

La gran marcha del pueblo de Puerto Rico:

Content analysis and intertextuality in Puerto Rican protest signage

1.0 Introduction

During the summer of 2019, Puerto Rico had one of the most intense and persistent social movements in its modern history. Responding to the now infamous leaked Telegram group chat, where the former Puerto Rican governor Ricardo Rosselló and his closest advisors engaged in politically incorrect and scandalous conversations, Puerto Ricans repudiated the content of the group chat and took to the streets demanding his resignation. Seals (2011) cites Halliday (1978) stating that “signs tell us something about the world and position us in relation to someone or something in it” (p. 192). Protest signs were the medium to express the dissent of many Puerto Ricans towards the leaked chat and Rosselló’s administration.

This essay explores the protest signage of *La Gran Marcha del Pueblo de Puerto Rico*, the massive protest that occurred on July 22, 2019 as part of the *#RickyRenuncia* (*#RickyResign*) social movement. Dabbour (2017) comments on protest signs stating that they “usually denote objection or disapproval to an official entity” (p. 142). Many of the protest signs of *La Gran Marcha del Pueblo de Puerto Rico* use text to express their discontent with Rosselló’s administration and political scandals. For the purpose of this paper, we will analyze the thematic content of the signage, the function of intertextuality as a contestant mechanism by protestors and its sociocultural and contextual meaning through signage. To do so, the following research questions were generated:

- 1) Which themes are evidenced in the protest signage?
- 2) How does intertextuality create a contestant voice by protestors?
- 3) Is the protest signage socioculturally relevant?

2.0 #*TelegramGate* and protest movements in Puerto Rico

The Puerto Rican protest mobilizations occurred after the *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo* (Center of Investigative Journalism), a non-profit Puerto Rican journalist organization, published an article about the now infamous Telegram chats of former governor Ricardo Rosselló and his cabinet on July 11, 2019. The article contained a link with a PDF document of the 889 pages of the Telegram group chat. This scandal was later coined as *TelegramGate* (or #*TelegramGate* in social media).

Rosselló and his intimate advisors received extreme backlash and discontent from Puerto Ricans and the international community. An article published in Reuters.com summarizes the content of the group chat:

They show how Rosselló and his closest advisors, including former and current public officials, public relations operatives and the governor's former campaign manager, exchanged memes, derogatory, misogynistic and homophobic comments, as well as jokes about journalists, politicians and activists in a Telegram group chat. The messages further include public policy discussions, sharing of confidential government information and political campaign work, despite the presence of individuals who were not public officials at the time. (Valentín, 2019)

Aside from this, the group chat included insensitive comments about the victims of Hurricane María and corrupt schemes, much to the discontent of Puerto Ricans. The New York Times (2019) published an article that expands on the sociopolitical Puerto Rican situation:

They amount to a rejection of decades of mismanagement by leaders who always seemed to benefit while ordinary Puerto Ricans suffered. Grievances have been building up over

12 years of economic recession, a debt crisis that has prompted layoffs and cutbacks in public services and the botched response to Hurricane Maria.

The discourse utilized in the chat was widely deemed morally and politically unacceptable. After TelegramGate, Rosselló solicited the resignation of various members of his cabinet, yet he still remained in power acknowledging his wrong-doing and stating that he had not committed illegal acts in the chat. However, this scandal was a detonator for many Puerto Ricans to begin massive protest movements in Old San Juan and the island demanding Rosselló's resignation with the *#RickyRenuncia* (*#RickyResign*) motto.

Hanauer (2012) explains that “the aim of a political demonstration is to influence public opinion, give public presence to specific political positions and change (or form) public understanding, policy and law” (p. 141). We can establish that protestors had a similar aim: Rosselló's resignation. Dabbour (2017) defines a mobilization as “a process that changes the individuals or groups from being passive to be active actors in order to participate collectively in public life” (p. 147). The majority of the protest mobilizations occurred at *Calle Fortaleza*, a street in Old San Juan that leads to *La Fortaleza*, the governor's residence. The first mobilization occurred on July 15, 2019 when a group of citizens marched to *La Fortaleza* to express their dissent of TelegramGate. Police forces were dispatched and stationed in the vicinity of *La Fortaleza* during the protest movements. As most of the outcomes of these protests, the protestors were scattered with tear gas and rubber bullets forcefully used by the police, leaving approximately 20 hurt and five arrested in this protest. By July 17, the first massive protest was convened with the help of famous Puerto Rican artists, such as Residente, Bad Bunny, Ricky Martin, Tommy Torres, and Karla Monroig. Many citizens around Puerto Rico also assembled pacific protests at their hometowns in support of the protestors at Old San Juan. The latter

gathered at the Capitol and marched to the governor's residence. This mobilization ended in a violent confrontation between the police and the protestors, which led to several hurt and journalists caught between the crossfire. After the July 17 protest, many creative mobilizations were summoned by different sectors. Some protests included: yoga classes, ballroom dancing and voguing, maritime mobilizations, scheduled pot banging (*Cacerolazos*), readings out loud of the Telegram chats, and so on. After this protest, a call by various sectors was sent through social media to convene at *Expreso Las Américas*, a highly transited highway in San Juan, for a national march on July 22nd at 9:00 a.m. On July 21st, Puerto Rican singers Residente and Ricky Martin summoned Puerto Ricans via social media to take to the streets in what is now known as *La Gran Marcha del Pueblo de Puerto Rico* (Own translation: The Great March of the People of Puerto Rico).

3.0 *La Gran Marcha del Pueblo de Puerto Rico* and Rosselló's resignation

Meadows (2018) quotes Tilly and Wood (2015) stating that social movements serve “as a major mechanism for ordinary people to participate in public politics and define them as a series of contentious events in the campaigns of ordinary people making claims on others” (p. 5). This participation of ordinary Puerto Ricans as active protestors in public politics was evidenced in *La Gran Marcha del Pueblo de Puerto Rico*, the most active and massive march during the protest mobilizations against Rosselló and his cabinet. Situated at *Expreso Las Américas*, *La Gran Marcha* was a success among protestors. It was estimated that thousands of protestors attended the national strike. Many Puerto Ricans artists, like Residente, Ricky Martin, Bad Bunny, Ednita Nazario, Kany García, and so on, participated in it. After the march, many protestors marched to the governor's residence; this ultimately resulted in a confrontation between the participants and the police.

After nearly two weeks of intense mobilizations and strikes by Puerto Ricans and international communities, Ricardo Rosselló resigned as governor of Puerto Rico on July 24, 2019 through a video streamed on his official Facebook page. He was succeeded by the current governor Hon. Wanda Vázquez, former Secretary of Justice. His resignation was officiated on August 2, 2019. He is the first democratically elected governor in Puerto Rican history to not complete his term in office.

4.0 Methodology

To analyze the thematic content of the protest signage in *La Gran Marcha del Pueblo de Puerto Rico*, the researcher published a post on his personal Twitter account on July 27 asking users to submit pictures of the different *#RickyRenuncia* protest movements in Puerto Rico or abroad. The post was retweeted 637 times and 328 replies were uploaded in it. The researcher downloaded approximately 500 pictures that were submitted voluntarily by Twitter users. No other social media were used to collect data.

To select the data corresponding to *La Gran Marcha del Pueblo de Puerto Rico*, the following criteria were used to choose the sample of the protest signs:

- It must include text.
- It must be legible.
- It must be written in Spanish or English.
- It must be physically situated in *Expreso Las Américas* and nearby areas in San Juan where the national march occurred.

After applying the criteria to the pictures submitted by Twitter users, 176 pictures met the requirements established for this research. In the case where a picture had multiple protest signs

in it, each one counted as an individual data sample. This will serve as a representative sample of the protest signage used in *La Gran Marcha del Pueblo de Puerto Rico*.

To analyze the protest signage, the researcher used the conceptual framework of the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Corbin, 2017). There are many considerations of the grounded theory that significantly relate to this research. Corbin & Strauss (1990) developed 11 canons and procedures in order to use the approach accordingly. The canons are:

- 1) data collection and analysis are interrelated processes.
- 2) concepts are the basic units of analysis.
- 3) categories must be developed and related.
- 4) sampling in grounded theory proceeds on theoretical grounds.
- 5) analysis makes use of constant comparisons.
- 6) patterns and variations must be accounted for.
- 7) process must be built into the theory.
- 8) writing theoretical memos is an integral part of doing grounded theory.
- 9) hypotheses about relationships among categories should be developed and verified as much as possible during the research process.
- 10) a grounded theorist need not work alone.
- 11) broader structural conditions must be analyzed, however microscopic the research (pp. 6 – 12).

The methodology of this framework is qualitative in nature and it “utilizes actual data gathered through field work to identify, develop, and integrate concepts” (Corbin, 2017, p. 301). To organize the data, categories are developed to create concepts that pertain to the phenomenon

under study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5). The categories found in this research were created through constant comparison and contrast of the most salient and repetitive concepts. As stated by Corbin & Strauss (1990), categories “are generated through the same analytic process of making comparisons to highlight similarities and differences” (p. 7) among the concepts.

Another crucial consideration is the role of the actor, in this case, the protestors. As mentioned by Corbin & Strauss (1990), “grounded theory seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to consequences of their actions” (p. 5). Overall, grounded theory is an ongoing verification of concepts and categories through a solid theoretical framework. It is an active process of analysis and finding relationships in the data. Once categories are thoroughly related, then concepts can be interconnected for theory formulation.

5.0 Findings

The analysis revealed various recurring themes and intertextuality to the Telegram group chat scandal. The discussion of the findings is subdivided into four sections. The first section discusses the thematic content of the protest signage with examples. The second explores the signage that utilizes intertextuality as a contestant response to the Telegram chat. The third identifies the themes in protest signage written in English. The last section analyzes sociocultural relevance and how it is represented in the protest signage.

5.1 Themes in protest signage

After analyzing the protest signage sample of *La Gran Marcha del Pueblo de Puerto Rico*, the themes are: (1) call for revolution and resistance (40 pictures); (2) use of humor to express discontent and disapproval (25 pictures); (3) demands for Rosselló’s resignation (17 pictures); (4) personal attacks against Rosselló (14 pictures); (5) opposition to corruption (11

pictures); (6) crisis in the Department of Education (7 pictures); and (7) the figure of Rosselló's father, former governor Pedro Rosselló (5 pictures). Monje (2017) mentions how "texts in public spaces to be seen as dynamic and endowed with power, authority, and influence in both informational and symbolic ways" (p. 15). This is evidenced in the sample used for this research. Dabbour (2017) expands on the function of protest signage by stating that "protest signs may function as communicative and motivational forces" (p. 149).

5.1.1 Call for revolution and resistance

The protest signs under this theme express a call to Puerto Ricans for revolution and resistance (Figure 1). Protest signs mention respect and dignity as important values and virtues needed to defend the country. Also, there is a sense of pride represented through the signage that suggests an awakening by Puerto Ricans after the Telegram scandal. One of the signs reads *No podría mirar a mis hijas a los ojos y decirle que ellas viven así porque yo no me atreví a luchar* (Own translation: I could not look at my daughters' eyes and tell them that they live like this because I did not dare to fight.), which is a personal and insightful opinion by a protesting mother who actively participates in revolution as a civil and personal duty.

Defiance from Puerto Rican protestors suggests resistance and perseverance until Rosselló resigns. Furthermore, a sense of responsibility and duty is evident throughout the protest signage, as if protestors were called upon to defend their country. A sign reads *Mi pueblo despertó y se vistió de dignidad* (Own translation: My country woke up and dressed itself in dignity), which also comments on the passiveness of Puerto Ricans on the corruption schemes that have plagued the government for many years; a sense of fulfillment and pride is evident in this sign. Unity is also a recurrent theme in this revolution in which protestors acknowledge the

power in majority and union for the same cause. This signage also represents the power of democracy since the protestors have assumed the position of control and power in this situation.



Figure 1. Sample of protest signage regarding call for revolution and resistance

5.1.2 Use of humor to express discontent and disapproval

The protest signage categorized under this theme relies on humor to express the protestors’ objection to Rosselló’s scandal (Figure 2). Most of them use Internet memes and references to films to attack Rosselló’s persona while others use Latino pop culture references. One of the signs references *El Chacal* from the Chilean program *Sábado Gigante*; this was a ghost-like character that judged participants’ singing and blew a trumpet to eliminate them. The

signs reads *¡Y fuera! #Renuncia #Puerco* (Own translation: Out! #Resign #Pig), which was the phrase chanted by the public when *El Chacal* eliminated a participant; this becomes a humorous take on *El Chacal*'s chant demanding Rosselló's resignation. There also seems to be a recurrent idea alluding to preventing Rosselló's birth through the use of time travel and abortion; this is suggested through the use of condoms or the legalization of abortion to avoid scandals like the Telegram group chat. One of these signs reads *Quisiera viajar al pasado y darle esto a tu padre* (Own translation: I wish I could travel to the past and give this to your dad). In it there is a condom pack attached to the sign, which provides humor and meaning to the text. Other content included: politicians as rats, cockroaches, pigs and feces, Rosselló affecting personal lives, the governor as a psychopath, and so on. It can be argued that humor was systematically used to lighten the mood, but still be respondent and active in the protest movements as Dabbour (2017) argued in his research, "protesters used their hilarious handmade signs to build a sense of safe community among themselves as well as to mobilize the rest of population" (p. 156). This signage exemplifies how humor is a radical tool to convey strong opinions and judgments.





Figure 2. Sample of protest signage regarding humor and discontent or disapproval

5.1.3 Peoples’ demands: Rosselló’s resignation

The protest signage categorized under this theme explicitly demands the resignation of Ricardo Rosselló as the only viable option to amend the situation that caused uproar among Puerto Ricans (Figure 3). Most protest signs incorporate slurs to make poignant statements, such as *cabrón* (fucker), *puñeta* (fuck/damn), or *carajo* (fuck/damn), directed towards Rosselló. Others use faults and deficiencies of his acts referencing the content of the Telegram chat, which were deemed unacceptable and unworthy of a governor. Other signs included *#RickyRenuncia* taken from social media as part of the mobilization. One sign describes Rosselló’s action through a checklist that reads *#RickyRenuncia: mediocre, corrupto, traidor, embustero, homofóbico, misógino. ¡Te tienes que ir!* (Own translation: *#RickyResign: Mediocre, corrupt, traitor, liar, homophobic, misogynist. You have to go!*), which express the dissent of Puerto Rican protestors on the politically incorrect discourse displayed in the group chat. This signage represents the dissatisfaction and disapproval of Puerto Ricans that leads to the ultimatum triggering Rosselló’s resignation.



Figure 3. Sample of protest signage regarding Rosselló’s resignation

5.1.4 Personal attacks against Rosselló

The protest signage categorized under this theme expresses the anger and frustration of Puerto Rican protestors through the use of personal attacks towards Rosselló (Figure 4). Some signs rely on slurs and insults, such as *cabrón* (fucker) and *mamabicho* (cocksucker), while others use events from Rosselló’s past, such as the alleged plagiarism of his thesis regarding stem cells, which is referenced in the protest signage. An example of these two instances can be found in Figure 4. One sign reads *Vivo en un país donde mi celular es más inteligente que mi ¡Cabrón!* “Gobernador” #RickyRenuncia (Own translation: I live in a country where my cellphone is smarter than my fucking “governor” #RickyResign) and disregards Rosselló’s capabilities and intelligence lower than a cellphone’s. Another sign reads *¡Ricky, charlatán, ni*

las células madres te salvarán! (Own translation: Ricky, charlatan, not even the stem cells will save you!) which references Rosselló’s thesis plagiarism case and criticizes a controversy before he was governor. The signs provide opinions as to Rosselló’s performance as governor, also questioning his values and morality. Meadows (2018) states that “denigrating messages on protest signs are used to increase the value of one’s ingroup by devaluing the outgroup” (p. 29). Other signs rely on adjectives to describe additional characteristics of his personality, such as *ladrón* (burglar), *asesino* (murderer), *dictador* (dictator), and *embustero* (liar). This signage showcases the rage and uprising of Puerto Rican protestors against Rosselló by attacking his persona and competencies as governor.



Figure 4. Sample of protest signage regarding personal attacks against Rosselló

5.1.5 Opposition to corruption

The protest signage categorized under this theme focuses on the corruption schemes revealed in the Telegram scandal (Figure 5). Although the majority of the signs reject the

misogynistic, homophobic, and politically incorrect discourse of the chat, protestors also expressed their discontent with the corruption schemes that have plagued the Puerto Rican government, a controversy around different administrations that has been criticized for many years. Seals (2011) comments that “signs throughout the landscape create an image of solidarity within the protesting group and create a distancing from the government...and institutions of power” (p. 201). As is the case with Puerto Rican protestors, the signage explicitly rejects government corruption and expects solutions. One of the signs reads *La corrupción es vandalismo* (Own translation: Corruption is vandalism), which comments on the ongoing and public corruption schemes in the Puerto Rican government. Another sign that shares that line of thought reads *Los criminales no están aquí, están en Fortaleza* (Own: The criminals are not here, they are at *Fortaleza*), which pinpoints that Puerto Rican politicians are the real criminals due to their corrupt acts. Some signs demand justice while others criminalize the elected politicians. There is also the notion of corruption as an entrapment of the island, which has led to a huge financial crisis in Puerto Rico, as well as, massive migrations for better job opportunities. This signage recognizes and rejects corruption among higher officials and the government sphere.



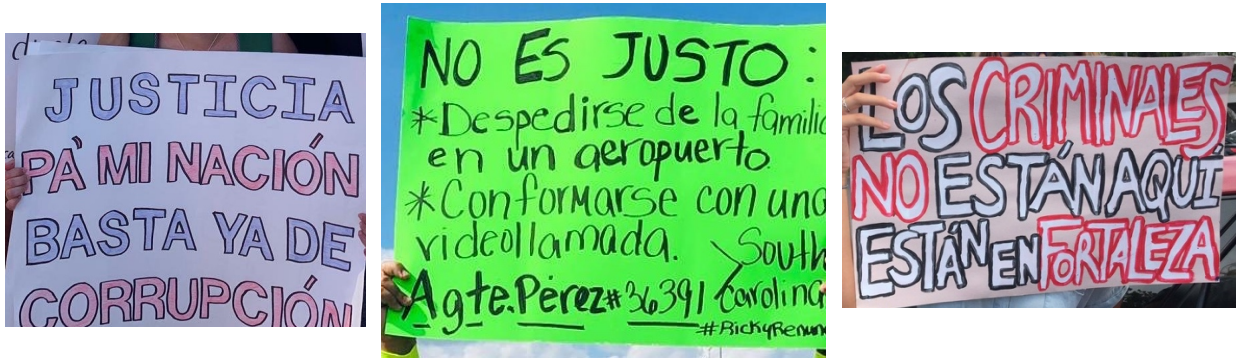


Figure 5. Sample of protest signage regarding opposition to corruption

5.1.6 Crisis in the Department of Education

The protest signage categorized under this theme brings forth the crisis in the Department of Education and its effects on Puerto Rican society (Figure 6). Prior to the release of the Telegram group chat, the former Secretary of Education, Julia Keleher, was arrested by the FBI under counts of money laundering, fraud and other similar charges. Although there is no explicit mention of Keleher's arrest in the group chat, protestors used the manifestations to express their discontent with current educational policies and outcomes. Many protestors made reference to the massive closure of schools around the island and the misuse of special education funds, which left thousands of students without professional services and therapists related to their condition in order to function in the schools, as the sign comments on this precise situation stating *Ricky y Keleher le robaron los fondos de Educación Especial a mi nieto Adrián* (Own translation: Ricky and Keleher stole the Special Education funds from my grandson Adrián).

Most signs demand accountability and reject the inhumane treatment of students. Two signs in particular read *No somos cucarachas, somos niñxs. #RickyRenuncia #EducaciónPública #EscuelasAbieras* (Own translation: We are not cockroaches, we are children. #RickyResign #PublicEducation #OpenSchools) and *Mi educación y calidad de vida se afectan con la corrupción. #RickyRenuncia* (Own translation: My education and quality of life are affected by

corruption. #RickyResign); both signs state that the Puerto Rican students and public schools are mistreated, undervalued and victims of the various political controversies in Puerto Rico. This signage represents the crisis of the Department of Education due to corruption and the disapproval by Puerto Rican protestors of such situation.



Figure 6. Sample of protest signage regarding the crisis in the Department of Education

5.1.7 Ricardo Rosselló’s father, Pedro Rosselló

The signage of the protest march categorized under this theme relates to the family lineage of Ricardo Rosselló with his father, former governor Pedro Rosselló (Figure 7). As a brief background, Hon. Pedro Rosselló was governor of Puerto Rico for eight years (1993 to 2001). He was often referred to as “The Messiah” by his followers. During his last term as governor, he faced several scandals, such as the misuse of public funds for personal gains and political campaign. Making reference to these political scandals, protestors criticize the son’s actions as corrupt as his father’s. As seen in Figure 7, one protestor claims Rosselló is the

Antichrist in reference to being Pedro RosSELLó’s son: *El hijo del Mesías resultó ser el Anticristo* (Own translation: The son of the Messiah turned out to be the Antichrist). Also, protestors mention how his paternal relationship will not help him to get out of the scandal. We can observe how protestors call to past events that are relevant to the situation at hand. One sign reads *De esta no te saca ni tu pai. #RickyRenuncia* (Own translation: Not even your dad can get you out of this one, #RickyResign), which comments on the possible political influences Pedro RosSELLó used to cover up Ricardo RosSELLó’s well-known past scandals before arriving at the governorship. This signage expresses how lineage and parental link to a previous governor cannot solve RosSELLó’s scandal.



Figure 7. Sample of protest signage regarding Ricardo RosSELLó’s father

5.2 Intertextuality in protest signage

Textual linguistics analyzes text as communication and human interaction. It can be considered part of discourse analysis. To study texts, we consider the seven traits of textuality: Cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality. Aboezz (2012) defines intertextuality as “the reproduction of a text or its structure in a different context for a range of purposes, e.g. irony, parody, humour, reverence, etc.” (p. 2). Ben Said & Kasanga (2015) also mention that intertextuality “refers to a combination

of different discourses in texts resulting in new hybrid or nodal discourses, or even new hybrid genres” (p. 78). The framework behind choosing intertextuality as a trait to analyze protest signage is the fact that there is a source that Puerto Rican protestors can use as reference: The Telegram group chat.

For the purpose of this paper, we considered the trait of intertextuality as a mechanism to create a contestant response through protest signage. Puerto Rican protestors, directly or indirectly, make reference to the Telegram group chat in order to create their protest sign texts. Three major recurrent themes were classified and cited the Telegram chat in the protest signage: Hurricane María (23 pictures), misogynistic discourse (19 pictures), and corruption (6 pictures).

5.2.1 Hurricane María

Many Puerto Ricans were outraged after a comment made by one of the members of the Telegram group chat. The comment spoke of the accumulation of dead bodies in the Forensic Science Institute after the passing of Hurricane María. He asks if there are any cadavers to feed their crows (in reference to their political opponents). Most Puerto Ricans did not appreciate this comment; in fact, it was heavily criticized. After it was informed that 4,645 people had died in the aftermath of María, Puerto Rican protestors cited this comment and the statistics in their signage (Figure 8). In this sample, many signs use the number 4,645 and *cuervos* (crows) in reference to the comment in the chat. Protestors use 4,645 as a symbol of remembrance, resistance and a voice for those who departed due to María. One sign reads *Escribe el nombre (4645) de las personas que perdiste que no debemos olvidar tras el paso del huracán María* (Own translation: Write the name (4645) of the people that you lost that we must not forget after the passing of Hurricane María) and invites protestors to write the names of people who departed in the aftermath of María, which serves as a powerful political statement against the comments

made in the chat regarding this issue. Another protest sign reads *Traigo en el alma 4,645 espíritus que me acompañan* (Own translation: I bring in my soul 4,645 spirits that accompany me), another emotional and impactful statement that appeals to Puerto Ricans that lived through the hurricane and its aftermath. The mention of *cuervos* rejects the comment made in the chat; there is an evident disavowal of the comment and the chat members.



Figure 8. Sample of protest signage regarding intertextuality and Hurricane María

5.2.2 Misogynistic discourse

A comment from the Telegram group chat that was widely criticized by Puerto Ricans used misogynistic discourse, which included the slur *puta* (whore). The comment reads: *Nuestra gente debe salir a defender a Tom y caerle encima a esta puta* (Own translation: Our people must go to defend Tom and gang up on that whore) (p. 74). This comment was directed at Puerto Rican Democratic politician Melissa Mark-Viverito. The protest signage of the national march utilizes the word *puta* in several ways, which evidences an appropriation of the slur to create a contestant response and attitude (Figure 9). An instance of this is the acronym *P.U.T.A*

(*Puertorriqueños Unidos Tomando Acción*) [Own translation: Puerto Ricans United Taking Action], widely used among protestors. Another example of appropriation of *puta* is women reclaiming the term as a symbol of resistance, pride and revolution. Claiming the slur *puta* is an evident statement of power shift and provocation by women protestors. One sign reads *Esta puta no se calla hasta que Ricky se vaya* (Own translation: This whore will not shut up until Ricky leaves), which reclaims the slur *puta* as a voice of resistance that demands Rosselló's resignation. Taking the slur as a call to action exemplifies the role of intertextuality in the protestors' contestant responses to Rosselló's scandal.



Figure 9. Sample of protest signage regarding intertextuality and misogynistic discourse

5.2.3 Corruption: *Cogemos de pendejo hasta los nuestros*

Aside from the misogynistic discourse expressed in the chat, another comment in the Telegram chat was repeated throughout many protest signs in *La Gran Marcha del Pueblo del Puerto Rico*. The comment was made by Ricardo Rosselló: *Ja! Gran trabajo guys! Cogemos de pendejo hasta los nuestros* (Telegram chat, p. 33) [Own translation: Ha! Great job, guys! We trick even our own.]. Although this is a rough translation of the comment, it utilizes a culturally relevant slur: *pendejo* (stupid, motherfucker, coward). Some protest signs quote the comment explicitly from the Telegram chat, which can be considered an intertextual mechanism to demonstrate rejection of Rosselló's administration. Other signs equated the comment to the

rampant and well-known corruption schemes from this and past administrations. Although the comment refers to tricking “our own” (in regards to politicians), protestors took offense and expanded to Puerto Ricans treated like *pendejos*. This led to the youth movement *La Generación del Yo No Me Dejo* (Own translation: The “I Won’t Yield” Generation), which was initiated in social media and promoted by Puerto Rican trap artist Bad Bunny. Rosselló’s comment enraged the younger generations, which in turn declared that he tricked the wrong generation (*Cogiste de “pendejo” a la generación equivocada*).

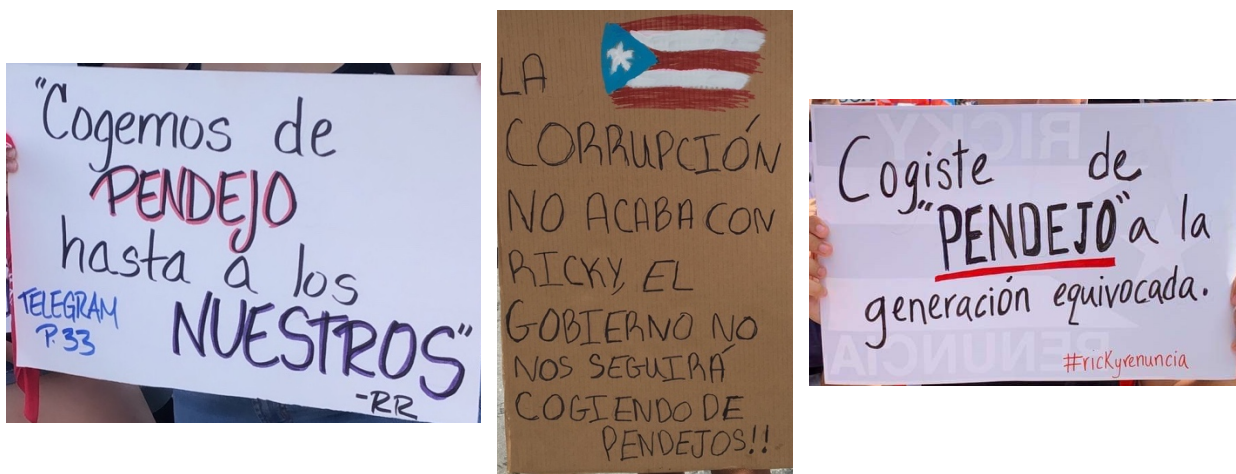


Figure 10. Sample of protest signage regarding intertextuality and corruption

5.3 Protest signage in English

Even though Puerto Rico is a Spanish speaking country, English is the official second language. It was no surprise to see protest signage in this language to express a contestant message to Rosselló’s administration. In regards of the use of English in a protest, Monje (2017) mentions that English could be “a tactical choice to appeal to audiences, ... especially for international media that could help push the revolution along” (p. 18). This might be possible due to our political and historical relationship with the United States. In this sample, six signs written in English met the requirements for this research (Figure 11). As we can see, four protest signs make reference to pop culture and media. These posters referenced the movies *Mean Girls*,

Toy Story 4, and *The Lorax* demanding Rossello’s resignation, while another poster referenced the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black* and Keleher’s arrest. One sign referenced Vincent van Gogh using a pun asking Rosselló if he is “Ready to Gogh?” as in “Ready to go?”; this is another instance of humor to demand Rosselló’s resignation. The last poster makes use of intertextuality to the Telegram group chat and responds to the message by changing the original comment to a contestant response. The message referenced in this poster reads: ““I saw the future....is woooooonderful..there are no puertorricans”” (Telegram chat, p. 868); the protestor creates a new version as a prophetic and defiant message to corrupt Puerto Rican legislators and mayors for the upcoming 2020 general elections: “*Legisladores y alcaldes*: I see the future in 2020; none of you are there. It’s wonderful!”



Figure 11. Sample of protest signage written in English

5.4 Sociocultural relevance

After discussing the themes of the protest signage and the role of intertextuality as a contestant mechanism by protestors, we need to analyze if the protest signage of *La Gran Marcha del Pueblo de Puerto Rico* can convey sociocultural relevance. We have seen the convergence of many Puerto Ricans in one major mobilization. Seals (2011) states that “all of these signs in one space create a powerful mixing of embodied and institutional symbolic capital together to share stories and start conversations at all social levels” (p. 199); the conversation he speaks of also relates to relevance and aim. The key factor to create socioculturally relevant protest signage is social and cultural contexts.

Aboelezz (2014) comments that “protest messages provide valuable contextual insights by highlighting ‘factors within knowledge, within ideology, or within domain of representations’, which situate the protest messages, not only geographically, but also socially” (p. 601), which in this case are the national march and the Telegram scandal respectively. The role of signs is not merely to convey a message; it is to represent the social and cultural ideologies and knowledge in a certain place. Ming (2014) explains systemic functional linguistics (SFL) theory stating it “provides a social perspective to language study and regards language as a social semiotic resource” (p. 1238). The language employed in the signage of Puerto Rican protest march was culturally relevant with the use of swear words, like *mamabicho*, *pendejo*, *cabrón*, which are contextually well-known among Puerto Rican protestors and society in general. Meadows (2018) further expands on the importance of protest signage saying that “they provide context for the protest itself and because they help persuade people to think in certain ways” (p. 3). Lou & Jaworski (2016) also mention that protest signage has “an indispensable role in appropriating public spaces” (p. 612), such as *Expreso Las Américas* and

nearby areas in the case of the island. Through the use of contextually relevant language, the Puerto Rican protest signage creates sociocultural relevance in the social movements.

6.0 Conclusions

Throughout the research essay, a background of the social movements and its outcomes was provided, as well as, an analysis of the thematic contents of the protest signage, intertextuality as a contestant mechanism and sociocultural relevance in the signage. Among some of the findings, seven recurrent themes were identified in the protest signage's content: call for revolution and resistance; use of humor to express discontent and disapproval; demands for Rosselló's resignation; personal attacks against Rosselló; opposition to corruption; crisis in the Department of Education; and the figure of Rosselló's father, former governor Pedro Rosselló. Contestant attitudes and responses were created through the use of intertextuality. Protestors made reference to widely criticized comments made in the Telegram group chat and even appropriated these comments to defy Rosselló's administration. Lastly, sociocultural relevance was evident through the use of knowledgeable and contextually relevant language, as well as, the messages within the protest signs that criticized the Telegram scandal and Rosselló.

For further study, a geosemiotic approach can be used to analyze the role of language and location and how *Expreso Las Américas* offers a deeper meaning to the protest signage and movement. Also, we recommend a larger sample with protest signage utilized throughout Puerto Rico during the two weeks of social mobilization. Other research can focus on describing the role of power between the protestors and Rosselló's administration and how power is conveyed in the protest signage through a critical discourse analysis approach.

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