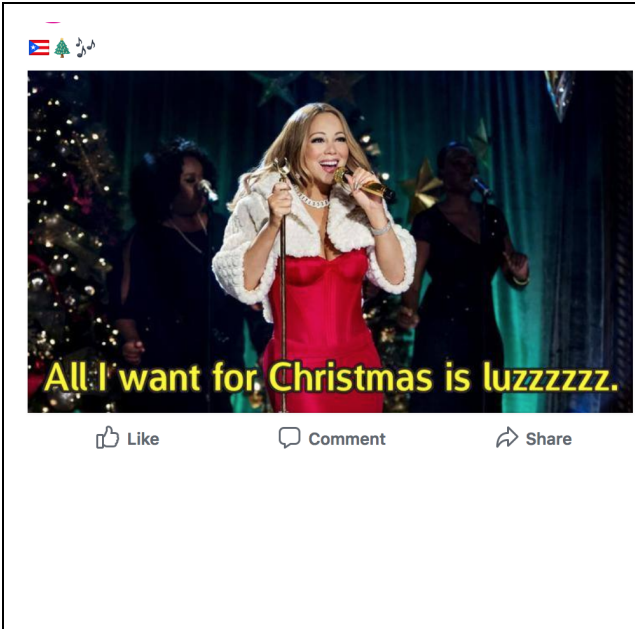Topics: Colonialism, Statehood

Source: Radical Cowry

Image 35- No Luz (No Light)

Date: Decembre 7, 2017

Description: Meme that pretends that Mariah Carey is singing about having electricity to her famous song: All I want for Christmas is You. It's a jab a disaster response efforts taking a long time in Puerto Rico. Where in December, 3 months after the hurricane people still had no electricity.

Topic: Huracan María, Disaster Response, No Electricity

Source: Radical Cowry

Image 36 & 37- Otro apagón más & #postalesqueenamoran

Date: February 3 & 8, 2017

Description: There are Valentines Day cards about power outages and power plants in the island do to Hurricane María.

Topics: Power Outages, Disaster Response, Government Inefficiency

Source: Radical Cowry

Boriwave ボーリ	
Content	Image Number/ Date/ Description/ Source
	Image 38- pnp| populareigns

Date: January 17, 2017

Description: Meme make allusion to the 'kingdom' and power that is hoarded by the two parties in a two party system.

Topics: Partidocracia, Political Discontent

Source: Boriwave |
| | Image 39- reforma laboral #penepe

Date: January 19, 2017

Description: When the labor reform bill was passed the Puerto Rican government people created memes that illustrated that they were disappointed but not surprised that it happened.

Topics: Labor Reform, Conservative Party, Austerity Measures

Source: Boriwave |

continue?

HIGH SCORE
001895

DEBT CRISIS
デット・クライシス

PRESS START

(0/1 CREDITS)

Like   Comment   Share

Image 40- continue?

Date: February 17, 2017

Description: It imagines the Puerto Rican Debt Crisis as an old school game that we are about to play.

Topics: Puerto Rican Debt, Economic Crisis

Source: Boriwave

Azulcomoelmarazul🇺🇸⛰️

Click for more

-2:00

3.1K Views

Like   Comment   Share

Imagine 41- azulcomoelmarazu

Date: April 28, 2017

Description: It makes references to a song that mentions blue as the ocean because it related to Puerto Rico's conservative Party and how some its supporters stormed into a public agency to make sure the American Flag was there.

Topics:Statehood, Colonialism, Misogyny

Source: Boriwave

1 DE MAYO

Like   Comment   Share

Claro que apoyo el Paro Nacional. Me wa cagar en la madre del sistema y el gobierno de Puerto Rico abusadores que son.

Imagine 42 & 43- momento|resistencia

Date: April 29 & 30, 2017

Describe: The memes describe the path to resistance that popular culture character and a popular reguetton artist were going to have in the protest of may first, 2017.

Topic: Protest, Workers Rights, 1 de Mayo, National Strike

Source: Boriwave

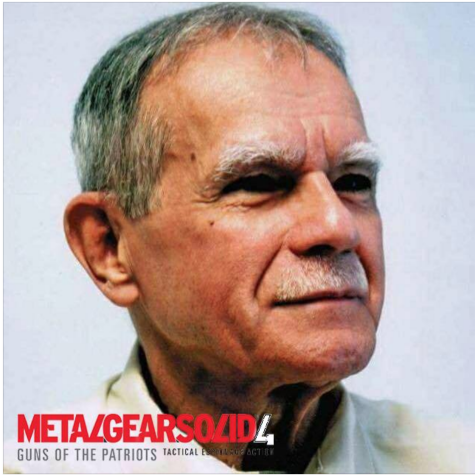PATRIOTA

Like   Comment   Share

Image 44, 45, & 46

Dates: May 17, 2017 & June 16, 2017

Describe: This memes make pay an ode to prominent independent movement activist by placing them in the context of iconic game development platforms.

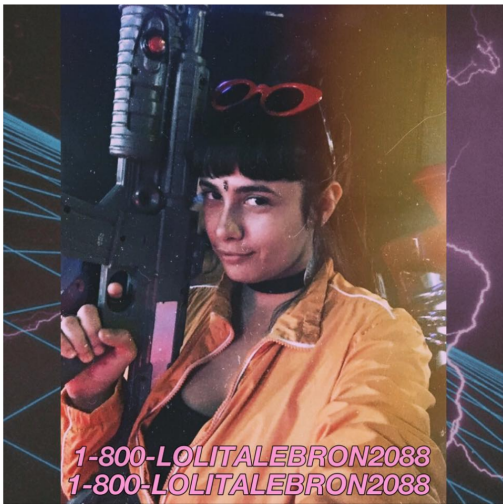Topics: National Independence Activists, Patriotism, Nationalism, Feminists Activist

Source: Boriwave

war,haschanged

Like   Comment   Share

novictorywithoutpain

1-800-LOLITALEBRON2088
1-800-LOLITALEBRON2088

Like   Comment   Share

highonlegalstatehood ヨンリーン WE ARE THE NEW AMERICANA	Image 47: highonlegalstatehood Date: May 31, 2017 Description: Because of the plebiscite Puerto Rico's was going to be the 51th our representatives like the first lady became the new americana. Statehood, First Lady, Colonialism
Así es María HURRICANE MARIA CURRENT SATELLITE Like Comment Share	Image 48, 49, & 50 Date: September 18, 2017, Octobre 6, 2017, & Octobre 17, 2017 Description: All of these memes make reference to the hardships that Puerto Ricans went through with Hurricane María. Not have electricity, and not have general access to the outside world by complimenting them with popular culture iconography. Topics: Climate Change, Hurricanes, Disaster Response, No electricity Source: Boriwave

contemplaciones semanales

LLEGO LA LUZ?

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ↪ Share

solo en Wapa TV

Pimp My Ride
Mon-thurs | 7pm

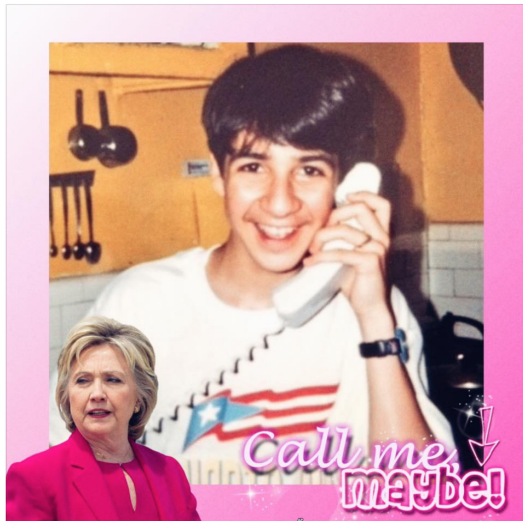|	
se me fue el LTE de tu corazón bebe ME CAGO EN LA HOSTIA Like Comment Share 380 Top Comments	Image 51: Me cago en la hostia Date: November 4, 2017 Description: The meme coins a popular cursing phrase used in Puerto Rico to explain the awful situation of not having cell service. Topics: Information Communication Technologies, No communication, disaster response Source: Boriwave
It's almost like praying for promesa Call me maybe! Like Comment Share	Image 52: It's almost like praying for promesa Date: November 8, 2017 Description: It makes references Lin Manuel Miranda's ties to the Democratic Party of the U.S. which was in charged of instituting a colonial supervising board to oversee the island and pass austerity measures. Topics: Fiscal Control Board, Promesa, Austerity Measures, Colonialism Source: Boriwave

Context Analysis

Both pages make use of highly aestheticized ironic meme content to discuss political

issues and cultural critique on the island. There are observable patterns of discussion topics that

get covered repeatedly. Some of those discussion topics are: colonialism, economic and political

crisis, protest, austerity measures, the fiscal control board, censorship and media bias, workers'

rights and incompetent governmental disaster response.

Individually, the multimodality and polyvocality of the images allow spectators to interact

with the artifacts and formulate their own opinions. Nevertheless, when analyzed jointly (as a

group of artifacts) developed over time, the images start to showcase the critical economic and

political realities of living in an colonial and indebted island. Irony here is used in the **a e s t h e t**

i c packaging and the messaging. Double or triple meanings are created, dependent on the

observers' knowledge of Puerto Rican popular culture, current events, and media literacy.

Information seeking is always at play with this type of content, it requires that the user

participate in the development of meaning and play. The collage and pastiche construction of

Puerto Rican political issues manages to presents a problem and simultaneously devalue it

through saturation. The ironic formulations sometimes put in to question the real beliefs and

intentions of the page owners. For example: Images 32 to 34 make use of American reality

television culture and popular culture iconography to present the problem of colonialism in an

attractive and situated way. The images make you constantly ask yourself if they are reifying

ideas of colonialism, economic crisis, and austerity measures in detrimental and problematic

ways, or if they are in fact questioning our preconceived notions of them. I believe the creators

and the artifacts manage to raise awareness around the issues that are politically relevant, while maintaining a hypercritical perspective that keeps participants on their toes. They are able to engage with anti-colonialism and anti-capitalist ideas in ways that seem refreshing and versatile because they are not limited by one medium to get their message across. Through the incorporation of color, fonts, and remix they are able to present complex topics that otherwise might not be of interest to the general population.

Moreover, the use of affective elements like nostalgia is at the cornerstone of discursive engagement. People relate to the content on a deeper level, which allows them to think about it more carefully and engage.

However, there are cases in which it is evident that the page creators espouse political views that don't take into consideration an intersectional analysis of the issues at hand. Image 20 *Pokemon La Durota Ortiz vs. Alejandro García Padilla,* is a great example of the a meme that exhibits an incredible use of medium an aesthetic affordances to showcase a problem but fails to recognize nuances of class, gender and race in its analysis. *La Durota Ortiz vs. Alejandro García Padilla* presents a pokemon style fight were Alejandro García Padilla (on of Puerto Rico's ex governors) is challenging La Durota to a Pokemón style fight. La Durota is a racially mixed woman that was involved in a scandal when she was boarding a jetblue plane and refused to sit next to a black man and called him demeaning names. The meme plays like a video were each character takes a turn fighting and scoring points. Alejandro uses weapons like austerity measures, and poverty to gain points while La Durota uses street slang, aggressiveness, and racism to score hers. At the end of the game everybody loses. The meme is interesting because it showcases the intricacies that face and indebted island by pointing out the how the government

uses austerity measures to control people. Nevertheless, it misses the mark in it's conception of La Durota as the sole representative of what it means to be a woman and lower class in Puerto Rico. Granted, La Durota engaged in racial and problematic behavior but the games depicts her as a commonality within the women identifying lower class of the island. This rhetoric is incredibly problematic and it can be deemed anti-poor and misogynistic. The example clearly showcases the a missing intersectional analysis from the development of this particular meme.

This type of situation rarely happens, but when it does, there are dynamic discussions in the comment section were everybody participates and share their ideas. On the other hand, when it comes to the closed Facebook Groups, page administrators have a very offhand approach to content production and interaction on the page. Even though there are some general rules of behavior for the groups, they are rarely enforced. This creates an often toxic and problematic environment for all types of minorities. Users are allowed to any type of content that the see fit and the result is a mixed of anti-trans, pro alt right and heavily charged racial discussions. Certainly if both Radical Cowry and b o r i w a v e ボーリ promote these pages and ask people to join, they are somewhat responsible for what transpires in them and therefore should be accountable.

Image 53: LloriPari Trans Tred

Source: LloriPari Facebook

Events like the one in the image above, were people are talking about 'trans-traps' to refer to a trans men or women not disclosing they are trans something become recurring discussion topics in the group. Even though there are people in the group that fight for trans people and engage in discussions about the trans community in informative and productive ways the discussion is still initiated from a principle of hate and ignorance that ultimately enganger the trans community. These types of events demonstrate the complex relationship that exist within processes of participatory creation and distribution even within a context of political activism and critique.

Interview Analysis

   As a second part of this case study I wanted to understand the role of page creators in

deciding how internet memes are used for political critique. Both Radical Cowry and b o r i w a v

e ボーリ agreed to participatein interviews. I conducted the interviews via google forms,

because the page admins wanted to preserve their anonymity and didn't trust any other interview

medium. The interview questions focused on five areas; 1) the interviewees general perception of

internet memes; 2) the interviewees tool usage and time investment for meme creation; 3) their

motivation and inspiration for content generation; 4) their thoughts on internet meme's utility for

political critique and impact; and 5) what they thought about production onlines meme's

production and distribution patterns.

   Both Radical Cowry and b o r i w a v e ボーリ have been involved with internet meme

culture since 2005 and 2011, respectively. They use social media platforms like Facebook and

Instagram to share content that they or others have created. When asked to define in their own

words what they understood by an 'internet meme,' they said that 1) internet memes are

images/video that can be used to ridicule or glorify something/someone and 2) internet memes

are a universal response from our daily lives, past, future, and culture that should be considered a

new literary genre. Radical Cowry argued that internet memes are incredibly important tools to

grab people's attention and send powerful messages. B o r i w a v e ボーリ proposed that internet

memes allow us to understand and critique community flaws in a better way than traditional

medial would ever allow.

   Radical Cowry said that making people laugh and receiving positive feedback are the

main drivers for their content creation. They explain in detail that the reason they love creating

internet memes is because they are able to be creative and to create their own ideas. They assert that there is a great feeling in knowing that everything is developed from their perspective, and that everything that they put out there is under their control. They confess that they first got inspired to create their very own meme page when a political candidate started running for governor. They voluntarily made a campaign for her on their page using internet memes. Suddenly, they noticed that all the memes were going viral, and that ended up providing them a chance to get to know her.

Ｂｏｒｉｗａｖｅ ボーリ on the other hand said that what inspires them the most is "people and life." They disclosed that, since they were little kids, they had ideas and references that they felt could not be translated into words, but that everything changed when memes arrived in their lives.

Radical Cowry revealed that politics and current events are the main topics that inform their creations. While Ｂｏｒｉｗａｖｅ ボーリ mentioned that the richness of Puerto Rican popular culture and personalities from the 80's and 90's are the main drivers of their creative process. They believe people have a short memory span and usually do not remember how culturally amazing and grand Puerto Rico can be.

In terms of techniques, both mentioned editing software like preview, photoshop, final cut pro, illustrator, premier, Glitché and R4VE. Ｂｏｒｉｗａｖｅ ボーリ often makes use of "mood boards" to keep their ideas flowing for their next memes. When it comes to time spent developing these products, they says it depends on what they are trying to produce. If they are trying to produce something quick for an easy laugh, they might spend five minutes working.

Nevertheless, if they want to develop something more complicated, the process could take from an hour to a week, depending on how complicated the videos or designs they want to display are.

Both Radical Cowry and B o r i w a v e ボーリ generally try to have a positive impact on people with the content they produce. B o r i w a v e ボーリ is particularly interested in giving their followers a sense of nostalgia, while also at the same time showcasing that Puerto Rico was and will continue to be a cultural and aesthetic powerhouse. Furthermore, they believe in positively reaffirming PR identity, ideally by situating it in the future. They believe they pushed people to reflect on their choices and become informed about how get involved politically in the future.

Finally when discussing monetization, they both said they had thought about developing and selling merchandize like pins, shirts and designs, and B o r i w a v e ボーリ expressed and interest in maybe opening a YouTube channel.

Conclusion #Case Study 2

There is a considerable amount of time, thought, and effort invested in making this content look as though there was no time, though or effort invested at all. Content creators often share the stage of their creations as active participants in the development process. They are aware that they are participating in a global language that allows them to express emotions and thought processes that otherwise they would not be able to put into words. Furthermore, they see how being able to incorporate imagery, sound, and text in often discordant and challenging ways allows them to use this content to engage in public discourse and political debate. Internet memes play a role in the reflective political process that allows people to engage with different ideas at different discursive levels.

Using ironic **a e s t h e t i c s** to push forward political and cultural critique is not a new phenomenon, but certainly today more people can participate of that development process than ever before.The development of this aesthetic form allows internet users to publicly participate of the discussion and production process of content while before that might have been done in a more private matter.   Regardless of their proven impact, internet memes are being taken seriously not only by scholars but also by practitioners as a legitimate way to express political dissent. Furthermore, showcased by Boriwave and Radical Cowry creators are not afraid to exploit the affective affordances of internet memes to provoke feeling and sensations that encourage critical thought.

Given the reception this type of content has, it is evident that internet users approve of the semantic play and cultural meanings that are being developed from what is deemed global content. Image 42 and 43 are incredible examples of the placement of globalized imagery within a Puerto Rican context to make a pointed argument about our political or social situation. Image 42, places the cartoons from the group Gorillaz as political activist within the content of labor day protest of May 1, 2017. Image 43, does the same thing but inversely, it situates one of Puerto Rico's most famous trap artist Anuel AA in the context of an old school game console whilst showcasing he's expressions in favor of the protests that would take place May first. These examples, clearly demonstrate how creolization of global content certainly gives a space for the development of a Puerto Rican identity that takes pride in what we have to offer culturally by placing it in a larger global context.

Producing and engaging with this type of content might be they way, as B o r i w a v e ボーリ puts it, to critically reflect about Puerto Rican identity by reaffirming its place in the

future. Both Radical Cowry and B o r i w a v e ボ ー リ function as original meme content creators by that are responsible for developing conceptual and aesthetic sensibilities that enable reflexive discussion. As creators, they partake in activities that people that only remix or curate content do not. In creating their original work they are able to take it in directions that are not constrained by the meme's history; they are only responsible with engaging with the general principles of what an internet memes look like and to expand and deconstruct that collective definition as they see fit.

I believe their function as original content creators can pave the way for an anti-colonialist culture that is not sustained on nationalist and xenophobic tropes. Puerto Rican vaporwave creators are producing a neo-tropical, nostalgic, futurist political critique that allows people to see culture and cultural production for what it is: a social construction that we can modify and improve as we see fit.

Chapter 4: Huracan Maria: climate crisis, colonial aid, and diasporic resistance

Image 54: 2017 Atlantic Hurricane Season
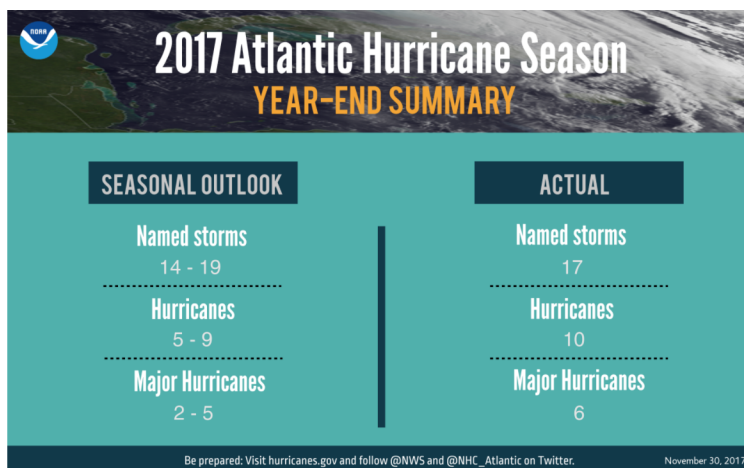
Source: NOAA

According to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Colorado State University, and the Weather Channel, 2017 was a year with above above average hurricane activity (Gresko, 2017). The 2017 Atlantic hurricane season produced seventeen storms, ten of which became hurricanes, with six of them being classified as major hurricanes (category 3, 4, or 5) (NOAA, 2017). The season's increased atmospheric activity is credited to "hurricane friendly conditions and warmer sea temperature (Gresko, 2017).

Even though detecting climate change's influence on hurricane behavior is difficult due to the scarcity of data (hurricanes are rare events), the scientific community believes that in the decades to come climate change will drive hurricane activity (Gresko, 2017). Furthermore, according to Kerry Emanuel, an MIT atmospheric scientist, climate predictions based on warming suggest an increase in the intensity of tropical cyclones (Gresko, 2017).

The Caribbean is already experiencing climate changes that signal a new climate regime (Taylor, 2017). Droughts, prolonged hot days, intense rainfall that produces local flooding, and rising sea levels are some of the observable changes that are only aggravated by intense atmospheric events like hurricanes (Taylor, 2017). The unfamiliarity and unprecedented changes in the environment present a challenge to the people in the Caribbean region. Most of the caribbean economies are based on tourism and agriculture, and are therefore especially sensitive to and dependent on climate variation. Although the Caribbean infrastructure is created to withstand storms and hurricanes, the current trends and changes in their intensity have left everything known about disaster preparedness and infrastructure behind (Taylor, 2017). Ironically, the Caribbean islands are minuscule emitters of greenhouse gases, but the region is being deeply affected by climate change. Caribbean nations have made bold commitments regarding greenhouse gas use. It is important to recognized that the future of the region depends on the actions taken by the global community to reduce greenhouse emissions (Taylor, 2017).

Hurricane María & Puerto Rico

Within the context of climate change and atmospheric events in the Caribbean, hurricane María is an example of how things could play out in the future if we do not engage in climate justice now. In September 20th, 2017 at 6:15 am Maria - a category 4 hurricane - made landfall in the southeast of the island of Puerto Rico with sustained winds of 155 miles per hour (Meyer, 2017). María struck the island a week after hurricane Irma, a category 3 hurricane that left four people dead, two thirds of the island without power, and over 1 billion in damages (Sullivan, 2017). On the eve of hurricane María's landfall, it was estimated that between 60,000 to 80,000 customers that had lost power during Irma still didn't have electricity. It was estimated that over

2,756 people were already relocated in school shelters before María reached the island

(Ferré-Sadurní & Robles, 2017). María was the first category 4 cyclone to hit the island since

1932 (Meyer, 2017). Puerto Rico received 30 inches of rain in one day which is the same amount

that hurricane Harvey left in Texas in 3 days (Meyer, 2017). Furthermore, it left the entire island

without power, and it devastated entire communities, in some cases destroying 80 to 90% of the

infrastructure (Resnick, 2017).

Both the electrical and communication infrastructure of the island were completely

destroyed, with 85 percent of the cell towers unable to work (Gillette, 2017). Moreover, since

water plants were powered by electricity, 55 percent of people (1.87 million) in the island didn't

have access to drinking water (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). The disaster that struck the

island was of great magnitude, but the people's ordeal was only beginning. Both the state and

federal government failed Puerto Ricans when it came to swiftly managing disaster response in

an already dire situation.

Disaster Response

Eight days after María's landfall, the state government was still unable to distribute food

and water supplies. The supplies were stuck in the main San Juan port and couldn't be distributed

because the state government had no fuel, labor or workable roads (CNN, 2017). The

government also declared that it would take them 6 to 8 months to restore power to the entire

island (Robles, Alvarez, & Walsh, 2017). That path to power restoration was filled with pitfalls,

setbacks and political and corruption scandals. A month after the hurricane hit the island, a

company called Whitefish secured a 300 million contract to help restore power (Mufson, Gillum,

Davis, & Hernández, 2017). The contract came under scrutiny for various reasons: 1) the

company did not acquire the contract in a formal bidding process, but by having conversations

with the Puerto Rican Electric Power Authority (PREPA) through LinkedIn (Metro Puerto Rico,

2017); 2) The contract established between PREPA and Whitefish had irregularities and didn't

meet FEMA standards for job regulation, lobbying, and environmental regulation (Campbell &

Irfan, 2017); and 3) PREPA didn't activate "mutual aid" agreements with other mainland utilities

before the hurricane hit, which would have allowed them to access cheap restoration help

(Mufson, Gillum, Davis, & Hernández, 2017). Agency officials argued that they didn't do this

because they didn't have the logistical capabilities to house "mutual aid workers" (Resnick-Ault,

2017). After facing incredible public backlash and scrutiny from the U.S. congress, Puerto Rico's

governor Ricardo Rosselló canceled the contract but not before it cost PREPA 100,000 dollars

and their inability to back out of the contract for another 30 days (Campbell & Irfan, 2017).

Image 55: Is WhiteFish Trusted?   Image 56: Yulin vs. Whitefish

Source: @Alastor   Source: El Calce

Aside from PREPA's shady involvement in onerous contracts, it was reported that many

of its employees were involved in bribery scandals through the island; some of them asking for

as much as 5,000 dollars for power restoration (Akpan, 2018). Furthermore, it was also

discovered that PREPA had an unknown materials warehouse that could have benefited recovery efforts, but it couldn't be found in their computerized inventories by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Scurria, 2018). Moreover, at least one more island wide power outage happened after partial power restoration (Univision Puerto Rico, 2017), and more are projected to happen in the future according to PREPA (Cortés, 2018). This has left people wondering about certainty and efficacy of power restoration.

The death toll after hurricane María is also a source of controversy in the island. Official government death toll counts are far lower than those estimated by other reliable sources (Robles, Davis, Fink, & Almukhtar, 2017). The last official death toll count made by the government recorded 64 deaths, but reports from different media organizations suggest that the actual number of deaths nears 1,000 (CNN, 2018). Since the disaster occurred, the government has only acknowledged a small quantity of deaths. Nevertheless, the number of deaths recorded did not compare to historical death patterns of previous years by 25 percent. This means there was a 25 percent increase in deaths in 2017 that cannot be explained by the State's official death count disaster or historical death patterns (Santos, 2018). Undercounting those deaths is incredibly problematic because it "reduces the attention to the crisis Puerto Ricans live day by day. It … delays international recovery efforts and the approval of policies to help those who need it the most." (Santos, 2 018). The government drew an incredible amount of criticism and scrutiny for the official low numbers they reported, and the backlash forced them to partner up with George Washington University to review the death count (CNN, 2018). The review is currently underway and preliminary result have not been made public.

Finally, another source of controversy in the government-led disaster recovery efforts is related to the government-created non-profit organization "United for Puerto Rico." United for Puerto Rico was created to gather donations for the island from corporate and individual donors. In the month following the hurricane it also came under scrutiny for various reasons. First, the non-profit's base of operations, collection, and distribution center cost $11,600 daily in operational costs, undertaken by the governmental wing of "United for Puerto Rico" and not the non-profit organization (Sepúlveda, 2017). Second, the non-profit organization is administered by big banks and for profit companies in the private sector that had direct ties with current government officials (Sepúlveda, 2017). Third, for about a month and a half the organization operated without a Executive Director and was distributing funds without being detailed about how the help was being assigned (Sepúlveda, 2017). Finally, Puerto Rico's first lady Beatriz Rosselló proposed that the funds be used for the reconstruction of public parks and amenities when huge sectors of the population still didn't have access to electricity or adequate house infrastructure. She later had to withdraw her recommendation when she came under criticism for her tone def proposal (El Nuevo Día, 2018).

All of the problems generated around power restoration, donations funds mishandling, death miscount, and problematic food and goods distribution made an already dire situation worse. Puerto Ricans couldn't trust their state government in their worst time of need, which ultimately lead to a massive exodus and copious suffering (Pérez, 2018).

Given Puerto Rico's colonial relationship to the United States, federal disaster response efforts were no better. Immediately after hurricane María made landfall in Puerto Rico, President Trump appeared to be taking effective actions to help Puerto Rico. He "called local officials on

the island, issued an emergency declaration and pledged that all federal resources would be directed to help" (Phillip, O'Keefe, Miroff, & Paletta, 2017). Nevertheless, four days later he spent his long weekend at a New Jersey golf club and his top aides were unresponsive, with none of them publicly speaking about the unfolding crisis (Phillip, O'Keefe, Miroff, & Paletta, 2017). The President went to a political rally, discussed the United States travel ban, started twitter feuds with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un and the National Football League, but said nothing about the Puerto Rican disaster (Phillip, O'Keefe, Miroff, & Paletta, 2017). After the long weekend, the president tweeted that Puerto Rico was in bad shape but that sadly the debt they owed to Wall Street and banks had to be dealt with (Meyer, 2017). Eight days after the hurricane struck, the President still had not visited the island, but did temporarily lift the Jones Act to allow ships not flying the U.S. flag to access the islands main port to deliver aid (Meyer, 2017). It took him 8 days to reach the decision to lift the Jones Act for 10 days because "a lot of shippers and a lot of people that work in the shipping industry didn't want the Jones Act lifted" (Brown, 2017).

After 13 days the president visited Puerto Rico, but his visit fueled even more controversy. He started by saying in a press conference that Puerto Rico had thrown the U.S. budget "out of whack," and he also stated that in comparison to Katrina, María was not really that bad because Katrina was a "real disaster." He argued that if María left 16 deaths in comparison to the hundreds of deaths that Katrina left, Puerto Ricans should be proud (Meyer, 2017). Comparing death tolls to measure how "real" a disaster is is not only incredibly insensitive and dehumanizing, but it also rested on informational inaccuracy. Talking about a the figure of 16 deaths two weeks after the hurricane was actually premature, because even though the official count had that number, government officials expected it go up and other media and

research organizations had data that put the death count much higher (Graham, 2017).

Furthermore, the President met with survivors of the catastrophe and tossed paper towels at the

crowd like it was a basketball game (Graham, 2017).

Image 57: Trump throws paper towel

Soure: CNN

Also, before and during his visit to the island, Trump took several opportunities to criticize the

Mayor of San Juan, Carmen Yulin Cruz, because she had been very critical of FEMA and White

House efforts to help the island (Graham, 2017).

It is important to point out that the president and the White House were not the only

actors from the federal government to mishandle disaster response. In an article developed by the

investigative branch of Politico Magazine, it was found that there was a double standard when it

came to disaster response efforts to help Puerto Rico in the wake of María in comparison to the

efforts to help Texas in the wake of Harvey (Vinik, 2018).

The following image represents a comparison of how disaster response was handled the first nine

days after the storms hit between hurricane Maria and hurricane Harvey, which affected Puerto

Rico and Texas respectively.

FEMA and the federal government's response to Hurricane María was actively slow. Here is a

list detailed by Politico of all the ways Puerto Rico became an afterthought for FEMA, the

military, and the White House in comparison with other states that suffered catastrophes like

Texas or Florida (Vinik, 2018).

- Mike Byrne, a widely acknowledged star of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, remained in Houston, even though Harvey recovery efforts were well underway.

- It took at least three weeks after Maria before Puerto Rico had more than 70 helicopters helping in recovery efforts; compared to six days for Houston.

- It took just 10 days for FEMA to approve permanent disaster work for Texas, compared with 43 days for Puerto Rico.

- Seventy-eight days after each hurricane, FEMA had approved 39 percent of federal applications for relief from victims of Harvey, versus 28 percent for Maria.

- The federal government has already begun funding projects to help make permanent repairs to Texas infrastructure. In Puerto Rico, that funding has not started, as local officials continue to negotiate the details of an experimental funding system that the island agreed to adopt after they were forced to take it or not have money.

- FEMA was mostly absent during the initial days after the storm.

- Puerto Rico, with a single, non-voting delegate in the House, can't hold up White House nominations. The territory doesn't have a full delegation of lawmakers — or congressional staffers — to put pressure on FEMA. So it's unable to pressure congress to get the aid it needs (Vinik, 2018).

Like the response by the state government, the federal government also failed the people

of Puerto Rico when it came to disaster response. Their inefficiency had an impact on how fast

people were saved, and on how fast the island will be able to recover after the disaster. To this

day, 6 months after María struck the island, 156,000 people still don't have access to power and

people keep dying of preventable deaths like diabetes, heart attacks, and sleep apnea because

they don't have appropriate access to electricity in order to power necessary medical equipment or to store their medication (Sutter, 2018).

Furthermore, the hurricane in combination with government inefficiency at both the state and the federal level is responsible for accelerating an already ongoing mass migration process in the island (EFE, 2017). It is estimated that at least 100,000 Puerto Ricans left the island in the six weeks after the hurricane struck and that number is expected to triple by 2020 (Péres, 2018). This massive migration is already impacting the health funds destined for Puerto Rico from the Medicare and Medicaid federal programs; which will inevitably impact Puerto Rico's aging population access to affordable care (Péres, 2018).

Description

Hurricane María through Memes

Before, during, and after the disaster, content related to hurricane María was developed and distributed on the internet. Incredibly enough, Internet memes don't stop, not even in the wake of a disaster like María. Several print and digital media organizations and blogs published articles about the creation of internet memes before and after the hurricane (Metro PR & El Calce, 2017). Know Your Meme even has a page dedicated to the meme content generated by people in the wake of María (Know Your Meme, 2017).

Table IV

Before	
Content	Image Number/ Date/ Description/ Source

	Image 58: Saving Rich Port Date: Before September 20 Description: The meme makes a reference to the movie Saving Private Ryan but the creators changed the people in the original poster and place Puerto Rican political figures that by no means are serving Puerto Rico as it was expected. They also refer to Puerto Rico as Rich Port, the English literal translation Puerto Rico that was create when Statehood won the last plebiscite in the island. Source: Lloripari
	Image 59 & 60: ATT Maria & Tres Reyes Magos Dete: Before September 20 Description: Both images talk about the Hurricane in Biblical terms. Making a reference between the name of the hurricane, the mother of jesus christ, and other holy figures from the bible. Source: El Calce
	Image 61: Take it out again Date: Before September 20 Description: The memes discusses disaster preparedness. It asks the users if they were storing canned foods for the Hurricane Irma, that they had to take them back out because of Hurricane María.

	Source: El Calce
	Image 62: Ricky and María

Date: Before September 20

Description: The memes references on of Ricky Martin's (Puerto Rico pop singer) mayor musical hits: María and uses the lyrics of the song to talk about the Hurricane.

Source: Facebook |
| | Image 63, 64, & 65: Ada Monzón Lives

Date: Before September 20

Description: All meme reference local weather reporter Ada Monzón live streaming news about the upcoming Hurricane. The memes reflect the anxiety, sadness, and scary thoughts that everyone was going through the days before the Hurricane hit the island.

Source: Facebook |

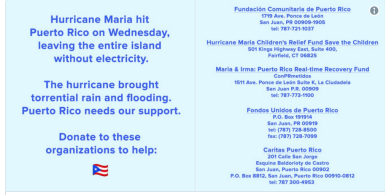|	
	Image 66: Luz & Puerto Rico Date: Before September 20 Description: Memes shows places in a world map where there are power outages before any natural disaster or incident and they it shows Puerto Rico as the only place where that happens. Source: PR Memes
	Image 67: Being Fucked Date: Before September 20 Description: Using an image of dogs having sex the meme illustrates how Puerto Rico got fucked by Hurricane Irma and the María. Then it illustrates the ambivalence of the U.S. government by showing another dog that is not participating in the sex. Finally it talks about José which is a doble reference to both a storm that came close to Puerto Rico called José before María and Joseph from the Bible. Source: PR Memes
	Image 68: Pope and María Date: Before September 20 Description: It showcases a video of the Pope being messed up by winds and then says "Nobody is safe from my winds" Source: Hurricane María Facebook Page

During

Content	Image Number/ Date/ Description/ Source
Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico on Wednesday, leaving the entire island without electricity. The hurricane brought torrential rain and flooding. Puerto Rico needs our support. Donate to these organizations to help:	Image 69: Information Date: The week of September 20th Description: Post of general information were you could find help and also donate money. The priority was getting information out to people that needed it. Source: Facebook
	Image 70: Pray for Puerto Rico Date: The week of September 20th Description: The diaspora developed memes asking for prayers for the people in Puerto Rico and other places affected by natural disasters like Mexico.
After	

Content	Image Number/ Date/ Description/ Source
	Image 71: Sex and María Date: A month after September 20th Description: Meme references a fake porno page. The page is showcases things that activate Puerto Rican desire as porno elements part of the page. The things that make Puerto Rican's 'horny' are: electric power, ice, being able to wash their clothes, and having air conditioner. Source: Facebook
	Image 72: Vaporwave Ada Monzón Date: A month after September 20th Description: Meme of Ada Monzón as vaporwave. It was created as an ode to the reporter for her had work. Source: Lloirpari
	Image 73, 74, & 75: Trump Paper Towel Date: A month after September 20th Description: Memes 73 to 74 make reference to Donald Trump's visit to Puerto Rico where he threw paper towels at Hurricane Survivors like as if he were on a basketball court. It was met with derision from Puerto Ricans who saw the gesture as demeaning and dismissive of the Puerto Rican situation. Source: El Calce

TU CARA CUANDO **SE VA LA LUZ**	Image 76: Your face when the electricity goes out Date: A month after September 20th Description: It show a black screen and then says: "My face when there is a power outage" and you can't see the face because there is no electricity. Source: PR Memes
AQUÍ ESPERANDO **QUE LLEGUE LA LUZ** "Quédate en casa, tengo planta."	Image 77,78,79, & 80: Waiting for electricity to come Date: A month after September 20th Description: Memes 77 to 80 make reference to Puerto Ricans desire to have electricity back on their households. They make fun of the inefficiency of PREPA and laugh at their own situation. Source: PR Memes

  Es que no me tienen paciencia. VEO QUE TIENES MUCHAS COSAS POR HACER SERIA UNA PENA QUE SE CAYERA EL SISTEMA	
  ¿HAS RECIBIDO ALGUNA AYUDA? SI NO NADA AÚN	Image 81: Have you received any help Date: A month after September 20th Description: Meme asks people to answer with Facebook's like expression buttons to see if they've gotten the help the need. Source: PR Memes
  Jose Bonilla Santiago shared Just another meme page's post. February 3 Durante María	Image 82: During María Date: A month after September 20th Description: Memes references how boring it was when they had no power because of María that they had to play with cards with their cats. Source: Facebook

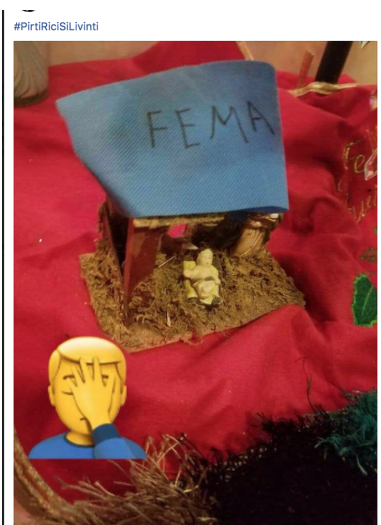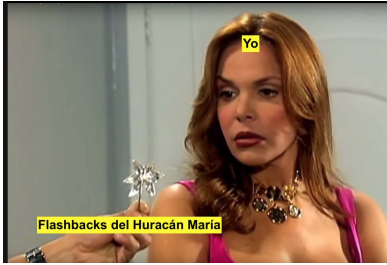|	
	Image 83: Spiderman/Puerto Rico- Florida Date: A month after September 20th Description: Meme ferefences Puerto Rico's Max exodus to florida after the Hurricane because the conditions on the island were horrible. Source: Facebook
	Image 84: Ricky and Costumes Date: A month after September 20th Description: Meme criticizes the governor for playing dress up to pretend he is working on the emergency when people were going through hardships. Source: Twitter
	Image 85 and 86: Puerto Rico se levanta Date: A month after September 20th Description: Meme 85 references FEMA's inefficiency by placing a Fema's famous blue ceilings in a nativity scene to criticize their poor job. Meme 86 is a backlash against a slogan about Puerto Rican resilience because it doesn't showcase that people are still suffering. Source: #puertoricoselevanta Facebook

	Image 87: María Flashbacks Date: A month after September 20th Description: Meme uses the Telenovela prompt for flashbacks to talk about collective PTSD months after the Hurricane hit the Island. Source: Lloripari

Before

Before the hurricane came to the island the memes generated were related to the imminent strike of the storm to the island. People were making religious jokes about the hurricane because it was named after María (Mary) the mother of Jesus Christ. Before hurricane María was announced there was another hurricane named José (Joseph) that had gone by the island, so many memes drew the connections between Mary and Joseph and other biblical traditions like Three Kings Day and developed memes in relation to that. People also made cultural references to popular Puerto Rican songs that talk about winds and candles to talk about how María was going to take commodities away. Puerto Ricans also discussed disaster

preparedness, and how they bought canned foods and products before the hurricane. Images 63 to 65 showcaed interesting memes generated before the hurricane. The memes had to do with how anxious people felt in response to Ada Monzón, weather reports. Ada Monzón is a local weather news reporter who was in charge of giving updates about the storm; as the storm progressed towards Puerto Rico people became increasingly anxious about her reports and that anxiousness was reflected in the memes that were created in the island. Another interesting angle of meme production came from criticizing U.S. ambivalence towards Puerto Rico's possible disaster situation, and also criticizing existent infrastructural problems in the island.

During

During the hurricane and immediately after it passed, people (both in the diaspora and people in the island) were preoccupied with getting aid delivered, assessing damages, and getting in touch with their loved ones. People didn't necessarily create memes, but used their format to distribute information. People distributed information about where to send help, how to communicate with loved ones, and the classic "thoughts and prayers." People in the island were unable to share or communicate with anyone, because the entire island had no power and the communication grid was also severely affected.

After

A couple weeks and months after the hurricane, memes started to resurface. It is difficult to know if who was generating and sharing the content: if it was people in the island who somehow had access to electricity and cell reception, or if it was primarily people in the Puerto Rican diaspora that disseminated the content online. Two of the major topics of discussion were the #puertoricoselevanta/#pirtiricisilivinti meme and the Donald Trump throwing hand towel

memes. The first, #puertoricoselevanta (Puerto Rico will stand), was an attempt at building up spirit and resiliency within the Puerto Rican community, and many people embraced the slogan in the time of need. Image 86, show the second instance of #puertoricoselevanta, #pirtiricisilivinti. #pirtiricisilivinti was an ironic take on the use of the tag because the situation in the island was bad and progressively getting worse. People changed the vocals for i as a form of pig latin to signal that nothing had changed, that things were as bad as or worse than before, and that saying different was hypocritical and unnecessary. Puerto Ricans were calling out the movement by building irony to the movement itself. Another popular meme, was generated after president Trump threw paper towels at hurricane survivors like he was in a basketball game when he visited the island two weeks after the hurricane. Images 73 to 75 illustrate how users found it incredibly disrespectful, and compared the president's actions to the scene of the *wolf of wall street* movie where Leonardo Dicaprio flashes his wealth at FBI officials.

Puerto Ricans also took the time to criticize state government institutions and government officials as well as FEMA because of their lack of preparedness and their inability to help in a time of need. Through memes, people suggested that Ricardo Rosselló, Puerto Rico's governor, was playing dress up by using disaster preparedness gear, rather than actually helping improve the situation for people on the island. They criticized PREPA's inability to make effective power restoration efforts, because of the recurrent power outages that occurred even after power had reached some parts of the island.

People also created memes to express how their immediate desires and necessities had changed after the hurricane hit the island. People joked about being aroused by the hope of getting electric power, ice, water and food. One meme recommended that if you were lucky

enough to have a power generator, you could use that fact as a pick-up line to get anyone you liked to be your partner.

Finally, through memes people are also making references to the PTSD they are suffering after the event by using Telenovela imagery that references traumatic flashbacks. They discuss how if the sky turns grey and there are rain and wind sounds, they get flashbacks to the awful times they had to withstand during and after hurricane María hit the island.

Content & Interviews

Content Analysis

I believe the memes and content generated about María represent the different attitudes and thoughts of the Puerto Rican population in an event as intense as this one. People used a diverse range of aesthetic styles to communicate their ideas and made use of familiar meme concepts and rhetoric to make their voices heard. Even though the aesthetic styles used were diverse they all fall under what is deemed the "normie" aesthetic style. Normie styles are aesthetic style that follow the norm or mainstream standards for image macros; the people that use the standar are usually the last people to remix and share an internet memes before this one becomes irrelevant (Urban Dictionary, 2016).

Sharing and remixing normie memes became a way to deal with, vent, and survive a dire situation for the Puerto Rican population and the diaspora. I think they were used as a form of catharsis by the people that were sharing them and creating them. There are a wide set of memes that are focused solely on expressing emotional states around the event. Emotions like: fear,

anxiety(Image 63 to 65), anger (Image 84 to 86), and shock(Image 87) are prevalent themes in the content creation. In the case of María memes became an outlet to express thoughts and emotions, rather than a discussion platform. Political critique was done by using comedy to display raw emotional discontent, rather than using the comedic/satiric tropes for engaging political discussion and critique. The vulnerability and sensitivity displayed through the jokes served as space to generate empathy and meaningful thought around such a traumatic event.

Interview Analysis

The second part of this cases study involved discussing hurricane Maria memes with Puerto Ricans in the island and the diaspora. Thirty two participants agreed to be surveyed and responded to an online questionnaire. The survey questions asked the interviewees about their knowledge and experience in three key areas. The first questions asked about the interviewees general perception of internet memes and if they thought meme were useful tools for political critique and political impact impact. The second line of questioning, asked them about their tool usage and time investment in content generation; as well their thought on meme production patterns/distribution patterns. The third and final line of questioning asked about their motivation and inspiration for generating content, and how that related to context of the hurricane María.

The survey was posted on my personal Facebook profile as a 'public post' and it was shared 10 times by Facebook friends and friends of friends. The survey was also posted on a closed facebook community group called: LLORIPARI 🎈 . It was promoted by friends and group participants calling on their friends to participate on filling out the survey. Even though nothing was offered in exchange for participating, people participated and shared the survey because they 'understood the difficulties of researching in pursuing an academic degree".

The general profile of the people that responded to the survey is really interesting. The majority of the people self identified as hispanic (10), latino (11), or Puerto Rican (5), and the minority identified as white (2), American (1), or decided not to provide the information (3). In terms of gender the majority of the respondents self-identified as women (23) and the minority self identified as men (7), non-binary (1), or chose to not disclose (1). When it came to age the majority of the respondents (18) fit the 25 to 34 years of age bracket, (8) fit the 35 to 44 age bracket, and (6) fit the 18 to 24 years of age bracket. When asked about their employment status (17) declared to be employed and 15 declared to be unemployed. In terms of education (11) of the interview participants said they had a bachelor's degree, (9) said they had a master's degree, (6) said they had an associate's degree, (5) said they had a high school diploma, and (1) decided not disclose. Finally, when asked where they were when hurricane María hit the island, most (24) of them responded that they were on the island, while a few (8) were elsewhere.

The general profile of the person that agreed to be surveyed was: a hispanic/latinx woman, between the ages 25 to 34, with some degree of higher education, currently living on the island, who might or might not be employed.

Everyone that was surveyed said that they participate in meme culture in one way or another; all of the respondents with the exception of three people said they mainly share pre-created content rather than creating original content themselves. The general topics that inspire people to share memes are comedy and politics. Politics was mentioned countless of times as one of the themes that drives people to share memes online. Other popular themes are philosophical topics like existentialism and nihilism, as well as mental health and education. In terms of tools, meme creators said they use google images, photoshop, and meme generators.

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The majority of respondents said that they mainly share memes on Facebook and Whatsapp; other social media platforms were mentioned (Twitter, Instagram, Tubmlr, and Snapchat) but they are not the ones generally used. The survey was mainly distributed through facebook, so that may explain why the platform dominates as a reported tool for sharing. Nevertheless, people usually used more than one platform at a time to access and share content. Likewise, most of the survey respondents said they spent various minutes and hours in a day scrolling and looking at memes to share.

When discussing how hurricane María related to meme creation and sharing, the survey participants said that before and during the hurricane they were able to communicate with each other and their families through the use of cellphones and social media, but once the hurricane hit the island they mostly visited each other in person because there was no cell reception. After three weeks most people started to get reception back and were able to use their phones again. All of the participants said that they saw memes before and 3 weeks after the events, but that immediately after they didn't see anything because they didn't have access to electricity or the internet. The topics that they saw before the hurricanes had to do with religious and weather jokes, then 3 weeks after most of the memes were related to government inefficiency/sluggishness and not having access to basic necessities like water, food supplies, and electricity. When asked if they shared memes, many (20) of the respondents said they didn't share memes because they thought they were not funny, it wasn't the time to share memes, or it wasn't a priority. On the other hand, some (11) respondents said they did share memes when they had the opportunity and they did it mainly to vent, express their feelings, laugh at their own tragedy, and to critique the government inefficiency that surrounded the whole disaster process.

Finally, when asked about the the importance of memes for political critique, many (20) of the participants argued that memes were extremely important because they help spread information, they help people gain consciousness about important topics, and they can serve as a measure of public opinion and sentiment around any topic. The other (10) respondents said that they didn't believe they were effective or useful because elected officials/people in power didn't care about what people thought. Finally, the last (2) people claim that they just couldn't judge the effectiveness of memes as political critique tools.

Conclusion #Case Study 3

This case study illustrates how, even in times of incredible distress, internet memes are present. However, during disaster, people approach meme creation and distribution from a completely different angle: memes were used for catharsis. They were used to express frustration, need, anger and general anxiety, which clearly translated to effective political critique messaging. People are aware of the potential that memes have as a medium/content space, even if they don't agree with their deployment on every occasion. I think it is particularly interesting that participants see memes as objects that can potentially help create a more conscientious population. Furthermore, even though many participants said that they didn't partake in the creation or sharing of memes in the context of the hurricane, there was a lot of content created/disseminated about the topic. Some of the participants even said that they experienced meme culture by way of friends and family when they met them in person. There was a general understanding around the ubiquitousness and inescapability of memes that permeated their discussions in these cases.

As the content analysis and the interviews showed, in this case study, there are no particular content creators or remixers that centrally manage content and then distribute it. The main participation or engagement functions in this chase have to do with curation and sharing. The content was generally curated by multiple users in multiple pages that engage with a wide array of topics. Pages like PR memes, for example, will share anything and everything that has to do with Puerto Rico regardless of if it fits with an aesthetic element or creative choice in their page. Likewise, this case study showcases the function of what I call 'sharers'. Sharers are people that don't create, curate or remix internet memes they only share the content with others. The sharer's main goal is to make their pears laugh and finding relatable content that can make the forge stronger relationships with people online.

The functions performed by curators and sharers in this case study were fundamental in making internet memes an integral part of development of culture in the wake of the natural disaster. The jobs performed by people that were committed to internet culture and politics was able to create a space for dissent, catharsis, and political critique that was fundamental Puerto Rican discussion of Hurricane María. I believe memes as tools for political critique are here to stay, and have been used in interesting and effective ways to initiate dialogue, express discontent, and critique any institution or establishment.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have explored how memes are deployed by Puerto Ricans on the island and in the diaspora to push forward political critique and political work. I believe this work produced seven major conclusions related to internet memes and meme culture. First, the case studies demonstrated that content continuity, commitment, building trust, and investing time are key elements of engaging with internet political meme culture. Second, the studies show that aesthetic choices (color, images, fonts) as well as rhetorical tone and popular culture references are used purposely to disrupt and create new meanings. Moreover, the work showed that the aesthetic choices, rhetorical tone and media incorporation (video, sound, images, etc) was used to convey the ineffable. Incorporating multiple elements allowed creator to express those feelings, sensations, and ideas that they couldn't put into words. Meme culture has to do with finding the perfect combination of elements to express a very specific feeling, emotion, or idea. The third main conclusion is that internet memes are a global language that can be creolized and appropriated to deliver messages in a local setting for political disruption. Furthermore, the appropriation can result in the development in new identities and meanings for the local communities that deployed them. Fourth, the case studies illustrate that internet memes can be used as catharsis instruments in times of political distress and natural disasters. Creating memes, sharing them, or participating in meme culture allowed Puerto Rican internet users to feel empowered about their situation. They engage with internet meme content in order to create bonds with other people and engage in productive discussion. Fifth, internet memes are part of a broader media ecology. They simultaneously influence and are influenced by other media

elements; people's participation in social media and meme culture serves to amplify whatever message is already happening or to showcase interests that are not being covered by traditional media. Sixth, meme production resembles a humorous collective storytelling process that ends when the majority of participants either get tired of the joke or understand it.

As I explored the three case studies, the final thing that became apparent was that not everyone participates in meme culture equally; not everyone is a meme creator. Through interviews, a short survey, and content analysis, I developed evidence that there are possibly four meme engagement types: meme creators, remixers, curators, and sharers. Meme creators are people who create original content. They integrate images or video with text, fonts, colors, and other aesthetic choices to deliver a message or an idea. Remixers are people who take that idea and put their own spin on it; they add new elements, develop new text iterations, and so on. Curators are people who select, gather, and integrate meme content under a theme, be it stylistic, conceptual or topic related. They aggregate content and promote it on web spaces that they control, such as Facebook pages or other social media platforms . Curators also receive user submissions, review them, and share some of them via social media. Finally, there are sharers, people that see memes online and share them with their peers, mainly to be funny but also to discuss topics that are relevant to them, like politics, mental health, and academics. Any given person can assume multiple roles when it comes to participating in meme culture, and most people wouldn't necessarily self-identify with any of my proposed categories. Nevertheless, I believe that understanding the types of practices that these categories of meme participation entail could be instrumental to understand and use participatory content creation for political critique.

Finally, I believe that there are two additional interesting avenues to further expand on meme research. First, some meme creators expressed concerns about the role that artificial intelligence and algorithms will play on their ability to create and share content. They are worried with Facebook's content policy change of showing mostly friends and family content in news feeds their content will get buried in a sea of ads and personal posts. This change would impact the reach their content has and it will be detrimental to their creative process. Nevertheless, there is little to no academic research going into understanding how the affordances of specific platforms facilitate or constrain meme production and circulation. Research should consider a comparative study of social media affordances and meme output as a way of understanding what their effect is. A second avenue of research could involve interviewing and engaging with people involved in the four types of meme engagement described above so that we are able to understand the scope of each type of engagement and what are the task that it involves.

Being able to learn about a participatory and collective creation process that looks to engage in self reflection and referencing, humor and relatability- all the while acknowledging that everything is up for critique- is worth exploring. Puerto Rican creators, remixers, curators and sharers have established an interesting meme culture media ecosystem that has allowed them to engage politically with other media and governmental institutions. My hope is that in the future this organically created space can be either be replicated or used to develop more intentional lines of political collaboration and communication.

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