



#HuelgaUPR: The Kidnapping of the University of Puerto Rico, Students Activism, and the Era of Trump

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For the past 100 years, Puerto Rico as an unincorporated territory of the United States, has experienced economic hardship. In 2016, President Barack Obama signed into law a bill known as PROMESA (promise) to assist Puerto Rico in the reconstruction of the economy hoping to relieve the island from its 74 billion dollar debt. PROMESA proposed to cut funds to the island's university system totaling roughly \$450 million over 3 years. In the wake of the presidential administration changing from President Barack Obama to Donald Trump, Puerto Rico filed for bankruptcy. The University of Puerto Rico (UPR), the main public university system of the island, has become a site of protests and strikes for students due to proposed cuts in the fiscal plan submitted by Gov. Ricardo Rosselló Nevares to the Fiscal Oversight and Management Board. All the universities in the UPR system are considered Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), producing college graduates that work on the island, but also stateside contributing to the United States economy. This study examines the #HuelgaUPR (strike UPR), created by student activists that attend college in UPR system. We examine newspapers (local and national), and Twitter as primary documents to understand student demands, UPR, and government responses to those demands. Through a content analysis, which is the study of sign systems intersecting with power, we seek to understand the activism that has always been a part of the culture within the UPR system. Our analysis uses Chicana/Latina feminist cultural studies (FCS) and the four tenets: intersectionality and global solidarity, breaking down dualisms, the embracing of ambiguity, and the project of tracking decolonial agency. Our findings suggests that #HuelgaUPR movement illuminates how student activism issues of free speech have proliferated since the election of Trump, and how the students of UPR resist the "kidnapping" of their institution through civil disobedience and the use of social media.

Keywords: activism, free speech, Puerto Rico, students, access

INTRODUCTION

On September 29th, 2017, about a week after Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico, causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damage to Puerto Rico's infrastructure, President Donald Trump tweeted, "...The fact is that Puerto Rico has been destroyed by two hurricanes. Big decisions will have to be made as to the cost of its rebuilding!" Unlike his response to hurricanes that happened

a few months before in Texas and Florida, where there was a sense of urgency to provide aid and hope for the region, the focus of Trump's concern was the "decisions" that had to be made on how to help the island that has been struggling through a financial crisis for years. When he visited the island in early October, he was recorded throwing paper towels and other supplies to a crowd in a relief center as if this was one of his rallies and he was throwing merchandise to his fans. Furthermore, it took immense pressure from Puerto Rican government officials to get Trump and his administration to authorize a waiver of the Jones Act so that more relief supplies can be accepted and disbursed on the island. This received a lot of criticism with much of the critique arguing that Trump is treating the people in Puerto Rico as second-class citizens.

This type of treatment, however, is nothing new for the citizens of Puerto Rico. Due to the financial crisis it has been for the past decade, the Puerto Rican government has cut public funds drastically, laid off thousands of public employees to cut costs, and increased private contracts to fuel their economy and pay off their massive debt (Morales, 2017). Arguably, the cause of the economic crisis can be traced back to Operation Bootstrap in 1947, which transformed Puerto Rico's economy from agricultural to manufacturing. The transition to a manufacturing economic model would make Puerto Rico and its people completely dependent on the U.S. In 2016, President Barack Obama signed into law the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act a bill known as PROMESA (promise) to assist Puerto Rico in the reconstruction of the economy. This law established an unelected Fiscal Control Board (FCB) to oversee the debt restructuring of the island with the power to override decisions made by the local government. This can be seen undemocratic and contradictory to the "right to self-govern" that the island has by its constitution, thus an example of the colonial relationship between the US and Puerto Rico.

Soon after PROMESA was passed, the administration of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), the major public university system of the island. Announced its austerity measures cutting approximately \$450 million over the next 3 years from the university's budget. Despite student pushback which included different proposals to raise money to pay off the debt and calling for an audit on the debt since many felt that the island was being taken advantage of by investors, the FCB remained firm on carrying out these austerity measures which led to student unrest, protests, and eventually a system wide strike (Morales, 2017).

In this article, we provide a broad overview of student activism within UPR system and a brief discussion of UPR as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Our study addresses the following question:

How does published media and social media demonstrate the ways in which students in UPR system resisted the colonial relationship between the island and the United States?

We employ a directed content analysis of the Twitter hashtag #HuelgaUPR, and articles from mainstream and alternative news sources to demonstrate how students in the UPR system

continue to resist the colonial relationship between the island and the U.S. Our analysis uses a Chicana/Latina Feminist Cultural Studies (FCS) as our theoretical framework, which reveals how students in the UPR system demonstrate the four tenets of intersectionality and global solidarity, breaking down dualisms, the embracing of ambiguity, and the project of tracking diverse modes of decolonial agency. This specific framework analyzes how social media allows for cultural productions among Puerto Rican students to be used as mediums in creating grassroots activism on a digital platform. Our findings suggest that UPR students are active agents in decolonizing modes of power and oppression.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO SYSTEM AND STUDENT ACTIVISM

Scholarship surrounding economic or social conflict in Puerto Rico must acknowledge the colonial conditions that the island has experienced since Spanish rule. As Atilés-Osoria (2013) argued,

[a]ny analysis of Puerto Rican political conflicts must start by recognizing three facts: (1) Puerto Rico has been under colonial rule for almost 520 years, the past 114 years under the United States; (2) the Puerto Rican people have experienced a high degree of polarization and politicization because of this colonial condition; and (3) the UPR is not exempt from the country's colonial and social conflicts (p. 106).

These colonial conditions are seen by how the UPR, and the forms of resistance developed by its students, have been stifled by laws and policies that threatened student's civil rights and participation in shared governance. In this section of the paper, we provide an overview of student activism at UPR campuses to demonstrate how its students have resisted against the administration and government to their education.

Developed out of legislation in 1903, UPR was established to train teachers to educate students on the island. In 1908, the benefits of the Morrill act were extended to the island of Puerto Rico which led to the rapid growth of UPR as it was given land to establish an agriculture school. Since then, UPR, the main public university system of Puerto Rico, has grown to encompass 11 campuses offering over 450 academic programs to about 58,000 students (University of Puerto Rico, 2018).

During its early years, much of the tension that led to protests dealt with the U.S. colonial rule of the institution's governance. When Puerto Ricans were granted United States citizenship due to the passing of the Jones Act, UPR soon created Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) programs as mandatory conscription resulted from the granting of citizenship. Seen as an effort to "Americanize" Puerto Ricans, the UPR had prohibited the display of the Puerto Rican flag on university property. Troubled by the infringement of their national pride coupled with the growing concern of U.S. intervention in Puerto Rico, students began protesting by hoisting Puerto Rican flags, denouncing the growth of ROTC programs, and critiquing the

dynamics of U.S. and Puerto Rican relations. This resistance was met with heavy surveillance by the Puerto Rican government and some students were suspended and expelled. Student activists or anyone considered to be in favor of Puerto Rican independence were monitored closely (de García, 2005).

By the 1930s, the university had restructured to accommodate its growth and respond to students concerns of university autonomy from the government. Despite this growth, students and professors were concerned that the curriculum was still predominantly English and that there were no classes about Puerto Rico or the issues affecting the island. Given that the institutional leadership was regularly changed internally, students and professors demanded involvement in these decisions, especially when they felt that these changes in the administration were made for political reasons. Due to the tension of the colonial status of Puerto Rico and a growing nationalist movement, political protests and resistance via critical publications of UPR governance were met with harsh punishment with more monitoring of students, suspension and expulsions, and in some instances were met with police brutality public demonstrations. In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Agency with the University chancellor, Carlos Chardón, as director. Puerto Rican Nationalist Party leader Pedro Albizu Campos condemned UPR officials as traitors and pawns to the United States over the radio and students who supported the reconstruction plan declared Albizu Campos an enemy. Because there was a growing number of pro-nationalist students on campus, Chancellor Chardón had armed police officers on the Ríos Piedras campus to prevent violence, however, four pro-Nationalists students were killed. This led to an assembly organized by the students to ask for the elimination of ROTC and reassurance of civil rights (Ramos Rodríguez et al., 2008).

In response to students seeking representation toward their disagreements with the UPR administration, the General Student Council [CGE (Spanish acronym)], was formed as the official legal representation to voice their opinions and concerns. The CGE, along with professors and political leaders in the island, pushed for UPR to be redefined and refocused to center the livelihood and development of Puerto Rico. This led to the “University Reform Bill” where Jaime Benítez was named chancellor and the mission of UPR was changed to “study the fundamental problems of Puerto Rico, extend the benefits of culture to the people of Puerto Rico, and prepare the future public officials of Puerto Rico” (Rodríguez, 2005 p. 149). This law also established Spanish as the preferred language of instruction. During this time, the Vice-Chancellor position was created and Chancellor Benítez appointed a professor at Ríos Pedras’ campus, Joseph Axtmayer, to this position at the Mayagüez campus, which was met with a 6-month strike from students. Benítez responded by threatening the students that they were not exempt from their obligatory military service, especially since World War II was going on (Rodríguez, 2005).

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman vetoed the establishment of Spanish as the official language of the public education system in Puerto Rico. To protest this, an assembly was held where students voted to stop academic activities at UPR for 48 h.

The following year, several students who created student-run newspapers that frequently critiqued the administration were expelled for hoisting a Puerto Rican flag at the University Tower. In 1948, the year where Puerto Ricans were granted the right to vote for their own governor, Puerto Rican Nationalist leader, Pedro Albizu Campos, was released from prison in the US and returned to the island. President of the CGE at the time, Juan Noriega Maldonado, attempted to bring Albizu Campos to campus but was denied permission to hold this event. Given the newly instated mission of the university, students were surprised and protested by striking and driving caravans around the island educating the community of their resistance. This strike was met with 400 students being expelled, more than 50 students suspended, several students arrested, and some faculty who supported the students being fired. Punitive measures were taken that banned students newspapers and political demonstrations to be held at the Ríos Pedras campus. The most shocking result was a law passed that limited the civil and political rights on the island. The University Law of 1945 gave more power to the chancellor and eliminated student representation in UPR’s governance. The CGE was eliminated and students were now left out of negotiations to policy and administrative changes at UPR. This law was deemed unconstitutional and repealed in 1957 (de García, 2005).

Given the growth of pro-statehood and pro-independence groups in the 1960s and 70s, along with the tensions created by the Vietnam War, resisting ROTC and military presence at UPR campuses became the focus of student activism in UPR. Peaceful protests like sit-ins to demand reform were met with police violence. In response to the signing of a renewed contract with ROTC, bombs were planted in ROTC buildings, these buildings were also vandalized, and the U.S. flag was burned. This led to more violent demonstrations between ROTC students, pro-independence students, and police. More demonstrations followed, and to prevent more violent confrontations, ROTC at Ríos Pedras was suspended temporarily (Ramos Rodríguez et al., 2008).

The activism at UPR during the 1980s addressed financial insecurity of the institution and the ability of students to fund their education. In 1980, the salary of the chancellors of the UPR campuses increased by 40% yet the university’s budget was declared as being deficit (Nazario Velasco, 2005). To combat this deficit, the university announced an increase in the tuition fee for all students. Students pushed back by asking for a tuition fee adjusted to the income of the students’ families and they went on strike for several days to encourage dialogue between the students and the administration. The chancellor of Ríos Pedras at the time, Antonio Miró Montilla, created a mediating committee while also prohibiting meetings or demonstrations at the Ríos Pedras campus. Although the mediating committee reached an agreement with the CES, the students voted to reject it and go on an indefinite strike. Montilla responded with threatening to suspend students who violate the moratorium of meetings and demonstrations he imposed, suspended students who refused to pay the tuition fee, and had police and SWAT on campus to prevent protests (Ramos Rodríguez et al., 2008).

During the mid-1980s, the administration of UPR changed to new leadership and developed non-confrontational policies to promote dialogue between students and the administration. Although strikes and protests occurred throughout the 80s and 90s, these demonstrations were more peaceful than the ones decades prior, garnering the attention of media outlets through performative activism like paintings and teach-ins. These demonstrations were in response to more tuition hikes and the growing privatization of the university (Brusi, 2011).

These non-confrontational policies were put to an end in 2010 with the protests and strikes that occurred due to the financial crisis on the island and austerity measures enacted toward the university. Given the economic crisis the US was facing during this time, coupled with the debt Puerto Rico had with foreign investors, former governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Fortuño, passed Public Law 7 which declared Puerto Rico in a state of fiscal emergency and allowed the government to quickly dismiss 17,000 public employees, propose massive cuts to public funding, while also calling for the expansion of private contracting (Brusi, 2011). Because of these funding cuts, UPR was facing an annual deficit of nearly \$300 million. This led to the university no longer providing tuition waivers to Pell grant eligible students. Due to the cuts in federal aid to students, along with an \$800 increase in tuition per year through a “special fee,” the students began to lead protests and demonstrations, which led to a system strike (Brusi, 2011).

In attempt to silence the students and avoid further conflict, the government and university administration passed laws and policies prohibiting protests in public spaces and changing voting systems at the university to be electronic and anonymous. When students disobeyed these policies, they were met with violence—tear gas, physical assault by riot police, and arrests (Brusi, 2011). This strike, which was initially supposed to last 48 h, resulted in the cancelation of summer and fall semesters because the students voted to indefinitely continue the strike. It was not until former UPR Rio Piedras chancellor Ana Guadalupe and her chief security officer were physically assaulted by students that the protests began to die down. Although students were able to garner support from faculty, and the general public through national media, their needs were not met. However, there were several attempts to strike after this period but it was not until 2017, when more austerity measures were announced by the UPR administration, that a system wide strike occurred.

Since its founding, there have always been a group of students in UPR organizing to address student concerns of the education institution. Whether it is demanding more culturally relevant curriculum, more representation, greater access, or transparency on administrative decisions, these organized protests, demonstrations, and strikes have played a significant role in the ways in which the island-wide post-secondary education system operates. The difference between the activism during its early years and now is the presence and popularity of using social media to bring global attention.

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO AS A HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTION

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) developed in response to the demographic shifts in the nation. The federal government defines HSIs as institutions with at least 25% Latinx/a/o undergraduate student enrollment with 50% of its overall student population being Pell grant eligible (Núñez et al., 2015). Unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) whose missions are rooted in providing an education to a specific ethnic background that have been historically prohibited from post-secondary education, this minority serving institution (MSI) designation can be achieved by enrollment trends. Most HSIs were initially (and some are still) predominantly white institutions. This federal designation comes with the opportunity to apply for federal funding to help support an institution in serving their Latinx/a/o students.

HSIs enroll about 62% of all Latinx/a/o students in college (Santiago et al., 2015) and graduate 40% of Latinx/a/o students and 54% of Latinx/a/o students with STEM degrees (Núñez et al., 2015). Given that HSIs disproportionately graduate Latinx/a/o students in post-secondary education, many of whom would not attend college otherwise, these institutions are critical for our nation to reach its higher education and workforce goals (Santiago and Callan, 2010).

It is no surprise that the different UPR campuses are all HSIs, however, it is important to note that the context of higher education in Puerto Rico differs significantly than in the U.S. mainland. Most citizens on the island identify as Hispanic, and since 43.5% of the island's citizens live below the poverty line (Bishaw and Benson, 2017), many of the students rely on federal financial aid to finance their post-secondary education. Seventy-three percent of students at Puerto Rican HSIs receive Pell Grants to finance their college education compared to 41% of students at HSIs in the mainland (Núñez and Elizondo, 2012). HSIs in Puerto Rico are also funded at much lower rates than U.S. mainland HSIs. They charge significantly less tuition (approximately one-third of the price of U.S. mainland institutions) and receive \$1,853 from grants and contracts per student compared to \$5,073 received per student at U.S. mainland HSIs (Núñez and Elizondo, 2012). Put simply, HSIs in Puerto Rico are doing much more with less, yet their contributions to educating Latinx/a/o students are rarely researched. Cole (2011) noted that HSIs in Puerto Rico offered more Hispanic-oriented classes than mainland HSIs and attributed this to student demands for these courses during different periods of activism, the student body makeup of Puerto Rican colleges and universities, and the distinct political identity of the island as a commonwealth of the United States. However, beyond that, HSIs in Puerto Rico are often left out of literature analyzing HSIs.

Although 4-year HSIs in Puerto Rico have lower graduation rates than their U.S. mainland peers (26 and 35%, respectively), it is important to consider the economic and socio-political realities of the island. Núñez and Elizondo (2012) argue “[b]ecause student and institutional access to financial capital is critical

in promoting Latinx/a/os' graduation rates, these challenging economic and higher education conditions in Puerto Rico make sustaining Latinx/a/o graduation rates even more difficult" (p. 20). Overall, to understand student activism in in the UPR system that are designated as HSIs we turn to the theoretical framework of Chicana/Latina FCS to unearth how students engage in grassroots activism.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CHICANA/LATINA FEMINIST CULTURAL STUDIES

Chicana/Latina feminisms emerges out the 1960s feminist movement in response to white liberal feminist agenda (Anzaldúa, 1987). Chicana/Latina feminisms challenge western hegemonic ideologies that position Chicano/Latino communities as inferior. We use Chicana/Latina feminisms as our theoretical lens to shift ideological deficit perspectives and reclaim Puerto Rican students as knowledge holders. Chicana/Latina feminisms provides a perspective of the oppressed focusing on lived realities while negotiating the effects of racism, classism, sexism, and heteronormativity. It is also a feminist thought that pushes the collective struggle of communities and is not restricted to gender binaries. For Chicana/Latina feminists believe that to undo patriarchy the collective must actively engage to dismantle it fully. In response to oppression, cultural productions or what is known as cultural studies emerged. Contemporary theorizing in Cultural Studies is organized within two intellectual camps; American Cultural Studies and British Cultural Studies. Despite the contributions of the British Cultural Studies and American Cultural Studies intellectual schools of thought the dismissal of the experiences of People of Color is prevalent. Latina/o scholars (Chabram-Dernersesian, 1999; Villenas, 2010) have created alternative discourses informed by British Cultural Studies and American Cultural Studies. Chicana/o Cultural Studies emerged in the 1960s-70s to critically examine the experiences of Mexican Americans in the Southwest. Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, scholar of cultural theory, provides an understanding of Chicana/o Cultural Studies in the context of American Cultural Studies:

Chicana/o cultural studies and cultural studies...fosters an understanding of specific ways cultural practices operate in daily life and social formations and which is devoted to intervening in the processes by which existing techniques, institutions, and structures of power are reproduced, resisted, and transformed (1999, p.174).

Chabram-Dernersesian situates Chicana/o cultural studies as a decolonial project that reveals the impact of colonization of Chicano/Latino communities. Villenas (2010) merges Chicana/Latina feminisms and cultural studies to create a new framework and states:

Chicana/Latina FCS in particular, emerge from the geopolitical space of the border and borderlands with a decolonizing orientation that "thinks" from hybrid cultural practices,

knowledges, and social movements. This thinking encompasses understandings of power involving labor and migration, border/cultural surveillance and exclusionary nationalisms built on economies of race, gender and sexuality (see Saldivar, 1997; Chabram-Dernersesian, 2006, 2007) (p.454)

As such, we use Chicana/Latina FCS as a paradigm to understand how Puerto Rico has been a site of colonial rule, and despite these conditions student social movements have challenged hegemonic power to create social change. Specifically, Villenas (2010) extracts a feminist paradigm of four tenets that are operational to move toward a critical praxis of education: intersectionality and global solidarity, the breaking down of dualism, the embracing of ambiguity, and the project of tracking decolonial agency (p.456).

The first tenet, intersectionality and global solidarity, refers to how Chicanas/Latinas acknowledge intersecting and interlocking oppression (i.e., sexism, classism, racism). As individuals experience oppression they use these incidents as a tool to theorize subjectivities and agency (Anzaldúa, 1987). As these subjectivities are created they are also used to understand other marginalized groups and allows individuals to transgress physical and metaphorical borders. Specifically, for Puerto Rican students, intersectionality and global solidarity, is grounded in the ongoing colonial relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. We argue that we must not divorce how colonialism is tied to the historical experiences faced by Puerto Ricans on the island. Nieto (2000) articulates, "Given its status as a colony of larger world powers for almost 500 years, Puerto Rico has always been at the mercy of policies and practices over which it has had little control" (p.7). To date, there are more Puerto Rican students stateside than on the island. Educational institutions on the island for Puerto Rican students have become a site to resist and (re)imagine their positionalities.

The second tenet, breaking down of dualism, Chicanas/Latinas move away from dichotomization and binary ways of knowing and thinking that restrict them to either/or. For Chicana/Latina feminist to reject either/or binaries they must in fact embrace and negotiate ambiguity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Pérez, 1999). Puerto Ricans have dismantled dualisms in entering educational institutions by rejecting notions that their culture and language are inferior. In fact, Puerto Ricans learn English and Spanish within the household fostering high academic expectations and embrace negative stereotypes of Puerto Rican culture and identity as motivation to achieve (Nieto, 2000).

The third tenet, embracing ambiguity, allows Chicanas/Latinas as they live in the apertures of oppression a way of understanding their experiences. In the borderlands people are caught in the paradox of being born in a space where they are not recognized as legitimate, or where they are categorized as different, and are therefore constantly being asked to question their own existence. Puerto Rican students, in embracing the ambiguity that comes from navigating the UPR system, (re)center their social positionalities to resist colonial rule.

Finally, the last tenet, tracking decolonial agency, is developed by the shadow moving between the colonial self and the colonized

other. This third space, bridges difference, explores, and reclaims alternative modes of knowledge not traditionally recognized among communities of color by those in power (Pérez, 1999). As a result, Puerto Rican students in the UPR system move beyond colonial constructs and track their decolonial agency through remembering their histories and experiences which enable them to continue combating their struggles and rearticulating spaces of potentiality. Overall, these four tenets offer a guiding lens to conduct a content analysis for how Puerto Rican students in the UPR system engage in activism and disseminate information.

CONTENT ANALYSIS AS METHODOLOGY

Content Analysis

According to Downe-Wamboldt (1992), content analysis provides researchers the knowledge, context, and understanding of a phenomenon being studied. Research using qualitative content analysis emphasizes the characteristics of language as communication and pays special attention to the contextual meaning of the text (Budd et al., 1967; McTavish and Pirro, 1990). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) describe different approaches to qualitative content analysis. In this paper, we employ a directed approach to qualitative content analysis, which they suggest is best used when the study is guided by theory. They argue, “the main strength of a directed approach to content analysis is that existing theory can be supported and extended” (p. 1283). Because of its reliance on theory, the coding process for directed content analysis begins before and during data analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The codes are derived from the theory and guide the researcher to find connections between the theory and the phenomenon and additional codes are found within relevant research findings.

Data Collection

Twitter has been described as a microblogging site that has become very popular to share news and update the general public on a variety of things, from personal feelings toward a topic by an individual to a reputable news source updating its followers on world events. A tweet is a 140-character statement that can be shared by a profile. Other users can like the tweet, comment on the tweet, and/or share the tweet by retweeting it. The websites use of hashtags help organize tweets around a single topic. Hashtags are keywords prefaced with the pound symbol (#) which allows a user to click on the word to see publicly available tweets that also use the hashtag. For this study, we focused exclusively on tweets from April 2016 to December, 2017 to capture what was being said about the financial crisis Puerto Rico was facing in relation to austerity measures being taken by UPR. The tweets we collected contained the hashtag #HuelgaUPR as this was the moniker used commonly to spread news surrounding the protests at UPR. Top tweets were identified by the amount of times they were “retweeted” which captures the number of times the tweet was shared by other users.

In addition to the tweets, we collected newspaper articles about the protests and strikes. To find these articles, we conducted searches on google using the term “Huelga UPR,” “austerity measures UPR,” and “UPR strikes 2017.” The results

produced links to many articles from different websites, and the webpages themselves suggested other articles covering the same topic. We restricted our analysis to U.S. mainstream newspapers/ magazines (i.e., *The New York Times*), alternative U.S. newspapers/magazines (i.e., *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*), and Puerto Rico newspapers (*Al Dia*). We wanted to underscore how popular media reflected the realities of what was occurring on the island vs. alternative media reflecting on actual student voices via Twitter.

ANALYSIS

As previously stated we use a directed content analysis guided by theoretical framework of Chicana/Latina (FCS) and the four tenets of intersectionality and global solidarity, dismantling dualism, embracing ambiguity, and tracking decolonial agency. These four tenets acted as guiding codes which we used through the cycles of coding. Pérez (1999) argues that “coding is not just labeling, it’s linking from the data to the idea and back to other data” (p. 8). We engaged in Saldaña (2013) coding cycle of initial data (i.e., newspapers and twitter), familiarizing ourselves with the data to reflect and reorder, extracting key themes, and looking for patterns within the data (p. 8). To triangulate the data, we went through three cycles of coding individually for a total of six cycles. We compared our codes after every initial coding cycle and from there themes emerged in alignment with our theoretical framework and the four tenets of Chicana/Latina (FCS).

We have restricted our analysis to the period of April 2016-December 2017 for three reasons. First, the U.S. was transitioning from the Obama to Trump presidential administration which caused the political climate of mainland and island to change. Second, we were interested in how millennial student activists were engaged in grassroot organizing at the local and national level due to the colonial relationship of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Finally, we were interested in understanding how the biggest student strike to date on the island was represented in social media by the students themselves and news coverage.

Intersectionality and Global Solidarity: A Fleeting People

As provided in the historical background our findings are consistent with the ongoing colonialism of Puerto Rico and the repercussions it has on its people. From experiencing colonial rule and accumulating debt which has left the state of the island and its people in poverty. On April 5th 2016, *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, a one of few critical American higher education new sources headlined, “Puerto Rico debt crisis more than just an economic issue” stated:

The island has more than \$70 billion in debt, a poverty rate of 45 percent, and a shrinking population. Hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans are estimated to be leaving the island each year in what is known as the Puerto Rican Diaspora. The declining economic situation and lack of jobs are pushing many Puerto Ricans to seek better opportunities in states like Florida, Ohio, and Maryland, all of which have growing Puerto Rican populations (Morris, 2016).

With the economic crisis being a driving force for the decline in Puerto Rico the government sought alternative means to reduce the debt. Through PROMESA, one of the solutions was to create budget cuts within the educational system. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* reported:

According to the Boston Consulting Group, which the Puerto Rican government hired as a consultant in their effort to restructure the island's education system, the island may have to close 600 K-12 schools by 2020. The student population is declining as families move to the mainland US. School enrollment dropped 42 percent over the past three decades, and enrollment is projected to drop by 22 percent over the next five years (Morris, 2016).

Diverse: Issues in Higher Education was one of the first newspapers to discuss how the debt in Puerto Rico would affect the educational system and overall being of the Puerto Rican people. A few months later, on July 1, 2016, *The New York Times*, a U.S. mainstream newspaper ran, "How Puerto Rico is Grappling with a Debt Crisis," stating:

But the lack of statehood status is now hurting the island at its time of greatest need. Health care is a large and growing part of its economy, but the federal government reimburses its doctors and hospitals at lower rates than if it were a state, for example. That prompts its doctors to leave for the mainland. And unlike cities or counties on the mainland, Puerto Rico can't simply file for bankruptcy (Williams Walsh and Moyer, 2016).

The New York Times contextualized how the lack of statehood was affecting the island regarding the healthcare system, but there is no mention of the educational system. It would not be until 7 months later in 2017, that the link between the debt of Puerto Rico and the UPR system would be recognized. Two alternative newspapers *Caribbean Business* and Puerto Rico's *Al Dia* in mid-February, both headlined "Thousands of Puerto Rico university students go on strike" and "Cuts to university budget spur resistance in Puerto Rico." *Caribbean Business* on February 22, 2017 reported:

The students are blocking the entrance to campuses in Ponce, Bayamon, Arecibo, Mayaguez and Cayey. Students at the main campus in the capital of San Juan are holding an assembly on Wednesday to talk about the issue (The Associated Press., 2017).

Two days later, on February 24, 2017 *Al Dia* reported:

The mobilization in San Juan was in support of the 48-h strike approved Wednesday by nearly 3,000 delegates representing students at the 11 UPR campuses...Backing for the UPR students and faculty has come from Puerto Rico's National Union of Teachers and Education Workers (Unete), which says that education "should be protected as the fundamental tool to drive our social and economic development" (Efe., 2017).

We first learn globally from these two alternative newspaper sources that unlike other Puerto Ricans who had to flee the island, students attending the UPR system were actively engaged

in intersectionality and global solidarity as they demonstrated that interlocking systems of oppression were affecting who they were as a community and broader public. The students engaged in intersectionality and global solidarity by working "against political, economic, cultural, gender and homophobic violence at home and abroad" (Villenas, 2010, p.459). While students would turn to Twitter to disseminate the bulk of information to organize the strike, these two alternative newspapers highlight the resistance that these students engaged in. In March multiple newspapers, mainstream and alternative, would cover the student strike and UPR all highlighting the student strike and the colonial relationship of Puerto Rico and the United States. On April 6th, 2017 the students would mobilize across all 11 campuses in the UPR system for an indefinite strike. The students became active agents on their own behalf to raise consciousness locally and globally, which demonstrated their ability to break down dualisms.

Breaking Down Dualisms: Student Resistance and Agency

Villenas (2010) reminds us that breaking down dualisms is, "how we approach interlocking structures of oppression and solidarities across difference"—the students of UPR broke down dualisms by challenging the notion of colonized/colonizer (p. 460). Students turned to Twitter and created the hashtag #HuelgaUPR generating approximately 4,000 tweets shared by student themselves, student organizations, and allies. Across 11 campuses this mode of communication worked to keep the strike consistent. Through Twitter, students were able to mobilize, share information instantly, and be strategic in disseminating what to do if encountering police violence.

The day the indefinite strike began, on April 6th, 2017, a student wrote the following tweet, "Aquí está el video de cuando policías armados entraron al recinto de Utuado anoche. ¡RT A ESTE VÍDEO POR FAVOR! #HuelgaUPR" Translation: Here is the video of when armed police entered the Utuado compound last night. RT TO THIS VIDEO PLEASE! #HuelgaUPR. The student filmed the entering of police on campus and called for retweets in which it generated 1,001 retweets and 283 likes, causing this to be the top tweet of #HuelgaUPR. In breaking down dualism, students demonstrated their ability to engage in resistance through consciousnesses even at the risk of experiencing police brutality. This tweet alone captured how students shared the reality that they were experiencing as student protesters. On April 11th, 2017, another student tweeted, "Llegaron las escuelas de Utuado en apoyo a la lucha. Hacen un llamado para que TODAS las escuelas de Puerto Rico se unan también. #HuelgaUPR." Translation: Utuado schools arrived in support of the fight. They call for all schools in Puerto Rico to unite as well. #HuelgaUPR. This generated 310 retweets and 209 likes resulting in being in the top ten of most retweeted tweets. Students refused to no longer be colonized, and took to their own social movement through grassroots activism. Students in the UPR system provided a list of demands that needed to be met before they would retreat the strike. However, mainstream media did not issue the demands to the broader public.

An alternative news source, *Pasquines*, an “online bilingual publication that covers all political events of Puerto Rico, that was founded by William-Jose Velez in June 2013,” actualized the reality of what the student strike stood centering on the student demands. On April 25th, 2017, *Pasquines* ran, “The University of Puerto Rico Student Strike, Explained,” which outlined the demands of the students in the UPR system as the following:

1. That the UPR’s administration shall not penalize any student for expressing themselves and participating in this process of stoppage, manifestation, and conflict in defense of the UPR.
2. That all sectors of the UPR community present a university reform plan that represents said community.
3. That the Public Debt Auditing Commission and its funds be reestablished immediately, that the auditing process begin immediately, and that a moratorium on the debt be established before and during the auditing process.
4. That no tuition increases or tuition exemption eliminations be considered.
5. That no budget cuts to the UPR be considered (Cortes, 2017).

Aligned with breaking down dualisms, these demands “[become] important in moving outside assimilation frameworks for articulating complex Latina/o subjectivities” (Villenas, 2010, p.461). The student’s articulation of no longer being a colonized entity came to the forefront based on their lived subjectivities in the UPR system. In the same publication, *Pasquines* concluded:

The students of UPR have decided to take a stance against the government’s attempt to cut education and to pay an unaudited debt as the people of Puerto Rico continue to live in possibly worsening conditions (Cortes, 2017).

Students were clearly against the budget cuts and tuition hikes, which would knowingly pushout students out of UPR system. Like *Pasquines*, the SocialistWorker.org headlined, “The Future of our University is at Stake: Interview with Gabriel Casal Nazario.” Nazario a student at the Rio Piedras campus and an activist with the student group Colectiva Independista Radical shared about the why the student strike was important stating:

...Because you can feel the drive that people have for a new kind of existence, and you see that people are willing to risk their studies and their lives for this. And we understand that this is also for the next generation, for the elementary and high school students. Right now, they don’t know if there will be a public university for them to go to when they are of age (Bon, 2017).

As an alternative media source, the SocialistWorker.org offers a socialist point of view regarding politics and aims to “giv[e] a voice to those struggling for a better world, seeking out the stories of labor struggles that are seldom reported in the mainstream media.” It was one the first to feature student voices around the strike, and several alternative news sources would follow suit. The ambiguous state of Puerto Rico was embraced by students who were done with the either/or but rather demanded the now resulting in their abilities to negotiate the contradictions they experience as “American citizens” under colonial rule.

Embracing Ambiguity: For Us, by Us

The ambiguity that students at UPR face is two-fold. First, by resisting colonialism and engaging in activism, these students face the threat of being suspended, expelled, or imprisoned, thus unsure whether their efforts may prohibit them from receiving the education they are fighting for. Secondly, the ambiguity of being an “American citizen” yet living in the colonial conditions that deny the people on the island rights that Americans in the United States have is often expressed in the activism that these students engage in. This ambiguity serves as a motivational factor and reason to resist and reclaim UPR as their own. As seen through the history of student activism at UPR, resistance of colonialism within the public higher education system in Puerto Rico has been ongoing. Whether it was demanding classes about Puerto Rico, classes to be taught in Spanish, or denouncing the growing presence of military training on the island, the students at UPR have remained vocal that the purpose of the university system is to provide an education for the people on the island. With the rising popularity of social media, students at UPR today use it as a way to spread news to each other instantly and to garner international support. Even before the headlines emerged to a national audience, students had tweeted the following on February 11, 2017, “If you don’t let us dream, we won’t let you sleep. #HuelgaUPR #PuertoRico #ParoNacional.” This tweet alone generated 381 retweets and 374 likes. This tweet calls attention to education as a vehicle to achieve dreams and the resistance that will proliferate if denied that opportunity.

News coverage of the strikes in 2017 have emphasized the tension students on the island feel as American citizens. Due to the violence that occurred in the 2010 strikes, and the use of pepper spray and riot police during the 2017 strikes, The Nation reported that students often chant “We’re Citizens, Not Criminals!” during their demonstrations (Morales, 2017). In “Students are now leading the resistance to austerity in Puerto Rico,” Morales (2017) reports:

“In a colony where the manipulation of information has been the order of the day for 115 years, to have access to a university education has been the most powerful tool of the less-favored sectors,” said Muriente. “It’s been the home of intellectuals, artists, ballet dancers, architects, journalists, anthropologists, and poets. In a country where we don’t have international representation, or even an embassy, it’s a bridge to the rest of the world.”

Muriente, a student at UPR that helped organized an indefinite strike that stopped university operations in March of 2017, points out the lack of representation and self-authority the island has due to the colonial relationship with the United States and how important UPR has been in providing its students a way to resist. Ironically, an indefinite strike threatened the existence and future of UPR which is what the students were ultimately trying to protect. However, the austerity measures being taken toward the university threatened accessibility to the majority of its students causing a sense of urgency to resist and cause disruption—to not only call national attention to what is occurring on the island, but to send a message that students would not allow the government or administration to continue to subject the institution and its

students to punitive, unfair budget cuts that would make a public education more expensive to pay unaudited debt rather than to improve educational offerings at UPR.

Tracking Decolonial Agency: Repercussions and Consequences of Student Activism

On June 7th, 2017 after several months of maintaining a strong strike, the students ended their shut down of the UPR system. Villenas (2010) describes tracking decolonial agency as “interstitial moves for survival [and]...subtle interventions...to counter dominant ideologies that support unequal relations of power” (p. 463). Student activism became the focal point to achieve justice in the face of economic and educational exploitation in the UPR system. The students actions in the era of Trump did not go without repercussions or consequences. Students were forced to reconsider their strike once a criminal code was subject to revision to limit the massive student strike. On May 15, 2017, *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, covered, “Protesting Students in Puerto Rico Committed to Saving Higher Ed Access,” stating:

As the conflict continues with no sign of resolution, Puerto Rico’s elected government is moving to reform the criminal code in such a way as to limit the current student strike. Bill PC743, which has passed in both the House of Representatives and Senate, now awaits the Governor’s signature. Among other amendments, PC743 would prohibit the obstruction of access to government institutions of health and instruction, including universities (Morris, 2017a).

Just two days later, on May 17, 2017, *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* reported, “Title IV Funds Withheld from 5 Campuses in Puerto Rico during Strike,” due to classes being stopped as early as April in the infancy of the strike, five campuses were stripped of their funding:

Adding to the University of Puerto Rico’s financial woes, the Department of Education has rescinded the eligibility of five of the system’s 11 campuses for Title IV programs due to the ongoing student strike. So far, the UPR campuses of Río Piedras, Humacao, Ponce, Bayamón, and Carolina have lost eligibility for Title IV programs. That means funds for essential programs such as Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG) and federal work study will be withheld until the strike has ended and the campuses have reapplied for Title IV eligibility (Morris, 2017b).

Despite the government reforming the criminal code and revoking Title IV funds from five of the 11 campuses, students persisted in their beliefs surrounding the debt crisis in Puerto Rico and the future of their higher education system. Given that HSIs are known to be underfunded compared to predominantly White institutions (Núñez and Elizondo, 2012), any revoking of funds can have major ramifications to a student’s ability to finance their education. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* was one of few publications that identified the serious consequences the students were encountering on the frontline. The same day,

Pulso Estudiantil, a student ran media outlet, tweeted, “Adornan Torre de la universidad con pancarta que dice ‘REVOLUCIÓN PUÑETA’ #HuelgaUPR,” Translation: Displayed on a placard on University Tower, ‘A F***ing Revolution’ #HuelgaUPR” which generated 416 retweets and 272 likes being the second highest retweet to circulate. Despite the consequences and repercussions being imposed on the students they used Twitter to track their decolonial agency. By displaying a banner titled, “REVOLUCIÓN PUÑETA,” students were not going to lapse in their actions. Their mentality was to continue with their resistance as it was their demonstration of liberation.

The New York Times as a mainstream newspaper in the U.S. did not report what was occurring among students in Puerto Rico until May 25, 2017. Headlining, “Puerto Rico’s University is Paralyzed by Protests and Facing Huge Cuts,” which they highlight multiple perspectives regarding the student strike, one of importance is the ways in which students reacted to one another and the institution:

A group of six law students had taken the university to court to force it to reopen. A judge sided with them and began fining the university \$1,000 a day...Students stormed a board of trustees meeting, and a May 1 protest turned violent, so already lawmakers have submitted several new bills that would increase penalties on acts of disobedience. “We see it as a kidnapping of a public institution,” said Anamar Menendez, 36, one of the law students who sued to get classes to resume. “If the students want to strike, fine, let them strike, but the university has to offer its services” (Robles, 2017).

The way in which this news is reported pits students against one another eliminating the fact that these students have upheld a movement that was created by them for them. The kidnapping of UPR did not happen overnight and not in the context of students being uneducated on the reasons why they needed to strike. By tracking decolonial agency it is evident that students attending UPR were left with no other choice but to act and have their voices heard. They successfully achieved that even in the terrains of a colonial power using alternative news sources and Twitter. In this case, Twitter and alternative news sources, were used as decolonial tools to expose their lived realities. #HuelgaUPR is a resource to understand the kidnapping of UPR and how students reclaimed what they were entitled to by a government that has consistently undervalued them.

DISCUSSION

The rising popularity of participating in activism through Twitter has allowed students in Puerto Rico to recruit support for their endeavors rapidly on the island while broadcasting their activism to gain worldwide attention. Similar to President Donald Trump twitter, which continually calls attention to what angers him, students have expressed their frustration with Puerto Rico’s positionality as an unincorporated territory of the United States with limited rights to those who live on the island.

Although UPR as an HSI was not discussed among the students within our sources of data, it is important to bring

attention to the fact that all of the campuses that make up the UPR system are HSIs. This is significant as UPR remains nearly invisible within the literature on HSIs. Given the demographic context of the island, these institutions are innately Hispanic-Serving. While the context of higher education in Puerto Rico is vastly different than the United States, the federal designation of an HSI applies to the institutions on the island because they meet the enrollment conditions that the department of education has determined for eligibility. Given the invisibility of UPR within the HSI literature, we argue that these institutions also exist in an ambiguity of being legitimate HSIs. While they may be eligible for HSI funding from the federal government, the conditions within the island continually threatened the universities ability to actually serve their students.

Trump's attitude toward the "big decisions" regarding the economic crisis in Puerto Rico has sparked a sense of urgency to bring attention to his administration, and the ways in which Puerto Rican governmental affairs are handled on the island. In an environment where students exercise their free speech through different forms of activism, whether that is through Twitter or in person demonstrations, students in Puerto Rico are being vocal about the kidnapping of their university (UPR) through unjust austerity measures and the increase reliance of privatization at UPR. Given that Puerto Ricans on the island do not have the right to vote for presidential elections, their resistance to his leadership can be seen by their continual efforts to resist the colonial relationship they live through as citizens living on the island. Their intersectional experiences as American citizens with limited rights informs the ways in which they engage in activism and reclaim their positions as students who deserve to participate in the way the university is governed, especially when it deals with access to education.

Despite a system wide shut down, the protests and strike in response to the austerity measures toward UPR ended with not much change. Due to the authority the FCB

has through PROMESA, not much can be done about the nearly \$450 million budget cut the university system will face within the next couple of years. The strike ended so that students can continue their education. Not long after this all occurred, Hurricane Maria struck the island causing another shutdown and exacerbating the continuing migration of students out of the island into the United States. Although the strike did not resolve the issues brought up by the students, the activism surrounding the #HuelgaUPR movement continues to drive efforts of colonial resistance in Puerto Rico.

The precarious position that UPR is in due to the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, the FCB and university administration have met frequently to discuss how to cut costs and recover from the economic crises that the island is in. However, what student activism has accomplished is the understanding that the public higher education system in Puerto Rico is a hub of resistance to challenge the colonial relationship between the US and Puerto Rico. The history of activism within UPR, coupled with contemporary forms of resistance via Twitter and news media, has heightened the visibility of the economic crisis plaguing the island that is rooted in the colonial conditions that the island operates in with the US. By using a Chicana/Latina FCS framework our study demonstrates how the experiences of students in UPR can inform our understanding of how they have been able to reclaim their university system and their ability to pursue a post-secondary education.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors coded and analyzed the data. AM researched and synthesized historical information of UPR and activism and literature pertaining to UPR as an HSI. NG described the theoretical framework and methodology.

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