

**Digital Pulse: Looking at the Collective/Cultural Memorialization of the Puerto Rican Victims of the Terrorist Attack in Orlando**

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**Digital Pulse: Acercamiento al memorial colectivo-cultural de las víctimas puertorriqueñas en el ataque terrorista en Orlando**

**Digital Pulse: Abordagem do memorial coletivo-cultural das vítimas portoriquenhas no atentado terrorista em Orlando**

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**Abstract:** This article reflects on the configuration of digital memories among Puerto Ricans in social media platforms at times of crisis, represented by the way victims were memorialized in the wake of the terrorist attack at the Pulse club in the city of Orlando, Florida, 2016. The attack was covered by both traditional news media and social media outlets. The narratives produced by the news media coverage produced a collective memory narrative of the event that articulated the victims within four frames: 1) as victims of terrorism —news discourse employed to connect the attack with the terrorist group known as ISIS—; 2) as U.S. citizens —narrative recourse used to separate the “them,” uncivilized killers, from the “us,” civilized victims and responders—; 3) as night-time club patrons —entertainment and leisure spaces for the young—, and finally, 4) as gay club patrons attracted by Latina/o night. While all of these narratives sacrificed some portion of the individual histories of the victims to some preferred collective picture (depending on the framing), in social networking sites with their stronger penchant for a grassroots up approach, the particulars, the individuals, were the primary focus, with users illustrating some singularity of the victims’ life-stories while articulating cultural-individual memories digitally. My argument in this essay is that a digital cultural-memory approach challenged the collective memory framework that tended to produce a memory trace in which personal narratives were made to conform to the larger framing, thus neutralizing the particular engagement of the victims in their race, gender, class, and national identity.

**Keywords:** puerto rico; orlando; memorial; collective memory; individual memory; lgbtq community

**Resumen:** Este artículo reflexiona sobre la configuración de memorias digitales entre los puertorriqueños en plataformas de redes sociales en tiempos de crisis, representada por la forma en que se conmemoraron las víctimas tras el ataque terrorista en el club Pulse en la ciudad de Orlando, Florida, 2016. El ataque fue cubierto por los medios de noticias tradicionales y las redes sociales digitales. Las narraciones producidas por la cobertura de los medios de comunicación produjeron una narrativa de memoria colectiva del evento que articuló a las víctimas en cuatro marcos: 1) como víctimas del terrorismo: el discurso de noticias empleado para conectar el ataque con el grupo terrorista conocido como ISIS—; 2) como ciudadanos de los EE. UU. “Recurso narrativo utilizado para separar a los“ ellos ”, asesinos incivilizados, de los“ nosotros ”, víctimas y respondedores civilizados, 3) como clientes nocturnos del club, "espacios de entretenimiento y entretenimiento para los jóvenes" y, finalmente, 4) como clientes del club gay atraídos por la noche latina. Si bien todas estas narraciones sacrificaron una parte de las historias individuales de las víctimas a un cuadro colectivo preferido (dependiendo del encuadre), en las redes sociales se prefirió un enfoque más cotidiano, las personas fueron el principal enfoque, con usuarios que ilustran alguna singularidad de las historias de vida de las víctimas al tiempo que articulan digitalmente recuerdos culturales e individualmente. Mi argumento en este ensayo es que el enfoque de memoria cultural digital desafió el marco tradicional que tendía a narraciones que neutralizaban el compromiso de las víctimas con su raza, género, clase e identidad nacional.

**Palabras Claves:** puerto rico; orlando; memorial; collective memory; individual memory; lbgtq community

**Resumo:** Este artigo reflete sobre a configuração das memórias digitais entre os porto-riquenhos em plataformas de redes sociais em tempos de crise, representadas pela forma como as vítimas foram comemoradas após o ataque terrorista no clube Pulse na cidade de Orlando, Flórida, em 2016. O ataque foi coberto pela mídia tradicional e redes sociais digitais. As narrativas produzidas pela cobertura da mídia produziram uma narrativa coletiva de memória do evento que articulou as vítimas em quatro quadros: 1) como vítimas do terrorismo: o discurso noticioso utilizado para conectar o ataque ao grupo terrorista conhecido como ISIS-; 2) como cidadãos dos EUA "Recurso narrativo usado para separar" eles ", assassinos incivilizados, de" nós ", vítimas e respondentes civilizados, 3) como boates do clube," espaços de entretenimento e entretenimento para jovens "e, finalmente, 4) como clientes de clubes gays atraídos pela noite latina. Embora todas essas narrativas tenham

sacrificado uma parte das histórias individuais das vítimas para um quadro coletivo preferido (dependendo do quadro), nas redes sociais era preferível uma abordagem mais cotidiana, as pessoas eram o foco principal, com os usuários ilustrando alguma singularidade das histórias de vida das vítimas enquanto articulam digitalmente memórias culturais e individuais. Meu argumento neste ensaio é que a abordagem da memória cultural digital desafiou a estrutura tradicional que tendia a narrativas que neutralizavam o compromisso das vítimas com sua raça, gênero, classe e identidade nacional.

**Palabras Chaves:** puerto rico; orlando; memorial; collective memory; individual memory; lbgtq community

## 1. Introduction

This essay reflects on the construction of digital memories among Puerto Ricans at times of crisis. I have chosen as an exemplary event the terrorist attack that took place on June 12, 2016 at the gay club Pulse, in the city of Orlando, Florida when forty-nine people were killed and fifty-three others were wounded during what is often referred to as the deadliest incident of violence against LGBTQ community in the history of the United States. Twenty-three fatalities in the Pulse shooting were Puerto Ricans who either lived in the Orlando area or were visiting family and friends in the Puerto Rican diasporic community of Central Florida. Although New York City had long been the primary diasporic center for Puerto Ricans in the twentieth century, the trend began to change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with Florida becoming a popular destination for Puerto Ricans. According to the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), the Puerto Rican population in Florida increased by 110% since 2000 (Capielo, 2018). These demographics have created not only a large community of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida, but a constant flow between Orlando and Puerto Rico.

For this population, social media platforms such as Facebook have become vital links between families and friends. Due to its low entry cost and broad capacity to disseminate news and points of view, social media has become an important venue for articulating national identity and solidarity. For the LGBTQI community, digital environments have offered (at times and not universally) a safe zone for virtual coming out, establishing identity ideals, connecting to and constructing communities, mobilize political ideologies, and composing self-narratives through blogging (Pullen and Cooper, 2010). My interest with the Pulse's case study is to understand how digital cultural memories configured by those who

inhabit the digital homeland interact with those collective memories' narratives, arising from traditional media, particularly, news outlets. Digital cultural memories refer to memories that are often produced, reproduced and circulated through technologies of memory such as social media platforms. In this scenario, memories are not a static text or a finalized edition, but a textual work that is always open to revision by the individual (Sturken, 2008; Avilés-Santiago, 2014). In contrast, collective memory has "often been reified into an entity that is somehow distinctly separate and unconnected to the individual memory" (Rivard, 2007, p. 5).

My argument is that the blurring effect produced by the traditional news outlet stories operated as one of the prompts to the outflow of memory by private citizens, who employed a vocabulary, tropes and narrative grammar that enregistered them within a cultural-individual memory approach. Within this approach, a dialectic emerges in which the subject is particularized, and those particularities are embedded within ideas about the cultural life-world of the subject. In this case, it was Puerto Rican murder victims and casualties who were memorialized within this process. In the dialogically open social media platform, the particular life stories of the Puerto Rican victims are opened to the historical currents and forces that brought them to Orlando. It also prompts the creation of a web that presents a larger collective story of queer Puerto Rican migrations to the state of Florida because of the colonial link between the two countries. According to Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (2009) issues like unemployment, underemployment, economic stagnation and in some cases, a violent expulsion from families and communities because of sexuality, are some of the reasons behind the Puerto Rican queer migrations. In the specific case of Orlando, dating from the early 90s, when the economic crisis uprooted many islanders saw in the Mainland, and particularly in Florida, a place of opportunity that was made easier by networks of earlier arrivals.

To do this exploratory project, I used two methodological approaches. The first part of the methodology consisted on an auto-virtual-ethnography that highlights the role of the virtual ethnographer's experiences in online environments. It combines the participant-observational approach of ethnography with the reflexive, autobiographical mode of auto-ethnography (Wood & Solomon, 2009). Then, I collected and analyzed news articles that circulated during the 48-hours after the incident. That time period produced a first impression of the story that framed the way the news would be generated and received. The objective was to compare the frames of narratives produced as collective memory by the news media with the person-centric memories produced by the public on social media. Finally, I did a textual analysis of

images (e.g. videos and photos) and texts (e.g., status updates) available through my Facebook newsfeed and also, through the hashtags #pulse #pulseorlando #prayorlando.

The analysis will conclude with a reflection on the notion of post mortem algorithm and the possibility for critical analysis of the digital memories. Even though this essay is only a reflection on a virtual ethnography of a specific tragic event, it aims at adding a contribution to the unexplored field of digital memory studies in Puerto Rico.

## **2. Towards the configuration of a Patria Digital [Digital Homeland]**

In eras of economic hardship, Puerto Rican public discourse strays from key legal and political terms, such as *nation*, and embraces more affective notions —at times romanticized— such as the term *homeland*. Puerto Rican literature scholar Margot Arce de Vázquez (1998) proposed that the homeland was “much more than the piece of land where one is born; it is also, and above all, the conglomerate of community memories, traditions, experiences and customs... joined together and given continuity in the hopes and moral ideals of the future” (p. 396).

Singer and songwriter Rubén Blades, son of the Panamanian diaspora, expresses this sentiment more succinctly in “Patria,” where the homeland “is that which is carried in the soul by those who distance themselves.”<sup>1</sup> Within this trope, which is loaded with nostalgia, the diasporic subject is recognized: as economic necessity uproots the Puerto Rican worker, the notion of “where” Puerto Rico becomes more virtual, a matter of not only physical geography but of memory, a possession in the mind of those who are not physically present in the homeland but distant from it, and also on the move. New definitions arise in the coming to and fro the homeland between the homeland (Puerto Rico) and the putative nation-state (U.S.). As a subject in transit myself, who goes to and fro between the island and the mainland, I’ve become interested in the articulation of an expanded Puerto Rico that exists not only as a physical destination but as a digital creation; in particular, I am interested in how digital memories are created, circulated, archived and contested in this space.

Although I migrated to the U.S. in 2006, I never felt I was absent from Puerto Rico. Regardless that since 2012 the physical coordinates placed me in the arid deserts of the state of Arizona, in social media the over 3,000 miles of physical distance and the time zones that separated me from the island were instantly eliminated. Back in early the days, the email, the ICQ messaging system and the social networking site (SNS) of MySpace were the preferred

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<sup>1</sup> In Spanish: “patria es lo que se lleva en el alma todo aquel cuando se aleja.” Retrieved from: <https://www.musica.com/letras.asp?letra=1046630>

platforms of communication.<sup>2</sup> More recently, other SNS such as Facebook and Instagram are the systems that allowed me to keep a close bond with family and friends.<sup>3</sup> It was within this exchange that, over the course of the years, I became aware of the configuration of a Puerto Rican digital homeland: a virtual *terruño*<sup>4</sup> based on pictures, videos, memes and hashtags, shared links and recommended films, check-ins and live videos, all of this framed in form of emotional capitalism (Illouz, 2015),<sup>5</sup> a system that is based on a primitive capital that is produced, in its basic most character, by “likes,” creating a kind of solidarity that thrives on a sense of affection and a logic of belonging and ownership at little emotional cost.

Puerto Rico has been articulating the digital homeland since 1995, (Colon-Zayas, 2004) however, it has been during the past decade that improvements in the computer/internet interface, technological advances in software, and a steep decline in costs have allowed the creation of more concrete cartographies and even the configuration of digital social movements. Among the most iconic instances of digital political activism were: a) the use of the web as a communication means during the struggle for the demilitarization of the island of Vieques in 2000; b) the creation of the Puerto Rico Electronic Government Act in 2006 that prompted the digitization of public service delivery as well as the methods by which governments interface with citizens; and c) the virtual protest that brought along the cancellation of the gossip TV program SuperXclusivo in 2012.<sup>6</sup> Such was the influence of social media in Puerto Rico that in the 2016 election cycle the digital homeland produced the first governor candidate from the social networks: Alexandra Lúgaro. Lúgaro’s use of Facebook Live marked her as a member of a new generation (she is 36); her refusal of public funding and reliance of individual donations was entirely dependent on internet modalities

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<sup>2</sup> ICQ was an instant messaging developed and popularized by the Israeli company Mirabilis in 1996. The name ICQ derives from the English phrase "I Seek You. Myspace was among the first social networking site offering an interactive, user-submitted network of friends, personal profiles, blogs, groups, photos, music, and videos. Myspace was the largest social networking site in the world from 2005 to 2009.

<sup>3</sup> The consolidation of social media has become increasingly controversial, as the monopoly position of Facebook has led to accusations of abuse, and concerns about who exactly polices the site. See for instance “LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media,” P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking.

<sup>4</sup> In English, native land.

<sup>5</sup> Emotional capitalism is a dual process by which emotional and economic relationships come to define and shape each. Eva Illouz finds evidence of this process of emotional capitalism in various social sites: self-help literature, women's magazines, talk shows, support groups, and the Internet dating sites.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the history of social media boycott of La Comay, read “No Puppet's Land: The Role of Social Media in Puerto Rico's Mainstream Television” available at: <https://www.alaic.org/journal/index.php/jlacr/article/view/122>

which allow donations to happen at the click of a link. Her embrace of the internet probably prefigures the political future of campaigns in Puerto Rico, as the generation that was brought up on YouTube, Twitter and Instagram matures. But beyond the articulation of a digital polis, it is important to consider the digital homeland as an ideology production machine.

#### *#YoNoMeQuito and the digital diaspora*

During the past decade, the use of the #hashtag has become one of the most used resources in the digital homeland. While “slogans” have often served to demarcate sides in ideological debates, the hashtag is unique in being both, and index that facilitates topical or conceptual searches, and a community maker which pulls together people around ideological, emotional and affective bonds. In Puerto Rico, the hashtag has stood out for its reactive character and for generating important identity-related debates. For example, in 2016 the digital movement entitled #YoNoMeQuito [“I don’t quit”] emerged as a reaction to the exponential increase of Puerto Rican migration to the U.S, putting the diaspora under the negative sign of “quitting.” The creators of the #YoNoMeQuito hashtag aimed to create a movement to encourage the development of Puerto Rico by way of inspirational stories of those who, despite the economic crisis faced by the country, have decided to remain in the island.<sup>7</sup> However, the interpretation in the networks was entirely different.

#YoNoMeQuito was appropriated by the users and used as a tool to divide Puerto Ricans from the island and those on the mainland. In the ecologies of the digital homeland, the use of the #YoNoMeQuito hashtag reduces the life stories of those subjects in transit, or in the words of Jorge Duany (2002) in his work *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, as a *mobile identity*. These were the identities that characterized the paths taken by Edward, Stanley, Luis Omar, Eric Iván, Anthony, Franky, Martin, Yilmery, Jean Carlos, Amanda and the majority of the other 13 Puerto Ricans who were victims of the Pulse terrorist attack. These were, after all, either migrants or visitors to the city of Orlando, Florida.

### **3. “Everyone, get out of Pulse and keep running”: The Facebook Post**

During one of my visits to San Juan to begin a postdoctoral project, an unexpected event took place at 5:00 a.m., on Sunday, June 12, 2016. I started the day with my morning routines: coffee in hand and Facebook access. While logging in, I received a Facebook

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<sup>7</sup> Carlos Lopez-Lay was the creator the #YoNoMeQuito movement, or 'I will not give up'. The goal of the movement was to “spread positive energy and motivate "boricuas," as Puerto Ricans are known, to keep moving forward despite the island’s recent challenges.” Retrieved from: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/yonomequito-movement-aims-inspire-uplift-puerto-ricans-n573016>

message from my friend George Arce, a Puerto Rican living in Los Angeles. The messages stated:

“Check the news. Something is going on in a gay club in Orlando. It’s a hostage situation and it seems there are some people dead and wounded. Tonight, was Latino night there.”

My alarm was immediate. The attack on this club pushed many identity buttons: from queer Disney-Rican to Latina/o-solidarity. Orlando is not an empty signifier for Puerto Ricans, given the Disney mythology and its place on the map of the Puerto Rican diaspora. I was not alone: hundreds of family members, friends and colleagues started showing up on Facebook, posting on the walls of their respective social networks’ comments expressing concern, unease, and fright regarding what was happening there.

"Everyone, get out of Pulse and keep running," the nightclub posted on its Facebook page at 2:09 A.M on June 12. Survivors of the attack were able to communicate with their family and friends via social media to let them know they were safe, and many others in the Orlando area received a message from Facebook asking if they were safe. Hours later, the victims’ list started to be disclosed and a roster of photos began to emerge from spontaneous curators who collected pictures from Facebook and Instagram. Through the tag option available on social media, hundreds of pictures started to appear on my news feed. Friends of friends were some of the victims who were subject to instantaneous memorialization.

Journalist Xorge Olivares (2017) captured the feeling succinctly when he stated:

Looking back at the victims’ list and scanning through their pictures, how could I not take it personally? A vast majority of those killed had names that sounded like mine, faces that looked like mine, skin tones that matched mine, and likely struggles that resembled mine, as a South Texas native forced to hide his truth from those who thought homosexuality was a sin reserved for jotos y maricones.<sup>8</sup>

Their story also resembled mine: one of Puerto Rican a diasporic subject who moved to the mainland in search for a better future and who casually enjoyed Latino Nights at a local gay club: a place where we routinely find refuge from an exclusionary world. However, the discourse that was emerging from the news networks contrasted from what was happening on social media.

In their informative duty, news outlets, such as CNN, MSNBC and Fox News followed a narrative different from that being woven in social media. These news outlets blurred the life

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<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/ev45np/the-pulse-tragedy-and-the-ongoing-erasure-of-queer-latin-culture](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/ev45np/the-pulse-tragedy-and-the-ongoing-erasure-of-queer-latin-culture)



stories of the victims while reviewing the event in a collective frame of remembrance. The collective memory consists in producing memories as part of a group or community where some narratives are privileged over others. The creation of this kind of memory does not stem solely from either individual subjects or their communities, but rather depends in great measure on institutional decisions that create and filter them based on political, economic or ideological interests.

The significance of observing the collective memories produced by the media becomes the more important as those memories are imprinted in the collective consciousness: as Barbie Zelizer observed "the story of America's past will remain in part a story of what the media have chosen to remember, a story of how the media's memories have in turn become America's own." (Zelizer, 1992, 214). Neiger, Meyers, and Zandberg argue that "the fundamental role of mediation and the dominance of social constructions...are demarcated by similar themes regarding issues of representation, socio-cultural power relations, and the role of narrativity in the process of social construction of meaning" (p. 4). According to Neiger, et al., there are five characteristics associated to collective memories:

1. collective memories are socio-cultural constructs defined and negotiated by socio-political power and agendas.
2. the construction of collective memories is a continuous, multidirectional process where past schemes and frames of references shape the understanding of the present.
3. collective memory is functional as it defines and charts the boundaries of communities.
4. as an abstract idea, collective memories must be concretized into rituals, images, and other cultural artifacts.
5. collective memory is narrational and structured in familiar cultural patterns.

In that regards, in their attempt to construct the frame of reference in which the traumatic event of Pulse crystalized into a "story," the collective memories produced by the newscast absorbed and metamorphized, as it were, disparate identity narratives into a canonical, essentialist version of the event.

In the discourse of memory created from the coverage in the immediate aftermath of the Pulse massacre, the news story privileged several identity narratives over the motifs that the victims might have chosen to tell about themselves. The Pulse victims were, first and foremost, 1) Victims of terrorism —news discourse employed to connect the attack with the terrorist group known as ISIS as the identity of the shooter became known (e.g., ISIS Claims

Responsibility for America's Most Deadly Mass Shooting;<sup>9</sup> At Least 49 Dead in Nightclub Shooting: 'An Act of Terror and an Act of Hate')<sup>10</sup>—; 2) Americans —narrative recourse used to separate the “them,” that is, the barbarians, from the “us,” that is, civilization (e.g., 50 Dead At Orlando Nightclub In Worst Mass Shooting In U.S. History)<sup>11</sup>—; 3) nighttime club patrons —entertainment and leisure spaces for the young (e.g., Nightclub nightmare devastates Orlando; Attack that killed 50, wounded 53 'domestic terror incident'); and finally 4) gay club patrons in Latina/o night (e.g., Latino Community Mourns Victims Of Mass Shooting In Orlando;<sup>12</sup> Orlando Club Was Known in Gay Community as a Safe Place; Venue hosted dance parties, drag shows, and events for HIV awareness, treatment and prevention)<sup>13</sup>. As pointed out by Netta Ha-llan (2015) imagining a collective identity has become not only obvious but has gained certain acceptance during the last decade. Frames of remembrance are thus embedded within a series of pre-set identity narratives that are highly identifiable, recognized, and based on a strong affective element.<sup>14</sup>

However, the virtual ethnography during and a day after the attack reflected other digital memory registries. On social media, the names, the anecdotes and life stories of the Puerto Rican victims were claimed, remembered and individualized in multiple vignettes that emerged on the walls of Facebook friends, acquaintances and even people who did not know the victims. In a status posted on the Facebook wall of Puerto Rican Efraín Barradas, he states:

I never met Jean Carlos Méndez. I never saw him. Until that moment I had not known of his existence. But since then, I adopted him as a friend because my pain needed to be concreted: I needed to put a face on everything I was feeling. In the end, he adopted me, and it was like that because Jean Carlos, although he lived in Orlando, was from

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<sup>9</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3637414/Everyone-running-Gunman-bursts-gay-nightclub-Florida-shoots-20-people-taking-hostages.html#ixzz4BP9b8iGP>

<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/national-international/USW-Multiple-Injuries-as-Gunman-Opens-Fire-at-Orlando-Gay-Club-382604431.html>

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/many-dead-in-florida-nightclub-shooting>

<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.npr.org/2016/06/14/481977954/latino-community-mourns-victims-of-mass-shooting-in-orlando>

<sup>13</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/orlando-club-was-known-by-gay-community-as-a-safe-place-1465775266>

<sup>14</sup> For more information read Images of History in Israel Television News The Territorial Dimensions of Collective Memories 1987-1990 in *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* (2015).

my town. His family lived near mine in Aguadilla. Therefore, Jean Carlos became the face of my pain.

Barradas makes an important intervention in contributing to Méndez's place in the collective memory in as much as that is channeled through the Facebook social network; at the same time, by introducing his comment with a negation ("I never met Jean Carlos Méndez) he makes an implicit reference to the forum, the social media platform, in which he is particularizing the construction of a digital narrative, since a Facebook connection is never face-to-face. It is a form of mediated intimacy that incisively enters into the public discourse to interrupt the kind of knowing produced by media power machines. I became part of this chain conjoining the intimate space of memory and the social media space of memory merely by witnessing Efraín Barradas's digital intervention, one of many that struck me on Facebook and Instagram.

However, it was the rhythm of the Puerto Rican *danza* what led to one of the most powerful interventions in the memorialization of the Pulse victims. During the 2016 commencement ceremony of the University of Puerto Rico, the choir of the Río Piedras campus sang the *danza Mis Amores* ["My Loves"], composed by Simón Madera, in honor of the Orlando massacre victims<sup>15</sup>.

Adiós, Adiós, amores,  
*Goodbye, goodbye my love ones*  
encantos de mi vida,  
*beauties of my life,*  
la prenda más querida de mi vida,  
*The most precious gift,*  
Vida, de mi amor, amor.  
*Of my life, my life, my love, love.*  
Siento en el alma pesares  
*I feel a sorrow in my soul*  
que jamás podré olvidar  
That I would never forget

With thousands of views, the video went viral on Facebook and operated in the networks to articulate solidarity through the medium of a product of cultural nationalism, the Puerto Rican

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<sup>15</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeEwU5CKvCQ>

*danza*, with the addition of an icon of the LGBTTTQ struggle, the rainbow flag, is used to complement the song. In light of the situation currently faced by the University of Puerto Rico, shaken by extreme austerity measures, the video of the concert choir, singing to the victims of the Pulse massacre during the graduation acts, becomes a memetic sign of the times.

#### 4. Final Remarks

The internet synthesis that brings together the power of search engines and the digitalization of memories produces a new kind of archival/memorial experience. Cataloging, in the past, was a passive adjunct to institutions: the library card catalog did not drive the library. But the internet has reversed and modified this relationship. On social media, the algorithm post-mortem has emerged as a tool for the collection, correlation, pattern creation, and production of information about the death of individuals without any of the traditional rituals that have surrounded death since the beginning of human culture. Yet without knowing or understanding the memory of the death they process, they re-insert the dead back into our memories, spurring a ritualistic/emotional response. Every year, Facebook and its algorithm post-mortem forced us to remember and rethink the Pulse massacre through its "On This Day" (OTD) application. The OTD was created in 2015 and feature highlights past posts on a private page, sometimes inserts them as a suggestion for sharing into your News Feed.<sup>16</sup> One of the challenges with the application is that it is almost impossible for the algorithm to filter painful memories.<sup>17</sup> For Facebook to filter painful memories through some kind of broad word-sensitive search would knock out too many OTDs, from a top-down perspective. Instead, users have to request deactivation of their OTD status or to filter out date ranges they do not want returning on their pages.<sup>18</sup>

Elena Esposito (2017) argues that in the face of the mechanical impersonality of the algorithmic memory there is a chance for some sort of memory fatigue. She states that "algorithms can implement, for the first time, the classical insight that it might be possible to reinforce forgetting not by erasing memories but by multiplying them." (p. 1). She also argues that "Memory requires the ability to focus and select data, and to produce information referring to a meaningful context, which implies both the ability to remember and the ability to forget" (p. 2).

Furthering these arguments, some critics of the Web 2.0, who see the algorithm as an appropriation of the work of the *prosumer* who creates and distributes these digital

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<sup>16</sup> Retrieved from: <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2015/03/introducing-on-this-day-a-new-way-to-look-back-at-photos-and-memories-on-facebook/>

<sup>17</sup> Retrieved from:

<https://www.facebook.com/help/community/question/?id=10207781996975065>

<sup>18</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.theverge.com/2015/4/2/8315897/facebook-on-this-day-nostalgia-app-bringing-back-painful-memories>

manifestations. These critics see in the algorithm an opportunity for critical analysis.<sup>19</sup> For instance, when watching the status updates, images, and links shared a year after the Pulse massacre, it begs the question of the kinds of ways the Puerto Ricans who died during the massacre were presented. For instance, the memorialization might prompt a discussion about issues related to gun violence, disenfranchised communities, and the increasing migration of Puerto Ricans from the island to the mainland – which might be valid issues, but which also might obscure the particular characteristics and lives of the victims themselves, forcing their loved ones into issues that are not central to their own grief. As the digital homeland continues in crisis, a digital lament as an expression of pain, sadness, uneasiness, sorrow, guilt, shame or nostalgia, found in the web an opportunity for production, viral circulation and resistance.

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<sup>19</sup> According to Gillespie (2014), the subtle power effects of Web 2.0 algorithms, which support the expropriation of user-generated value, should be understood as a key mediator of contemporary Memory Studies and neoliberal capitalism.

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