

TerceraGuerraMundial in Memes: Latin American Perspectives on the Russo-Ukrainian War

Latin America, war memes, political memes, social media, Ukraine war

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How to cite: Martinez Ziegler, Samantha. 2024. "TerceraGuerraMundial in Memes: Latin American Perspectives on the Russo-Ukrainian War". *WiderScreen Ajankohtaista* 20.12.2024. <https://widerscreen.fi/numerot/ajankohtaista/terceraguerramundial-in-memes-latin-american-perspectives-on-the-russo-ukrainian-war/>

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has seen the use of war memes on social media as tools to engage in political discussion, spread ideologies, and as visual propaganda, particularly in anglophone cyberspaces and with an Eurocentric standpoint. In Latin America, where memetic culture is distinctly rooted in humour, emotions, and irony, Ukraine war memes have been used to express social and political commentary on the conflict. These war memes reveal affective responses to the Russia-Ukraine war, and present different perspectives on the effects of the war. The focus of this paper is the Latin American perspectives on the Russia-Ukraine war conveyed through memes created and posted on the day of the invasion under the hashtag Tercera Guerra Mundial (Third World War). By examining ten Spanish-language memes, I establish three common responses and stances, and explain the context in which they are conceived. This text was originally written for the 2024 course on Media Criticism and Society as part of the Dark Play project in the Digital Culture, Cultural Heritage and Landscape program at the University of Turku, and was revisited and last modified in the autumn of 2024.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, memes have been used as political and social commentary for years. From criticism and mockery aimed at specific political figures and parties, to bringing

awareness to social issues that affect society, memes are today a common tool of Latin American political agendas (Makhortykh & González Aguilar 2020, 342). While this commentary sometimes focuses on local incidents and political figures that are relevant within specific geographical boundaries, as it can be commonly observed in memes that highlight the ongoing social unrest in countries like Argentina, Venezuela, Chile, Mexico, among others, other instances also show how memes are used to engage in political discourse that extends beyond the region, like international geopolitical issues. In this sense, the Latino memetic culture on social media is built upon the communicative power established between individuals that can observe reality from a particular perspective, thus allowing for collective commentary on foreign socio-political issues (Vera Campillay 2016, 6).

From a personal standpoint, I have been part of *Twitterzuela* (Graterol 2021), an online community of Venezuelan X¹¹ users, since 2009. My experience as a member of this digital community has given me the opportunity to witness the evolution and production of political memes first-hand. A good example of the popularity of political memes in *Twitterzuela* is the creation of memes to celebrate the death of former president and controversial politician Hugo Chávez. Since 2013, the hashtag *#ChavezPartyNightClub* has been used on X every March 5th to share hundreds of memes, usually through a mix of image macros, text, and video clips (Maduradas 2021). Many of these memes are recycled and reposted each year, although it is common for new posts in the form of image macros or videos to be shared as well.

The memetic culture found in *Twitterzuela* is, though, part of a much larger culture that is shared with other Spanish-speaking countries in the region. For instance, in Mexico, memes became an effective campaign weapon employed by political parties and their followers during the 2018 presidential elections (Franco Estrada & Rawsley 2021, 334). Latino abortion rights activists created and shared political memes during massive online protests on social media platforms like X and Instagram under the hashtag *#AbortoLegalYa* (Legal abortion now) since the late 2010s onwards (Acosta 2020, 40). In this manner, with over 400 million native Spanish speakers living across 20 countries (Osoblivaia 2020), Latin America has developed their own way of creating, replicating, adopting, and sharing memes through the years. The semantics of the Spanish language allow for visual and textual imagery to travel across these countries, despite the slight differences in regional dialects and area-specific internet jargon.

Bueno Oliviera (2022, 178) expands on this by explaining that the cultural characteristics of the Latino memes are not always understood by foreign individuals, and vice versa. In regard to political memes directed towards foreign conflicts and/or events, the digital boundaries between the Latin American countries begin to blur. Instead of 20 countries, the region becomes one geographical entity, a spectator isolated from the rest of the world where the conflict takes place (Gómez-Muñoz & Muñoz-Pico 2023, 23). This has been the case in respect to the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war following the Russia invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (ibid). The Ukraine war memes created and shared in Spanish spaces on social media do not stay in country-specific bubbles; rather, these memes are intended to express collective thoughts, ideas, and sentiments of Latin America, whether explicitly or implicitly, in their content. This is reflected by the use of visual and textual elements (e.g., including the map and/or flags of Latin American countries, or including the word *Latinoamérica* or *Latam* in the memes) to talk about “us” in relation to “them/it” (in this instance, the war).

On social media, particularly on the platform X, the use of the hashtag *#TerceraGuerraMundial* (Third World War) to post memes about the Russo-Ukraine war particularly stands out. The hashtag is a hyperbole, where Latinos interpret contemporary foreign conflicts and crises of international interest and reach as an “unofficial” Third World War. Along these lines, *#TerceraGuerraMundial* has been used sporadically since 2020 by Latinos to share political memes, especially whenever international tensions arise. For example, the January 2020 Iranian attack on US forces (Harkins 2021) generated a lot of reactionary memes in Latin American spaces, which were shared through this hashtag on X (see Fig. 1). Although the fear of conflict factors in the creation of political memes (Gómez-Muñoz & Muñoz-Pico 2023, 3), the use of *#TerceraGuerraMundial* also hints at an alarmist reaction before international political unrest.



Figure 1. Screenshot of a post on X. The post reads the following dialogue: “Trump: Latin America is on the side of the US. -Latin America:” followed by a video of the television show *RuPaul’s Drag Race: Untucked (2009–)* to show lack of interest and indifference towards the statement. Source: navas, X, 2020.

Today, #TerceraGuerraMundial has become particularly relevant to discuss the Russia-Ukraine war in Latino cyberspaces (Quintanilla Kanter 2022). This paper discusses Latin American perspectives on the Russian invasion of Ukraine based on the textual and visual contents of war memes. In particular, I am interested in examining the earliest memetic responses to the conflict in Ukraine. From this perspective, I ponder the following: what kind of social commentary on the Russia-Ukraine war do Latinos express through memes on social media? Which particular emotions, ideas, and stances are reflected in the content of these war memes? What are the characteristics of Latino meme culture on the social media platform X? Towards this goal, I collected a small sample of 10 Spanish memes that were published shortly after the Russia invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 on X. The sample was then split into three categories based on the ideational components of its contents, which in turn offer three typical frames of reference on the conflict.

War Memes: Political Weapons of the Digital Age

The term “meme” was first used by biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976 to talk about units of culture that are transmitted from person to person, usually by imitation (Shifman 2014, 2). This definition has served as the base upon which academics have further developed the concept of meme.

Particularly, in regard to internet memetics, professor Limor Shifman departs from Dawkins’ original definition proposes that instead of viewing memes as singular units of culture, they should be viewed as *groups* of units with common features, formats, and themes that can be replicated and imitated (Vainikka 2016, 61). Although the term is used colloquially to talk about fast-spread humorous images, videos, texts, among other media that is copied and replicated by others on the internet, academics offer a more ample understanding of what they are, what they represent, and how to interpret their content.

For example, Makhortykh & González Aguilar (2020, 343) describe memes as a combination of visual and verbal elements that aim to “stir affective reactions.” This echoes earlier statements by Nissenbaum and Shifman (2018, 297), which hold that “emotions are central to the operation of memes.” As another way of putting it, memes are carriers of an affective power. In this vein, Gómez-Muñoz & Muñoz-Pico (2023, 6) support these claims by defining memes as messages transmitted through repetition and emotions, anchored to the perception of a particular reality.

While internet memes can be used to convey positivity (e.g., celebrate success, enhance positive feelings, and show empathy), they can also be tools to spread misinformation, hate speech, and political propaganda (Vainikka 2016, 63; Nissenbaum & Shifman 2018, 297). Internet memes have played a particular role in the Russo-Ukrainian war, being used by both of the parties involved to promote their respective political agendas on social media. Pro-Ukraine and pro-Russia have been used by both civilians and government officials since the conflict started to engage in political discourse (Saarikoski et al. 2024, 7). In fact, a cartoon depicting Adolf Hitler caressing Russian president Vladimir Putin’s cheek, captioned “This is not a ‘meme’, but our and your reality right now” posted by the Ukraine government’s official X account hours after Putin announced the start of a “special military operation” in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, is one of the first official uses of political memes in this particular armed conflict (Gómez-Muñoz & Muñoz-Pico 2023, 7).



Figure 2. Screenshot of a post thread on X. The posts show what is considered to be the first official meme of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Source: Ukraine / Україна, X, 2022.

In a recent study, Chen et al. (2023) analysed the content of pro-Russia and pro-Ukraine war memes and were able to place them in different categories according to their contextual usage to convey political messages. Their findings indicate that the thematic of pro-Russian memes often emphasise the high competence of the Russian government while showcasing the incompetence of the enemies, i.e., “targeting aspects of US and their allies’ culture and beliefs” (Chen et al. 2023, 42). Meanwhile, the study allocates pro-Ukraine memes into three different categories: Russian deceit, Russian incompetence, and Ukrainian fortitude (Chen et al. 2023, 45). These findings establish similar patterns in the use of war memes by both of the belligerent parties, particularly as digital weapons to undermine the enemy (especially in the case of pro-Russian memes), as well as praising their fellow countrymen, military forces, and government.

Although acknowledging the weaponization of political memes in digital spaces is vital when discussing ideologies, movements, and modern conflicts as the war in Ukraine, it is important to note that memes have had other uses as well. For instance, Saarikoski et al. (2024, 6) explain that

beyond political agendas, memes have been used to express emotions caused by the war, particularly in regard to coping with emotional trauma. In other words, memes can offer cathartic psychological relief to those negatively affected by the war. Nissenbaum & Shifman (2018, 297) have previously explained the emotional nature of the internet meme, and have suggested that these emotions are co-constructed at both individual and collective levels. In this sense, although memes can reflect individualistic emotions (e.g., someone's personal fears and anxieties about the war), their relatability and virality further indicate that these emotions are felt collectively as well.

The aforementioned studies on the use of memes in the Russo-Ukrainian war also suggest that part of the conflict is carried out on social media as well (Saarikoski et al. 2024, 5). In this context, social media platforms are not only used to comment on the conflict, but as digital spaces where to use memetic warfare (ibid.). That is to say, the effects of the war are felt in geographical locations as well as in cyberspace. Nonetheless, the war memes analysed in these studies offer insights into (Western) European and Russian perspectives and do not encompass the entire landscape of Ukraine war memes shared online. Consequently, other foreign outlooks and stances are largely absent from their findings.

As noted earlier, the creation and sharing of Spanish-language war memes from a Latin American viewpoint has prevailed on social media from February 24, 2022, onwards. Discussing the memetic practices of Spanish speakers in Latin America, Bueno Olivera (2020, 180-181) highlights the use of humorous memes as political expressions and in the face of crises and disasters. Humour is one of the biggest characteristics of the Spanish-speaking internet, influencing the perception and creation of realities in the region.^[21] A recent study on the Latin American representation of the Russo-Ukrainian by Xavier Alejandro Gómez-Muñoz & Hilda Paola Muñoz-Pico (2023, 22) show that the memetic culture in the region heavily relies on humour and affective emotions rather than on logic. The authors focused on the rhetoric analysis of the most popular Ukraine war memes found on X at the time of their writing, as determined by the number of likes in a post. Furthermore, this research also found two predominant themes in Spanish memes: the celebration of Latin American integration (positive emotion) and an apathetic stance towards the war (self-awareness, and often negative emotions), both expressed through humour (Gómez-Muñoz & Muñoz-Pico 2023, 23).

Following their perspective, the memes discussed below illustrate these types of responses to conflict in the context of Latin American memetic culture. While the study by Gómez-Muñoz and

Muñoz-Pico chose to approach the topic by using a sample size of 10 X posts based on popularity, my sample was selected in terms of: immediacy (memes that were posted on the same day or the day after the invasion was announced) and hashtag usage (must include the hashtag #TerceraGuerraMundial).

Integration: “Today is a good day to be from Latin America”



Figure 3. Screenshot of a post on X. The post reads: “It’s a good day to be from Latin America. #Ukraine #ATTENTION #NOW #ThirdWorldWar.” Underneath, a meme template of Jotchua with the addition of the Latin American map, reading “I love you.” Source: Richie (@GranRichiee), X, 2022.

The meme above shows a template of Jotchua, a golden retriever puppy held up in one hand towards the camera, next to a map of Latin America and the Caribbean, with added text above reading “I love you,” in regard to the region (see Fig. 3). This meme, also known as *Perro Dinero* (Money Dog), has been used by Spanish speakers on social media, particularly on X, to express thankfulness. The superimposed text reading “I love you” above the puppy’s shabby and pixelated appearance often indicates a feeling best described as a “pained” relief. For instance, this meme became very popular during the Olympic games to show support for athletes and teams,

especially in cases where the possibilities of winning were minimal (Gómez-Muñoz & Muñoz-Pico 2023, 19).

This meme reflects the sentiments of Latin American integration from a cultural and geographical standpoint, and isolation (from the rest of the world) that were previously discussed. The humour here is subtle but simple: the war is happening in Europe, not in Latin America, and therefore, positive feelings towards living in Latin America are expressed. Although the war in Ukraine has affected the region in terms of lower economic growth and high inflation even a few months after the war began (UN 2022), the positive emotion here is reflected in the lack of proximity to the armed conflict.

The juxtaposition of the meme and its caption versus the hashtags used are also worth pointing out; while the visual and textual imagery show love towards Latin America, the use of warning hashtags like *#ATENCIÓN #AHORA* (*#ATTENTION #NOW*), in addition to the more alarmist *#ThirdWorldWar* creates a contrast in the message delivered by the meme. At the same time, the hashtags are used to give further background on the meme. If we were to view these memes by themselves, without knowing that they were posted in regard to the Russo-Ukrainian war, the meaning would surely be lost. This demonstrates what Milner (2013, 2365) has defined as “minimalistic humour,” a characteristic of memes in which further context is needed to understand its humour and textual content.



Figure 4. *SpongeBob SquarePants* image macro captioned “Latin America, my home.” Source: Zeceña, X, 2022.



Figure 5. Map of Latin America with video game character Kirby next to it, reading “Don’t take me out of Latin America anymore.” Source: Bonnie, X, 2022.



Figure 6. A SpongeBob SquarePants image macro captioned “I like it here. Here are the people I love.” In the context this meme was shared, the place “here” refers to Latin America, whereas “the people I love,” represented in the image by a group of criminal cartoon fish, refers to other Latinos. Source: Licenciado Yagami, X, 2022.

In the collected sample, I found several examples of memes that convey a strong collective feeling of Latin American integration, despite experienced hardships and socio-cultural issues found in the region (see Figs. 4-6). Simultaneously, other characteristics of the memetic culture in Latin America arose. For instance, in a study comparing the use of political memes in Venezuela and Ukraine, Makhortykh & González Aguilar (2020) point out that Venezuelan memes reference popular culture products, such as Western popular culture and anime/manga (349). The figures above illustrate how image macros of the American animated series *SpongeBob SquarePants* and the Nintendo video games character Kirby have been used to express feelings of love towards Latin America by Latinos (see Figs. 5-6).

A critical approach one could implement when studying these types of memes is the lack of empathy and insensitivity towards the effects of the war (namely casualties, injuries, tragedy). While the message of these memes is not meant to be mock the conflict, and rather showcases a newfound sense of unity in the region, there is still the lingering question of whether it is ethical to “celebrate” not being involved in a war, especially by using alarmist hashtags like #ATTENTION and the more visible #ThirdWarWorld to spread these memes.

Apathy: “That’s my secret, Europe, I’m always in crisis”



Figure 7. Screenshot of a post on X. The post shows a dialogue: “Europe: Latin America, why are you not in crisis due to the #ThirdWorldWar? Latin America: That’s my secret, Europe, I’m always in crisis.” Underneath, an image of superhero the Hulk in the film *the Avengers* (2012). Source: Alex, X, 2022.

This second type of meme showcases a playful take on the region’s apathy in situations of international crisis or disasters. In the particular meme above, a figureless representation of Europe asks, “Latin America, why are you not in crisis due to the #ThirdWorldWar?” In this context, the hashtag is used to replace the name of the actual conflict, the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The meme shows a reconfiguration of the original line delivered by the Hulk in Marvel’s 2012 film *the Avengers*: “that’s my secret, Captain. I’m always angry” becomes “that’s my secret, Europe. I’m always in crisis,” and in this stance, Latin America is embodied by the Hulk (see Fig. 7).

Apathy is best defined as a human behaviour that reflects absence or suppression of empathy, emotion, or interest. I mentioned earlier that humorous memes are used to cope with the trauma generated by the war. At the same time, pessimistic and parodic humour can be employed as a coping mechanism for other political stresses and insecurities (Makhortykh & González Aguilar 2020, 352). In the case of Latin America, the region has been afflicted by socioeconomic crises for decades, many of which have been heightened by several military dictatorships from the 19th century onwards, leaving millions living in poverty. For instance, a study by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC 2023) shows that “more than 180 million people in the region do not have enough income to meet their basic needs and 70 million of them lack the income needed to acquire a basic food basket.” My home country of Venezuela has seen an inflation rate of over 60.000% in the past years (Statista 2020), while its capital city, Caracas, is ranked third in the world’s most violent cities (World Population Review, n.d.). The top ten is composed of Latin American cities.

With this in mind, it is easier to put the apathy expressed through these memes in a wider geopolitical and social context. Seiffert et al. (2018, 2863) consider that, while memes can be used as political commentary, they can move from their original political expression “toward humour, irreverence, and meaninglessness.” In the case of these memes, while they are originally intended to show lack of interest in the Russo-Ukrainian war and further the feelings of isolation previously described by Gómez-Muñoz and Muñoz-Pico (2023), they can also be viewed as a collective introspection. In other words, Latin Americans look at their own experiences living in the region,

they review the negative side of it (i.e., the socio-economic crises, economic collapses, dictatorships, corruption, ongoing violence, etc), and acknowledge them through humour.



Figure 8. Megadeth comic trip. The strip above reads “Russia and Ukraine.” Below, the text continues, “As I was saying, I never wanted to leave the country. I love Latin America.” Source: Wen, X, 2022.



Y decían que vivir en un país tercermundista no traía beneficios

#TerceraGuerraMundial #URGENTE

Translate post



7:53 AM · Feb 24, 2022

42

824

7.3K

54



Figure 9. Screenshot of a post on X. The text reads “And they said that there are no benefits of living in a third world country #ThirdWorldWar #URGENT.” Underneath, the image of a dog in a tie sitting in front of a laptop, with images of war in the background. Source: Pøly_shitpøster, X, 2022.

That said, the content of these memes can also be examined through more critical lenses. For instance, in the examples shown in Figs. 8-9, both images indicate that Spanish speakers are aware of the war and the tragedy it brings, but they choose not to take a side or express any empathy towards any of the belligerent parties. In the first meme (Fig. 8), the anthropomorphic skeleton glances at the nuclear explosion happening at its back, yet chooses to look away and carry on the conversation, strengthening the feeling of Latin American integration that was described in the previous chapter. Ironically, or perhaps intentionally, the comic strip that serves as a template for this meme is taken from the cover of *Peace Sells... but Who's Buying?* (1986), an album by American thrash metal band Megadeth.

Alternatively, the next sample meme (Fig. 9) shows a combination of a visual component (an image of a golden retriever dog sitting in front of a laptop while the background behind it depicts a catastrophic war scenario) and a textual component (the post caption, indicating that a benefit from living in a “third world country,” namely a developing country, is not to be affected by the war). The dog’s breed (golden retriever) and demeanour (its mouth open and relaxed, with the tongue hanging out) can represent happiness, while the war at its back represents the Ukraine war. The dog’s paws are on the laptop, thus showing that it must carry on its activities, in spite of the conflict.

It is worth noting that these memes were posted on the day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Over two years afterwards, we have witnessed the rampant tragedy, death and destruction brought by the war. The dark and borderline prophetic nature of these memes must then be questioned. Is apathy visible in these memes still “justifiable,” when there is an implicit level of consciousness of the possible consequences of the Ukraine war? Can we infer that apathy equals acceptance, when this reality had not yet come to fruition? Or rather, should this apathy be interpreted as a form of complacency?

Fear and Self-Awareness: “No. Next question.”



Figure 10. Screenshot of a post on X. The post reads, “Other countries: Latin America, can you stop making memes to hide your fear and take this seriously? Latin America: #ThirdWorldWar.” Underneath, an image from the American sitcom *the Big Bang Theory* (2007–2019) captioned “No. Next question.” Source: GabyLR, X, 2022.

Lastly, this last example shows a dialogue in Spanish followed by an image of the character Amy Fowler from the American sitcom *the Big Bang Theory* (2007–2019). As has been the case with previous examples, the dialogue in this meme is between a foreign figure (“other countries”) and Latin America as one entity. The foreign figure addresses the influx of Spanish memes and jokes being created about the war, and acknowledges the unspoken and widespread feelings of dread caused by the conflict. In return, Latin America’s response is that of Amy Fowler. In the image, the character is being pushed for questions by reporters, and carries a blank expression as the caption “No. Next question,” indicates a rather blunt, direct answer.

In a recent study of the depiction of fear in memes related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Damatis (2024, 41) determined that emotions are commonly represented by a combination of verbal and visual elements. Namely, the mix of pictures and text let the reader understand the emotion

behind its creation. The representation of fear present in the Spanish-language sample are not dissimilar; it is the combination of text and images that gives meaning to the memes at an emotional level. And even more so, the memes used as example here show a level of self-awareness and introspection in regard to this fear; Latinos acknowledge the fear of war and conflict, even if it is happening in another continent, and credit it as the driving force behind the creation of war memes. Yet, at the same time, the dialogue shown in Fig. 10 points that despite their self-awareness, Latinos refuse to stop using memes to cope and “take it seriously.”

Earlier in the text, I referenced research of Saarikoski et al. (2024, 6-7), who argue that memes become a momentary relief to cope with traumatic experiences in the case of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Along these lines, Gómez-Muñoz and Muñoz-Pico (2023, 23) also observed in their study of Spanish-language memes that fear was the most predominant emotion present in their sample. More specifically, their findings establish that this fear is rooted in being forced to be involved *in* the war, and not on the overall effects of the war at a global scale (ibid.). With this in mind, we must once again think of the ethics of war memes. Is it right to share memes that either celebrate the isolation of the continent or that turn a blind eye to the war, when the same are masking the fear of being forced into taking part in it through humour?

Latinos seem to be aware of the moral dilemmas associated with war memes, as reflected in the figures shown in this section. In this regard, the main question seems to be “why post memes about the war, given how serious the issue is?” Each of the memes selected offer a different stance: the first meme shows avoidance and bluntness (see Fig. 10). The second meme shows the duality of the Latino memetic culture, highlighting the affinity for humour even when facing moments of distress (see Fig. 11). Lastly, the third meme shows a similar lack of interest and empathy as described in the previous chapter; the comic strip shows the map of Latin America personified by the character Homer Simpson, who not only acknowledges it is not right to “joke” about serious topics, but seconds the sentiment with apathy by stating that “that’s just how things are” (see Fig. 12) The implication here is subtle but strong: this is how the memetic culture in the region is, and Latinos are not willing to compromise nor change it.



Figure 11. Screenshot of a post on X. The caption reads: “Everyone is worried about the Third World War yet still logging onto Twitter to look at the memes.” Underneath, an image of Marge Simpson from the Simpsons (1989–) pensively looking to the side, superimposed with a still image of the same character laughing. Source: Luisa, X, 2022.



Figure 12. *Simpsons comic strip. The strip above reads, “You can’t make memes about a serious topic like this,” while the strip below reads, “That’s what I say, but that’s just how things are.”*

Source: Perez, X, 2022.

Conclusion

Global events of international importance inspire the creation of memes. In today’s time and age, memes have gained a purpose beyond humour and/or entertainment, becoming vehicles through which to engage in social and political discourse. Through satire and comedy, memes can be used to quickly spread opinions, thoughts, and ideas with the intention to praise, criticise, or simply offer commentary on socio-political problems, figures, and environments. Along these lines, the creation of memes does not occur in a vacuum; external factors, particularly social and cultural ones, influence the textual and visual components of the meme, and the overall message it conveys.

Through the years, Latin America has developed its own memetic culture in the digital world. This culture is very much headlined by a distinct, and oftentimes unapologetic sense of humour, which itself reflects the vibrant and jokey nature of Latinos. In this regard, Spanish-language memes are used to express collective stances and remarks on current and political issues, as has been the case with the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. On February 24, 2022, the day of the invasion of Ukraine, Latinos turned to the social media platform X to engage in political discourse by sharing memes with the hashtag #TerceraGuerraMundial. Translating to *Third World War* in English, the hashtag carries a heavy and rather alarmist connotation: this war will become a global conflict.

Although the full effects of the Ukraine war and its impact on the global economic, geopolitics, cost-of-living were yet to erupt as we have now witnessed in the past couple of years, these memes reflect a collectivistic and immediate response to the possibility of an upcoming global conflict. As is the case with the memetic culture of Latin America, humour and satire have been used to express collective feelings, and in particular, positive and negative emotions.

The collected sample shows that a portion of the Spanish-language memes focused on highlighting the geographical separation between Latin America and Ukraine, where the conflict is taking place. In doing so, memes are used to create a feeling of integration in the region. This is reflected in the “happy” textual and visual components of the memes (i.e., the use of images where hearts and smiling characters are visible, the bold text reading “I love you” above the Latin America map). Yet,

while these emotions are positive from a Latin America perspective, they can be interpreted as insensitive or rude in view of a real war that has had appalling consequences.

Thus and thus, apathy and fear were the two prevalent negative emotions found in the sample. As I mentioned, the creation of memes does not happen in a vacuum; the apathy that is shown in these memes can be attributed to the socioeconomic and political challenges and inequalities that have impacted the lives of millions of people living in Latin America. Namely, when daily life is a struggle, poverty is all around, and violence is rampant, a conflict taking place thousands of kilometres away does not feel as impactful as the realities Latinos face on their day-to-day. Yet, interestingly so, these Ukraine war memes also show a level of introspection, as Latinos use them to express their fear of the possibility of a Third World War. More specifically, of their forced participation in a global armed conflict. In this case, apathy and fear shall not be viewed as a juxtaposition; rather, this fear is closely related to the emergent problems found in the region. If life in Latin America can be very difficult, any additional threats, such as being forced to take part in a World War, can seem extremely frightening.

Whether positive or negative, the sample demonstrates how war memes are used to cope with the stress and anxieties of an emerging conflict, and shines the spotlight on Latin American perspectives of the war. The matter of whether or not certain stances and employed humour are insensitive or dark must be approached carefully, and it is of great importance to put things in the right context prior to making meanings of them. Viewing things from a critical perspective not only lets us have a better understanding of digital phenomena and human behaviour, but also to question them and the reasons behind them. I believe that some of the questions raised by the examples discussed in this paper, as well as evoked in the reader, could be answered by examining the evolution of these Spanish-langue war memes from February 2022 until today. Moreover, a comparative study might indicate whether the stances have changed with the evolution of the conflict.

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All links verified 18.12.2024.

Research Material

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Notes

^[1] Formerly known as Twitter; hence the portmanteau “Twitterzuela.”

^[2] For further information, see *Internet, Humor, and Nation in Latin America (2024)*, edited by Héctor Fernández L’Hoeste and Juan Poblete.