






This Puerto Rican Pride Organizer Swam Through a Flood to Find His Partner's Family



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Hurricane Maria.

BY JHONI JACKSON (/AUTHORS/JHONI-JACKSON)
OCTOBER 06 2017 4:46 PM EDT



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Santana-Rivera took shelter there, in that municipality of Toa Baja, rather than at home in Carolina, an area known to be more susceptible to flooding. After a long bout of vigilance during the storm, he'd gone to sleep, but woke up briefly hoping to return worried messages from his partner, Abdier Benitez, in New York. In search of a better signal, Santana-Rivera went outdoors, along with Nero, a dog the couple shares in tow.

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That's when he noticed the water rising.

"I'm like, it's not raining," he recalls. "Why is the street wet, and an hour ago it was dry?"

No cell reception. Cars rushed away in the opposite direction. The water was creeping up to the doors of his vehicle.

"I woke up my mom, and I told her we may have a problem," he says. "She thought it was [water clogged by blocked sewers]. I'm like, *No, sweetie, that's not what's going on. Everything is flooded; we need to get out of here.* We took the dog, we took the cat; my mom was still trying to put all the clothes and the furniture and everything up so it [wouldn't] get wet. I'm like, *Forget about that, we need to get out of here. Forget about everything.*"

Scrambling to reach higher ground, they found police and military officials prepared to take them to an official shelter. He'd just waded through waist-high water with his mother, Haydee Rivera, and his aunt; in all the frenzy, Santana-Rivera says, his cat nearly drowned when he fumbled, almost dropping the carrier. He'd left so frantically and suddenly that he forgot to put on shoes.

Related | Trans Power & Queer Visibility at Puerto Rican Pride (<https://www.out.com/travel-nightlife/2017/6/30/trans-power-queer-visibility-puerto-rican-pride>)

But he had to go back. The family of his partner lived close by—what if they were sleeping? No alarms had sounded to warn residents of the area, Santana-Rivera says. His mother was furious.

"She was like, *You're going where? Are you nuts?* I'm like, *I'm sorry, I can't leave them there,*" he says. "I just found out what was going on because I woke up; I was sleeping. What if they don't know what's going on? And they drown? I have to, I have to."

He left his mom, safe with the officials. The water had risen so high that walking was impossible; he literally swam the entire route to his boyfriend's family. Santana-Rivera arrived screaming.

They'd taken shelter on the second floor of a neighbor's home. Fearing a dangerous swim back, he stayed the night.

After the flooding recessed, the damage surfaced: The family of Santana-Rivera's partner had lost everything.

"[My boyfriend's mother] began crying; that's what's really painful for me," he says. "She didn't cry because they don't have a car or furniture, she began crying when she saw she had a closet full of pictures of her son, my boyfriend, and his two brothers. When she saw that all the pictures were ruined, she started crying. I was like, *Oh my god. What can you say?* I was like, *You know what? They are alive, and so are you. You need to be grateful for that, so forget about everything else.*"



(From Left): Santana-Rivera, Abdier's mother, Abdier's brother, Dog Nero

Despite the water level drop, there was still more flooding on the way back to his mother's home. He swam, again, searching until he located her at his grandmother's home. His family wasn't too happy with him at first, but later understood. Benetiz, who's been Santana-Rivera's partner since 2011, would have done the same for him, he says.

"The thing I cannot believe is how this tragedy, because it is a tragedy, has made the family of my boyfriend and my mom to come together," he says. "[Before], they were like, *Yeah, hi, how are you doing?* But now it's just the opposite. This can bring people together—if they decide to. It didn't happen for the best, it just happened. You have to decide whether you're going to take it as a lesson or not."

Santana-Rivera's mother didn't suffer any damages to her home, and his own place in Carolina is fine, too. They are grateful, of course, to be safe. At least 36 people have died (<https://weather.com/storms/hurricane/news/puerto-rico-death-toll-hurricane-maria>) as a result of Maria, whether directly during the storm or after for lack of medical treatments requiring electricity. Some experts believe the count to be significantly higher (<https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/10/2/16392670/puerto-rico-death-toll-trump>), and that it will likely continue to climb, as power has yet to be restored, many hospitals are without generators, less than half the island has water, and supplies outside the metro area are increasingly scarce.

Related | Puerto Rico Death Toll Rises to 34 After Trump Downplays Hurricane Devastation
(<https://www.out.com/news-opinion/2017/10/04/puerto-rico-death-toll-rises-34-after-trump-downplays-hurricane-devastation>)

A storm of this scale carries complex, long-term repercussions. The power outage caused by Hurricane Irma, only weeks before Maria, left many Puerto Ricans without work. Now, even more are unable to generate any income. While FEMA is offering some monetary aid, the forms must be filled out online—and finding wifi on an island without electricity isn't easy. Regardless of the potential \$500 in help, that's not enough money to carry anyone for an extended period of time. And this stretch without work will be a lengthy one.

Santana-Rivera is a contract employee for the Department of Health working on a HIV/AIDS surveillance project. Because of the storms, he has hardly been able to work at all throughout September.

"I'm not the only one," he says. "Everybody's in the same boat, and we need resources. We need people not only to be worried about what happened before the hurricane... what happens if I don't have my paycheck at the end of the month? How am I going to survive that? That's also part of the tragedy."

There are ways to help, like donating to the Maria Fund (<http://mariafund.org/>). You can also support efforts that cater specifically to the LGBTQIA community, like this fundraiser (<https://www.youcaring.com/transqueerpuertoricansimpactedbyhurricanemaria-961085>) that will put money directly in the hands of people who need it. It's headed up by a Puerto Rican in the diaspora in collaboration with the Puerto Rico Trans Youth Coalition (<https://www.facebook.com/PRTransYouthCoalition/>). Another project aims to facilitate relocation in Philadelphia (https://www.youcaring.com/lgbtqueertoricanevacueesofhurricanemaria-967804?fb_action_ids=516104102065959&fb_action_types=youcaringcom:share) for LGBTQIA evacuees in need of assistance. San Juan's Centro Comunitario LGBTT de Puerto Rico (https://www.facebook.com/Centro.LGBTT.PR/?hc_ref=ARTZDFn3ZunXPYBUsUNPYqLadyle5Wy442TQx65TOOBojoNfxOS7M_fYzIlmT2WQxqg&fref=nf) is also raising funds to provide relief (<https://connect.clickandpledge.com/Organization/lgbtcenters/campaign/PuertoRicoRelief>): Batteries, flashlights, food, and a generator to power the center.

Related | Here's How You Can Support Puerto Rico's LGBTQ Community Center
(<https://www.out.com/news-opinion/2017/10/02/heres-how-you-can-support-puerto-ricos-lgbtq-community-center>)

Because of the tightened financial strain for those on the island, Puerto Rico's LGBTQIA organizations will likely see a drop in fundraising. Santana-Rivera, who also works for the Colectivo Orgullo Arcoiris (<https://www.facebook.com/pg/orgulloarcoirispr/>), the year-round nonprofit that heads up San Juan's Pride (<https://www.out.com/travel-nightlife/2017/6/30/trans-power-queer-visibility-puerto-rican-pride>) festival, wanted to arrange a fundraising event, but without electricity, and considering the employment situation, that seems impractical, if not impossible. Help from outside—to keep existing services going, and to meet an increase in need—will be crucial.

“I don't know when we're going to electricity again,” Santana-Rivera stresses. “Maybe it's not four months, it's five. Well, we survive. That's the important part. But once again, it's not only surviving the hurricane, it's surviving what happens after.”

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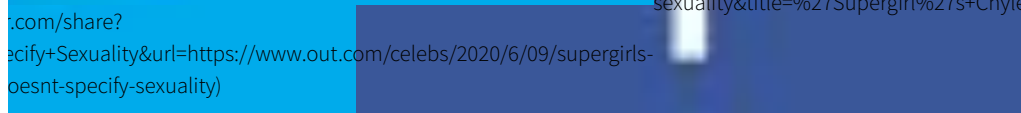


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This Photo Series Spotlights the Queer Millennial Scene in Post-María Puerto Rico



OUT: FEATURED VIDEO

Photography: Anthony Velazquez (/credits/photography-anthony-velazquez)

"When you're struggling to find water and a place to charge your phone every day, putting together a sickening look isn't exactly top priority."

BY JHONI JACKSON (/AUTHORS/JHONI-JACKSON)
OCTOBER 31 2017 11:37 AM EDT



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When Hurricane María ravaged the Caribbean, it destroyed electrical grids, homes, agriculture, and anything else in its path. But the lasting effects are a complex kind of catastrophe: It's been a month since the storm passed, and the damage continues.

Puerto Rican photographer Anthony Velázquez (<https://www.instagram.com/byanthonyv/>) is exploring a less-considered aspect: The ramifications for the millennial queer community of San Juan.



Related | Gallery: 12 Queer Millennials in Post-María Puerto Rico (<http://out.com/art-books/2017/10/31/gallery-12-queer-millennials-post-maria-puerto-rico>)

He didn't have a full series (<http://out.com/art-books/2017/10/31/gallery-12-queer-millennials-post-maria-puerto-rico>) in mind when he posed Anoma Lía (https://www.instagram.com/bo_blanco/), a San Juan drag queen, in a shower a few weeks ago. Aldrin Manuel Cañals (<https://www.instagram.com/drivenbyfashion/>) saw the photos and wanted his own, and so did Victoria Holiday, another local queen. All of them missed dressing up; when you're struggling to find water and a place to charge your phone every day, putting together a sickening look isn't exactly top priority.

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The project snowballed from there, and grew to include more drag performers, artists, students, and other members of the San Juan queer scene. The background elements intentionally reflect the times: A propane tank to power gas stoves closed businesses with storm shutters still in place, and a

refrigerator that's empty for lack of electricity, but also reflects the frightening reality of food shortages (<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57992#.WfeNGliQzIU>) on the island.

With every shoot, Velázquez conducted an interview, asking the subject questions about how María has changed their life.

“Most people are saying that the hurricane has shaken up all the plans that they had,” he says. “It's made them prioritize, and they really can't achieve their immediate goals that they had at the moment, and they're trying to reorganize and see how they will make ends meet, little by little. They're not thinking about their long-term plans. They're just thinking of surviving day to day.”

He's noticed some of the community has toned down their queerness, maybe as a means of precaution. In searching for supplies or electricity to charge devices, they're visiting unfamiliar places, making queer self-expression more precarious. (“It was like they didn't feel safe,” he says).

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The day he photographed Cañals—when Cañals wasn't wearing makeup, but donned high-waisted pants—they felt the “weird looks” intensely.

“I don't know if [people outside the community] just think it's not necessary for people to be fashionable or trendy or weird, or they think I do it because I want to impress them,” he says. “But I'm just doing it because this is how I feel comfortable... I wasn't wearing the gold pants because I was trying to impress everybody. These are the pants that were clean, and I wear them all the time. When we dress up, it's because we feel more comfortable; we do it for fun.”

Communication issues were a hurdle, too. More cell towers have been restored just recently (<http://status.pr/>), but there are still areas on the island with absolutely no reception. Outside the metro area especially, things are generally more difficult, he notes.

“We're here in San Juan, and we really are very privileged [in that] I can go charge my camera batteries. I have to do it two days before, but I have that privilege that I can just go to the mall and charge my things, and yeah, I might not have cell reception but I'll just stop at the Burger King,” he says. “To us, now, in Puerto Rico, that's privilege—just being able to do that. That's a huge privilege that other areas on the island don't have. In all of this, the people represented in the series, we've been a little more fortunate because we've had more access to these things, at least quicker.”

After the interview, Velázquez was headed to Aguadilla, the northwestern coastal town he's from. His family was expecting to receive a generator from his sister, who lives in the states. Water service was restored to their neighborhood just last week, but they were still without electricity.

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Of the 12 subjects featured, five have made the difficult decision to leave Puerto Rico, Velázquez says. That choice is inherently personal, and the reasons vary—but one major factor behind the exodus of Puerto Ricans is undeniably economic strife. In August, unemployment clocked in last at

10 percent (<https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.pr.htm>); today, with so many businesses still unable to open, it's fair to assume that number has risen drastically. Velázquez says he's considering relocating, too.

“I graduated in 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Communication. I graduated with a 3.95, the highest grade of my department, and I can't find a job anywhere,” he says.

The Center for Puerto Rican Studies in New York estimates that 14 percent of the Puerto Rican population (https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/RB2017-01-POST-MARIA%20EXODUS_V2.pdf) will relocate by 2019. For San Juan's young queer scene, the impact could be significant.

“I know there's still a lot of people here who aren't leaving and that can maintain it,” Velázquez says. “But it's a sad reality, and we took a long time to build [this community]. Maybe four, five years, and even people before us were building it, but us? It took us a long time to find these places we felt comfortable in, people we felt comfortable dressing up around. We put work into this scene.”

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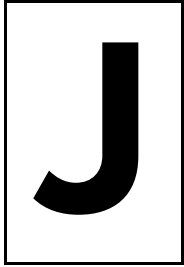


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Jo Cosme still doesn't have electricity at her home in Puerto Rico, but the 29-year-old multidisciplinary artist still managed to churn out an incredible piece for an exhibition at Museo las Américas in Old San Juan. Titled *Catarsis*, the expo features work from artists in a post-Hurricane Maria context. For Cosme, who mixes social and political critique with humor and cynicism, that meant relating every bit of the struggle after the storm.

You can't use the deck as a traditional tarot, Cosme notes, but Maria survivors undoubtedly identify with each card. As the humanitarian crisis unfolded, everyone literally lived what's in this deck.

"The cards, if you look at them, they focus less about the hurricane and more about what happened after," she says. "The hurricane was a monster, obviously – but even more monstrous was what happened after."

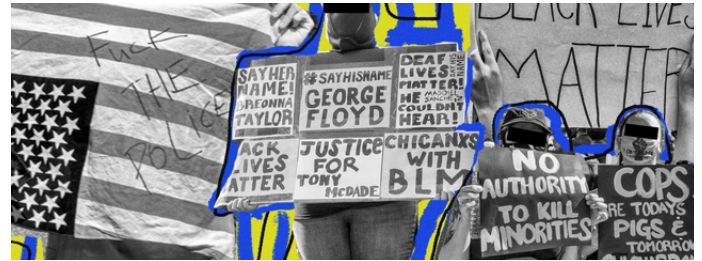
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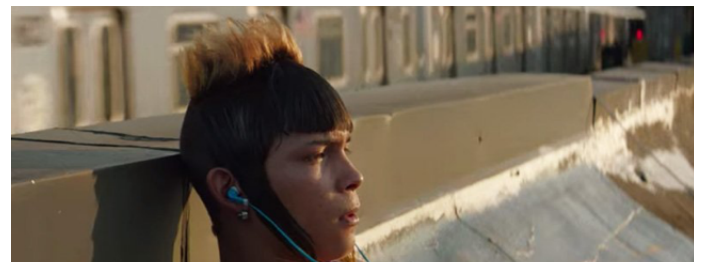
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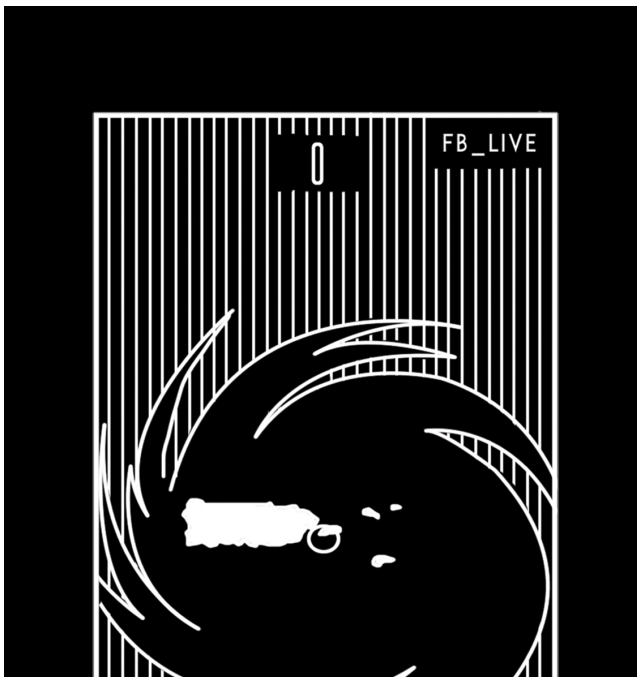
The anxiety felt while glued to local meteorologist Ada Monzon's Facebook page as Maria approached the island, the absurdity of the local and federal government's failures, and finally, the hashtag that purports recovery, but feels tragically ironic – it's all there in Cosme's deck. And on the back of each card, there's the Puerto Rican flag in black-and-white; a symbol of resistance.

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Learn what each card means below.

1

Los Bendecidos





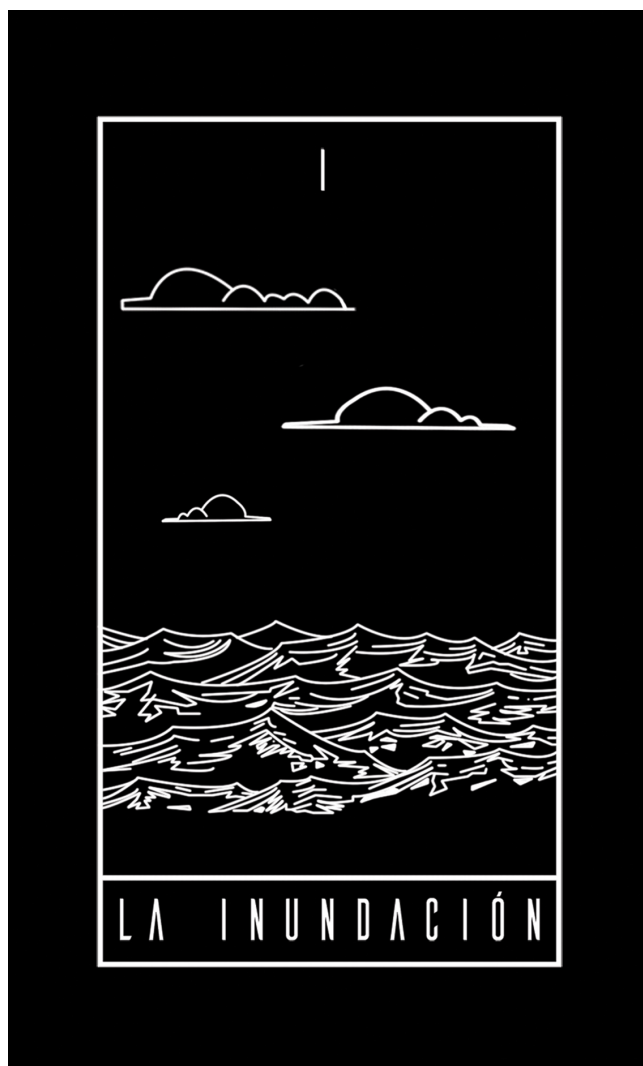
Courtesy of Jo Cosme

With a nod to the stressful, frightening Facebook Live vigilance, this card also references the way some Puerto Ricans spoke about Hurricane Irma's last-minute sparing of the island, just two weeks prior to Maria.

"People here were saying we're blessed because the hurricane missed us. But it hit our neighbor islands! And then Maria came and hit us," she says. "So it was a sarcastic comment."

2

La Inundación



Courtesy of Jo Cosme

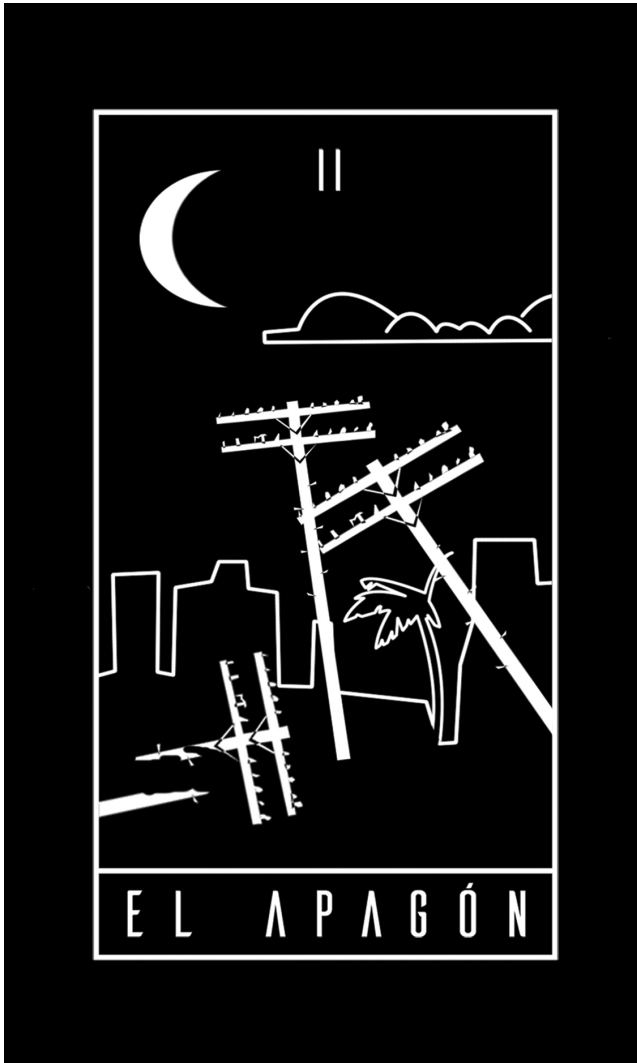
“In Puerto Rico, because of bad construction, if it rains a little bit, everything floods. And because of the hurricane, that was quadrupled,” she says. “People’s houses flooded, whether you’re in the metro [area] or el campo.”

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El Apagón

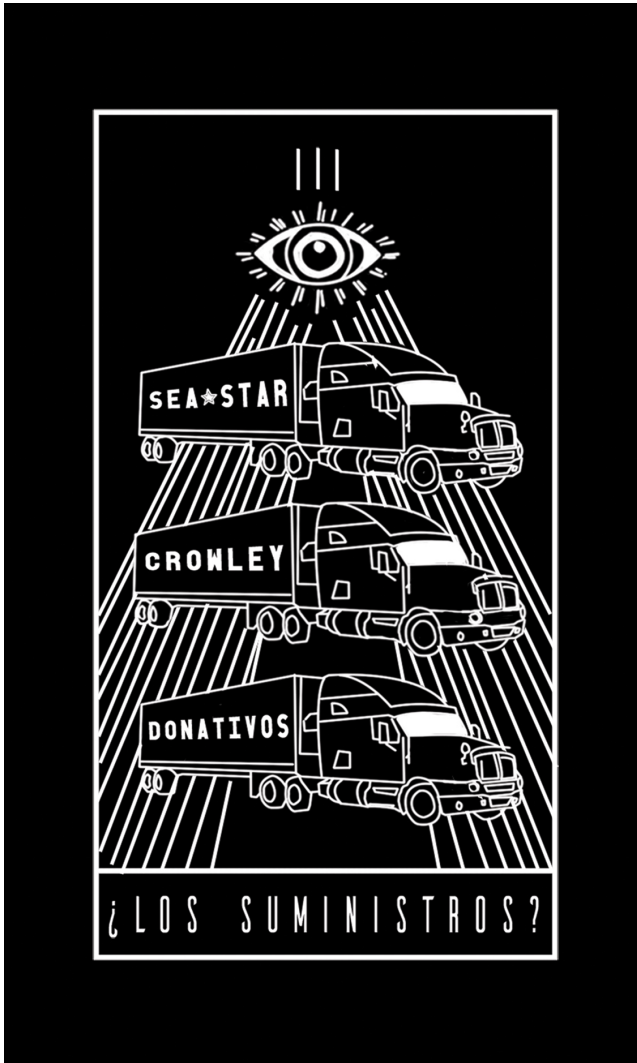


Courtesy of Jo Cosme

Today, at least 27 percent of Puerto Ricans are still living without electricity. That's more than 100 days without power, depending on whether it was Maria or Irma that caused the outage.

4

¿Los Suministros?



Courtesy of Jo Cosme

Whether infrastructure problems or a lack of truck drivers (<http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/27/us/puerto-rico-aid-problem/index.html>) was to blame, the fact is that Puerto Ricans needed food and water badly. “So that’s why [it] says suministros with a question mark – like, where are they?” Cosme says.

Scarcity was a serious problem (<http://www.newsweek.com/puerto-rico-electric-power-food-682493>) in the immediate aftermath, and remains an issue – but has been mitigated somewhat, thankfully, by grassroots community relief efforts.

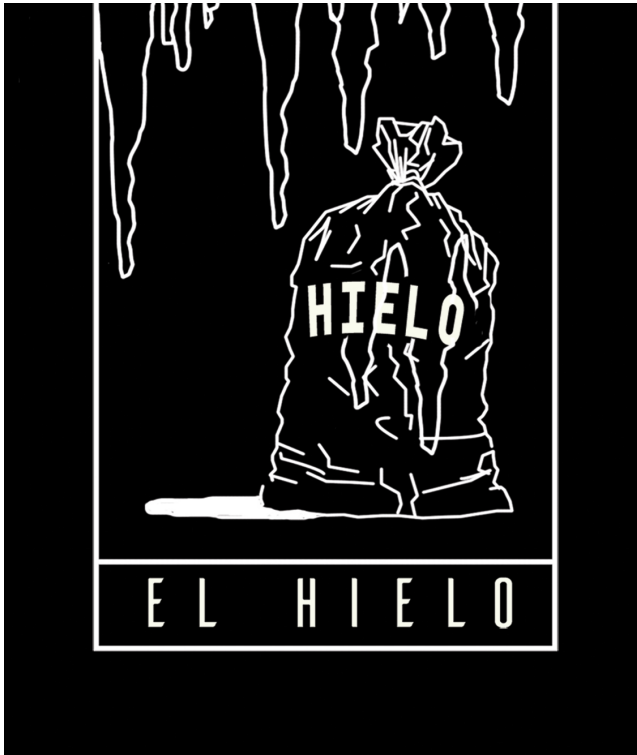
The eye on top, of course, represents Big Brother and George Orwell's dystopian *1984* novel, according to Cosme.

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El Hielo





Courtesy of Jo Cosme

“People started fighting over ice,” Cosme recalls. “It’s like 90-degree weather here in Puerto Rico. It’s very hot. Old people need something cold to drink or they’ll get sick, or even for medication; some people are diabetic, they need their medication stored in ice. So the lines for ice started forming, hours and hours long.”

6

San Gasolina





Courtesy of Jo Cosme

Waiting for hours in line

(<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/09/26/553632771/at-a-gas-station-with-no-gas-puerto-ricans-settle-in-for-an-interminable-wait>) for gas, whether in a car or in the unrelenting heat on foot to fill a container (there were lines to buy those, too), was an unfortunate post-storm ritual. There was no avoiding the process; many stations weren't operating, few were getting replenished – and there were limits on how much a single customer could purchase at once. Sometimes, the wait resulted only in frustration.

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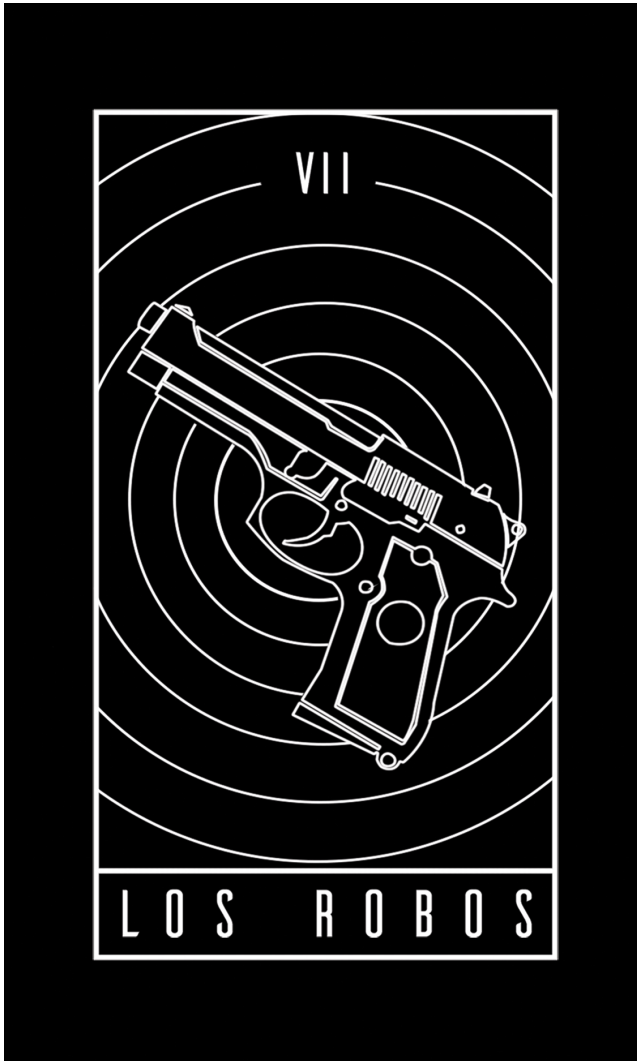


Courtesy of Jo Cosme

"It looks holy as well, because any person who had a power generator was sanctified," Cosme says.

8

Los Robos



Courtesy of Jo Cosme

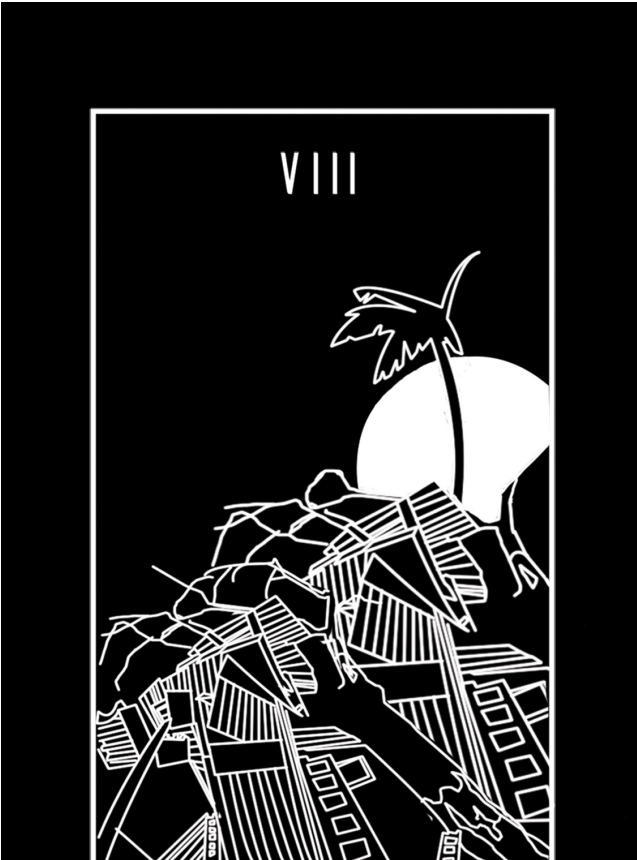
But anyone who owns a generator has had to contend with potential theft. Just last week, a man was killed (<https://www.telemundopr.com/noticias/de-stacados/Asesinado-en-intento-de-robo-de-planta-electrica-en-Vega-Baja-467651023.html>) in Vega Baja while trying to prevent thieves from taking his brother's generator. The police

department has created a task force to specifically address generator theft.

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El Escombro





EL ESCOMBRO

Courtesy of Jo Cosme

“The debris were in front of houses on streets for months. Another thing nobody wanted to take care of. People had to go to the streets and take care of it, because the government wasn’t taking care of it for us, even though we do pay taxes for that to happen,” Cosme says. “And that meant it would keep flooding, because every time it would rain, the debris would get in the drainage, and it would flood again.”

10

Toque de Queda





Courtesy of Jo Cosme

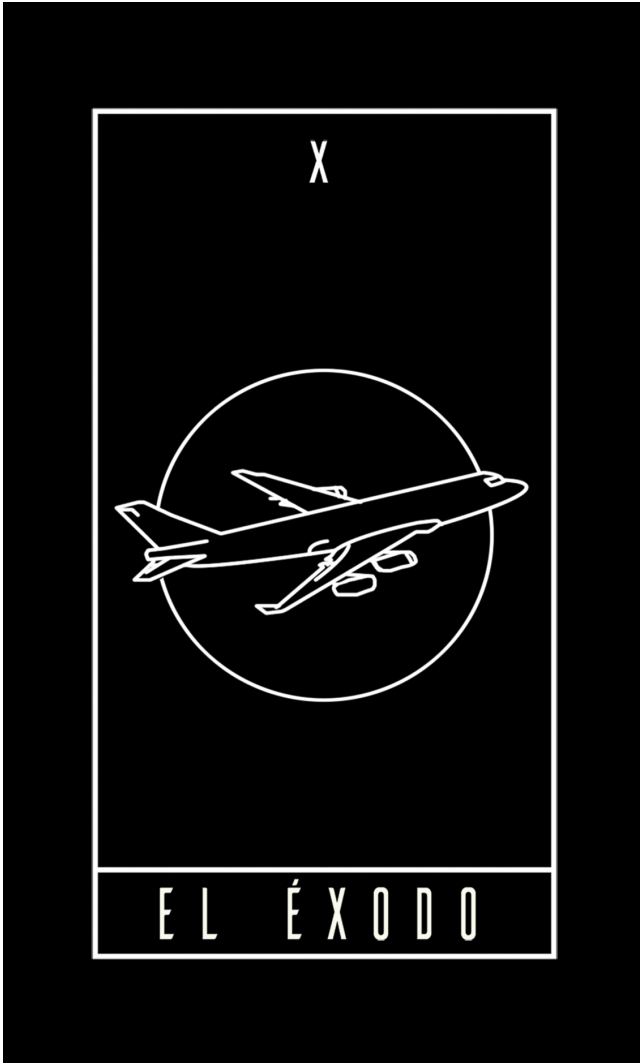
Governor Ricardo Rosselló imposed an island-wide curfew intended as a safety measure, but some believe it actually put Puerto Ricans in danger. Criminals seemed to have free rein on empty streets, and many medical offices closed early to adhere to the rule, leaving patients who couldn't arrive before then without necessary care (<https://www.metro.pr/pr/noticias/2017/11/17/fallido-toque-queda-rossello.html>).

It was initially was set from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m, but was eliminated altogether within a month. “They kept changing it constantly. Sometimes you wouldn’t even know; you would have to get on the governor’s Twitter to know what time. It was crazy,” Cosme says.

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El Éxodo



Courtesy of Jo Cosme

The Center for Puerto Rican Studies in

New York has estimated that between 2017 and 2019, 14 percent of Puerto Rico's population

([https://centopr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/RB2017-01-POST-](https://centopr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/RB2017-01-POST-MARIA%20EXODUS_V2.pdf)

[MARIA%20EXODUS_V2.pdf](https://centopr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/RB2017-01-POST-MARIA%20EXODUS_V2.pdf)) will leave the island. Approximately 250,000 residents

([http://www.elvocero.com/gobierno/mil-boricuas-se-han-ido-despu-s-de-mar-a/article_2890662c-f0a8-11e7-a968-](http://www.elvocero.com/gobierno/mil-boricuas-se-han-ido-despu-s-de-mar-a/article_2890662c-f0a8-11e7-a968-532be16b421a.html)

[532be16b421a.html](http://www.elvocero.com/gobierno/mil-boricuas-se-han-ido-despu-s-de-mar-a/article_2890662c-f0a8-11e7-a968-532be16b421a.html)) have already made

the painful decision to leave following

María. But because of the new blow to an

already grim economic outlook, fears of

medical inefficiencies, and poor quality of

life amid the crisis, some young people

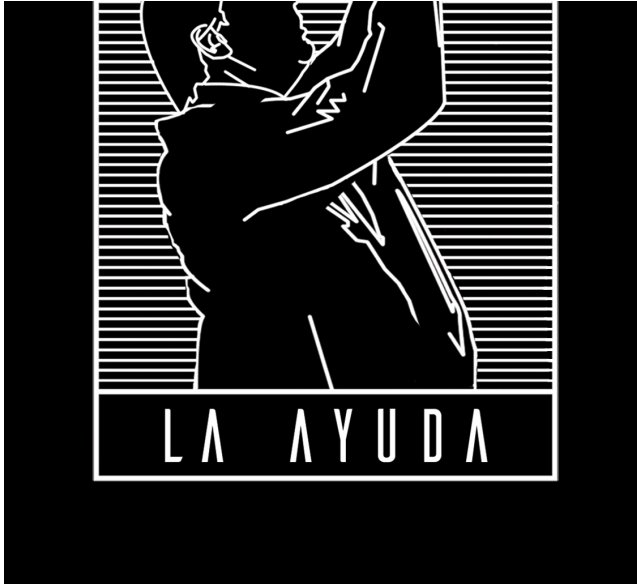
have said they feel forced out

(<http://remezcla.com/features/culture/puerto-rican-exodus-hurricane-maria/>).

12

La Ayuda





Courtesy of Jo Cosme

“When he came here, they took him to Guaynabo to a chapel; not much had happened there,” Cosme says about Trump. “He went to the prettiest corner of Guaynabo. He came here and instead of giving us food, he gave us paper towels. It was like a joke to him.”

Cosme, like many others, Cosme felt the visit was a slap in the face.

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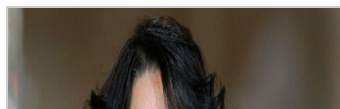
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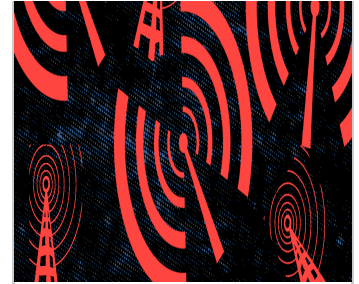
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Drag Kings Get Their Due in Puerto Rico's Burgeoning Queer Movement

(<https://www.papermag.com/drag-kings-queer-puerto-rico-2536820698.html>)

By Jhoni Jackson | 19 February 2018



Growing up in Puerto Rico, Génesis Castro Cruz was teased for their facial hair, for being a girl with "too much of a mustache." Today, at 22 years old, they wholly embrace it: In personifying Molly Jo (<https://www.instagram.com/mollyjoda/>) — a queer drag persona, the embodiment of Castro Cruz at their most extreme — they've come to love the fuzz.

"I just put a little mascara, and it looks beautiful," they laugh.

Molly Jo debuted just over a year ago as a leather-clad werewolf in a Halloween show, and from the start, it was all quite queer. For one, Jo didn't lip sync along to male vocals, instead opting for "You and I" as an homage to Lady Gaga, whose Jo Calderone character at the 2011 VMAs was an inspiration.

That was only two months after the first-ever all drag king show on the island, while the queer drag movement was developing with all-encompassing inclusivity of gender identities, sexualities, body types, and performance styles. The burgeoning scene represents what is truly great about queer drag — that literally anyone is welcome to participate.

Domme Darko

At any given event, you might see a cis gay man as a bearded queen in heels, or a cis queer woman donning chest hair and a push-up bra might pull audience members up for one-on-one lap dances. You might see a nonbinary artist engage the crowd in an emotive performance art piece. Blocking brows isn't a given for anyone (though plenty performers do it, and well), and looks run the gamut from avant-garde to casual-cool. Rhinestone-heavy, pageant-style gowns rarely make an

appearance.

Originally concentrated around the University of Puerto Rico's flagship campus in Río Piedras (many of the performers are students there), the queer drag scene has since expanded exponentially, and so has the drag king faction within it.

It's important to note that, while likeminded movements in Berlin, Atlanta, New York City, and elsewhere have flourished, sustaining a queer drag scene in a debt-addled island presents its own unique hurdles. The economic recession (<http://money.cnn.com/2017/09/20/news/economy/puerto-rico-maria-rebuilding/index.html>) began a decade before Hurricane María, and has no doubt worsened. And though millennials and younger generations stand as proof of progress, and despite a growing LGTBQIA+ community, politics and social norms on the island tend to be oppressively conservative. (It is a predominantly Catholic (http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/puerto-rico#/?affiliations_religion_id=11&affiliations_year=2010) society, after all).

Chris Korber, 29, better known onstage as Chris Griandher (<https://www.facebook.com/chris.griandher.dragking/>), has been a major facilitator in the growth of queer drag, and specifically, the drag kings movement (<https://www.facebook.com/dragkingsofpuertorico/>).

Mel Rey

He was one of the first kings to emerge — simply because he wanted to see drag kings in the queer scene mix, and there weren't any.

"I'm like, I'm not gonna be a drag king. I remember I was like, uh-uh, no way," he scoffs. "But in time, I was like, god, there's *no* drag kings! Why don't I just do it?"

With a background in art (he's still currently studying at Puerto Rico's Escuela de Artes Plásticas) that includes performance, Korber began to see Chris Griandher as another way to use his body to deliver messages. But this happened over time, and simultaneously as several sides of Chris Griandher took shape.

Presented under the same name, there's a handful of recurring characters: The Ghoul King, a ghastly Papi Loco who laughs maniacally (a stealthy way to cover up nervousness, Korber divulges); el Fauno, created for a Bacchus themed night; the glammed-up, rock 'n' roll Chris, the original Papi,

dressed in leather, leopard print, and a bare chests; and el Viejo Verde, a drunken elder who sells weed and inexplicably carries a baby Jesus.

Diamond Kings is Korber's weekly classy-jazzy themed night at Polo Norte Lounge in Old San Juan. There's also Dark Kings Vanquish, a monthly goth-leaning event that rotates venues. By creating these shows, Chris Griandher is undeniably at the forefront of the Puerto Rican drag king scene. He's helped propel the movement forward.

But at that inaugural performance at Kings of the '90s — an installment of De Show (<http://facebook.com/deshowpuertorico>) which, at the time, was the only queer drag monthly in Puerto Rico — Korber was overwhelmed. Hosted by Warhola Pop (<https://www.facebook.com/Warhola-Pop-134948000030083/>), a queen now relocated to NYC, the lineup featured all king newbies. Nobody had done this before. And hours before the show, Chris Griandher nearly bailed.

Nomi Latoken

"But I just ignored everything. I ran to the little [backstage] space that we had, and I tried not to listen to myself. I started doing the process. I'm like, you're already here, you're already putting the mustache, you're already doing this, so just go with it," he recalls. "The moment I got onstage... everything went away. I didn't feel anything. That was the most surprising part. I think I was smiling the whole time because I was like, I can't believe I don't feel anything, and I'm just having fun. I don't feel nervous... and it was packed! Packed, packed."

Some of the performers that debuted that August 2016 night, like Alex GoZer or Macho Chacón, aren't as active today (because of other commitments, and they're sorely missed). Pó Rodil and Mel Rey, however, are still performing now, albeit at varying frequency and, for Rodil, not strictly in a drag king environment. Mel Rey, Korber says, is now in rotation for any Griandher-produced shindig.

Astrid Moscoso Cardenales missed that first show, but was soon encouraged to get involved by Nomi Latoken, a fluid queen, and Nansi Cótica and Anoma Lía, both queens (and all of them were critical to the foundation of queer drag in Puerto Rico). Her persona, Domme Darko, oscillates between king, faux queen, and burlesque, and sometimes blends qualities of each into a hyper-sexual, genderfluid character.

"I did not know there were drag kings," she says. "I thought about it, like, if I thought about it, it must exist. But I never saw them until I started going to shows here."

Chris Griandher & Molly Jo

The 24-year-old's background in theater and love of cosplaying (she models, too) helped her eek into drag performing, first in supporting roles alongside Chris Griandher, then on her own, as a burlesque faux queen for a Nansi Cótica show, then as a king at a cult film themed night, where Domme dragified Ash from *Evil Dead*. She was at the first-ever Dark Kings event in full king, too. Domme Darko's fluidity, Moscoso Cardenales says, mirrors her own.

"I've always felt that I'm really in the middle of everything, even when I was first discovering my sexuality. I was trying to figure it out because, you know, people say, oh, you're confused, you like one more than the other. I was trying to analyze; what do I like from this, what do I like from that? I'm like, sincerely, this is pretty even," she says. "I can't [choose], same with being more submissive or dominant. I like this from this, I like this from that side; I'm always in the middle ground. Same with gender. I like boy stuff and boy clothes just as much as I like the girl stuff."

While there's plenty mingling with the queer drag scene, there's a particular impact made by allowing for a kings-centric limelight. It's a place for women and nonbinary folks to see themselves represented. Trans men also find a welcoming environment in drag king spaces, Moscoso Cardenales adds.

Dingo Konpé

"It's our way of saying like, hey, I'm here. I'm with [the queer drag scene] also, and we're all part of the same," she says. "But I'm here, and you see me. You know I exist."

If there's any doubt that a kings-specific movement has empowered a wider variety of people to try drag themselves, the proof is in the rapid growth in performers. There's currently 15 kings involved with Kober's shows. He's collected 'em all together in a parody "Griandher App" format: Among them is Eros Edonista, a bio king; Otto Erotic, a brand-new fluid performer; Simón, a king, much beloved for his salsa soundtracks; and more.

Two are direct descendents of Chris Griandher: Mel Shagwel, an offspring shared with Anoma Lía, who recently won the Queer Title series hosted at Polo Norte; and Dingo Konpe, who does an incredible version of Walter Mercado, the iconically famous Puerto Rican astrologer.

Dingo Konpé (<https://www.facebook.com/Dingo-Konp%C3%A9-2014865295205347/>) — personified by Orquídea Maldonado, 31 — is another performer with a background in theater. Beyond that interpretation of Mercado, her take on Mr. Trololo (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oavMtUWDBTM>) as Dingo, replete with a creepily stretched grin (using a mouthguard from the Watch Yo' Mouth board game), is a reliably silly-but-stunning iteration. Dingo dropped into queer drag first at De Show, then settled in as a mainstay performer with Griandher — but, like everyone else, still participates in queer drag events.

Chris Griandher

"In theater, there's a lot of competition. People are against each other all the time... so they can get ahead. I don't like that," she says. "I like working together. I'm a fan of Chris; there's no reason to compete. Right now, the group of kings we have, I like it because I haven't felt that kind of negative competition. We're all there, and what we want is to deliver a good show."

And there's still plenty room to grow. Korber is gradually expanding the drag king scene to other parts of the island; he's organized several shows already in Ponce, on the southern end, and is hoping the seeds of a brother scene are beginning there with a local king, Chris Piña. Dingo, Molly, and Domme are on board to help, with the latter performer adding that they're actively trying to recruit more Afro-Latinx performers to ensure a truly diverse group.

"I never even saw myself going on with this," Korber says. "I'm talking about this month, like oh, I have so many shows. It's something that doesn't diminish. I tell Orquí, like, get ready. Because they're going to be wanting you more and more."

Photography: Carmencita Carmona (<https://www.instagram.com/carmentiita/>)

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Queering the Map Is a Living LGBTQ History (<https://www.papermag.com/queering-the-map-lgbtq-history-2543546974.html>)

By Jhoni Jackson | 06 March 2018



If you haven't heard about Queering the Map, it's probably because the project was halted just as it heightened — for nearly a month now, the initiative has been offline, shut down by Trump supporters who spammed the site into oblivion. But creator Lucas LaRochelle says Queering the Map will return soon — likely this week.

For everyone who missed its original incarnation, the site is an interactive means of documenting queer histories, crowdsourced by anonymous users who drop pins on a map and leave personal accounts with each. Recovered from the pre-spam life (and relaunching with the new-and-improved site) is a trove of intimate stories about coming out, of loss and heartbreak, about surviving homophobia, of trans visibility, epiphanies of sexuality, and even wistful missed connections.

In the span of three days in early February, pins on the map jumped from 600 to more than 5,000. It was "pretty wild" to watch unfold, says Montreal-based LaRochelle, who created the map about a year ago as part of a class project at Concordia University and continued developing it after. Pins had been growing steadily in the six months prior, but the sudden boom — "It went from 300 shares on Facebook to 10,000." — was unexpected. The site wasn't exactly equipped for a viral explosion, and homophobic trolls capitalized on that weakness, clogging the east coast United States with mass repeats of pro-Trump messages.

LaRochelle was quick to set up socials for the project (Facebook, Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/queeringthemap/>)) in the wake of the shutdown, through which they've since highlighted handfuls of saved posts, but began by calling for coders who could help beef up

protection from spammers and hackers.

"The most important thing is making sure that once it goes back online, that it's fool-proof," LaRochelle says, adding that a moderator panel has been implemented as part of the new security measures. Now that it's supported with the behind-the-scenes work of "super dedicated" coders, Queering the Map, initially only collaborative on the front-end, is "now entirely collaborative and community generated, through and through."

That folks were so quick to rush in to restore and revamp the site, as well as the spike in submissions, speaks to how powerful the project is as a digital space for queers to see themselves, to feel represented, to know they're not alone, by reading someone's intimate reminiscing of their teenage first love in Montreal, back when the world was against them

(<https://www.instagram.com/p/BfLueQ4HfiX/?taken-by=queeringthemap>); a trans person from a family of Egyptian refugees dropping a pin in their hometown

(<https://www.instagram.com/p/BfRK5x-ns7W/?taken-by=queeringthemap>) for visibility; a coming out story (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BfzGddMH9J5/?taken-by=queeringthemap>) that starts with family rejection but follows through to a year-and-a-half later in Alaska, when they're ready to let go of that pain — a personal triumph.

The stories are often beautifully poetic, like a person recalling a time in love, but in hiding, who professes a devotion that'll last "until we are both nothing but sand in clams." Others are brief and simple: In Dubai, they learned to draw and, at the recommendation of their very first girl crush (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BfWMIrLHlgc/?taken-by=queeringthemap>), learned to put on eyeliner, too. However straightforward or elaborate, nuanced or not, there is rich profundity in each.

"I've been really blown away by all of the different ways in which it's been interpreted, from really devastating stories, to devastating stories that come out on a positive note, to raunchy sexual encounters, relational experiences with other people, singular experiences, whether they directly relate to spaces or not," LaRochelle says. "I guess I've just been really moved by the way that it's been taken up by people. And the kind of vulnerability that's being shared is really what moves me."

The project is a living queer history that's inclusive to multiple perspectives, LaRochelle says, through a platform that affords more agency in resisting a singular narrative that marginalizes and others. It'll likely be studied; a researcher in Toronto is interested in how the project relates to non-binary identity, and someone from UC Berkeley might draw from it data for a study on queer affect.

LaRochelle's own academics continue, but they've cleared their schedule enough to prioritize Queering the Map.

"The Internet very literally saved my life when I was a young queer person growing up in small-town Ontario," LaRochelle says. "And seeing queer people represent themselves on the internet, just by not having that connection in my real life, made it clear that we do exist."

The visibility that saved LaRochelle as a kid is reflected in the roots of Queering the Map; in these stories, someone may find validation, liberation, or hope. That power is undeniably already palpable, yet isn't even fully realized yet — there's plenty reason for emerging stronger and unshakably resilient.

"The amount of incredibly moving emails that I've received in the past little while thanking me for making the project, I mean, it's like, there's no way that I could [stop]," LaRochelle says. "Other emails I've received are people saying I'm sorry, sorry that you have to do this work. It doesn't feel like [work]. It just seems like such an obvious thing to do."

Photos Courtesy of Queering the Map

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Kevin Fret Is Latin Trap's First Openly Gay Pioneer

By Jhoni Jackson 25 April 2018



He's the trailblazer we never expected: Kevin Fret, a 24-year-old unabashedly, outspokenly gay Latin trap artist, born in Puerto Rico, currently living in Miami, and with an Instagram following of 46.4k (<https://www.instagram.com/iamkevinfret/?hl=en>) and counting.

While the massively popular genre leader Bad Bunny somehow earns queer cred for even the slightest feminine nuances (like painted nails), he's never publicly identified as anything but heterosexual. Kevin Fret, however, is actually gay — he wants everyone to know, but he also doesn't give a damn what you think about it.

"I'm a person that doesn't care what anybody has to say," he stresses. "[Now I see] young gay guys or young lesbians that are looking at me now like a role model, like wow, if he did it, and he don't care what anybody else has to say, I can do it."

In the video for his debut single, "Soy Asi," which has amassed more than 163k views in less than a month, Fret sports sparkly oversized shades, super-glossed lips, and a glittering crop top and pant set that was formerly a bodysuit. After last year's lipo, he says, he wasn't about to cover up his stomach for the official launch of his career.

"I had everything in my mind, like the day I come out [in Latin trap] as a gay guy, I'm going to make my first video and I'm going to be showing my stomach, and I'm going to act like I don't give a damn about what anybody has to say — with my blonde hair, my black nails, showing my stomach, glittery from head to toe," he says.

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It sorta goes without saying that Latin trap, like much of popular hip-hop, is riddled with misogyny and homophobia. It's a fact we sometimes accept from mainstream music, yet we don't let that kind of bigotry fly in our daily lives. Kevin Fret, however, is transcending the *machismo* and transforming the genre.

He's not a perfect hero, though. A strict religious upbringing is his reasoning for saying in a recent interview for *Rapetón* (<http://www.rapeton.com/entrevista-a-kevin-fret-el-primer-trapero-abiertamente-gay/>) that being gay is a choice — for him. It wasn't until he was 18 that he came out, Fret adds. Addressing the subject in this interview with *PAPER*, he notes the personal context, that it's how he feels specifically, and acknowledges that most LGBTQIA people disagree. (Science (<https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2015/jul/24/gay-genes-science-is-on-the-right-track-were-born-this-way-lets-deal-with-it>) also disagrees).

So he's flawed, yes. But he's no doubt queering the Latin trap genre — and that's a positive change we can definitely get behind.

Photo Courtesy Enrique Montes Benitez of Evo Lab Photography

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Culture

7 Queens Pushing Puerto Rico's Drag Scene Pa'Lante



Amalara Sofia. Photo: Emmanuel Almanzar

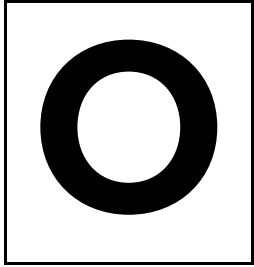


Written by Jhoni Jackson



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f the 21 Latina queens that have competed on *RuPaul's Drag Race* throughout its eight seasons, the vast majority of them are Boricua.

Sixteen queens, in fact—and that's a lot, sure, but the show still hasn't come close to representing the breadth of the actual scene in Puerto Rico. It's so vast, so diverse, that we can't even cover the whole landscape in one story. But we'll try to hit the high notes.

The island may be small, but throughout all of it there are pockets of thriving scenes, all of them overflowing with talent. In San Juan specifically, it's anchored by two clubs: Scandalo and Circo. Independent music venues and other bars also host events, but it's those specific Santurce-area clubs, which are located steps away from each other, where you'll see the most brilliant late-night shows. And we mean really, really late—whether a one-off themed event or part of one of many series of local pageants.

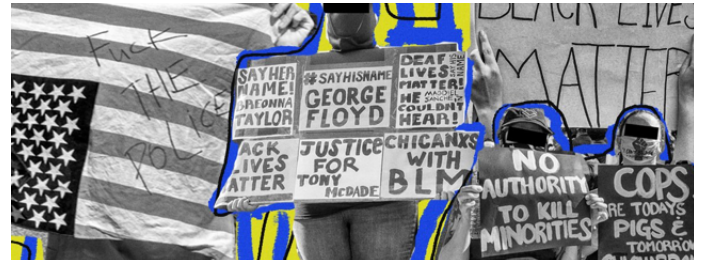
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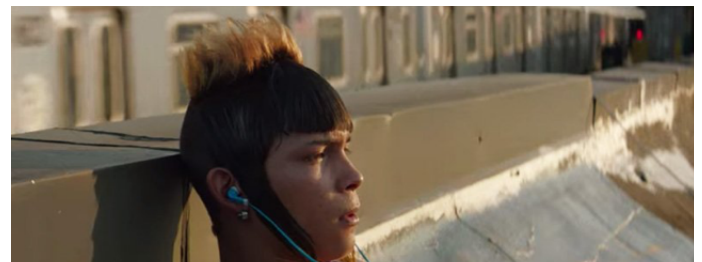
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Filmmaker Fernando Frías on Fighting Misconceptions About Mexican Masculinity With 'I'm No Longer Here'

(<https://remezcla.com/features/film/interview->

Hometown *RPDR* contestants enjoy their fair share of out-of-town bookings, of course, but there's an overall insularity to the community. It could be the literal insularity of island life that breeds hyper-creativity, or maybe it's simply that Puerto Rican queens are naturally incredibly fabulous. Whatever the case, queens here are intensely creative. Nobody's falling back on cultural stereotypes as performance fodder; artistry and genuine talent reign supreme.

[fernando-frias-no-longer-here-netflix/](#)

Check out a selection of seven of the most original, inventive faces in the Puerto Rican drag circuit. It's only the tip of a giant rhinestone-encrusted iceberg, but it's a stunningly bright crop to get you started.

1

Warhola Pop



Warhola Pop

[\(https://www.facebook.com/Warhola-Pop-](https://www.facebook.com/Warhola-Pop-)

[134948000030083/photos](https://www.instagram.com/134948000030083/photos)) returned to drag in 2014 after having explored it only briefly seven years ago, and while she didn't quite find her niche at first try, she's now pushing an idiosyncratic style of performance with early pop-art influences, particularly Andy Warhol.

During last month's Generation New Face competition (during which she won first runner up), she outfitted herself as a re-envisioned Pinocchio for the cartoon-themed leg. Painted to look literally wooden, Warhola made puppets seem surprisingly fabulous. Other recent favorites include a glittering fuchsia ensemble, complete with matching hairpiece, a full-length bodysuit painted by hand in homage to artist Keith Haring, and her take on Edward Scissorhands for a Tim Burton themed show.



via GIPHY (<http://giphy.com/gifs/daliok->

[pinocho-pinochio-10wiDGs3vkaDzq\)](#)

2

Rochelle Mon Chéri



Viewers only got a few glimpses of her in last year's *Mala Mala* (<http://remezcla.com/film/review-tribeca-doc-mala-mala-on-transgender-youth-in-pr-reminds-us-its-ok-to-be-our-freaky-selves/>) doc, but Rochelle Mon Chéri (<http://Rochelle Mon Chéri>) is actually the co-founder of the Doll House, of which *RPDR* contestants April Carrión and Kandy Ho' are both members. Had she gotten a little more screen time, you might've seen looks the award-winning queen says have been likened to a telenovela villain, stars like Jenni Rivera and Alejandra Guzmán and even a Puerto Rican Bettie Page.

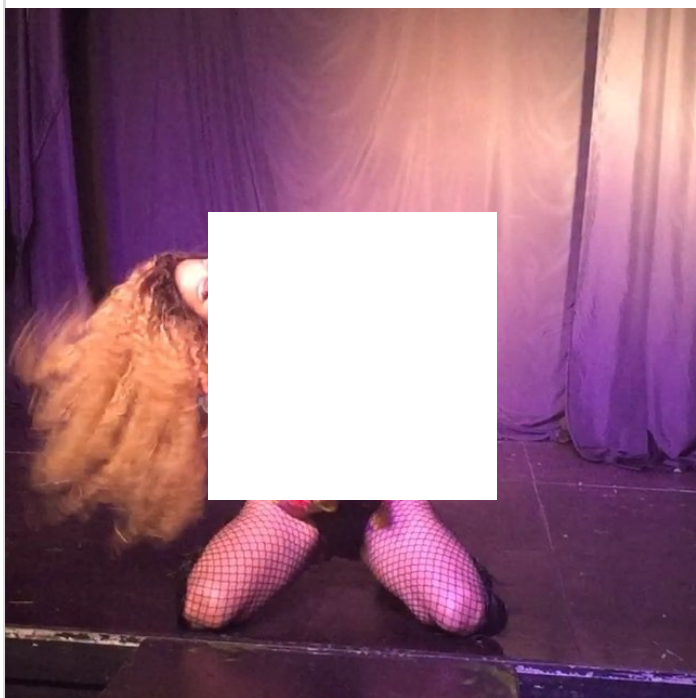
Rochelle's flowery pin-up realness at Puerto Rico's Gay Pride in 2014 was absolutely unforgettable, and she nailed *Rollergirl Realness* as early as last year,

well before the recent *RPDR* challenge (she continues to skate around the neighborhood of Condado on the regular.) To say she's got range is an understatement, but there's something especially stunning when she takes a decidedly simpler approach. One of the strongest of the bunch in terms of social media game, Rochelle often gives her fans face—and nothing else—with incredibly striking results.



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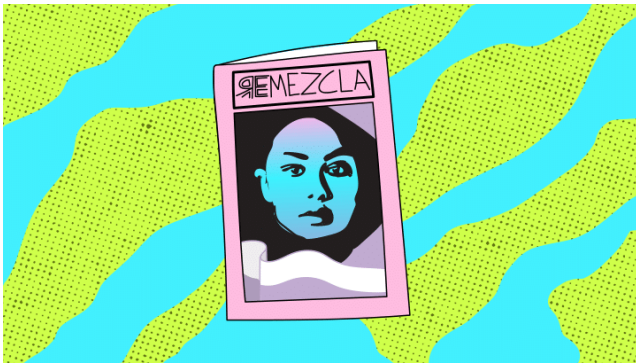
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3

Adi Love



"I live for the WTF factor," Adi Love (<https://www.facebook.com/adilovedragqueen>) gushes. The 23-year-old trans queen serves up super-vulgar shock comedy, and is notorious for dousing fans in confetti, glitter and even flour — and they love every second of it. Her fearless takeover of an entire club, from the bar-top to clearing space for insane death drops in the center of a packed crowd, add to her impressive performance prowess. Top that off with her mix of mainstream pop culture and underground

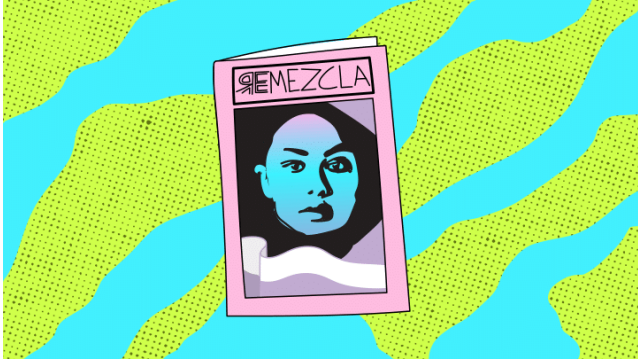
scene references – particularly goth and punk – and it's clear why watching Adi perform is a truly singular experience.

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4

Queen Bee Ho'



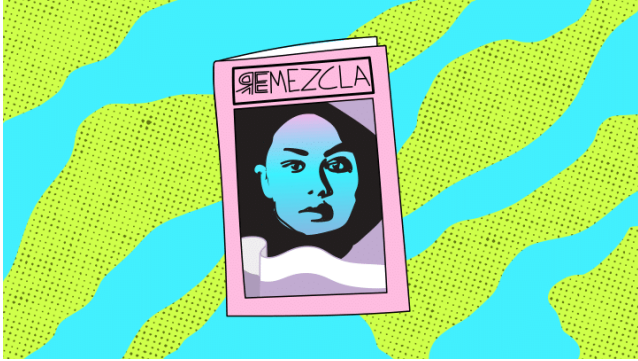
Another seasoned and well-regarded Puerto Rican queen, Queen Bee Ho' (<https://www.facebook.com/Queen-Bee-Ho-220104921351923/>) actually did get some due spotlight via *Mala Mala*—her superb, often mesmerizing dancing specifically. What you didn't get to see, though, are her super-tight, elaborately choreographed group performances. She's always center stage, of course, but the addition of back-up dancers takes things to another level of diva altogether.

Queen Bee Ho'



5

Alyssa Hunter



Puerto Rico's Miss Continental 2016, Miss Generation 2015 and Nuestra Belleza Gay the year prior, Alyssa Hunter (<https://www.facebook.com/alyssa.hunter.9210>) is one of those really, really good looking queens. She's versatile in styling, but whatever the wig shade or outfit inspo, it's jaw-dropping gorgeousness every single time. And the girl sashays like a dream, too.

6

Kriss Du Cecile

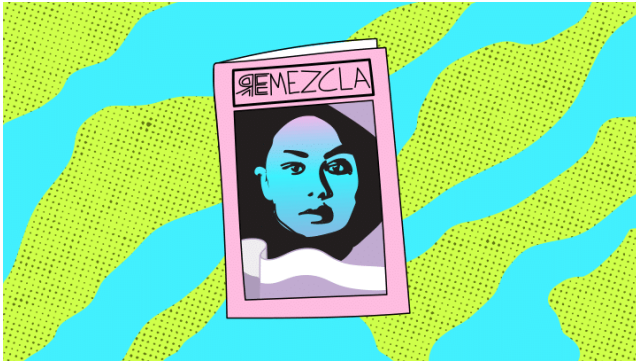
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Decidedly outlandish and over-the-top in both paint and performance, Kriss Du Cecile (<https://www.facebook.com/KrissDuCecile/>) is one of the most followed PR queens on any given social media platform (even among *RPDR* contestants). That draw is anchored by the regularity with which Kriss churns out hilarious YouTube videos, but also her penchant for being brazenly outspoken about social and political issues – albeit with a bit of kooky humor included.

7

Amalara Sofia



Her drag mother is Yara Sofia, the *RPDR* season 3 Miss Congeniality winner who coined the enduring catchphrase “echa pa’ lante!” With eight years of performing down already, Amalara is totally capable of following in Yara’s footsteps whenever Ru comes calling. She’s won plenty of local awards already, from Miss Gay Latina last year to Miss Legendary Continental this year.

Fishiness is a focal point, but Amalara says she stretches her spectrum of inspirations to include more avant-garde looks—occasionally even the dark and macabre make appearances.

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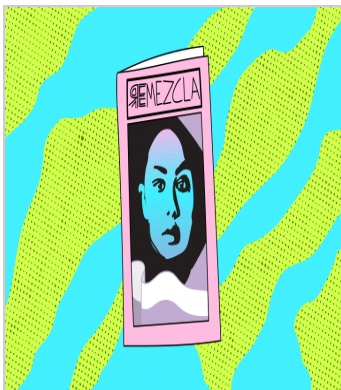
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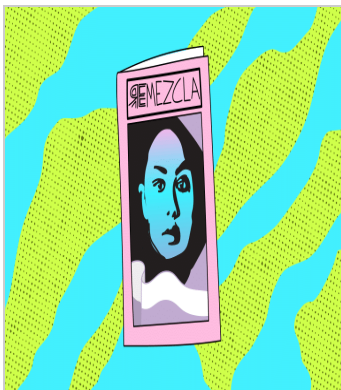
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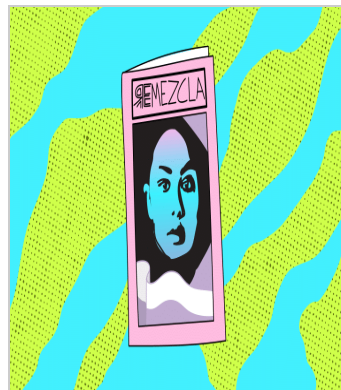
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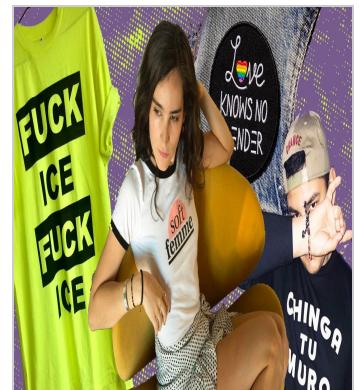
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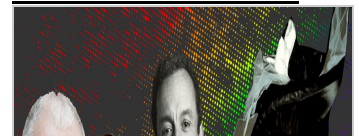
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Music

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Alegria Rampante Unveils a Queer Reimagining of Victor Jara's "Te Recuerdo Amanda"

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Written by [Jhoni Jackson](https://remezcla.com/author/jhonijackson/)[\(https://remezcla.com/author/jhonijackson/\)](https://remezcla.com/author/jhonijackson/) | 4**Trending**

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Over the weekend, Puerto Rico's [Alegría Rampante](https://www.facebook.com/alegriarampante/) (<https://www.facebook.com/alegriarampante/>) gifted contributors to the indie troupe's successful Indiegogo campaign for ***Se Nos***

Fue La Mano

(<http://remezcla.com/releases/music/alegria-rampante-se-nos-fue-la-mano-review/>), the group's debut album released last October. Part of the gift was early access to a bonus track and corresponding video. For Eduardo Alegría, the theatrics-loving troubador at the helm, its creation was an exercise in restraint.

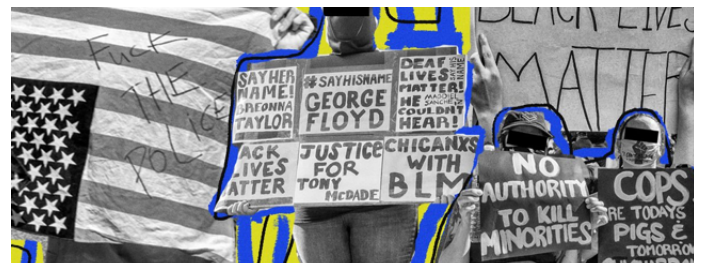
It was sometime in the 90s, around his time spearheading his former pop act Superaquello, that he revisited “**Te Recuerdo Amanda,**” one of the most famous folk songs by the legendary late Chilean activist Victor Jara. The cover comes just one day after [a Florida court found a Pinochet-era officer liable for the singer's murder](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/28/world/americas/chile-victor-jara-lawsuit.html) (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/28/world/americas/chile-victor-jara-lawsuit.html>).



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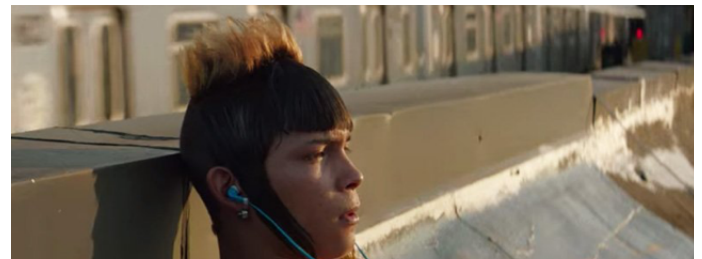
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(<https://remezcla.com/features/film/interview-fernando-frias-no-longer-here-netflix/>)

The former officer now faces potential extradition to Chile for a criminal prosecution.

Always with a visual element in mind, Eduardo saw something cinematic in the iconic song. He reworked it for a musical by Esquina Periferia in 2011, then began incorporating it into live Alegría Rampante sets in the years after. In his reimagining, Amanda becomes **“Armando.”** Eduardo explains in the accompanying press release that he tried to muffle his tendencies toward the extravagant as a way of respecting the solemn spirit of the original — but he is, after all, an “embellisher” by nature, he notes.

Still, there are thoughtful homages within the greater tribute: The end coda is a loop modeled after a brief instrumental preamble that Jara would play before starting the song. And by disorienting the listeners who know its lyrics well, Eduardo says he not only aimed to challenge its heteronormativity, but also evoke an actual queer feeling. As Jara sang, “la vida es eterna en cinco minutos,” so does Eduardo — a recalibrated version of the message, and with equal emotive power.

“Armando” is now available publicly. Watch it above, and download the track for free [here](#)

(<https://discosdiaspora.bandcamp.com/tracks/armando>).

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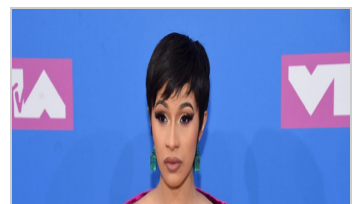
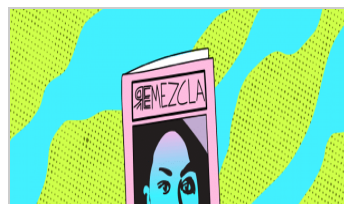
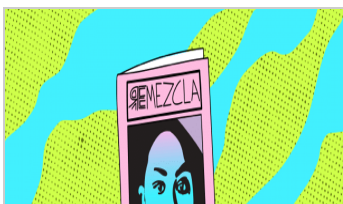
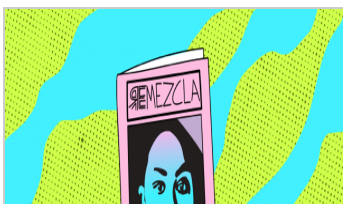
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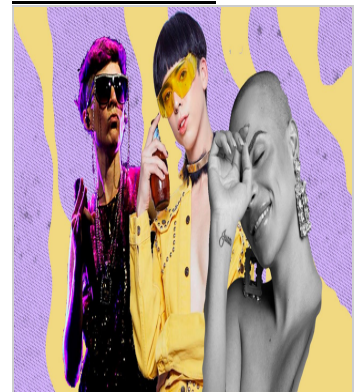
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**San Juan's Pride Was a Colorful
Celebration of LGBTQIA Diversity
(<https://www.papermag.com/puerto-rico-pride-parade-lgbtqia-2576067219.html>)**

By Jhoni Jackson | 07 June 2018



The San Juan Pride Parade, the vibrant centerpiece of Puerto Rico's Pride Month celebrations, kicked off around noon on Sunday in the tourism district of Condado at the Parque del Indio, where an estimated 5,000 people (<http://www.primerahora.com/noticias/puerto-rico/nota/diversoelrespaldoamarchapridepr-1285716/>) gathered. The more than 2-mile march toward historic Old San Juan ended at the expansive green lawn of the Parque del Tercer Milenio, located along the shimmering waters of Playa Escambrón, where a massive stage was graced by some of the island's top drag performers.

Organized by the Colectivo Orgullo Arcoiris (<https://www.facebook.com/orgulloarcoirispr/about/>) (Rainbow Pride Collective), a longstanding advocacy nonprofit, the parade convened groups and individuals representing a wide spectrum of LGBTQIA identities in promotion of this year's theme: "A Puerto Rico of Equality, Diversity, and Respect for Human Rights."

Related | Drag Kings Get Their Due in Puerto Rico's Burgeoning Queer Movement
(<http://www.papermag.com/drag-kings-queer-puerto-rico-2536820698.html>)

Celebrations continued into the evening, and spilled into the wee hours at unofficial after-parties, too. At El Local, a Santurce DIY venue, queer drag performers drew a still-enthused crowd for a late-night show. More events will follow throughout the rest of Pride Month, including another annual parade and festival next weekend, this one in the southwestern beach town of Boquerón in Cabo Rojo.

As the island is still grappling with the effects of Hurricane Maria and the humanitarian crisis that followed (<http://www.papermag.com/hurricane-maria-death-toll-increases-2573274860.html>), the parade not only felt like an outpouring of LGBTQIA pride, but also a reflection of the community's hope and continued fight for a better Puerto Rico.

hope — and continued fight — for a better Puerto Rico.

Photography: Carmencita Carmona

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What Kevin Fret's Murder Means to Puerto Rico's Queer Community (https://www.papermag.com/kevin -fret-murder-puerto-rico-

2625759270.html)

by Jhoni Jackson | 11 January 2019



Openly gay Latin trap artist Kevin Fret, who *PAPER* featured last spring (<http://www.papermag.com/kevin-fret-gay-latin-trap-pioneer-2563261994.html>), died Thursday morning in Puerto Rico. The 24-year-old was shot at least twice around dawn, while riding a motorbike through the San Juan neighborhood of Santurce. His attacker had fired multiple times: Eight bullet shells were found at the scene.

Fret, who hailed from the municipality of Carolina, had relocated to Miami years earlier. When he released the video for "Soy Asi" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7-gSwvoo8M>) last April, close to 50k fans were following him on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/iamkevinfret/?hl=en>), where he often spoke out against homophobia in the urbano market.

His account has been cleared of posts, but in a video posted to Facebook early in December, Fret jokes about not wanting to be gay — then reminds viewers he'd never stop being himself. He regularly defended that right across all platforms, in interviews, and in his music.



“Por si acaso y te confundes Tu tienes un

Kevin Fret • [Follow](#)

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The circumstances surrounding his murder are still being investigated, and Fret's death has not been declared a hate crime at this time. But for the queer community of San Juan, the loss is a reminder of the challenges they face, and the fear with which many live.

"I'm already afraid of navigating the island, and this makes that fear grow exponentially. Right now, so many people are feeling that fear," local artist and performer María José told *PAPER* last night. "My friend was going to come see me, but she didn't because she was afraid to leave her house."

So far this year, at least 24 people have been murdered in Puerto Rico. It's an alarming number — and it's actually lower than last year's count for the same period. *CBS* reports (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/puerto-rico-violence-former-police-superintendent-wont-go-out-after-6-pm/>) that in 2017 the homicide rate in Puerto Rico was higher than any U.S. state, attributing the violence to gangs. But factoring in the island's extreme economic problems is critical here: Crime is a symptom of a poverty, and in Puerto Rico, more than 40 percent (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/pr>) of the population is living in poverty.

"It's a crisis of violence, and a crisis of mental health, crisis of toxic masculinity, a gun crisis, a spiritual crisis, and an education crisis," María José said. "There's crisis everywhere, it's a crisis of everything."

🇵🇷🇵🇷🇵🇷🇵🇷🇵🇷 on Instagram: "En paz descanse @iamkevinfret 💔💔💔 . . . #kevinfret #artistasurbanos #raperos #artistasmundiales #farruko #bryantmyers #badbunnypr #ozuna..."
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In the U.S., the LGBTQIA community faces higher rates of poverty (<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/press-releases/lgbt-divide/>) and crime (<https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-assault-and-the-lgbt-community>). But those numbers are hard to quantify in Puerto Rico, especially in terms of homicides: The police do not separate statistics by population.

Osvaldo Burgos, president of the Comisión de Derechos Civiles (https://www.facebook.com/ComisionDerechosCiviles/?ref=br_rs) and secretary of the Colectivo Orgullo Arcoiris (<https://www.facebook.com/pg/orgulloarcoirispr/about/>), the Puerto Rico PRIDE organizing nonprofit, said the management of statistics, including in the courts system, is deficient overall. But the lack of analyzation for marginalized groups shows a bigger issue.

"This is part of the discrimination against LGBT communities. Because the information is not segregated, problems are not identified as they are," Burgos said. "Obviously, it's difficult to get funds, identify problems, and determine tendencies. All of that is very difficult to do in this country, and I think it constitutes another form of state violence against the LGBT community."

Discrimination against the LGBTQIA community is also apparent in the online response to Kevin Fret's death: Victim-blaming, religious zealots (when, in fact, Fret was quite religious), and other homophobic attacks are rampant in the comment sections of news outlet posts.

"It's a crisis of violence, and a crisis of mental health, crisis of

toxic masculinity, a gun crisis, a spiritual crisis, and an education crisis. There's crisis everywhere, it's a crisis of everything."

Someone even posted a Duck Hunter GIF, according to María José, alluding to shooting "patos," the word for ducks that's also used a slur against gay men.

"I'm an artist, too. I myself am a fucking performer, I have aspirations of doing music, and urban music, in the future," she added. "Doing that would be exposing myself to a lot of people that want me dead. Or maybe they don't actively want me dead, but they will find humor in my death, maybe, with a comment or a gif on Facebook. It's really discouraging. In Puerto Rico, the stakes are really high. And it's a monumental pressure on everyone."

Related | Kevin Fret Is Latin Trap's First Openly Gay Pioneer (<http://www.papermag.com/kevin-fret-gay-latin-trap-pioneer-2563261994.html>)

Sora Ferri is an activist with La Sombrilla Cuir, or the Queer Umbrella, a transfeminist educational platform. She was taken aback by Fret's death — they were the same age. That Fret was at times confrontational (he was arrested (<https://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/Hispanic-Rapper-Kevin-Fret-Arrested-for-Battery-in-Miami-486185401.html>) last June on aggravated battery charges) points to a coping or survival mechanism often adopted by femmes, she said.

"When you're a high femme, and super effeminate gay, people aren't going to take you seriously, and you have to be kind of on the offensive all the time," she said. "I think a lot about how... when we're out together, with people you trust, in public places that are not for us but we take up space, we're all kind of anxious — all the femmes and all the queers and all the trans girls. So what do we do to make up for it? We get loud and try to laugh and go over the anxiety, enjoying ourselves and dancing and having fun, basically. But then you kind of forget that you might be disturbing the homophobes and straight folks around you. The industry and the society kind of makes femmes have to be like that in the first place, be on the offensive in the first place, all the time."



La Sombrilla Cuir
about a year ago





Importante: No estamos eliminando las cosas negativas ni problemáticas de Kevin Fret.

Una reflexión traída por Raymond Rohena sobre lo positivo que nos trajo Kevin Fret a nuestras comunidades:

Kevin Fret el trapero autoproclamado como el primer cantante abiertamente gay del género urbano fue vílmente asesinado hoy en lo únicamente puede ser descrito como un crimen de odio. Con su proyección empoderada y colorida Fret transgredió muchos de las expectativas de masculinidad heg ... [See More](#)

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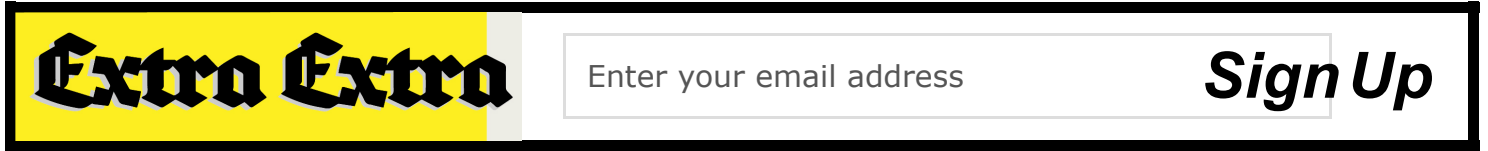
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In a Facebook post yesterday, Sombrilla Cuir's post noted that while not all of Fret's actions were favorable, his contribution to breaking gender norms and battling misogyny and machismo should serve as inspiration to live authentically, and to keep working toward greater space for queer artists.

"You would see him on Instagram being in the studio, in interviews, being in different parts of the world, just being himself and being loud and being femme," Ferri said. "To see someone out in public in the daylight out with people being unapologetically themselves and unapologetically

feminine, it made me think that I could also be outside and be myself and dress how I wanted, and not have to worry about how dangerous it is or how many people I'm making uncomfortable."

Photo via YouTube



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Friends and family recall his presence in urbano music

By **JHONI JACKSON**



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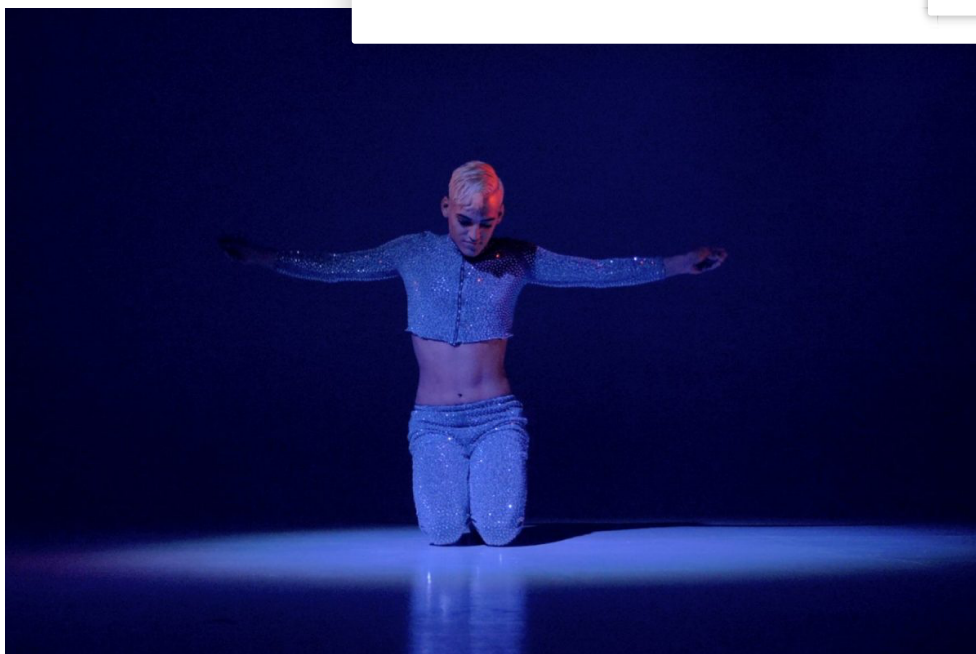
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Before his death in January, Kevin Fret flouted genre conventions with queer anthems such as "Soy Asi" and "Diferente."

Enrique Montes Benitez/Evo Lab Photography

When asked how he visualized himself **during a radio interview last April**, Kevin Fret — **Latin** trap's most unapologetically, and perhaps first openly gay artist — conjured a hippodrome: "Once you let horses free from their stables," said Fret, "It's difficult to catch them."

Posing the question was DJ Candy Boy, a veteran of the urbano genre who spent more than nine years touring with Daddy Yankee, and now programs and hosts for the Orlando and Kissimmee station Urbana FM. It was Kevin Fret's debut radio appearance; he was promoting his 2018 single, "Soy Asi," or "I Am Like This," an unabashedly queer and femme anthem that cut through the genre's systemic machismo with unprecedented force — much like the unbridled herd of horses that Fret described. "I'm here to change people's minds," he said.

Lambasting homophobia in the urbano market was a recurring mission for Fret: The Puerto Rican artist was driven by a clear vision of shattering the reggaeton and trap molds by defying traditional gender roles and speaking to gay sexuality with no restraint. **In the video for "Soy Asi,"** Fret flaunts his newly liposuction-crafted abs, donning a glittering crop top and pant set he'd fashioned out of a jumpsuit. He also brandishes a pink assault rifle — as DJ Candy Boy speculated in his radio interview — like some kind of "gender assassin." Within a month of its release on YouTube, the views were fast approaching 200K.



SEE ALSO

To say Fret was on the rise is an understatement. But on the morning of January 10th, his rapid ascent came to an abrupt end: while visiting his brother Steven in Puerto Rico, Fret was riding a

Queer Pride Is Going Back to Its Protest Roots

'In My Room' With Melissa Etheridge

motorcycle through the San Juan barrio of Santurce around 5:30 a.m., when he was shot by an unknown assailant. The gunman had taken his phone and wallet before he fled the scene; Fret died a few hours later in a nearby hospital, at the age of 25.

The investigation around his murder is still underway. Genre followers have posited theories stemming from **Fret's alleged \$50,000 blackmailing** of reggaeton star Ozuna in 2017 — over a pornographic video the latter filmed at age 16, which ultimately leaked to the public weeks later. Yet authorities have declared that Ozuna, who testified before a prosecutor in February, is not a suspect.

That same month, after police arrested two suspects in connection to the murder of Puerto Rican drug trafficker Carlos Giovanni Báez, assumptions that they were involved in the killing of Fret abound; but the island's Homicide Division director told press that the **two cases are unrelated.**

Fret's family first spoke publicly on the murder in January, which **aired on Univision program *Primer Impacto***. His siblings Doryann and Steven Fret expressed their own suspicions, especially with regards to the missing phone. "When you are real, [people] want you to keep your mouth shut," said Doryann of her late brother. "He had secrets that nobody wanted to be revealed," claimed Steven. "It seems he had more secrets than my sister and I knew."

Fret's mother, Hilda Rodríguez, told *Primer Impacto* that she knows who killed her son.

Speaking directly with *Rolling Stone*, Rodríguez says that, at the time of his murder, she asked God why he had not taken her instead. (For legal reasons, her representative informed, Rodríguez would not comment on the ongoing investigation around Fret's murder.) Her other three children, all of them in their twenties, assured her that Fret, the third among them, made peace with God before he died.

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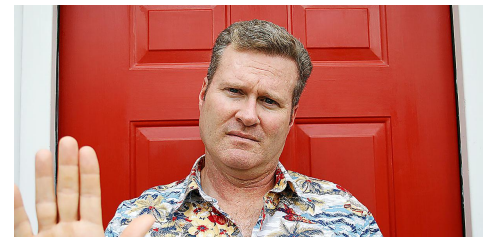
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“I know that because I sowed in Kevin the seeds of love for God,” she says. “That’s why we have faith and peace that...he asked God for forgiveness for things [about his life] that God didn’t like, and that God showed him mercy.”

Rodríguez, a Pentecostal Christian, raised her children in evangelism. While she was born in Puerto Rico, she relocated the family about 12 years ago to Massachusetts, where Fret regularly sang in church, she says.

“Since he was little, around seven, eight, nine years old, he loved to sing the church hymns,” she says. “I had already noticed his voice, the vibrato he had, the confidence. Doryann too. They would do a lot of duos, between the two of them... They were [eventually] going to release a song together.”

Despite the religious conflict Fret’s sexuality represented for Rodríguez, she notes, his sexuality did not frighten her. When he came out at 18, she recalls telling him, “You know that there are things God does not like about what you want to do.” She adds that he accepted this, and that he asked her to pray for him.

“We are not the ones to judge,” she says. “We are here only to pray for others. Each person chooses their life.” The family remained very united, Rodríguez says, and her relationship with Fret was a very close one.

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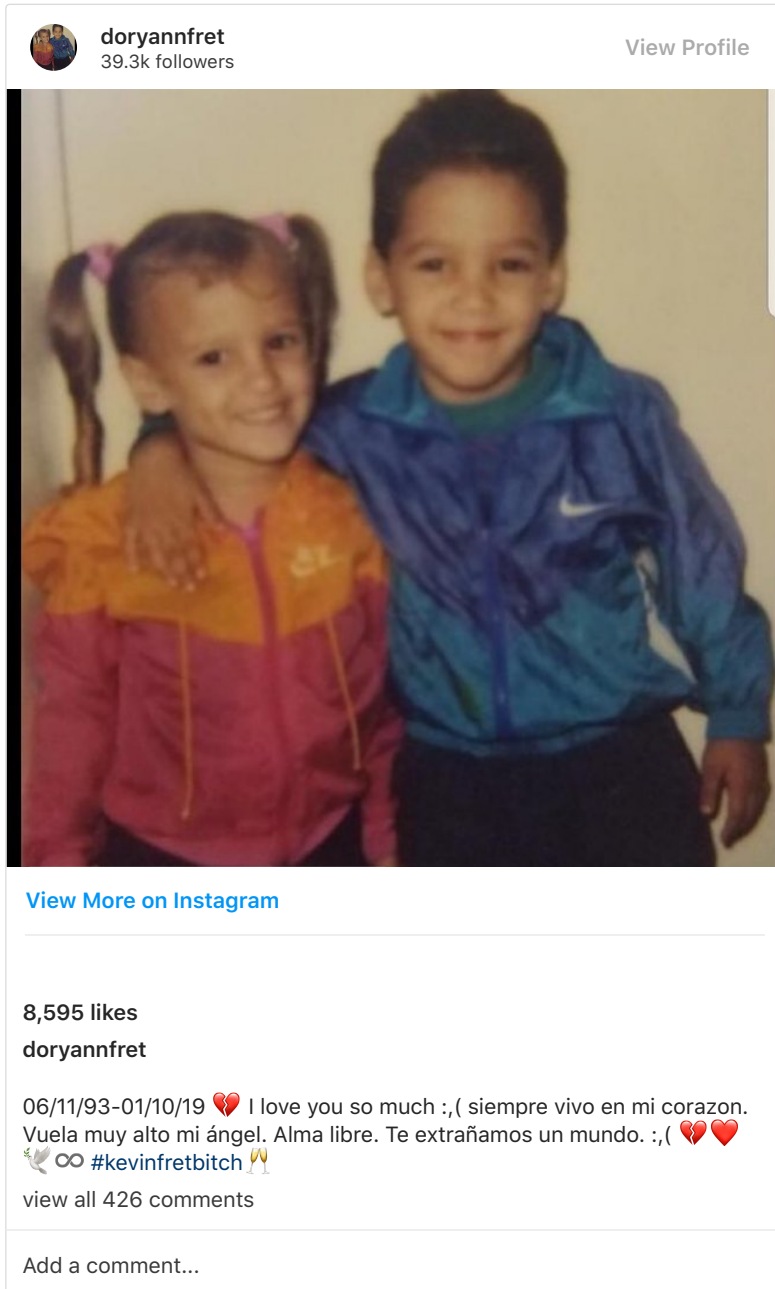


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Compounding the startling nature of Fret’s death is the complete sweep of his Instagram posts beforehand. At the time of his death, all that was left on his account was a temporary post: a story published the day prior which read, “Pray, relax, wait for my times and I will do the rest. — God.”

DJ Candy Boy, who proudly put “Soy Asi” in on-air rotation after its release last spring, last communicated with Fret in November in hopes of connecting him to a songwriter.

“I was really surprised. I didn’t expect that to happen, outside of the problems that he was having — because yes, it was known that there were problems,” he says. “What was very curious to me was that he had deleted his Instagram and posted [that story], like [he was] saying goodbye. I don’t know if [he knew] that he was going to die.”

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Fret’s social media presence was arguably more critical to his career than that of other artists; the internet is where he let his cheeky egoism run amok. He posted braggadocious displays of his **good looks**; he was **quite proud** of the results of his liposuction. He was funny too, once **hamming it up** with a flower crown filter before accidentally bringing the lit end of (what appeared to be) a blunt to his mouth. He often recorded his videos shirtless, doling out **relationship advice** and **encouraging fans to find happiness and self-empowerment**.

But Fret also regularly employed social media as a means of venting, and was sometimes intensely confrontational — and while all of those videos are now deleted, many are archived on various YouTube channels. **A compilation of clips** shows a range of Fret’s more fiery rants: take the palpable anger when he accused someone of sabotaging his social media reach; or when he urged naysayers to get over their obsession with his sexuality, declaring it irrelevant to his relationship with God. Without naming anyone specifically, he also alluded to married heterosexual artists partaking in affairs with either men or women, claimed that some had abused their wives, and called them hypocrites.

Still, homophobia reared its ugly head last fall, after Fret became a subject in a controversial track by Puerto Rican trapero Anuel AA. In addition to the song’s gratuitous misogyny, not to mention mockery of Puerto Ricans who lost their homes to Hurricane María, “Intocable” included homophobic slurs and insinuated a sexual relationship between Cosculluela, a rival artist, and Fret. **(Anuel AA removed the song and issued an apology** within days of its release.)

Earlier in June, however, Fret experienced what he described as a homophobic attack at a condo in Miami, where he was living at the time. The YouTube channel for the urbano site **Rapetón cataloged the incident** using posts

from Fret's Instagram: Pointing to bruises on his face and body, he said he was struck by someone angry that his butt was exposed while tanning by a pool — essentially, Fret claimed, he was attacked for being gay. Fret also shared video footage that not only shows him being struck in the face by an older man, but that Fret responded physically. Fret ultimately **faced battery charges**.

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Diferente - Mike Duran ft Kevin Fret (Video Oficial)



Among many who worked closely with him, the pervading response to Fret's death is confusion. Alfonso J. Alvarez, who managed Fret for a stretch around the release of "Soy Asi" last spring, says he didn't consider Fret to have been in any danger. "At the time, there wasn't anything that I could've seen that would tell me that in January he was going to be dead," Alvarez says. (He added that he's "seen a lot" in his history, having worked for artists like Snoop Dogg and Ice Cube under Priority Records in the Nineties.)

Puerto Rican singer Mike Duran, who featured Kevin Fret in his July 2018 single, "Diferente," tells *Rolling Stone*, "I can't understand why anyone would have killed him."

"There was a difference between normal Kevin Fret, who you could talk to — and the Kevin Fret making videos on social media," Duran says. "Honestly, he was a good person. He wasn't egotistical. He always wanted to help people."

Beyond his producers, Duran was the first and the only urbano artist who, as

Duran describes, dared to partner with Fret on a track. He made his approach through a mutual friend after hearing Fret's rendition of the 2018 genre essential, "**Me Compré Un Full.**"

"When I met Kevin, he said he expressed that a lot of people haven't helped him, that it's been a bit of an uphill battle, the dream of singing," Duran says. "So I told him, 'Listen: I have this idea of doing a song that's for all those people who are different, for all those people who, in one way or another, have something about them that makes them different, and because of that society doesn't accept them.'"

Backlash about "Diferente" from colleagues in the industry was scarce, Duran says. Instead, it was some urbano fans who responded with accusations that he was dating Fret.

"I make music with my heart, and my heart said in that moment, we have to do this song," Duran says of the collaboration. "It doesn't matter where Kevin is coming from, his sexual preference, or what he's done."



"I am Frida Kahlo reincarnate," sang Fret in his 2018 song, "Soy Asi."

Enrique Montes Benitez/Evo Lab Photography

Duran, along with DJ Candy Boy, refer to Fret's sexuality as a preference — as did Fret himself. Because of his religious upbringing, Fret often said, for him, being gay was a choice. He would typically **acknowledge the obvious clash** with the greater LGBTQIA community while espousing his personal beliefs.

While the urbano industry certainly has not set aside machismo and homophobia entirely, Fret made a significant dent for progress.

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“I think [in spite of the] stigma,” says Duran, “with the short career he had, with as much as he accomplished in such a short time, Kevin achieved [being] the first. I feel [that] there will be more different — not different in a bad way — but more people doing different things in the genre.”

Reflecting on Fret’s impact, DJ Candy Boy admits he couldn’t imagine a gay urbano artist being embraced anytime but now.

“If this had happened maybe 10 or 15 years ago, with the genre was still a little raw, a little more closed-minded, I don’t think he wouldn’t have been accepted, I don’t think he would have been accepted,” he says. “And I say this jokingly, but it’s true: after Ricky Martin, everything changed. Everything opened up, the acceptance of someone gay. And I think it has nothing to do with the talent, in reality. Sexual preference doesn’t affect what talent someone can have.”

Like many others in the urbano industry, as well as Fret’s fans, DJ Candy is left wondering what could have been.

Duran says his newly released single, “**Se Descontrola**” (or, “Out of Control”) is dedicated to Fret — who personally gave the track his stamp of approval when they last spoke.

“I think [opening up the genre for others] was his impact and his legacy,” says Duran. “If he hadn’t died, he would have been a big star. Because people loved him. The press loved him, everyone loved him. He was going to be big.”

Fret’s mother says that more music from Fret, including a video that was recorded before his death, will soon be released. She is currently working with a lawyer on legal details.

“After [the video] comes out, which is already complete, then comes the last song [he recorded],” she says. “People are going to be surprised, because it’s a very tropical song... It sounds very pretty, very pretty. I had told him, with that


one, you’re going to explode.”

Some interviews for this story have been translated from Spanish to English.

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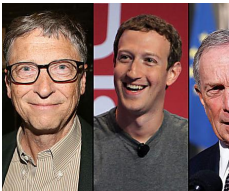
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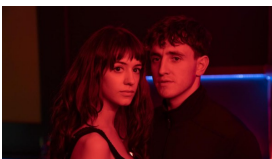
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How San Juan's Queer Scene Joined the Ricky Rosselló Protests With a Ball

Photos: Jhoni Jackson



Jhoni Jackson

7/26/19 10:30AM • Filed to: [#RICKYRENUNCIA](#) ▾



“A ball is an arm of the revolution,” 24-year-old [Villano Antillano](#) told me. “It’s an event that comes from historically the most marginalized communities. The ball is a

500,000 people, a platform in a plaza about two blocks from the Governor's Mansion—where demonstrators were densely packed at police barricades—became a makeshift stage for just such a display, the newly formed Haus of Resistance. In the ongoing movement to oust Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rosselló, the collective's event, which included chants, dancing, and a ballroom segment, proudly declared queer community as a powerful mobilizing force.

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"One of our goals was to make people uncomfortable," Antillano, one of the Haus's organizers, said. "Because we know if we're making someone uncomfortable, we're doing our job. We're making ourselves visible."

Haus of Resistance began its energetic demonstration last Wednesday afternoon with music and dancing. DJ Kaya Té, 28, was concerned that at some point the group may have to run; police response throughout the protests has included tear gas, rubber bullets, and pepper spray. So they opted for a DIY set: A collaborative playlist queued through a bluetooth speaker, and a megaphone by which they amplified the music.

Between songs, they chanted: "No hay libertad politica sin libertad sexual," or "There's no political freedom without sexual freedom," and "Soy pata, soy puta, pero nunca corrupta," which translates roughly to "I'm a queer, I'm a slut, but never corrupt!"

Then came the Renuncia Ball, or the Resignation Ball. Category is: La Fortaleza is Burning.

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A crowd gathered (obviously) as some of Puerto Rico's most beautiful and proud queers sashayed down a makeshift runway. Some carried fire. Some gave you face and body. Others did somersaults. Oversized fans among onlookers were flapping—hard. There was voguing, gravity-defying dips, and stylistic shows of flexibility.

This ball, the dancing, and the donning of the most flamboyant looks possible—this is what Puerto Rico's queer activists call patería combativa, or combative queerness.

“The heteropatriarchy is very closely related to capitalism,” said Edrimael Delgado, who MC'd the Renuncia Ball. Delgado, the 23-year-old leader of San Juan's burgeoning ballroom scene, said that queerness, as a subversion of the heteropatriarchy, is essentially a reprimand in the face of capitalism and state violence.

“SOY PATA, SOY PUTA, PERO NUNCA CORRUPTA”—“I’M A QUEER, I’M A SLUT, BUT NEVER CORRUPT!”

Protests in Puerto Rico started almost two weeks ago after a private chat between Governor Rosselló and his closest allies leaked, revealing 889 pages filled with misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and general indignation towards the people he purports to serve. To the dismay of millions, it wasn't until almost midnight this Wednesday night that he finally announced his resignation, effective August 2, in a video posted to the Facebook page of the Governor's Mansion.

Grounds for impeachment—based on offenses uncovered by the chat transcripts—had been found a day earlier by three attorneys commissioned by the president of Puerto Rico's House of Representatives.

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The chat scandal isn't the whole story, though. It was a truckload of fuel unloaded on a fire already lit. On July 10, a day prior to the initial leak, federal agents arrested several members of Governor Rosselló's administration on a total of 32 counts of fraud, conspiracy, and related charges. Demonstrations have occurred 'round the clock since, and not only at La Fortaleza—the Governor's Mansion in Old San Juan—but in towns across the archipelago.

Puerto Ricans protested in the standard methods, like bomba y plena (historical protest music), signs, chants, the banging of pots and pans (called a calderazo), but also in some new and unexpected ways. The people's message, #RenunciaRicky, was delivered by boat and jet ski, via underwater divers, on ATVs, through yoga en masse,

and on horseback.

Noting the prevalence of women and queer folks on the frontlines, Jadriam Casado “Malatuya,”²³ and Villano Antillano decided to cement the fact with a protest-within-the-protest that would speak directly to queer issues.

From a single-digit group chat, the Haus rapidly grew to include more than 100. The call to participate in or attend the Resignation Ball, or La Renuncia Ball, was open to anyone belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Two medical students in the crowd said it was their only week off from school, and while the political revolution was calling, they’d debated attending—until they heard about La Renuncia Ball.

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“This is a safer space to protest,” Edgardo Vargas, 26, said. “To be with your people, fighting for the same things.”

Félix Pérez, 25, added, “It’s important that we are present too, that we fight too—we are also part of el pueblo.”

“I think it’s really important that we did this,” Kaya Té said. “We didn’t know what would happen, we just knew we had to take up space. There’s a lot of things that need to be talked about regarding our needs and our safe spaces that aren’t being talked about in this big way. And we knew that this was a big opportunity to talk to other people and have other people see us manifesting ourselves in a happy way, against everything that’s happening.”

After the ball, those who were up for approaching the police barricades marched toward La Fortaleza as a group. Kaya Té took the megaphone, and was overjoyed when people they didn’t know began chanting in unison: “We actually got the big crowd, cis people and cis men, chanting with us. To hear a huge crowd around you screaming that they’re patas and putas was so fantastic,” they said.

For many Puerto Ricans, Roselló’s chat —which also included jokes about Hurricane María’s death and threats to political opponents—was the last-straw revelation for a people already saddled by more than a decade of recession, government mismanagement, the effects of U.S. colonialism, and the 2017 crisis of Hurricane María. In the past few years, there’s been hundreds of public school closures, drastic drops in the public university system’s budget, cuts to pensions, and other austerity measures jointly rolled out by Puerto Rico’s government and the U.S.-appointed Fiscal Oversight and Management Board, installed in 2016 as a purported means of managing Puerto Rico’s \$120 billion debt in bonds and pensions. Lest we forget the fact that nearly half the population lives in poverty and high rates of gender-based violence persist. Then there’s the 4,645 deaths of Hurricane Maria crisis, many of which, had the disaster been better managed, likely could have been avoided.

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Additionally, a “religious liberty” bill that would allow government employees to deny service to citizens on the basis of religious object nearly became law in June (yes, they really did that during Pride Month).

Puerto Ricans are already calling for the renunciation of his successor, Justice Secretary Wanda Vázquez. The movement for a better quality of life for all Puerto Ricans looks to be just beginning, and the Haus of Resistance continues. The chat remains not only a tool for organizing, but also way to collectively ensure safety and self-care, to share resources like legal aid, and to keep everyone motivated for the long haul.

“This affects all of us,” Casado adds. “I want it to be clear and evident that the queer community is resisting and fighting.”

Jhoni Jackson is an Atlanta-born Cuban living her best pansexual, sober life as a freelance writer in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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For Puerto Rico's LGBTQ community, fight doesn't end with Rosselló

Multiple LGBTQ people in Puerto Rico said the chat leak scandal validated their suspicions of government corruption and the anti-LGBTQ attitudes of lawmakers.



Ricky Martin, flying a gay pride flag, joins a protest to demand de resignation of Governor Ricardo Rossello from office, in San Juan, Puerto Rico on July 22, 2019.Dennis M. Rivera Pichardo / AP

July 26, 2019, 11:39 AM AST

By Jhoni Jackson

In the two weeks in which hundreds of thousands mobilized to [oust Puerto Rico Gov. Ricardo Rosselló](#), the island's LGBTQ community was on the front lines.

They shared in the outcry after the July 10 federal corruption arrests of members of the

governor's administration, and joined as the movement swelled when a private chat between Rosselló and his closest allies leaked. The chats revealed discriminatory attitudes – including homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, xenophobia and fat-shaming – and a callous indifference for the people of Puerto Rico, including the thousands who died after Hurricane Maria.

And while the people of Puerto Rico were successful in ousting Rosselló, many say the fight for a better quality of life for Puerto Ricans – including its lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer residents – continues.

Multiple LGBTQ people in Puerto Rico told NBC News that the leaked chat's contents – including the homophobic and transphobic remarks – were unsurprising. Instead, they said it validated their widespread suspicions of government corruption, especially post-Maria, as well as the anti-LGBTQ attitudes of lawmakers.

Rainbow flags were waved at virtually every demonstration, including one wielded by openly gay Puerto Rican pop star Ricky Martin at Monday's national strike, which drew an estimated 1 million people who blocked a major San Juan expressway.

Martin was the subject of homophobic jokes in the leaked chats, which were written by former Puerto Rico chief financial officer Christian Sobrino. Throughout the effort, Martin has been an especially outspoken leader in calling for Rosselló's resignation, lambasting him for [“unforgivable” offenses](#). On social media, he rallied fellow Puerto Ricans to join the national strike, as well as a July 17 march from the Capitol to the governor's mansion, and continually expressed [solidarity with and gratitude](#) for everyone involved.

“Puerto Rico, we did it... We just wrote an important page in history,” [Martin wrote on Instagram following Rosselló's resignation](#). “We rescued our island... We did it peacefully, without weapons... Now, let's lead by example.”

Prominent Puerto Rican trans activist Ivana Fred spoke at Monday's strike. She said the crowd gathered to listen was predominantly heterosexual, cisgender people.

“There was no booing or anything,” she said. “Instead, there was support. It's clear that change is happening.”

While LGBTQ people in Puerto Rico say the island is still plagued by misogyny, homophobia and transphobia, many activists, including Fred, see this massive movement as an opportunity for real change.

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“These protests are every day growing stronger among the trans community,” Fred said, adding that at Monday’s massive strike, she saw “so many flags of different identities, like nonbinary people.”

“That fills me with pride,” she said.

Over the past several years, LGBTQ people in Puerto Rico have gained a number of rights, including same-sex marriage in 2015 (through the U.S. Supreme Court’s Obergefell v. Hodges decision) and transgender name changes on driver’s licenses just last year. However, advocates say the work is far from over to ensure full equality.

Last month, which was LGBTQ Pride Month, a bill that would have allowed government employees to [deny services to LGBTQ people based on religious objections](#) nearly became law.

While Rosselló ultimately demanded the bill be shelved, he’s the one who pushed its creation in the first place.

Here again, Martin [was one of the leading voices against the bill](#), using his international clout to slam the proposed legislation.

There’s also little information about anti-LGBTQ hate crimes, as Puerto Rico’s police force does not keep track of these bias incidents. The lack of statistics makes addressing the issue of anti-LGBTQ violence [significantly more difficult](#), according to advocates.

A number of advocates, including drag performer Pipiotah Lakoa, 28, are calling for others, in addition to Rosselló, to leave office.

“There's a lot of people in power that have to get out,” Lakoa said, specifically naming Senate President Thomas Rivera Schatz and House Rep. María Milagros Charbonier, both of whom have adamantly supported or spearheaded anti-LGBTQ legislation in the past. The latter co-authored

the failed religious liberty bill, which the former supported. Schatz also supported Rosselló's [removal of LGBTQ-inclusive gender education](#) and school uniform use based on gender identity from public schools, a change which LGBTQ and feminist organizations say is to the detriment of students.

"These are people who don't contribute to anything but their own benefit and power, their own profit," Lakoa said of Schatz and Charbonier. "They don't contribute to Puerto Rico."

Lakoa, who is part of a queer collective formed in response to the leaked chats called Haus of Resistance, said the leaked comments "were the confirmation that the people who are in power shouldn't be there."

Fred said recent pro-LGBTQ government efforts made during Pride Month – like covering the governor's mansion with rainbow-colored lights and having the island's first lady Beatriz Rosselló dedicate a sculpture to the LGBTQ community – are empty gestures meant to save face.

"We need more than a statue or something that represents us with colors," Fred said. "I need stability, adequate services, education and safe spaces where I can be as a citizen without having to explain myself."

There is even an [entity within Rosselló's administration](#), which created by his own executive order in 2017, specifically intended to address LGBTQ issues. However, the entity's [official Facebook page](#) and [website](#) do not address the recent controversy.

Fred said she has participated in pro-community events organized by Rosselló's administration, and in the name of change, has assisted. Now, however, she said she feels deceived.

"What's the point of being bringing this message, participating in events, when the reality is that they're hypocrites?," she lamented.

Despite Rosselló's resignation, Fred said she will "keep fighting" for more legal protections for the LGBTQ community, and to get people to positions in power who "really want to see change."

"Today I rest, and tomorrow I'll be back again," she said. "I'll go to San Juan or anywhere else I need to protest. We have to make our voices heard."

Lakoa also vowed to keep pushing for change, namely a change in Puerto Rico's leadership. "If the way of doing it is protesting every single day," she said, "then we will have to do it."

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Politics

Queer Puerto Rican Activists La Sombrilla Cuir Are Creating Change on Social Media

“The way we make the posts — I think about me explaining something to my mom.”

BY JHONI JACKSON

BY SHON GARCIA

AUGUST 26, 2019

Sweeping change for Puerto Rico did not start — nor will it end — with **Governor Ricardo Rosselló stepping down**. His resignation, under pressure from weeks of mass protests, was undoubtedly a monumental demonstration of people power. But this achievement exists within a broad history of grassroots activism in Puerto Rico that predates **July's leak of offensive private chats** between Rosselló and his closest allies and the **arrests of members of his administration on fraud and related charges**.

Existing sociopolitical movements concentrated around better quality of life in Puerto Rico, be it via the stoppage of **toxic coal ash dumping** or **calls for an independent audit** of the government's **\$120 billion debt**, continue, now bolstered and empowered by the recent historic grassroots win for the island's activists.

Among those movements is the intersectional fight of La Sombrilla Cuir (in Spanish, the Queer Umbrella), a collective of more than 20 young activists, mostly in their early 20s, who believe that confronting the root causes of oppression — systems like capitalism, the patriarchy, the gender binary, and colonialism — is foundational to achieving genuine progress for Puerto Ricans who are LGBTTTQIAP+ (**the acronym the group prefers to use**, which means “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual”). And educating the general public about these subjects is key.

Resistance comes in many forms; activism is not limited to physically taking to the streets. And while some group members were on the front lines of protests at the governor's mansion, not everyone can or should use their bodies in protest. Particularly for nonbinary and trans people, presenting in public at all can be precarious. Personal safety and comfort are paramount, even when

pressing for social change.

La Sombrilla Cuir's activism is one that "allows us not to sacrifice our bodies that we already sacrifice on the daily," 25-year-old founding member Ínaru de la Fuente Díaz says.

The collective's explainer infographics on social media may seem similar to what you'd see on some English-language platforms. But in Puerto Rico, La Sombrilla Cuir's deliberately intersectional approach is pioneering; in the context of queer activism on the archipelago right now, offering free education about **gender identity, sexuality, race, capitalism, consent**, and other intersectional **transfeminist** topics is truly radical. And of course, even before a grassroots uprising unseated him, Rosselló was on the group's radar.

One of Governor Rosselló's **first acts after taking office in 2016** was to eliminate gender perspective education from public schools. It was at the time a relatively new addition to Puerto Rico's curricula, and it included a mandate allowing students to choose their uniforms (skirt or pants) based on gender identity rather than what gender they were assigned at birth. Critics such as La Sombrilla Cuir say the removal of these measures was a setback in combating misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia in Puerto Rico's future generations, and the move spawned backlash from all kinds of local LGBTQ organizations.

But La Sombrilla Cuir worries that the archipelago's major LGBT nonprofits aren't prepared for topics like nonbinary identity, what it means to be intersex, the importance of inclusive language in Spanish, or how toxic masculinity manifests even in cisgender gay men. And that lack of knowledge can negatively affect how successful they are in helping members of their community.

"Some organizations only concentrated on LGB and not T, and not nonbinary,"

De La Fuente Díaz says. “[After Hurricane Maria], some nonbinary people couldn't even apply for trans help because it was [for] trans men and women, it was [for] ‘female’ and ‘male,’ nothing else. A lot of nonbinary people were also left out.”

Educating other organizations is part of La Sombrilla Cuir’s work. The group has already become a valuable educational resource within activist circles since forming in August 2018. Its role as educator speaks not only to the consistency of its work but also its necessity. Organizations, including LGBT nonprofits, regularly invite La Sombrilla Cuir to give workshops on language justice and other issues that intersect with more traditional LGBTQIAP+ concerns.

Making clear the connections between feminist and queer issues is part of La Sombrilla Cuir’s mission. One possible way to assess this commonality is in the violence both women and LGBTQ people on the island experience. Puerto Rico’s rates of gender-based violence are tragically high: In 2018 alone, more than 40 women were killed, **at least 23 of them by intimate partners**.

Machismo and toxic masculinity, both products of a patriarchal society, are commonly known (and **proven by studies**) to be root causes of violence in cisgender men. Both are also fuel for homophobia, transphobia, and the violence those discriminatory ideologies can lead to.

In terms of crimes against LGBTQIAP+ people, there is no specific record-keeping in Puerto Rico — **local police** and **court systems** do not separate assaults or homicides based on gender identity or sexual orientation from overall reporting.

The lack of statistics makes it difficult to quantify the presence of homophobic and transphobic crimes, but government record or not, queer-presenting, trans, and nonbinary people in Puerto Rico **experience discrimination** and **violent crime** all too regularly.

“[Some organizations were] not seeing the big picture,” says 25-year-old La Sombrilla Cuir member Luis José. “How violence against women was affecting the communities, how politics was affecting the communities — all these social issues that in some way are affecting the community.”

The past decade in Puerto Rico has brought the legalization of same-sex marriage and, more recently, the option for **gender marker correction on the birth certificates of transgender people**. Both are benchmarks of progress, but there’s still more work to do.

Last June, a **“religious liberty” bill** that would allow government employees to deny service to Puerto Rican citizens on the basis of religious objection nearly became law. **Abortion restrictions** proposed months earlier were a close call too. Understanding that these transgressions against human rights are linked by connecting them to the greater concepts of religious and patriarchal oppression is part of what La Sombrilla Cuir hopes to convey to everyone, regardless of age or education level.

“The way we make the posts — I think about me explaining something to my mom,” de la Fuente Díaz says. “My mom doesn't have higher education, but she still understands a lot of stuff. There's a lot of things that people can understand if you explain them in a very loving and also very easy way.”

Some teachers and professors are even using La Sombrilla Cuir’s infographics to teach gender perspective in classrooms. Just recently, the collective delivered a workshop at a kids’ summer camp.

“Having these conversations about racism and ableism and inclusive language...[the kids] really wanted to learn about the topics,” cofounder Soraya Ferri, 24, says. “They wanted to vent about all the problematic things they're observing but don't have the language to describe as problematic.”

Racism, though some choose to deny its prevalence in Puerto Rican culture, is also rampant. To that effect, La Sombrilla Cuir has created explainers about the **history of slavery** in Puerto Rico and how some **common Puerto Rican phrases** perpetuate **racism**. A **Facebook post** about **digital blackface** turned into a debate, but that's part of the learning process too. Some content is inspired by existing infographics or articles, and cited as such after being translated for La Sombrilla Cuir's posts, like quotes from **Angela Davis** and Black Panther Party cofounder **Bobby Seale**.

Coalition building with like-minded groups is also part of La Sombrilla Cuir's ethos. The group shares and promotes events (whether or not it'll be present) and informative social media posts, and exchanges feedback as mutual support.

De La Fuente Díaz says, “I used to know this activist that told me, if we divide our work, then it's going to be even more work. We should all just be one group. But no — because we still have our differences, and everyone wants to concentrate on different stuff. Not everyone wants to be on the street fighting.”

The meetings, plus the podcasts the group produces in conjunction with transfeminist collective **Espicy Nipples**, are like therapy, says Luis José.

“This is where we can express ourselves,” the group explains. “And in the podcast, we talk about some issues that maybe we've been keeping inside, and we use La Sombrilla Cuir to express all that anger or sadness or trauma. And that way, by expressing all that, that's how we make others understand.”

While La Sombrilla Cuir is based in San Juan, members do travel to other parts of the island for workshops. Recently, though, a new group, **Cap.i.cú**, has emerged on the west coast, and is addressing some similar issues. La Sombrilla Cuir sees this as progress, not conflict.

“We don't see [other groups] as competition; we see them as allies,” de la Fuente Díaz says. “Older groups don't always see that. They see us as competition, like reducing [their] power, [like] it's a fight for power — and we don't have that.”

While Puerto Rico has just undergone revolutionary changes, there's still much to do — and the work of continuing education never really ends because there's always room to learn and improve. That La Sombrilla Cuir prioritizes accessibility and personal situations in delegating work means the collective is better equipped for the long haul.

“Since the conception of the group, we've always talked about accountability when it comes to everyone's different circumstances,” says Ferri. “A lot of these meetings with other [activism] groups, you're supposed to just leave your sh*t and personality at the door and just focus on the meeting. That's not really accessible to a lot of people. In fact, a lot of this stuff, like going to meetings, presentations, scheduling, is not accessible. So we always try to have an honest conversation with the group, like, ‘Okay, who's working a lot? Who's dealing with a lot of stuff? Who has the funds?’ to try to keep that balance as much as possible.”

The group has also connected with collectives outside of Puerto Rico that have made donations possible. La Sombrilla Cuir is a passion project, its members stress, and they have no intention of converting to a nonprofit organization; government funding or grants often come with specific stipulations and limitations for use, they explain, and the group sees the nonprofit sector as

part of a system that has too often failed LGBTTQIAP+ people.

Following Rosselló's departure, the governorship went to his newly nominated secretary of state, Pedro Pierluisi, who would replace Luis G. Rivera Marín (involved in the chat scandal, he resigned in its wake). Pierluisi, too, stepped down after the island's Supreme Court deemed **his appointment unconstitutional**. Puerto Rico's governor now is former secretary of justice Wanda Vázquez, constitutionally next in line for the job and **sworn in on August 7**. Her track record in protecting human rights has been **criticized**; it remains to be seen what kind of relationship she will have with the archipelago's LGBTTQIAP+ population.

La Sombrilla Cuir may not upend Puerto Rico's government on its own. But in providing understanding on how oppression works, where it comes from, and how we often inadvertently perpetuate it ourselves, it's giving organizations and individuals the necessary tools to fight those systems — or, at the very least, make better choices within them. Positive social change is paramount in pushing progressive political change.

“We can't go to the Capitol and tell them nonbinary people exist without them laughing in our faces,” says De La Fuente Díaz. “[But] we can do it through Facebook; we can do it through Instagram.”

Want more from Teen Vogue? Check this out: [Protesters in Puerto Rico Are Using Makeup to Make a Political Statement](#)



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Growing Up Trans

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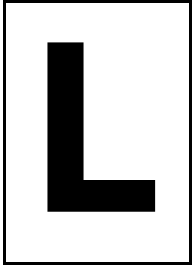


By Jhoni Jackson



(<https://remezcla.com/author/jhonijackson/>) | 3

months ago



a Fortaleza Street was colloquially renamed Resistance Street after Puerto Rico's #RickyRenuncia movement last summer. On Saturday, an altar honoring Neulisa Alexa Luciano Ruiz—a trans woman murdered in Puerto Rico in the early morning hours of February 24—was constructed at the corner of del Cristo and La Fortaleza in Old San Juan. The cross street is within sight of the Governor's Mansion—a landmark for local protests.

On Saturday evening, however, as the sun set on a crowd of about 100, there was no chanting or picketing on La Fortaleza. The only sound heard throughout the crowd was the occasional snuffle of a tearful mourner. Everyone spoke in hushed tones in between snaps and soft applause as speakers shared personal stories about the challenges and oppressions of the trans experience, or their heartfelt lament for what happened to Alexa.

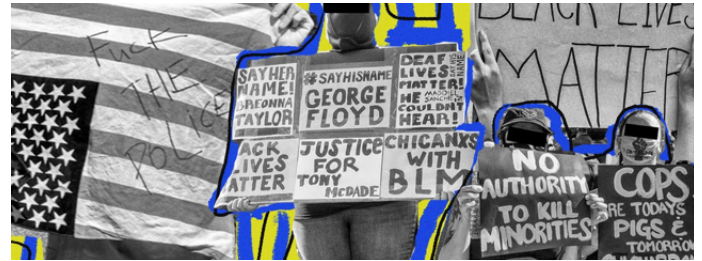
Trending



Music

Cosculluela Suggests Black American Protestors "Kill Each Other," Goes on Racist Rant

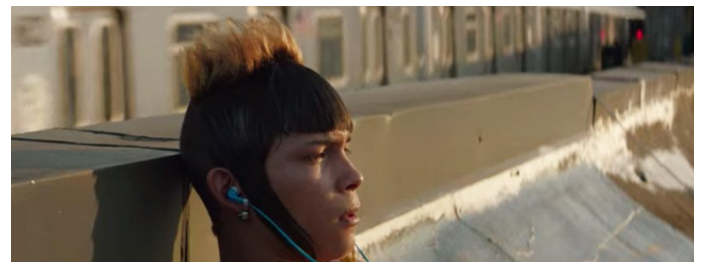
(<https://remezcla.com/music/cosculluela-suggests-black-protestors-kill-each-other/>)



Culture

Be About It: How a City Stands Together for #BLM & the Cry to Defund the Police

(<https://remezcla.com/features/culture/los-angeles-protest-black-lives-matter-defund-the-police/>)



Film


Filmmaker Fernando Frías on Fighting Misconceptions About Mexican Masculinity With 'I'm No Longer Here'

(<https://remezcla.com/features/film/interview->

An image of her seen half-smiling was placed inside a wreath made by queer Chicanx artist [Broobs](http://instagram.com/broobs.psd) (<http://instagram.com/broobs.psd>) and illuminated beside a tapestry of candles, flowers and handwritten notes. A cake was later added to the mix as a crowd sang an emotional, belated “Happy Birthday.”

[fernando-frias-no-longer-here-netflix/](#)

Alexa was murdered on [her 29th birthday](#) (<https://twitter.com/DavidBegnaud/status/1234308491105460225>).



tayshayra
3,058 followers

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tavshavra

On the dawn of February 24th 2020, Neulisa Alexa was taken away from us before someone could wish her a happy birthday. From this day onward every February 24th is your day, Alexa. We will sing and let your kind spirit live on. Happy belated Neulisa Alexa.

Neulisa Alexa was a homeless trans woman murdered in Toa Baja, Puerto Rico. A mirror was her only defense mechanism and rumors about her turned it into a weapon. Transphobia and slander killed Alexa, and continues to kill our sisters. But Saturday night, the trans community of Puerto Rico made sure she passed on to the next stages of her life with only her kind soul to be remembered.

[#sellamabaalexa](#) [#polaroidoriginals](#)

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Numerous vigils and commemorations were held in her honor throughout the course of the week. This gathering, however, was helmed by trans people—a group that best understands the impact of Alexa’s life and its tragic end. María José, who organized the event with the help of friends, stood up front, flanked by many other trans women, men and non-binary Puerto Ricans—including members of the nonprofit organization [Trans Tanamá](#) (<https://www.facebook.com/tanamatrans/>) and the grassroots transfeminist collective [La Sombrilla Cuir](#) (<http://facebook.com/lasombrillacuir>).

Within a few days of local outlets breaking the story, news of Alexa's killing spread worldwide and drew attention from the international press, as well as support from people and organizations like Bad Bunny (<https://remezcla.com/music/bad-bunny-takes-a-stand-for-trans-rights-announces-album-release-date-on-the-tonight-show/>), Indya Moore (<https://www.instagram.com/p/B9UYhRcH4DB/>), Senator Elizabeth Warren and the ACLU.

The outrage fueled by the murder of a Black trans woman is immediate and multifaceted. Alexa was marginalized in more ways than one: She was black, poor, homeless and believed to have been living with a mental illness. Activists say Alexa's story serves as a reminder of the brutal truth that transphobia (<https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/puerto-rico/notas/mujeres-trans-todos-los-dias-nos-matan-con-el-estigma-y-los-estereotipos/?fbclid=IwAR390Az5usd5wWkbPhCTEKMmmuoZDHZ1HdBFJeeNysEHChy-zyNvtOGzw4Q>), racism and a misunderstanding of neurodiversity, all thrive in Puerto Rico—an unfortunate reality that is generally the case throughout the world for all marginalized people.



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El jueves pasado, en nuestra primera noche cuir, honramos la vida de Alexa y abrimos el espacio para, junto a miembrxs de la comunidad trans, sanar colectivamente.

Que cada día, dondequiera que nos encontremos, podamos ser luz y ayudar a otrxs en su proceso de búsqueda y sanación.

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. .

#sellamabaalexa #justiciaparaalexa
#espacioseguero

📸: @artis.designs.pr

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On February 23, hours before her murder, Alexa was accused of using a mirror to look underneath the stall inside the women's restroom at a McDonald's. Police arrived to question her, but she was not detained and no charges were filed. Still, social media posts that warned of a "peeping Tom" went viral online (<http://metro.pr/pr/noticias/2020/02/25/se-defiende-hombre-que-denuncio-incidente-con-alexa-en-fast-food-de-toa-baja.html>). Most included photos of Alexa, which were taken during questioning. The image (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/29/us/alexa-puerto-rico-transgender-killing/index.html>) of her looking up at the officer standing over her is now familiar to many who have read about her murder.

At around 3:50 a.m. the next morning, a cadaver found in a grassy field in Toa Baja was reported to police. The body was immediately suspected to be Alexa's. Her mother ultimately confirmed (<https://www.univision.com/local/puerto-rico-wlii/identifican-el-cuerpo-de-alexa-la-joven-trans-asesinada-en-toa-baja>) that that was, unfortunately, the case.

By Monday morning, a video of a group of cisgender males who authorities originally believed were responsible for her murder

surfaced online. Obscenities (“Give me that ass!”) and threats (“You bet I’m going to shoot him”) are heard shouted into a dark field from inside a vehicle. The sound of a gun being loaded is heard after. The video then pans to a person, presumed to be Alexa, who was walking in the opposite direction of the car. When she turns around, at least 10 shots are fired in her direction.



V. Torres Montalvo 🍷
@Motinsitepegas

[VÍDEO] Este vídeo muestra la otra parte que, hasta hoy, no se conocía de Alexa Torres. El “live” fue tomado por Nandy Torres Rosa en noviembre del 2019 y aquí ella dice tener 28 años, llevar 7 meses en la calle y sufrir de depresión.

Nandy ayudó a Alexa luego de esta conv.



3,596 1:53 PM - Feb 24, 2020

1,488 people are talking about this

Alexa allegedly left messages on the mirrors of public restrooms: “I always wanted to travel, but not like this,” one read.

Another resonates as a disclaimer: “I am pretty and feminine enough for you, motherf**kers. Don’t please this sh*t society, please yourself.”

Alexa was reportedly estranged from her family and neighbors have even reported suspected abuse during Alexa's childhood. Relatives have provided little to no information of their own about her life. Thus, what the public knows of Alexa has been culled from the words of people who helped her or encountered her. Most notably, Nandy Torres, a friend of Alexa's, told CBS (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/shocking-murder-of-transgender-woman-alexa-puerto-rico/>) the mirror was a go-to way for her to check her surroundings for safety.

Among the flowers and handwritten notes and candles at Alexa's altar on Saturday was a line of handheld mirrors. When the memorial ended and the crowd dispersed, a few people paid their respects and approached the altar just enough to make their reflections seen. Around them, the predictable dim of a Saturday night in Old San Juan—music, laughter, cars honking—grew louder.

The link to this photo or video may be broken, or the post may have been removed.

[Visit Instagram](#)

While an official autopsy has not yet been released, a preliminary report (<https://www.telemundopr.com/noticias/puerto-rico/ciencias-forenses-alexa-fue-asesinada-a-balazos-segun-la-autopsia/2052657/>) confirmed Alexa died as a result of multiple gunshot wounds.

Puerto Rico police questioned four suspects last week (<https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/seguridad/nota/henryescaleraaseguraqueelasesinatodeale>

[xaseraresuelto-2550480/](#)). But, what momentarily felt like steps toward justice have been halted. Officials now report that one of the [suspects claimed the weapon](#) (<http://noticel.com/policiacas/la-calle/ahora/20200303/no-avanza-la-investigacion-tras-asesinato-de-alexa/>) heard in the video was a type of air gun used to scare, but not murder, Alexa. Thus, the suspects have been released and no charges have been filed. Some members of Puerto Rico's LGBTQIA+ community wonder if authorities truly even want to solve the case.

“Because, as usual, we’re disposable,” local rapper Villano Antillano tweeted in Spanish. “For you all, it’s in the past, but know that the community is still mourning.”



Prince Ashitaka

@villanomalandro

Los asesinos de Alexa aún no han sido arrestados. La policía no puede ni dar con los asesinos de una matanza que fue live streamed. Quizás sí pueden, pero no quieren. Porque como de costumbre somos desechables. Para ustedes ya pasó, pero sepan que su comunidad la sigue llorando.

818 1:21 PM - Mar 2, 2020

501 people are talking about this

In addition to a lack of urgency in solving the case, there has been frustration over the failure to properly report Alexa's story.

In 2019, a local activist compiled a list (<https://twitter.com/MTheLeon/status/1136248256139354115>) of trans women murdered in Puerto Rico. But, the information is hard to verify, she notes, because these women are often misgendered.

Alexa, as of now—according to The Police Bureau's official murder statistics (<https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/policia-tribunales/notas/crimen-de-alexa-figura-en-las-estadisticas-de-la-policia-como-varon-adulto/>)—is among those misgendered and mislabeled deaths. The hashtag #SeLlamabaAlexa is being used to condemn both the media and police's frequent misgendering.

Without proof of trends in crime, resources to combat them or help survivors are difficult to attain (<http://papermag.com/kevin-fret-murder-puerto-rico-2625759270.html?rebelltitem=12#rebelltitem12>).

Puerto Rican media initially misgendered Alexa as well. They called her “a man dressed as a woman,” a “man in a skirt” and referred to her as “a transgender”—a descriptor considered by

many within the LGBTQIA+ community to be dehumanizing—or assumed she was “a transsexual”—a term not all trans people identify with (and some find offensive). Many have retroactively been edited.

Then, at a press conference (<https://www.univision.com/local/puerto-rico-wlii/autoridades-trabajaran-para-fortalecer-planes-anticrimenes-video>) held the day Alexa’s death was reported, Governor Wanda Vázquez, too, misgendered Alexa. “El joven,” she called her amid promises to fortify defense against all violent crime in Puerto Rico. The following day, however, Vázquez told the press that Alexa’s murder would be treated as a hate crime. She used Alexa’s correct pronouns throughout, noting that what occurred was an act of “violence against a woman.”

That, along with celebrity evangelist Wanda Rolón referring to transgender people as folks who exhibit a “rejection of gender,” are just a couple of the many instances of discriminatory rhetoric heard last week.

During a radio interview, House Representative María Milagros “Tata” Charbonier would neither deny nor confirm that Alexa was a woman. Charbonier, widely regarded by progressives as anti-LGBTQ, has supported multiple attempts—

as recently as last year

(<https://www.metro.pr/pr/noticias/2019/06/12/maria-milagros-charbonier-reacciona-a-rechazo-de-famosos-en-proyecto-de-libertad-religiosa.html>)

—to pass a “religious liberty

(<https://www.metro.pr/pr/noticias/2017/06/26/condenan-aprobacion-proyecto-discriminacion-comunidad-lgbt.html>)” law in PR, which

opponents say would essentially legalize discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people.



n_montcourt

Calle De La Resistencia, Vieja

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Vigilia para honrar la vida de Neulisa Alexa quien fue asesinada en la madrugada del lunes en Toa Baja. Ella vivía en la calle, un día antes de su homicidio se difundió información por las redes sociales que la acusaban de entrar al baño de mujeres de un local de comida rápida para “mirar niñas”. La acusaron de ser un hombre

vestido de mujer que entró al baño que no le correspondía, pero sí, le correspondía. Ayer frente a la Fortaleza, en la Calle Resistencia conmemoraron su vida con un espacio de luto, silencio, reflexión, amor y paz. Le dedicaron un altar con velas, flores blancas y violetas, espejos de mano, y notas de amor. El dolor es colectivo.

Aquí comparto extractos de la carta dedicada a Alexa escritas por [@maria._jose._](#)

Desde que te fuiste todos los días he llorado porque te siento, porque te pareces a tantas amigas mías.

Nada es asegurado en esta vida, mucho menos para nosotras.

El, el, el, perdón que tantas personas antes y después de tu muerte no te han identificado apropiadamente.

No es justo que nuestra sociedad este tan mal educada y tan inconsciente.

Nos deben mucho y no hemos logrado encontrar las soluciones, perdónanos.

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[#Alexa](#) [#AlexaEsSuNombre](#) [#niunamas](#)
[#niunamenos](#)
[#NoMásOdio](#)
[#photojournalism](#)
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#TransphobiaKills
#TransLivesMatter
#TransPeopleDeserveToLive
#TransMatter
#StopLGTBfobia
#JusticeForAlexa

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A speaker for the Dignity Project—a newly formed, religiously conservative political party—even went as far as to say hate crimes do not exist in Puerto Rico (<http://metro.pr/pr/noticias/2020/02/26/cesar-vazquez-en-puerto-rico-no-existen-los-crimenes-de-odio.html>). Unfortunately, if hard data is his measure, he's not wrong. There *is* in fact insufficient official information available regarding crimes against the LGBTQIA community in Puerto Rico.

In 2002, a law that makes aggravated offenses of hate crimes (<http://www.lexjuris.com/revista/opcion1/2013/Crimenes%20de%20Odio-Revisado.htm>) was put in place in order to prohibit discrimination based on gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. But, few cases have been classified

as hate crimes

([https://www.elvocero.com/gobierno/dudan-si-la-polic-a-cumpli-con-el-](https://www.elvocero.com/gobierno/dudan-si-la-polic-a-cumpli-con-el-protocolo/article_3c0a03c2-59d6-11ea-8b74-3f1b11c020f1.html?fbclid=IwAR3M3bYp724jSp1H6KLPA1wz7jhVbDOCoL9gDnq5LA3YIPkAVLi7okgJEn8)

[protocolo/article_3c0a03c2-59d6-11ea-8b74-](https://www.elvocero.com/gobierno/dudan-si-la-polic-a-cumpli-con-el-protocolo/article_3c0a03c2-59d6-11ea-8b74-3f1b11c020f1.html?fbclid=IwAR3M3bYp724jSp1H6KLPA1wz7jhVbDOCoL9gDnq5LA3YIPkAVLi7okgJEn8)

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[CoL9gDnq5LA3YIPkAVLi7okgJEn8](https://www.elvocero.com/gobierno/dudan-si-la-polic-a-cumpli-con-el-protocolo/article_3c0a03c2-59d6-11ea-8b74-3f1b11c020f1.html?fbclid=IwAR3M3bYp724jSp1H6KLPA1wz7jhVbDOCoL9gDnq5LA3YIPkAVLi7okgJEn8)) in Puerto

Rican courts and public police data does not

separate hate crimes from other crimes.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of gender and

sexuality education

([https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/politica/no](https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/politica/nota/rossellodefiendededecisiondeeliminarcurriculodoperspectivadegenero-2462748/)

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[eperspectivadegenero-2462748/](https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/politica/nota/rossellodefiendededecisiondeeliminarcurriculodoperspectivadegenero-2462748/)) in public

school curriculums, the system's and the

negligible adherence

([http://twitter.com/ACLUPR/status/123271501406](http://twitter.com/ACLUPR/status/1232715014060085252)

[0085252](http://twitter.com/ACLUPR/status/1232715014060085252)) to properly classify hate crimes

against the LGBTQIA+ community as such, the

onus of eradicating transphobia and educating

cisgender friends is overwhelmingly placed on

trans people themselves.

Last week, many trans people in Puerto Rico

were asked to publicly respond to Alexa's

murder. But, trans people have been telling their

stories all along—on social media, through trans

advocacy organizations

(<http://servicioslgbtpr.com/cat/salud-trans/>) and simply by living their truth on any given day.

Cisgender people's indignation over Alexa's murder and the in-person support offered at the myriad events held since her murder has not gone unseen by Puerto Rico's trans community. But is it enough?

During the open mic toward the end of Saturday's memorial, the father of a trans child stepped up to speak—but despite espousing love, support, and acceptance of his child, he repeatedly misgendered her.

“I love you, but you are not prepared to have a microphone at this event,” María José told the man. “But thank you. Thank you for trying.”

Have you met someone who is ...



“I would have loved to have met you.” María José read aloud on Saturday. “I would have loved you.”

She then led the crowd in a pledge in memory of Alexa and in commitment to “be better allies to trans people, to feminine people, to black people, to poor people, to neurodiverse people, and to people without homes.”

The pledge ended with a promise to protect Alexa’s legacy.

“Que descanses en paz, Alexa, en paz y en poder. Buen viaje.”

🔗 [alexa \(https://remezcla.com/tag/alexa/\)](https://remezcla.com/tag/alexa/), [puerto rico \(https://remezcla.com/tag/puerto-rico-5/\)](https://remezcla.com/tag/puerto-rico-5/), [transgender community \(https://remezcla.com/tag/transgender-community/\)](https://remezcla.com/tag/transgender-community/).

| Thursday, March 5, 2020 at 6:15 PM EST

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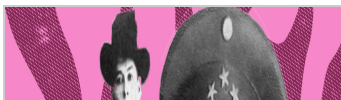
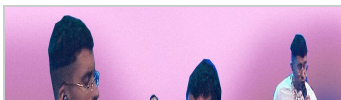
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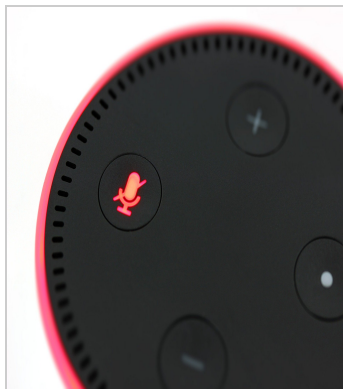
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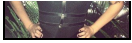
Kany García Rallies Fans to Raise Funds for Trans Puerto Ricans



Photo courtesy of HBO Latino



By Jhoni Jackson



(<https://remezcla.com/author/jhonijackson/>) | 4

weeks ago

When Kany García came out in 2016, it was a major breakthrough in representation for LGBTQIA+ Puerto Ricans. Since then, she hasn't stopped using her platform for positive change since. This weekend the singer-songwriter shared a video encouraging donations to [True Self Foundation](https://www.facebook.com/trueselffoundation/) (<https://www.facebook.com/trueselffoundation/>), a local nonprofit of which she's a member of the board of directors.

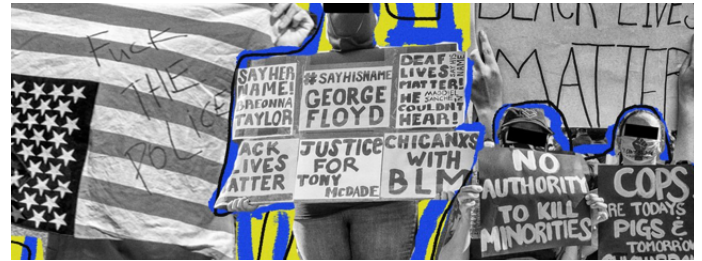
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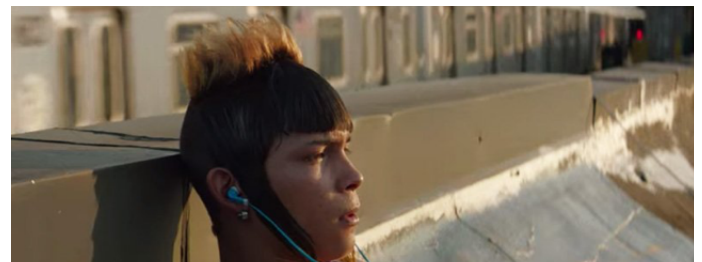
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True Self advocates for LGBTQIA+ Puerto Ricans, with an emphasis on taking care of trans and non-binary folks, whether through grants for gender affirmation processes or general financial aid.

“Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and strict island-wide lockdown,” García says in the clip. “There are a lot of people unemployed and in need.”

But “the trans community in Puerto Rico and Latin America is especially singled out and judged when looking for jobs... Today, those people are not only without work, but they don’t have anything to eat, either,” she says.

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Fear, unfortunately, is also very much a part of trans’ people’s daily lives in Puerto Rico, where “the number of hate crime killings [of trans people] is very high.”

Five trans people
(<https://www.hrc.org/blog/hrc-responds-to-rash-of-anti-lgbtq-violence-in-puerto-rico>),
four of them women, have been murdered

on the island in less than four months' time.

These tragedies comprise a disproportionate 50% of the 10 total LGTBQIA+ murders (<https://www.hrc.org/blog/hrc-responde-a-erupcion-de-violencia-contra-lgbtq-en-puerto-rico>) that have occurred in Puerto Rico the past 15 months.

García reminds fans that any donation helps, even just a dollar or two. The True Self Foundation team will use all funds raised to purchase food that will be directly delivered to trans people. The receipts will be shared, she notes.

Donations from outside Puerto Rico can be sent via PayPal (<https://www.paypal.com/donate/?token=rRnyjLCSu7kPM5fEvhspEiv4576OpLPZeip-wvOzueA1LVY55vaPM44Hc3cE4ifM6ewHjm&country.x=US&locale.x=US>).

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