UNIDOS ALCANZAREMOS UN VIEQUES LIBRE: DISCOURSE AS A REFLECTION OF SOCIAL AND GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

by

REBECCAH ANNE SANDERS

(Under the Direction of Elois Ann Berlin)

ABSTRACT

The sixty-year history of United States Naval activity on Vieques Island, Puerto Rico has been plagued with protests by island residents who have varyingly applied environmental and social justice discourse in their movement to evict the Navy. The most current inception of demonstrations spans a wide geographic range, centering on the island itself and radiating to cities throughout the continental United States. As the island prepares for a referendum determining the fate of the Navy’s presence, the social and political influence of these campaigns has risen dramatically. The movement has gained political and popular support with its dedication to civil disobedience and its rhetoric of health, the environment, human rights, and, more controversially, political determination. This thesis considers how the discourse of the movement reflects the location of its supporters.

INDEX WORDS: Social movements, community, location, discourse, environment, health, human rights, ethnicity, Puerto Rico, Vieques, U.S. Navy
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by

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B.A., University of Notre Dame, 1998

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2005
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my friend, Angel “Tato” Guadalupe.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The people of Vieques and their supporters around the country have been the heart of this research project. From the beginning of my project nearly five years ago through the present, they have continued to support me with their knowledge, wisdom, and dedication. I am especially grateful that they opened their minds and homes (and occasionally their kitchens) to me to openly discuss such a contentious issue even after I disclosed my connection to the Navy through my spouse. They trusted that the impossible could be made possible through dedication and bravery. Thank you for enriching this project, which would have been impossible without you, as well as enriching my life. The Navy may have departed finally from your small island, but your passion for justice continues in all those that you touched in your campaign.

I must also acknowledge the support, guidance, and assistance that I have received from the faculty at the University of Georgia, especially Brent Berlin, Elois Ann Berlin, Ben Blount, Pete Brosius, Lori Fowler, and Amy Ross. Amy, thank you for your insight, your honesty, and your work. I am especially grateful to the Berlins who have assisted me in the completion of this project. It truly would have been impossible without you Elois Ann!

I would also like to thank R.E.M. for their contribution to this project through a research grant. Although your music is known throughout the world, most people do not know your commitment to social justice. I appreciate you for both!

During my time in Athens, Georgia I was blessed to be surrounded by a rich community of friends. To Gregory, thank you for your music and your thoughtful messages that reached me when I needed them the most. To Vero, I smile every time that I think of your fearless opinions and insights. To Jennifer, a day was not complete without at least two or three consultations with
you on the phone or email; whether these were about love, life, or academics, they were always comforting and fun. To Beth, your quest for learning was coupled only by your ability to throw a good party and to be a good friend; even now, a few years later, you continue to support me! To Carlos, the hospitality shown to me by you and your family could not be matched anywhere. Your guidance in anything Puerto Rican eased any concerns I had about my research and your love for life helped me to see the beauty in every day. To Tom, you have taught me so many valuable lessons about life, love, and friendship. Though I could not say so at the time, thank you for this. To Mollie, I cannot think of anyone else with whom I would have enjoyed undertaking this adventure as much as I did with you. You are the type of friend who is intellectually challenging, emotionally supportive, and just fun to be around. To all, thank you for your friendship during one of the most challenging times in my life.

To Harlow, the very best friend of all, I am honored to be trusted with your honesty, loyalty, and quirkiness. We have traveled the world together, and no matter how many times I interrupt your cozy little life (or your cozy little naps), you bear me no grudges and remain steadfastly at my side.

Jimmy, not many people that I know would support their spouse in an endeavor that directly conflicted with his profession. This number diminishes even more when I consider the Navy. Thank you for being more than supportive. Your encouragement and insistence that I pursue what I believe reminds me each day why we are together. Our paths have led us in such different directions, yet they always brought us back together. I know our walk together will be far richer than it ever could have been apart.

And lastly, to my little bean: you have certainly made this process more challenging, but also forced me to finally conclude this chapter of my life. Your exuberance at meeting every day
reminds me of the importance of living fully and living greatly. I want to be the best person that I can be just for you. Each day with you is better than the one before.
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Chapter One

¡Vieques sí, Marina no!¹

“¡Vieques sí!” shouted Miguel from across the street. “¡Marina no!” responded the handful of children sitting on the fence of the schoolyard.² It was a Friday afternoon in Vieques, Puerto Rico, and a small group of activists had gathered in front of the U.S. Post Office to protest the presence and activities of the United States Navy on the island. The post office is located on the main street in Isabel Segunda, one of the two towns on the small island of Vieques. As cars drove by, many adorned with bumper stickers declaring “Paz para Vieques”³ and Puerto Rican flags, the drivers honked their horn or raised their hand out of the window declaring “¡Fuera!”⁴ Police officers, greatly outnumbering the protestors, watched from the shade of the post office doorway and a nearby tree. People passed by on the sidewalks, some clapping their hands in unison with the protest chants, others shaking their heads in disagreement. Some tourists, journalists, and anthropologists photographed the scene (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

The post office was targeted by the demonstrators because it is the only U.S. federal building on the island, and this particular group of activists believed that not only should the Navy leave the small island Vieques, but so too should the United States government leave Puerto Rico entirely. Miguel began the protest with the words “We denounce the criminal presence of the terrorists, the Navy. Navy out of Vieques!”⁵

¹ “Vieques, yes! Navy, no!”
² This protest was a weekly event during the month of March of 2001.
³ This translates to “Peace for Vieques.” This is one of the most commonly employed slogans of in the Vieques campaign.
⁴ This is a shortened form of the common cry “¡Fuera la Marina!” which translates to “Navy get out!”
⁵ “Para denunciar la presencia criminal de esta Marina terrorista. Fuera la Marina de Vieques!”
Passionately committed to the cause on Vieques, he was the organizer of this protest. A lifelong activist famous in Puerto Rico for his leadership in a land reclamation movement during the 1970s, he moved to Vieques from the main island of Puerto Rico in 1999 and vowed to stay until the Navy left the island. Of the other protesters, one was also from the main island and three were native to Vieques.

The same diversity existed within the police forces that watched from the doorway of the post office. Many were from the main island, but the force also included a number of Viequenses. As police they were charged with enforcing the laws of Puerto Rico and the United States. However, at least one of the local officers had taken a vacation from work to participate in protest actions that often involved trespassing on federal property, a misdemeanor carrying a penalty of up to six months imprisonment in a federal jail. The people walking by on the street were also divided. Many supported the movement to evict the Navy from Vieques, but disagreed with this particular protest. Others lent their support by standing in the street or on the sidewalk for a few minutes responding to the chants. Still another group of Viequenses wanted the Navy to remain on the island to continue its practices.

As it radiated away from the island, the Vieques campaign’s direction and politics were even more varied. The movement was championed by individuals and organizations with different membership bases, located in different cities around the world, with different approaches towards terminating U.S. Naval activity on this small Caribbean island. While movement participants were united in the overall cause to end the live-fire practice maneuvers of the United States Navy and their allies, this sense of unity

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6 Viequense is a term identifying people from the island of Vieques. Viequenses is the plural of this term.
loosened when examined on the basis of social and geographic location.\textsuperscript{7} The variety of rhetoric underlying the union of the actors in the Vieques movement directly affected the outcome in this struggle against the Navy.

In this thesis, I discuss how various actors and groups employed differential rhetoric in regards to the Navy depending on their location. These locations are situated within the historical and spatial relationship between the United States and the islands of Puerto Rico and Vieques as well as within the Puerto Rican community itself.

**La Isla Neña: The Little Girl Island**

In 1941 the United States Navy expropriated approximately two-thirds of Vieques Island, a municipality of the U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, to construct an Atlantic based training and launching facility.\textsuperscript{8} The Navy selected Vieques for this site in conjunction with two other areas in Puerto Rico: on the main island near the eastern coastal town of Ceiba, Roosevelt Roads that was, until its closure in 2003, one of the largest U.S. Naval bases in the world, and on Culebra, another inhabited Puerto Rican island eight miles north of Vieques. Together, these three sites comprised a triangular area in which the Navy trained its personnel in large-scale, live-fire maneuvers that combined air, sea, and land forces. With the closing of the training facility in Culebra in 1975 because of local protests, the Navy intensified its use of Vieques as a live-fire training facility. At the time of this research project, the Navy used Vieques as a space to practice invasion techniques, generally employing conventional weaponry, but occasionally using more controversial weapons such as depleted uranium bullets and napalm (Mullenneaux, 2000; Navarro, 1999). According the Department of Defense,

\textsuperscript{7} Please reference the next section and Chapter Four for a discussion of the term location.

\textsuperscript{8} The Navy originally envisioned a facility similar to Pearl Harbor. Roosevelt Roads was built to house the British Navy in case the Nazis invaded England (Fernandez, 1994; Murillo, 2001).
Vieques is the only place in the world that “allow[ed] the Navy and Marine Corps to combine land, air, and sea maneuvers with live ordnance in exercises that closely replicate actual combat” (Spencer, 2001a) because of various geological and geographic characteristics unique to island.9

The sixty-year relationship between the Navy and the people of Vieques has been nearly always antagonistic and at times tenuous, with recurrent periods of protest against the Navy by the people on the island. Over this time, the Navy’s presence had been associated with the island’s lack of economic development, disruption of its fishing industry, general social unrest, degradation of both the marine and terrestrial environments, and high disease rates, especially of cancer and asthma, for island residents. However, the people of Vieques had benefited somewhat from the Navy’s presence. Several Vieques residents were employed by the Navy, and the military’s presence was credited for delaying the over development of a charming Caribbean island.

The most recent period of protest was ignited by the death of an island resident in April of 1999. David Sanes worked as a civilian Navy guard on the bombing range and was killed in the training area when a U.S. Marine pilot released a bomb after receiving a false verification of target by a superior. That evening a group of island residents gathered for a vigil at the gates of Camp García, the area of Vieques that the Navy and its NATO and OAS allies use as a live-fire ammunition training range.10 Within weeks, activists from the island, Puerto Rico, the United States, and around the world flooded the

9 For example, the Department of Defense claimed that the size of the island allowed for maneuvers without endangering its inhabitants, that the island was outside the path of commercial airline flights, that the deep water allowed for ship maneuvers without interfering with commercial shipping, and that the terrain was appropriate for practicing amphibious landings (Navarro, 1999; Spencer, 2001a; Spencer, 2001b; U.S. Navy, 2001).
10 NATO is the acronym for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and OAS is the acronym for the Organization of American States. Countries from both of these organizations participated in joint exercises with the United States, and many also rented the bombing range from the U.S. for individual state exercises.
bombing range, eventually constructing fourteen semi-permanent camps and effectively terminating the Naval practice maneuvers for over a year.

In reaction to these protests, former President William J. Clinton issued a Presidential Directive that ordered the Navy to set and to honor a referendum on maintaining its occupation and use of Vieques. The referendum entailed two choices for the people of Vieques: continued use of the island as a live fire practice range with a one-time 50 million dollar grant to the municipality of Vieques or complete Naval evacuation of the island by 2003. The Navy set the date for this referendum for November 6, 2001. Activists contested the legitimacy of the referendum because the Navy controlled many of its parameters. In response, the government of Puerto Rico scheduled a non-binding referendum in Vieques for July of 2001.

This recent inception of protest against the Navy’s activities spanned a wide geographic range, centering on the island itself and radiating to major metropolitan centers throughout the continental United States and the world. As the referendums on the Navy’s status in Vieques approached, the social and political influence of these campaigns rose dramatically. The Vieques campaign was covered regularly by mainstream media as well as through various activist networks. Although protests occurred fairly regularly in the previous six decades, only since the death of David Sanes were the Navy’s practices consistently and easily accessible for public examination in the mainland United States. This increased exposure widened the circle of participation in the social movements around Vieques, engaging a more diverse range of participants. In turn, their inclusion in the campaign heightened the movement’s visibility and expanded the variety of rhetoric within the movement itself.

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11 In the latter option, the Navy and its allies were able to bomb the island up to 90 days a year until the evacuation date.
The efforts to evict the Navy from Vieques united a diverse set of actors, including those that traditionally are not associated with direct action or protest. These actors worked to raise awareness on the island itself as well in metropolitan centers in the mainland U.S. Beginning with the death of David Sanes, protesters organized at least one large, media-centered event a month; the protests typically intensified in frequency whenever the Navy was actively using the island for practice exercises. Examples of these protests include an occupation of the Statue of Liberty with the unfurling of both the Puerto Rican and Vieques flags, a silent march of 80,000 people through San Juan that was organized by a coalition of religious organizations, and a hunger strike by one protester camped across from the White House. In April of 2001 police arrested over 180 people, including prominent figures such as the Reverend Al Sharpton, Robert Kennedy, Jr. and Edward James Olmos, for trespassing in restricted military areas on the island itself.\textsuperscript{12}

Both the media and the activists themselves portrayed this expanding collection of actors as a united front fighting for a consistent cause. Yet, at any one of these instances of civil disobedience\textsuperscript{13} activists employed a range of discourse articulating their demand for a “Free Vieques.” While there was overlap in the expression of anti-Navy sentiment, each group used a distinct selection of rhetoric to engage their base. When discussing Vieques and the U.S. Navy most participants invoked the issues of health, the environment, human rights, and political determination; however, each actor tended to promote one of these four issues over the others, reflecting his or her social and geographic location.

\textsuperscript{12} Trespassing on federal properties is a violation of Title 18, U.S.C., 1382.
\textsuperscript{13} Activist groups commonly invoked this phrase to describe their activities.
Thus, at least two levels of discourse existed in the Vieques campaign. At one level, activists displayed a cohesive front promoting the eviction of the Navy. At this level, activists competed with the U.S. Navy for acceptance of their discourse within the local, national, and international public spheres. Within the movement itself however, there was a shifting rhetoric that was a consequence of how each actor prioritized the principal issues of the campaign. At this level, both the activists and their opponents manipulated these differences in priorities. At both levels of discourse, the anthropological concepts of localness, community, identity, and location were central to the conflict between the Navy and the Vieques movement and to the tensions among the movement’s participants themselves.

**Chapter Summaries**

Because the Vieques campaign is situated within the political, historical, and spatial relationships between the United States and Puerto Rico, the next chapter offers a brief discussion of Puerto Rican history and geography. I focus chiefly upon the ill-defined relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. As Puerto Rico struggles to define itself while living within the shadow of the U.S., various manifestations of the Vieques campaign historically have mirrored upsurges in the Commonwealth’s independence movement and its citizens' expressions of frustration. This link has been a factor in the failure of previous manifestations of the campaign and was openly criticized by the Navy in the most recent movement activities.

In Chapter Three I concentrate upon the history and geography of Vieques and outline the history of the Vieques movement. Nearly every decade since the occupation

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14 The United Nations has designated the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico as colonial (see United Nations Resolutions 748[VIII], 1514[XV] and 1541[XV]; for a more complete discussion reference Chapter 12, Trías Monge, 1997).
of island by the U.S. Navy, the island has seen social protest, culminating with the one sparked in 1999 with the death of David Sanes. The latter portion of this chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the events, participants, and rhetoric of this most recent protest. This leads into the discussion of movement discourse and strategy examined through the lens of anthropological theory in Chapters Four and Five.

Chapter Four explores the concepts of location and discourse and explains their significance to understanding the Vieques campaign. Although versions of this movement have existed since the 1940s, only this particular manifestation of the Vieques campaign garnered consistent support and media attention within Puerto Rico as well as from the global community. One reason for this success was the strategic deployment of discourse by movement leaders who allied their cause with other popular ideologies of the recent decades: environmentalism, human rights, and civil rights. The movement was shaped by the dynamic interchange between the diverse set of actors as their social and geographic locations influence the campaign’s tactics and discourse.

The analysis presented in Chapter Five builds upon the ideas, history, and geography presented in the first four chapters and links them together in a postmodern discussion of community, identity, and discourse. The campaign portrayed itself as a community of activists from around the world united against the Navy; the Navy specifically criticized the global nature of this campaign, noting that the majority of participants were not direct stakeholders in the island of Vieques. Moreover, I explore why this manifestation of the movement was able to gain such popular support within the Puerto Rican community and elsewhere. Movement leaders have capitalized upon the upsurge in Puerto Rican pride in the 1990s by deploying images uniting the Vieques cause to expressions of Puerto Rican heritage and esteem.
The thesis concludes with an Epilogue that offers a brief explanation of the events on Vieques since the completion of my field research. When the Navy terminated its operations in Vieques in 2003, the community of activists dissolved along with the attention of the global media. While the Navy has departed from Vieques, a few activists remain insisting that the fight continues for a clean environment, sound health, and economic development.
Figure 1.1: Post Office Protest: This small protest was held every week in front of the U.S. Post Office in Isabel Segunda. The combined use of the Puerto Rican and Vieques flags in discussed in Chapter Five.
Figure 1.2: Protesting and Pride: Like other protests around the world in support of the Vieques movement, these protest participants in front of the U.S. Post Office in Isabel Segunda prominently display the Puerto Rican flag. For many, participation in the movement is considered an expression of Puerto Rican identity and the flag is commonly used to unite the Vieques movement with Puerto Rico as a whole (see Chapter Five).
Chapter Two

Puerto Rico: Tied To A Colonial History

“Both in Latin America and the United States, Puerto Rico stands for something which cannot be assimilated. It is island and continent, a colony and a nation, a community bound by a language that some Puerto Ricans do not speak.” (Franco, 1993: 9)

The Vieques movement is predicated on the historic, geographic, and political relationships between the island, Puerto Rico, and the United States. These histories are vital to understanding the current inception of the Vieques campaign and are commonly referenced by informants in research interviews. As one New York based activist commented, “I think it does play in the whole politics of the situation between Puerto Rico and the U.S. in terms of the relationship, the status of the country, of Puerto Rico to the U.S. because all that plays a factor… It’s important to use that as a way of really educating the community about this… our reality. Not that we have to stand for it.” Thus, an analysis of the Vieques campaign must include information regarding the evolution of these relationships.

Puerto Rico is a collection of islands in that hold a strategic position as a midpoint between the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea (Figure 2.1). With the arrival of European colonizing forces in the late 15th century, Puerto Rico became a desirable property for the creation of an economic, political, and defense base in the Caribbean. San Juan Harbor is one of the largest natural harbors in the Caribbean Sea, and Mona Passage, located between Isla Grande and Isla Mona, serves as an important shipping passage to Central American and, in modern times, the Panama Canal (Figure 2.2). Isla Grande, the main island of Puerto Rico, measures approximately 3,600 square miles and
has one of the highest population densities of any state or territory of the United States (Balletto, 1999; Berríos-Martínez, 1997; Greico & Cassidy, 2001; Gúzman, 2001; Murillo, 2001; Rivera, 2001; Trías-Monge, 1997).

Part of the Greater Antilles archipelago, Isla Grande is surrounded by a collection of smaller islands, including Vieques and Culebra to the east (Figure 2.2). The islands of Puerto Rico have a tropical climate and a varied geology. Mountains shape the interior of Isla Grande, while the coast is composed primarily of lowlands. Puerto Rico’s ecology is quite diverse, ranging from grassy, dry hills on Vieques to El Yunque, a protected 28,000-acre rainforest in the northeast section of Isla Grande (Balletto, 1999; Rivera, 2001). The 2000 Census calculated the population of Puerto Rico at 3,808,610, with 98.8% of the population identifying themselves as Hispanic. Another 3.4 million Puerto Ricans reside in the United States; 2.1 million of these individuals live in the Northeastern United States, with approximately half located in the state of New York.

The islands of Puerto Rico are divided into 78 municipios that function much like counties in the United States. Vieques is one of these 78 municipios. The islands have a lower per capita income than any U.S. state but one higher than most other independent Caribbean nations (Balletto, 1999; Gúzman, 2001; Rivera, 2001).

At the time of U.S. annexation of the islands, Puerto Rico’s economy was primarily agricultural. The economy shifted towards an industrial base during the first decades of American governance. This was hastened with the New Deal programs of the 1930s and Operation Bootstrap, an economic development program of the 1950s that emphasized the islands’ potential for industry and tourism. Despite these efforts at economic development, unemployment was rampant, illiteracy rates were high, and many Puerto Ricans left the islands for the mainland United States in search of work. This
emigration was particularly pronounced following World War II while the U.S. economy was booming. As an incentive to invest in the island, the U.S. government extended a benefit to American corporations located in Puerto Rico through the IRS tax code. Section 936 of the code partially exempts profits of corporations’ Puerto Rican subsidiaries from U.S. income tax; this incentive will expire in 2006 (Balletto, 1999; Berríos-Martínez, 1997; Trías-Monge, 1997; Valdés-Pizzini, 2000).

A Colonial History

When Columbus ‘discovered’ Puerto Rico in November of 1493, he found the island populated by the Taíno Indians. Within the next three decades the Spanish colonists traded the Indian population into slavery. Using the slave labor of the Taínos as well as the labor of imported African slaves, the Spanish Europeanized the islands’ economy primarily through the creation of cattle ranches and sugar plantations. Ponce de León served as the first governor of Puerto Rico, which was originally known as San Juan Bautista. Over time a stratified society based upon race emerged, with families of mixed ethnicity denied the privileges of the Spanish settlers. The majority of island residents were illiterate, poverty was widespread, and the colonial government offered few public services. Yet, islanders shared a common identity, forged by a common language, religion, geography, and, over time, a common history (Balletto, 1999; Trías-Monge, 1997). Trías-Monge highlights the importance of place in Puerto Rico’s culture: “Living on a small island also tends to bring people together, pressing them against each other, encouraging a common purpose” (1997: 19). Puerto Ricans trace their ethnic heritage to the tres raíces (three ethnicities) of this colonial period: Taíno, African, and Spanish (Flores, 1993[1985]).
Throughout its nearly continuous 400-year rule of Puerto Rico, Spain deflected attacks from several other colonial powers that sought Puerto Rico for its strategic location, agricultural lands, and natural resources (Murillo, 2001; Trías-Monge, 1997). During the 19th century, Spain periodically granted and then revoked political representation to its colonies and their male residents. Puerto Rican autonomists formed covert organizations throughout the island, and in 1868, over 500 Puerto Ricans rebelled in the town of Lares, arresting its officials and declaring the formation of the free Republic of Puerto Rico. This short lived revolution, known as the “Grito de Lares,” was quickly suppressed by the Spanish government, but it continues to serve as rallying point for Puerto Ricans seeking an independent state (Balletto, 1999; Murillo, 2001).

As its political power dwindled in the last three decades of the 1800s, Spain ceded more autonomy and political power to its colonists in Puerto Rico. Males were granted citizenship and the right to organize in political parties; these primarily centered on the status of Puerto Rico as a Spanish colony. Trías-Monge notes,

> More than one hundred years ago public opinion in Puerto Rico was divided in much the same way as it is now. A group, many of them in exile in Spanish times, clamored for independence; another wanted full integration or assimilation to the metropolis; and a third opted for a middle way (1997: 12).

In November 1897 Spain ceded a relative autonomy to Puerto Rico, but retained the right to appoint the island’s governor. This independence was short-lived, however. In July of 1898, U.S. forces led by General Nelson A. Miles invaded the island during the brief Spanish-American War, officially initiating the complex relationship that still exists today.

As it is today, New York was a center for Puerto Rican Independistas in the 1800s. Spain exiled many autonomist leaders, who then formed their own organizations in New York and retained their ties in Puerto Rico (Balletto, 1999).
between the United States and Puerto Rico (Balletto, 1999; Murillo, 2001; Trías-Monge, 1997).

In the 1800s U.S. foreign policy was fueled by an expansionist ideology informed by the Monroe Doctrine. Following the Spanish-American War, Spain surrendered Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines to the United States in the Treaty of Paris in 1899. The Third Article of the Treaty declares that the U.S. Congress will determine “the civil rights and political status of the territories.” Thus, unlike other areas acquired by the U.S. during the 19th century, the residents of the territories transferred under the Treaty of Paris lacked the guarantee of U.S. citizenship (Murillo, 2001; Trías-Monge, 1997). Only U.S. Congress, a political body in which the Puerto Rican people have no direct voting representation, holds the authority to define the islands' status in relation to the United States. This imposition of political authority over the territory has led the United Nations to define Puerto Rico as a colony of the United States (Murillo, 2001; Trías-Monge, 1997).

The United States and Puerto Rico: A Legislative Review

U.S. Congress sealed the ambiguous political status of Puerto Rico with the passage of the Foraker Act. Following two years of military rule, the Act established a civil government system for the islands. Under this legislation U.S. federal law applied in Puerto Rico. Laws were enforced by a Puerto Rican judicial system whose judges were appointed by the U.S. government. The President also appointed the Governor, but the island residents selected a Resident Commissioner to represent them in U.S. Congress.

16 Most recently the United Nations Decolonization Committee passed a resolution stating the right of self-determination for Puerto Rico in 2000 (Murillo, 2001).
17 The Foraker Act is officially titled The Organic Act of 1900.
The election of a Resident Commissioner continues today, and while he or she may speak in the House of Representatives, the Commissioner does not hold voting rights in Congress. The Foraker Act left Puerto Rico without a clear path towards either complete independence from the United States or eventual statehood within it.

Over the next decade in Washington, D.C., representatives of the Puerto Rican population lobbied Congress and the President to define their islands’ political status. Yet, unlike the relatively clear political paths set for other territories of the U.S., Puerto Rico’s political and economic relationship to the United States became only more complex. The passage of the Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917 granted U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans, allowing for their participation in the military draft but denying them voting representation in Washington, D.C. A representative, bicameral legislature was established for Puerto Rico, but it was subject to veto by the President and the appointed Governor. Moreover, Congress drafted legislation specifically for Puerto Rico, a power that it was not allowed to wield over individual states.

In 1950 Puerto Rico was defined as a Free Associated State (Estado Libre Associado), or Commonwealth, with the passage of Public Law 600. Both U.S. and Puerto Rican politicians claimed that Public Law 600 moved Puerto Rico towards self-governance as it allowed Puerto Ricans to develop their own constitution; yet, while Puerto Ricans would draft it, the constitution was subject to approval of Congress and the

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18 In 1947, President Truman signed into law the Elective Governor Act, giving the people of Puerto Rico the right to elect their Governor.
19 Hawaii was promised eventual statehood and the Philippines were set on a path for eventual independence from the U.S.
20 In interviews, many informants emphasized that the Vieques campaign was not anti-military in nature, pointing out the high rate of Puerto Rican military service. In fact, many protestors have served in the military themselves, and one specific group is composed entirely of retired service members. Murillo notes “[in the Korean War] Puerto Ricans endured approximately one casualty for every 600 people. The ratio for the general U.S. population was one casualty for every 1,125 inhabitants” (2001: 29).
President. The law also upheld all of the provisions of the Jones Act that had not been previously repealed. After the law’s passage in Congress, the people of Puerto Rico voted in a referendum to accept or reject the offers set forth in Public Law 600. In effect, Public Law 600 allowed the people of Puerto Rico to draft a constitution to guide their civil government, but this government would remain under the governance systems of the United States. The referendum on Public Law 600 passed with 76.5% of the vote in Puerto Rico (Balletto, 1999; Berríos-Martínez, 1997; Murillo, 2001; Rivera, 2001; Trías-Monge, 1997).

Commonwealth status allows a Puerto Rican government to function much as a government of a U.S. state. Puerto Rico controls its internal affairs and regulations, and the federal government oversees areas such as foreign trade and relations, military service and bases, the postal service, and federal legal proceedings. As U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans can travel freely to the United States and its territories and are eligible for federal services such as social welfare and education programs. However, Puerto Rican residents cannot vote in Presidential elections and are subject to a local taxation system rather than the U.S. Internal Revenue Service codes (Balletto, 1999; Trías-Monge, 1997; Rivera, 2001). Thus, the vote to support Commonwealth status allowed Puerto Ricans to access many of the benefits conferred by U.S. citizenship while deferring the right to
representation in the federal system that controls these benefits. Murillo notes the
difficulty of altering this relationship because there now exists “a dependency that to this
day is used to create a major obstacle to any real discussion of independence as an option
for the island” (2001: 28).

Despite the overwhelming support, the adoption of Public Law 600 and the
continuance of a Puerto Rican civil government embedded within the United States’
political system were extremely controversial. The Nationalist Party boycotted the
referendum and revolted against the Puerto Rican and U.S. leaders that supported it.
Nationalists attempted to assassinate the Puerto Rican Governor and the U.S. President
and a group charged into the U.S. Capitol firing shots onto the floor of the House of
Representatives (Balletto, 1999; Murillo, 2001; Trías-Monge, 1997). As Puerto Rico was
defined as a Commonwealth of the United States, the contentious issue of political status
for the islands only became more volatile.

Politics As Usual

The political status issue is central to Puerto Rican life and politics. As it was
during the Spanish colonial era, status is the issue around which the political parties are
organized (MSBC, 2001; Rivera, 2001; Trías-Monge, 1997). The pro-statehood and pro-
Commonwealth parties garner the most votes in elections. There is also a party dedicated
to independence that is generally joined in elections by several other smaller parties with
similar objectives.

Because of the magnitude of the status issue and a nearly evenly divided public
opinion, Puerto Ricans have a remarkably high rate of voter participation. In the 2000
gubernatorial election, 82.2% of registered voters cast a ballot, electing Sila Calderón of
the Popular Democratic Party (PDP), or pro-Commonwealth party, as the first female
governor of Puerto Rico with 48.8% of the vote. The pro-statehood New Progressive Party (NPP) received 45.6% of votes, and the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) secured just 5.3% of the vote (Rivera, 2001).

In many ways, any Puerto Rican election is viewed as a gauge on the territory’s sentiment about its relationship to the United States and, thus, an influence on policy in Washington, D.C. Each election is considered a significant event that could alter the political fate of the islands. In addition to general elections for their representative government, Puerto Ricans have also voted in several ‘non-binding’ plebiscites regarding their political connection to the United States; the results of these exercises generally reflect the sentiments of the current ruling party, fluctuating between a pro-Commonwealth status quo and a full incorporation into the U.S. as the 51st state (Murillo, 2001; Trías-Monge, 1997).

When speaking of Puerto Rican politics, many of my pro-independence informants insisted support for an independent Puerto Rico was much higher than reflected in election returns. Because elections are considered an informal referendum on the status issue, they insist that many independence supporters will vote for the pro-Commonwealth candidates. In effect, these voters would rather continue with the ambiguous status as a quasi-autonomous state than to allow the pro-statehood party to gain a significant majority in the legislature.

Moreover, the United States has historically persecuted Independistas, people who support Puerto Rican independence from the United States. Legislation such as the 1948 Gag Law prohibited seditious speech, allowing for the prosecution of individuals for such pedestrian acts as displaying the Puerto Rican flag (Berríos-Martínez, 1997).
One protester actively involved in Puerto Rican politics described the repression of the Independistas:

In the ‘50s it was illegal, illegal, to raise the Puerto Rican flag by itself. It was illegal. You could be arrested and put in jail. And actually in 1950 there was an insurrection led by the Nationalist Party. And people who had the Puerto Rican flag flying over their house by itself were literally arrested… When I was growing up… I had one semester of Puerto Rican history. And the book we used was literally ridiculous… I’m not exaggerating. The explanation for the existence of the Nationalist Party was that they were crazy… In that one semester of Puerto Rican history no teacher basically went… beyond 1898… People were so afraid of being called a subversive.  

Both Independistas and Commonwealth supporters predict that if it were to be granted statehood, Puerto Rico would lose not only much of its autonomy, but, more significantly, its cultural identity. When discussing Puerto Rico’s political status, a New York based Viequense noted the cultural shifts in Puerto Rico since the U.S. occupation in 1898, “They turned the country from an agricultural to an industrial country. They spoiled the whole feeling… of a country.” She feared that further assimilation would fully strip Puerto Rico of its cultural heritage.

Even if a clear majority of Puerto Ricans agreed on the status of the island existed, ultimately it is only the U.S. Congress that has the authority to decide the territory’s political destiny. After nearly fifty years of Commonwealth status, the economies of Puerto Rico and the United State are tightly interwoven, and Puerto Rico is dependent upon numerous social and economic subsidies. To grant the territory independence could be viewed as abandoning the country’s responsibilities to the people of Puerto Rico, especially when election and referendum results indicate the majority of citizens prefer to maintain a relationship with the U.S. Yet, Puerto Rico’s Commonwealth

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status is a remnant of a colonial system of governance in which the U.S. dictates most laws and policies to a people who have no direct vote in these decisions.

Granting the territory statehood is also problematic, not only because there is no overwhelming majority of the populace that desires it, but also because of the implications this holds for U.S. politics. Like other states, Puerto Rico would have two senators, but it would have at least seven representatives, outranking at least twenty other states, while its per capita income is approximately one third the average for American states (Berríos-Martínez, 1997; Murillo, 2001; Trías-Monge, 1997). Moreover, Puerto Rican politicians could form voting blocks with other Hispanic politicians granting them even more power and allowing a large voting block to address Latino issues. These ethnic groups generally support the Democratic Party, and the addition of Puerto Rico as a state could fundamentally shift the direction of U.S. policy on labor, immigration, education, and urban issues towards the left of the political spectrum.

**A Resurgence of Puerto Rican Pride**

When the centennial of the possession of Puerto Rico by the United States arrived in 1998, the date did not serve as a rallying point for much of the Puerto Rican population because each of the three main political factions viewed the anniversary from such varied perspectives (Murillo, 2001). However, more unifying events for Puerto Ricans in the U.S. and the Commonwealth did arrive in the following years. The death of Vieques resident David Sanes and the pardon of 11 Puerto Rican nationalists by President Clinton in 1999 coupled with the release of FBI files on thousands of politically active Puerto Ricans in 2000 served as a rallying point for Puerto Ricans and furthered the reclamation of Puerto Rican pride and a reformulation of identity (Berríos-Martínez, 1997; Murillo, 2001). These built on the swell in Puerto Rican pride that had been building since the
1970s. One U.S. based activist explained the gradual process of regaining pride in ethnic identity:

The poets, the singers, the musicians, the sculptors, the painters, they brought forth the consciousness. They are the people who became fearless and who broke with the fears and the repression, and they came out and said, “You know, I’m Puerto Rican.” And through song, through painting, through art, through whatever, people started getting it, getting it, getting it. Another important phenomenon is the Puerto Rican immigration… When Puerto Ricans try to say to the rest of America, “We are Americans,” the rest of America said, “Oh no you’re not. You’re Puerto Rican.” So it dawned on Puerto Ricans that after all we are Puerto Ricans. We thought we were not, but everybody is telling us we are. We are different.23

Despite their debates over Puerto Rico’s political status, most of her citizens agree that the United States Navy must honor the demand by the people of Vieques to cease all activities and evacuate the island. News articles, individuals, and movement propaganda commonly reference the Vieques situation as the first issue on which the three major political philosophies have agreed (Moreno, 2000; Murillo, 2001; Navarro, 1999; New York Times, 1999). One activist emphasized this phenomenon:

The movement in Vieques is important, but the movement on the main island is just as important because once Sanes was killed a call was made to try to build a consensus of the three political parties that represent the three status options. And for the first time in the history all three got on the same page. They said the bombing has to stop and the Navy has to get the hell out.24

This unanimity is striking given that the animosity among the parties had become so divisive by the 1990s that Trías-Monge notes that “political discourse has deteriorated to the extend of hindering meaningful communication among the local political parties and creating a spiral of increasing contempt and rage at each other’s beliefs” (1997: 168). In an interview on Capitol Hill, Enrique Fernandez-Toledo, Senior Policy Advisor to Representative Luís Gutierrez of

24 Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 9th, 2001.
Illinois noted “There has not been a single issue in the 20th century Puerto Rican history that has united everybody in Puerto Rico as the issue of Vieques.” Another activists described the reason behind this union:

And all of the sudden when… David Sanes died it was sort of ‘Oh my God… It’s the 1990s [and] the United States has killed a United States citizen.’ Not only a United States citizen was killed, [but] a Puerto Rican person. And I think at that point it was a wake-up call to say it’s still going on. I mean for a long time it was heating in their hearts. It was heating up. It was discussions at home. It was it was always on the agenda in terms of Puerto Rico and the United States, their relationship. And they were always butting heads, but there was never an island or a people or an issue that really solidified that argument. And for a change in impact to say, ‘Oh Puerto Rico should be independent. Puerto Rico should be a Commonwealth.’ That no longer almost became an issue. It became an issue of what we are going to do about Vieques.

This unity of purpose highlights the significance of the Vieques campaign and can be viewed in conjunction with a surge in Puerto Rican pride and identity related to rising Latino political power and visibility in the United States throughout the 1990s.

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Figure 2.1: The Strategic Importance of Puerto Rico (Magellan Geographix, 1997)
Figure 2.2: Puerto Rico. (Central Intelligence Agency, 2005)
Chapter Three

Vieques: “Una Llamada a Todos Los Puertoriqueños”

So [returning to] Vieques was … a disappointment. It was like going into Vesuvius, you know. Like going back into old Rome… And then all of the sudden … you know [the] catastrophe of the things that were left behind. It’s like going back and seeing somebody and seeing the bones instead of seeing the person… And it’s still not the ashes now, but it will be if they keep up, if they keep at it.

Anita Velez, a New York based actress and Viequenses

Vieques is a small island, measuring approximately 20 miles long and 6 miles across at its widest section with a total area of nearly 33,000 acres. With its dry hills, thick forest, breathtaking beaches, coral reefs, bioluminescent bays, and mangrove swamps, Vieques has a remarkably varied ecology for such a small landmass. Located only seven miles from Isla Grande at the shortest distance across Vieques Sound (Figure 3.1), the island’s lack of development seemed miraculous in comparison to other Caribbean islands of similar size until one considered the determined presence of the United States Navy.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the late 15th Century, Taíno Indians, who referred to their home as Bieques or Little Island, inhabited Vieques. A hierarchy of chiefs governed their theocratic society, and they shared a language and cosmology with the other Taíno groups living throughout the Greater Antilles. For subsistence, the Taínos hunted local animals and foraged in the historically lush forests of the Caribbean. They cultivated crops such as corn, cassava, pineapples, and potatoes. They also harvest the seas. The waters surrounding Vieques are biologically diverse. The island is situated at

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27 “A call to all Puerto Ricans:” Statement taken from an interview with a San Juan based activist at the Peace and Justice Camp on March 4, 2001.
the point where cooler Atlantic waters meet those of the warmer Caribbean Sea, creating a zone of rich biodiversity. The coral reefs surrounding the island have supplied fishermen with plentiful catches (Balletto, 1999; Bermúdez, 1998; Mullenneaux, 2000; Murillo, 2001).

The Spanish conquest reached Vieques in 1493. Movement participants often liken their struggle against the Navy to the Viequense Taínos resistance to Spanish rule, which they claimed was stronger, longer, and more determined than that of the Taínos on Isla Grande. Following the final defeat of the Vieques Taínos in 1514, the population was transferred to Isla Grande to work as slaves (Bermúdez, 1998; Rabin, n.d.).

Vieques was managed by a Spanish-appointed French governor who recruited other aristocratic families to the island. By the 1880s five sugar mills, for which some neighborhoods are still named, dominated the island’s economy. The production and export of coconuts and pineapples was also important to the local economy. These plantations employed the majority of Viequenses, and most of their employees lived on their land working under poor conditions for little pay. Between the years of the American annexation of Puerto Rico and the advent of World War II, the economy of Vieques crumbled as most of the major sugar mills closed (Ayala & Carro, n.d.; Balletto, 1999; Bermúdez, 1998; Mullenneaux, 2000; Rabin, n.d.).

Militarization of an Island

From the beginning, the relationship between the United States Navy and the people of Vieques was controversial. Following a visit in 1939 to observe naval practice maneuvers off the coast of Puerto Rico, President Roosevelt began working towards the creation of an Atlantic base and training facility that would complement Pearl Harbor in the Pacific. The base would accommodate the majority of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet and, in
the event of a German capture of England, would serve as a base for the British Navy. This base was designed to incorporate a triangular area that included the islands of Culebra and Vieques and an area of land near the town of Ceiba on Isla Grande. That land was developed into Naval Station Roosevelt Roads, one of the largest Naval bases outside of the fifty states.

U.S. Congress authorized the training area’s construction with HR 3325 and HR 5412. Although the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 altered the plan to house the majority of the Atlantic Fleet in one location, the plans for a large Atlantic/Caribbean base continued with the purpose shifting from a location to house the fleet to a place to train sailors and to guard the Caribbean Sea. The Puerto Rican legislature approved Law 54 in April of 1942, awarding the Navy ownership of approximately 26,000 of the island’s 33,000 acres (Ayala & Carro, n.d.; EPA, 2000; Mullenneaux, 2000; Rabin, n.d.).

In a bilingual memorandum the Navy notified families and landowners that they were required to leave their homes and that they had the option to be resettled on land granted by the government; these notices generally allowed families between one to ten days to evacuate their properties. The average amount paid to families for their home and land was $47, a price the Navy contends was a fair market value for the time (Mullenneaux, 2000; Rabin, n.d.). Despite these letters, many residents were unprepared for the relocation, and several claim that they never received compensation for their homes and their land. One woman, whose parents were removed from their land in Vieques, described the devastation of community structure caused by the expropriations:

These people have lived there their whole lives. Their culture is there. Their farms are there. Everything is there. So these people were given ten days. And we’re not talking about one person at a time. We’re talking about hundreds of persons at a time. Now in ten days you cannot build a house. So they were expropriated from the land, their land, and sandwiched facing the center of the island… People had to start from
nothing… Probably you were not even given a plot of land next to your neighbor.29

The expropriation remained a point of contention between the Navy and the Viequenses. The Navy asserted that it purchased land from island residents, but Viequenses felt that they were forced off of their land because families did not have a choice in vacating their houses. Movement participants suggested that the Navy neglected to compensate many families. The stories of families who were not paid for their homes may reflect the experience of those workers who lived on the land of sugar plantations without holding a title to any property. These tenant-workers, however, did hold traditional rights to plots of land that supported subsistence crops and small farm animals. These plots provided a safety net for families during times when food or money was scarce. Residents were not compensated for these plots of land, and their loss added to the devastation of the displaced families (Ayala and Carro, n.d.). Ayala and Carro note that “when the expropriation of the large landowners took place, workers lost in one single blow both their jobs and their houses. To urban workers, this would be the equivalent of being fired from the job and evicted by the landlord in the same day” (n.d.: 16).

When asked to recount the history of the Navy’s presence in Vieques, many movement participants commented on the people’s forceful removal from the land. Others maintained that families willingly vacated lands to assist with the war effort, but that many were expecting to return to their land at the conclusion of World War II. Most likely, both of these histories are accurate with the difference in opinion reflecting the experience of individual Viequenses families.

29 Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 10, 2001.
When discussing Vieques it is convenient to divide the island into thirds (Figure 3.2). From the 1940s until 2003 the Navy managed the eastern and western thirds of the island; the U.S. Department of the Interior assumed the administration of these lands in 2003. The people of Vieques live in the middle third of Vieques in the towns of Esperanza and Isabel Segunda. Activists commonly referred to the civilian population as being ‘sandwiched’ between the two naval areas, with limited or no access to the two ends of the island. A Viequense schoolteacher described her frustration: “We are in jail, in the middle.”

Island residents and visitors travel across Vieques Sound by air service offered from Fajardo or San Juan at a cost of $35 to $50 each way or, more commonly, via a one and a half hour ferry ride from Fajardo to Isabel Segunda at a cost of a few dollars. The island has a medical clinic, but no hospital, and island women are frequently flown to Fajardo to give birth. The towns receive their water and electricity from a pipeline running from Isla Grande to Vieques that then continues to Culebra (ATSDR, 2001). This system is often disrupted, leaving island residents and businesses to rely on water storage tanks and electric generators (Figure 3.3). These unreliable services limit the economic development of the island as nearly all industries, ranging from manufacturing to tourism, rely on consistent access to these utilities. The population of Vieques has a poverty rate of 73% compared to 58% of the rest of Puerto Rico (Navarro, 1999).

The Navy has used the western third of the island, designated the Naval Ammunition Support Detachment (NASD), for the storage of munitions. The NASD, totaling approximately 8,000 acres, was transferred to the Government of Puerto Rico.

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31 Activists note that the Navy used a more convenient and faster route between Vieques and Isla Grande for shuttling its personnel by crossing between a more western point of Vieques and the Roosevelt Roads Naval base.
and the U.S. Department of Interior under the Directive issued by President Clinton in 2000. The area is dotted with several sites under investigation for toxic waste under the regulations of the Superfund Law (EPA, 2001). This area continues to house the Relocatable Over the Horizon Radar transmitter (ROTHR), which is part of the U.S. government’s extensive anti-narcotic operations in the Caribbean and Latin America (Mullenneaux, 2000; Murillo, 2001).

The eastern ‘third’ of the island, the Eastern Maneuver Area (EMA), was a bombing and maneuver area. The Navy insisted that the EMA was vital to national defense and military readiness, and frequently asserted that Vieques was the only place in the world where the U.S. military could conduct large-scale, multiple mission training exercises. The Navy continues to sponsor exercises in several other locations throughout the U.S. and the world, many of which are located near human populations. However, Vieques was the only location with over 200,000 square miles of uncongested air, sea, and land space for the U.S. military to conduct exercises involving all of its resources: ships, submarines, planes, helicopters, and marines on land and sea (EPA, 2000; Navarro, 1999; U.S. Navy, 2000). The Navy contended that without Vieques sailors would receive vastly inadequate training, endangering their lives, their missions, and national security. As stated on its Vieques Fact Sheet (1999:3), the Navy maintained,

The success of our military forces around the world depends on regular access to our national training facilities at Vieques Island and other sites that provide these essential training opportunities... Decreasing, restricting, or eliminating access to such facilities as a result of a one-in-a-generation accident [the death of Sanes] will result in reduced combat skills proficiency of our servicemen and could cause loss of American lives in future conflicts.

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This area is approximately 14,600 acres in area (EPA, 2000).
The shelling area for ships and planes was located on the easternmost point of the island, a 900-acre peninsula approximately eight miles from the civilian area. This area is part of the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility (AFWTF). Other live fire exercises for land troops and amphibious landings were scattered throughout the Navy’s eastern enclave. Using both live and inert ammunition, the U.S. military and its allies practiced bombing mock targets such as an airstrip, convoys, tanks, and a battlefield (Figures 3.4, 3.5, 3.6). The exercises were limited to 180 days each year, and the Navy stated that only 12% of the bombs that they used were active explosives; the ‘dummy bombs’ were bomb casings filled with cement (EPA, 2000; Mullenneaux, 2000; Navarro, 1999; U.S. Navy, 1999). The Navy and U.S. allies have used both conventional and unconventional weaponry on the range. As late as 1993, practice exercises occasionally included use of napalm canisters, and in February 1999, in violation of the Navy’s own regulations, a Marine jet “accidentally” fired 263 rounds of depleted uranium bullets; only a few of the radioactive shells have been recovered (Navarro, 1999; U.S. District Court, 2000; U.S. Navy, 1999). The EMA also was used to detonate damaged and outdated munitions (Puerto Rico State Department, 1999).

The Navy maintained that it enforced strict regulations that ensured human and environmental safety. The ban on targeting marine areas or bombing in the buffer zone theoretically “ensure[d] maximum safety” for Vieques residents (U.S. Navy, 1999: 3). Yet, as informants often stressed, Vieques is used as a training range, to teach pilots and sailors how to conduct military exercises; in any training operation participants will make

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33 In addition to these two areas, the Navy maintained an underwater training facility between Vieques and St. Croix for submarine maneuvers (Navarro, 1999).
34 The Navy rented the bombing range to its allies for their target practice, training exercises, and tests for new weaponry. The Puerto Rican National Guard has also trained in this area (EPA, 2000; Mullenneaux, 2000; Murillo, 2001).
35 When questioned by the Puerto Rican Secretary of State, Navy officials denied until 1999 that they used napalm on the island (Murillo, 2001).
mistakes, and, in the case of Vieques and the U.S. Navy, these mistakes have the possibility of being fatal.

**A History of Conflict**

In the name of national security and defense over three-quarters of Vieques was expropriated by the Navy between 1942 and 1950, displacing the majority of the Viequenses population. Entire neighborhoods were destroyed, and by 1950 civilians could access only 16% of the land available to them in 1940. At the time of the expropriations the Vieques population totaled around 10,000 people; following World War II, the population had plummeted to approximately 7,000 (Ayala & Carro, n.d.; Bermúdez, 1998; Rabin, n.d.). There are now substantial populations of Viequenses in St. Croix, Orlando, Florida, and Isla Grande.

The expropriations fundamentally altered the economy and social structure of Vieques Island from a primarily traditional, agrarian culture to a more urban existence in the shadow of the U.S. Navy. Although the Navy restricted access to coastal waters and the mangrove swamps, the number of fishermen on the island increased because their previous sources of income were eliminated. Fishing became a more commercial enterprise rather than a subsistence activity. Women often supported by their families by working as housekeepers, cooks, and, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, by working as prostitutes (Ayala & Carro, n.d.; Mullenneaux, 2000). Children also supported the sex industry by acting as runners to recruit sailors for the pimps and prostitutes.

Island residents initiated a tradition of social resistance against the Navy soon after the first set of expropriations. In 1943 residents gathered to protest the lack of employment opportunities on the island. These protests were linked to the independence movement when Pedro Albizu Campos, a nationalist leader of the 1940s and 1950s,
argued against the Navy’s activities in Vieques (Ayala & Carro, n.d.; Rabin, n.d.). They were quickly quieted, but the tradition of protest had begun.

Following the expropriations, Viequenses opposed the Navy’s presence and activities through various means – some spontaneous and others planned. From the 1940s through the 1960s, the island experienced an increase in the practice of prostitution, the number of saloons, and the incidents of violent conflicts between military personnel and islanders. Residents who lived through time recount violent confrontations with the Navy and Navy personnel harassing women on the streets and in their homes. One Puerto Rican activist described this part of the island’s history: “In the 1950s and 1960s there were a lot of incidents of drunken sailors trying to pick up women and fist fights… and things like that. So I remember growing up hearing about these things in [Vieques].”

**Six Decades of Resistance**

For the Vieques movement, one event from this period has assumed particular importance as a symbol of the early resistance against the Navy. On April 4, 1953 a storekeeper in his 70s, Pepe Christian was beaten to death for refusing to sell rum to a group of Marines. In a military court, the Marines were acquitted of all charges. In response the Vieques Municipal Association condemned the murder and issued one of the first demands for the Navy to leave the island and to return all occupied land to the people of Vieques (Mullenneaux, 2000; Rabin, n.d).

In the 1960s the United States resurrected an earlier plan to relocate the entire populations of Vieques and Culebra to St. Croix so that the Navy could expand its

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37 While the most common version of this story involved the Marines seeking rum, a few informants insisted that the argument involved women.
38 When protesters occupied the bombing range in 1999, one of the 19 camps was named Campamento MaPepe in honor of Mr. Christian.
operations on the islands.\textsuperscript{39} Puerto Rican Governor Muñoz Marín successfully argued that these further expropriations were unacceptable and politically untenable, and President John F. Kennedy eventually directed the abandonment of the plan. The Navy then attempted to expropriate land on the southern coast of Vieques in 1964, but eventually deserted this plan as well. In response to these further attempts at expropriation, a coalition of community leaders formed the Comité en Defensa de Vieques\textsuperscript{40} and traveled to San Juan and Washington, D.C. to present their opposition to any further expropriation (Mullenneaux, 2000; Murillo, 2001; Rabin, n.d.). Thus the movement assumed a more organized form, lobbying for its cause in the halls of the Puerto Rican legislature and U.S. Congress.

In the 1970s President Richard Nixon terminated military activities on Culebra because of the protests of local residents and the Puerto Rican community at large. Until this time, Culebra had served as the main bombing range in the AFWTF. Several accidents where live fire munitions landed near the civilian population provoked this set of social protests. Until the closure of Culebra, Vieques was not the main bombing range, but rather an area for the U.S. and its allies to practice joint maneuvers. As activity in the skies and seas around Vieques increased, fishermen’s access to their traditional fishing grounds was impeded even more and damage to their nets and traps became more frequent. In response, a group of 40 fishermen formed the Vieques Fishing Association, which served both as a fishing cooperative and as a mobilization force for protests (Mullenneaux, 2000; Murillo, 2001).

\textsuperscript{39} The plan included removal and relocation of island cemeteries because residents would not be allowed to return to the islands following their resettlement.

\textsuperscript{40} The English translation of this group is the Committee in Defense of Vieques.
The protests of the 1970s were the most organized form of resistance since the Navy’s arrival in the 1940s, and they began to attract attention outside of Puerto Rico. The international press covered a story about a group of 95 fishermen in 30 small fishing vessels blocking NATO maneuvers off the southern coast of Vieques in February of 1978. The following year, to commemorate the anniversary of that action, termed “La Batalla de Vieques,” 150 protesters covertly camped on a beach in the EMA (Mullenneaux, 2000; Murillo, 2001; Rabin, n.d.).

In May of 1979 nearly 200 people infiltrated the Navy’s space once again. On a beach on the eastern area of the island, protesters celebrated their movement in an ecumenical service. Military police arrested 21 of the participants; 12 of those arrested were sentenced to six months in federal prison for the misdemeanor of trespassing on federal land. One of these protesters has assumed particular importance to the movement, symbolizing the persecution by the Navy and U.S. government that protesters have endured. Angel Rodriguez Cristobal was serving his six-month sentence in the Tallahassee Federal Institution when he was found dead in his cell. The jail’s coroner ruled his death a suicide, but movement participants insist that he was murdered, citing his character and letters that he issued to friends in Vieques, stating that prison officials were harassing him. At his trial, he did not defend himself. Rather, he stated that he did not recognize the United States’ jurisdiction in Puerto Rico and that he was a prisoner of war. This is a stance that many protesters continued to hold when they are tried for their acts of civil disobedience.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s the movement was gaining momentum, gaining recognition beyond the island of Vieques, and gaining the support of Puerto Rican officials. The fishermen presented their movement as an act of self-defense against a
powerful adversary, a tactic that had particular resonance following the Vietnam War. In 1980, 2,500 protesters gathered in Washington, D.C. to demand that the Navy leave Vieques. In 1979 and 1980 a subcommittee of the House Armed Forces Committee investigated the consequences of the Navy’s presence in Vieques and the tactics that the Navy had employed to discredit protesters. The subcommittee issued a recommendation that the Navy abandon their operations on Vieques and study ways to improve the economic and social situation on the island (Mullenneaux, 2000).

In 1978, Governor Carlos Romero Barceló filed a lawsuit against the Navy, specifying the ecological damage caused by naval activities. With the protests gaining more visibility and popular support, the Navy conceded to review its practices, and in 1983 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Puerto Rican government. Barceló dropped his federal suit. In the MOU the Navy agreed to several measures to improve the economic and environmental state of the island. They also promoted economic development and environmental programs, such as those protecting endangered species and marine habitats. Most significantly, the Navy agreed to minimize the use of live ordnance on the range. In the public relations battle of the current Vieques movement, the Navy often referenced this document to argue that they were a ‘good neighbor’ to the people on the island – providing jobs, economic assistance, and environmental protection (Danzig, 1999; Mullenneaux, 2000; U.S. Department of Defense, 1999).

The signing of the 1983 MOU silenced the majority of the movement, though an active contingent still existed in the sixteen years that the naval operations proceeded relatively unchanged. The Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques (CPRDV) was formed in 1993 and maintained some awareness of the issues surrounding the Navy’s
activities.\textsuperscript{41} However, even when an FA-18 pilot dropped five 500-pound bombs one mile from Isabel Segunda, movement leaders were not able to raise large-scale protests like those in the 1970s and 1980s.

A number of interview subjects noted that they were active in the movement prior to 1983, but that following the signing of the MOU, they believed that the Navy had actually stopped bombing Vieques. Navy’s strategy had been successful. In signing the MOU, a document that the Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig eventually admitted was implemented insufficiently, the Navy effectively halted the momentum of the Vieques movement (Danzig, 1999). That is, until a tragic accident on the night of April 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1999 claimed the life of a Viequense.

That evening David Sanes Rodriguez, a civilian security guard for the Navy, was working near Observation Post 1 (OP1), overlooking the 900-acre target range. The sky was fairly cloudy, but Mr. Sanes stood outside OP1, by some accounts smoking a cigarette, and, perhaps observing the military exercises underway on the peninsula. According to the mythology of the Vieques movement, he was unhappy with his position and considering quitting in the near future. Then, because of a series of errors by several naval personnel, a new FA-18 pilot from the aircraft carrier the U.S.S. Kennedy dropped his two 500-pound bombs more than a mile off-target, killing Mr. Sanes and re-igniting the Vieques movement. Within hours of the accident, as the pilot was transported back to his home base,\textsuperscript{42} island residents began gathering at the gates of Camp García, discussing the evening’s tragic events and the relationship between the island and the Navy.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} Committee For the Rescue and Development of Vieques
\textsuperscript{42} Based on information gathered from a personal conversation with Navy personnel.
\textsuperscript{43} Sanes became a symbolic martyr for the movement, but he was a problematic one because he was working for the Navy at the time of his death. The movement, however, incorporated this position with the Navy into their discourse. For example, one Puerto Rican activists stated, “[Sanes] had complained to a couple of family members that he felt unsafe and unsecure (sic) there because the security system was not
Mobilization of a Movement

The effect of the death of Mr. Sanes was immediate. The following day Vieques residents descended upon the municipality’s mayoral office to demand that the Navy cease all activities and evacuate the island. Several high-ranking Puerto Rican officials, including the Commonwealth’s Governor Pedro Roselló called for a permanent termination of bombing exercises on Vieques. Hundreds of people attended Mr. Sanes’s funeral, and within days of his death, the movement’s civil disobedience and protest activities were underway. Most significantly, an environmentalist from Isla Grande, Alberto “Tito” de Jesús, commonly known as Tito Kayak, established a camp on the bombing range, naming this site Monte David and initiating an occupation of the range that would bring hundreds other protesters to Vieques and effectively halt naval maneuvers on the island for over a year’s time.

Not only did the death of David Sanes serve as the catalyst to rekindle the movement and propel it to the international scene, but also, for movement participants, the Navy’s response to it symbolized of the entire relationship between the Navy and the people of Vieques. The Navy emphasized that when he was killed, Mr. Sanes was located well within the buffer zone provided by the EMA and far from either Isabel Segunda or Esperanza. Officials often stated that because Mr. Sanes, despite safety regulations, was outside of the observation building, he was more susceptible to injuries from an accident on the range. This assertion particularly incensed movement participants because they viewed it as the Navy transferring its responsibility for Sanes’s death from itself onto Mr. Sanes. A New York based activist commented on the Navy’s view of Mr. Sanes’s death:

very efficient… I feel that even though this guy… is pro-Navy, and he represents many things that are contrary to what this movement stands for he is a symbol for the people.” (Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City, on February 12, 2001).
They say he died because it was his fault. He was taking a cigarette out of where he was supposed to be… So they tried as always, blame the victim. It was his fault. But actually David Sanes don’t even smoke… I think somebody should pay for Sanes’s death probably… I think the one that should pay is the whole Navy… They should leave. That’s the best way that they can honor the death of that person… It’s very offensive that this person [was] killed, and [that] they tried to blame him… He’s Puerto Rican. He’s Viequense. He’s black. We don’t care. And no big deal. No big deal. He just died.44

The Navy’s refusal to publicly accept its role in Sanes’s death worsened its position in Vieques, where people were already suspicious of the military’s motives.

The death allowed the people of Vieques to temporarily set aside political differences for a common cause. One interview subject noted that before Sanes’s death, movement participants were all considered Independistas or communists, but “Now it’s different. Now the people of Vieques have come together and realized that the Navy is killing us.”45 Despite the fact that Mr. Sanes was on the range, located miles from the civilian sector, protest participants commonly declared that another misdropped bomb may take the life of another civilian: “When David Sanes was killed everybody said that it could have been us.”46 To bolster this argument several protest organizations compiled a list of accidents and deaths that they attributed to the Navy.47 48 One person connected the death of Mr. Sanes to a number of near accidents:

You have had bombs dropped near the civilian area, near fishermen when they are fishing in approved areas. They are told, ‘Yeah, you can fish there.’ Bombs are falling close to them even when fishermen are under the water, fishing lobster and stuff like that that needs to be caught… They’re

44 Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City, on February 12, 2001
47 Outside of the gates of Camp Garcia, protesters have erected a mock cemetery. Names of those protesters allege have been killed by the Navy are written on white crosses. The causes of these deaths include violent clashes between residents and marines live ordnance in or near civilian areas or the sea, and disease related deaths such as cancer and pulmonary disorders.
48 These accidents include the dropping of five 500-pound bombs one mile from civilian area in 1993 and bullets from a live-fire, small arms exercise hitting a truck with a driver in the civilian area in the 1990s (Navarro, 1999; Ruiz, J. 2000; U.S. District Court, 2000).
under the water and bombs fall not far from them. Thank God nobody had ever been killed by such an accident… Then this accident happened. Somebody from Vieques, he was a resident of Vieques! Born and raised on Vieques, got killed and people just got fed up.³⁹

Mr. Sanes’s death remained the central mobilizing point in the movement with these other deaths reinforcing the protesters’ view that no Viequenses was safe from the Navy.

In interviews, most informants stated that the death of Sanes was what propelled them to become involved in the movement. An island resident described the island’s reaction to his death:

If you take a glass of water and there is a little space and the water is more than half full. When David Sanes died… that is what we needed to spill. Because we had the anxiety, we had the bitterness, we were angry. All these years we have felt it, but David Sanes was like, ‘Hello. Do you see what you did?’³⁰

The anniversary of his death served as a time of mobilization for the movement. When asked if the movement would have gained so much momentum if David Sanes had not died on that evening in April, one informant replied,

No one knows… This person was killed and that created an unexpected event that changed the arrangement of political and social and cultural forces in Puerto Rico and has also bring (sic) into question the relation between Puerto Rico and the United States.⁵¹

**Civil Disobedience**

When he erected a camp in the Live Impact Area stating that he would not leave until the Navy departed, Tito Kayak initiated a protest that would gain visibility around the world. Over the course of a little more than a year, he was joined by thousands of Viequenses, Puerto Ricans, and environmental, human rights, and political activists.

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⁵¹ Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 12, 2001.
Protestors established 14 camps throughout the LIA, each sponsored by a different sector of Puerto Rican society: a Viequenses family, the Catholic Church, the Ecumenical Council (of Christian Churches), University of Puerto Rico students, political parties, and labor unions. At each camp, protesters flew the Puerto Rican flag and withstood extreme weather conditions, including two hurricanes (Haase, 2000; Mullenneaux, 2000; Owens, 1999; Ruiz, J. 2000; Sealy, 2000). Fishermen and other Viequenses delivered supplies that were purchased with money donated to the CPRDV or by local businesses. While generally ignoring the camps’ daily activities on the LIA, the Navy asserted its presence with frequent helicopter flights and boats passing near the camps; personnel continued to secure the entrance to Camp García and patrol the perimeter of its lands.

The movement was widely supported throughout Puerto Rico. Participants pledged to demonstrate their resistance to the Navy through peaceful civil disobedience.

One protester described this commitment and its historical background:

Civil disobedience, which has its traditions from Jesus to Mahatma Gandhi to Martin Luther King, made… an impact because there’s a consensus… There’s some basic rules. And the rules are [that] you will not be disrespectful to people. This is a peaceful movement so we do not use arms. We do not use foul language. We do not scream at each other. And I think those are very… common, respectful ways of communication among people. And that doesn’t mean that this is a perfect movement, that there is no conflict, that there [are] no contradictions. I think there’s a lot of things we need to learn. But overall it’s been a very successful one because it’s brought together a lot of people. 

In addition to the occupation of the bombing range, these acts of protest included car conveys throughout the island, marches in Isabel Segunda and in front of Camp García, and small acts of resistance, such a the distribution of bumper stickers and honking car horns or yelling slogans as they passed the Navy occupied lands. The dedication to non-violent action was a strategic assertion that contrasted this mobilization.

of the movement against other periods of protest, which had not been completely non-violent. It also served as an effective visual and ideological contrast to the Navy’s practice exercises on the islands; in news and documentary coverage of the movement, individuals singing and chanting slogans were juxtaposed with stock footage of the Navy’s mock battles, gun fights, and bomb explosions on the island. One protest supporter articulated this strategy: “[The popular appeal of the movement] is that the people of Vieques have shown that we are human beings, and we’ve been doing it with peaceful disobedience… The only bad guys over here is [sic] the Navy.”53 The Puerto Rican Bar Association, which offered free legal aid to anyone arrested for trespassing on the range, nominated the movement for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1999 and 2000.

While protesters occupied the range in Vieques, other acts of civil disobedience were taking place in Puerto Rico and the mainland United States. Protesters often staged protests at naval recruiting stations and outside military bases and installations. The Ecumenical Council of Puerto Rico organized the largest march in Puerto Rico’s history in San Juan, and Todo Puerto Rico Con Vieques held a demonstration outside of Roosevelt Roads Naval Base attended by nearly 50,000 people (Marino, 2000; Mullenneaux, 2000; Vieques Solidarity Network, 2000). In New York City, protesters, waving Puerto Rican flags and chanting Vieques slogans, marched in front of the United Nations. Labor unions and political activists throughout the country raised awareness through the distribution of materials, the organization of rallies and parades, and Internet listservs. In a symbol of solidarity with Vieques, many Puerto Rican towns raised the Vieques flag next to the flags of their municipality and the Commonwealth (Haase, 2000; Mullenneaux, 2000). Movement leaders enlisted celebrities to defend their cause. Rosie

Peres, Edward James Olmos, and Martin Sheen all participated in Vieques events, and many prominent political, religious, and social leaders visited the island or participated in protests, including Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, the Bishop of Chiapas, Mexico, Nobel Peace Prize winner Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, and Robert Kennedy, Jr. The movement expanded to an international scope as the leaders allied themselves with groups struggling to evict the U.S. Navy from Okinawa, Japan and by traveling to Europe and Asia to speak about their cause (Agencia EFE, 2001; Associated Press, 2001b; Lipton, 2001; Mullenneaux, 2000; Star Wire Services, 2001; TheGully.com, 2000).

One of the most visible events for the Vieques campaign was the National Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City on June 11, 2000. The parade was dedicated to the Vieques campaign, demonstrating its significance and acceptance by the Puerto Rican population in the city. As one New York Puerto Rican described, “It was one of the biggest parades. Usually you only have the flag of Puerto Rico at the parade. This year people were not only holding the flag of Puerto Rico, but they were also waving the Vieques flag or [a] flag calling for peace.”^{54} However, the parade’s theme was somewhat contentious because the dedication to Vieques was coupled with a dedication to Pedro Albizu Campos, one of the most controversial figures in the independence movement. This clearly united the two issues despite the mainstream nature of the Vieques campaign and the less accepted promotion of independence for Puerto Rico. Despite this controversy, over one million Puerto Ricans attended the parade, which is traditionally one of the largest gatherings of Latinos in the United States (Murillo, 2001; Ruiz, A., 2000, Suarez, 2001).

^{54} Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 6, 2001.
Organizations supporting the Vieques movement also filed lawsuits against the Navy. The Puerto Rican Attorney General Jose Fuentes Agostini threatened to sue the Navy based on gross violations of U.S. environmental laws, and the EPA warned the Navy that it was in violation of the Clean Water Act (Associated Press, 2001a; Owens, 1999; Vieques Solidarity Network, 2000). Robert Kennedy, Jr.’s Water Keeper Alliance partnered with the Natural Resources Defense Council, labor unions, political representatives, and movement groups in a suit against the Departments of Defense, Navy, and Interior in United States District Court (Puerto Rico) contending that these federal agencies have demonstrated flagrant disregard for environmental laws and civil rights (Ruiz, A., 2000; U.S. District Court, District of Puerto Rico, 2000). The law firm of John Arthur Eaves filed a class action lawsuit against the Navy on behalf of island residents that have been diagnosed with cancer (Mullenneaux, 2000; Personal Communication, March, 2001).

As it expanded beyond the borders of Puerto Rico, the issue of Vieques became a mainstream political issue in the United States, especially in New York with its large Puerto Rican population. Hillary Clinton, preparing for a run for a U.S. Senate seat representing the state of New York, declared that the Navy should evacuate Vieques, as did Presidential candidate Vice-President Al Gore (Becker, 1999a; Friedman, 2001a). New York Senator Charles Schumer also called for the termination of Navy exercises on Vieques along with numerous national and state senators and representatives (Becker, 1999a; Mulero, 2001b; Nordheimer & Johnston, 2000; Waldman, 2000). However, the view of the Navy was far from unanimous, even on the island itself. Several Republican Senators committed themselves to maintaining the live-fire use of Vieques for the
Navy and held meetings with a pro-Navy faction of the Vieques community. Senators Inhofe of Oklahoma and Warner of Virginia threatened to close the Roosevelt Road Naval Base in Ceiba if the protesters won their demands (Becker, 2000; Friedman, 2001b; Younes, 2001).

Several commissions at different levels government were created to review the case of Vieques. A U.S. Congressional Committee convened hearings regarding the practice range (Becker, 1999a). In July of 2000 the U.N. Decolonization Committee addressed the status issue of Puerto Rico and specifically called for the termination of naval maneuvers on the island of Vieques. Governor Roselló created a Special Commission on Vieques that allowed 45 days for island resident testimony as well as a tour of the Navy’s lands and a review of their activities. Issued on June 25, 1999, the report cited massive social, economic, and environmental damage to the island and called on the Navy to leave the island. The Commission’s members specifically noted a failure by the Navy to implement the 1983 MOU as well as emphasizing the higher rates of mortality and cancer for island residents when compared to the rest of Puerto Rico (Mullenneaux, 2000; Puerto Rico State Department, 1999). The report issued by the Special Commission stated that the Navy’s practices lead to “a violation of residents’ basic constitutional, civil, and human rights” (Mullenneaux, 1999:61).

In June the Clinton White House created a panel headed by the Undersecretary of Defense Frank Rush to examine the situation on Vieques. At the same time, the Navy conducted its own investigation into the feasibility of continuing exercises on Vieques and, under the direction of Clinton, the examination of alternative sites for training. The Navy released the Pace-Fallon study, chaired by Vice Admiral William Pace and Lieutenant General Peter Pace, in July of 1999. It directly contradicted the findings of the
Puerto Rican Special Commission and stated that the high cancer, asthma, and mortality rates on Vieques were not connected to the Navy’s activities on the island. The study recommended offering economic incentives, a reduction in use of live ordnance, and the transfer of unnecessary land from the Navy to the municipality in order to regain the trust of the Vieques population (Becker, 1999a; Mullenneaux, 2000). It also rejected 18 alternative sites for practice maneuvers. Representatives of the Navy steadfastly maintained this stance when dealing with the press throughout their battle against the protesters. In an interview with the television program 20/20, Vice-Admiral Pace stated that practice exercises on the island of Vieques were imperative to force readiness. Moreover, he insisted that for the Navy to reliably defend human rights around the world the practice range on Vieques was irreplaceable (Owens, 1999). The Pentagon eventually asserted that lack of training on the Vieques range contributed to a major military accident in Kuwait in which six people were killed (Mulero, 2001a).

Despite these assertions by the Navy, the Rush Panel issued a much different and more flexible stance in 1999. The panel recommended the extension of a $40 million economic package to the island municipality and the termination of all maneuvers within five years unless the residents of Vieques voted to extend the Navy’s activities (Becker, 1999b; Mullenneaux, 2000). While he accepted this proposal, President Clinton appeared to have major misgivings about the Navy’s activities on Vieques. Rueben Berríos, President of the Puerto Rican Independence Party and one of the initial protesters to establish a camp in the Live Impact Area, wrote a letter to Clinton outlining his position on why the Navy should cease its activities in Vieques. Clinton forwarded this to his National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger, on July 26 with the following notation in the margins: “I agree with this - this is wrong. I think they don’t want us there. That’s the
main point... The Navy can find a way to work around it” (Quoted in Becker, 2000; quoted in Mullenneaux, 2000; quoted in Owens, 1999). At the federal level there was a consensus that the President’s sentiment and the recommendations by the Rush Panel were greatly affected by the encampments on the Eastern Maneuver Area.

Despite the promise of a referendum to decide the fate of the Navy’s presence on Vieques, protesters found the timeline unacceptable and the offer of federal funds offensive. Many protesters likened it to bribery. One protest organizer said that the granting of money was “insulting. It’s disgusting. It shows lack of respect for humankind.”\textsuperscript{55} They also noted that the Navy had issued promises to modify its practices in the 1983 MOU but had failed to implement them. Organizations supporting the movement reasserted that the Navy should guarantee an immediate cessation to bombing and leave Vieques without any further negotiations other than those regarding the decontamination of Navy lands. One Viequenses expressed this sentiment, noting that the Navy should “clean up the damage that they have done. It’s not the case of giving us money and [our] keeping our mouths shut. It’s not going to work.”\textsuperscript{56}

Rather than diffusing the situation on the practice range, Clinton’s announcement only exacerbated it. The number of people visiting and camping on the range continued to increase. A possible intervention on the range entered the conversation on Vieques at the federal level, where Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI Director Louis Freeh were directed to prepare for the removal of protesters from the range so that the Navy could resume training exercises (Becker, 1999b).

The White House then entered into intense negotiations with the government of Puerto Rico. Roselló and Clinton agreed to a set of conditions under which the Navy

\textsuperscript{55} Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 10, 2001.

\textsuperscript{56} Statement taken from an interview in Isabel Segunda, Vieques, Puerto Rico on March 1, 2001.
would most likely be evicted from the island of Vieques, but could continue using the practice range until the eviction date. Clinton issued a Presidential Directive on January 31, 2000 that stated that in addition to the originally promised $40 million, the island community would receive $50 million if they voted to allow the Navy to retain its land and continue its exercises with live ammunition and bombs. Many of the parameters of the referendum would be determined by the Navy, but the community ultimately was given a choice of the eviction of the Navy and complete termination of exercises by May 31, 2003 or allowing the Navy full use of the bombing range and the affiliated training areas. In the interim the Navy would be allowed to resume training on the range using non-exploding “dummy” bombs, but with a limit of 90 days versus the previous 180 (Becker, 2000; Mullenneaux, 2000; Sealy, 2000).

By agreeing to these conditions, Roselló contradicted his Congressional testimony in which he stated that he would not allow any more bombs to be used on Vieques. He also agreed to assist in the eviction of protesters so that the Navy could resume its exercises. Robert Rabin, head of the Coordinating Committee of the CPRDV, expressed the general sentiment of individuals active in the movement when he stated, “This is treason” (Quoted in Becker, 2000).
In interviews and articles, Vieques was commonly assigned the distinction of being the first issue upon which the Puerto Rican political parties agreed (Becker, 1999b; Murillo, 2001). However, because of Roselló’s perceived betrayal of the cause, Vieques became a major campaign issue in the gubernatorial race. Roselló’s pro-statehood party lost its campaign, and the election of Sila Calderón of the pro-Commonwealth PDP party hinged in part on her strong stance on the Vieques issue. In her campaign, Calderón pledged to pull Puerto Rican police away from the Camp García gates, sponsor more epidemiological tests, and challenge the timing and options of the referendum outlined in Clinton’s Presidential Directive (Murillo, 2001).

Despite the strong stance taken by Governor Calderón, federal planning to remove protesters began in earnest in April of 2000. The government did not hide their preparation to remove the protesters and actually expected the number of people camping on the range and around the gates of Camp García to swell as their operation grew near (Johnston, 2000; Ruiz, J., 2000). One Vieques resident described the publicity: “It was outrageous. That morning I got up early, like four in the morning, to listen to the radio because it was practically announced what they [the federal government] were going to do. So I turned on the radio and they were broadcasting live from right here [Camp Garcia].”

The FBI, Federal Marshalls, and Coast Guard forcibly removed the protesters from the camps on the morning of May 5, 2000 (Johnston, 2000; Mullenneaux, 2000; Ruiz, J. 2000). Protesters were led outside of the EMA, many in plastic handcuffs, and then transported to Roosevelt Roads where they were eventually released. As they passed the gates of Camp García and by the cameras of the assembled international press,

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protesters were signing hymn and protest songs, chanting, and yelling slogans about Vieques and Puerto Rico. Over 200 protesters were removed from Vieques by several hundred federal agents without any injuries or incidents of violence; two U.S. Representatives, Luis Gutierrez (IL) and Nydia M. Velázquez (NY) were among the protesters detained (Nordheimer & Johnston, 2000; Ruiz, J., 2000; Waldman, 2000). As this was happening in the EMA, other island residents and movement supporters protested in Isabel Segunda (Nordheimer & Johnston, 2000).

While nobody was technically arrested, protesters were held for several hours. One participant that was detained explained the confusion of that day: “We were treated like we were arrested. We were under arrest. We were told what to do. We were told what we couldn’t do. And then, it was argued that we were never arrested.” Many interview subjects recall being driven around the island of Vieques in the sun for several hours and then being placed in the sun again on the deck of a ship. They also contend that they were given dirty water to drink and, if they needed to urinate, they were not given a private place to do this. Upon their arrival in Roosevelt Roads, the detained protesters were placed in outdoor holding cells and individually asked to sign a document stating their name and pledging not to enter the Navy lands again. My interview subjects that had been detained on that day insist that nobody signed these papers. Following this request, each protester was released at the gate of Roosevelt Roads. In the meantime on Vieques, 58

the Marines mobilized to guard the land perimeter of the EMA, and the Coast Guard formed a patrol area in the sea; the government was preparing for the possibility that another influx of protesters would attempt to infiltrate the island within the next few days (Nordheimer & Johnston, 2000).

Organizations launched protests around the United States that evening. Seven activists were arrested when they interrupted a Yankee’s baseball game in New York City by running onto the field waving Puerto Rican flags and a sign stating “U.S. Navy Out of Vieques”; they also gave a Vieques Libre shirt and cap to a Puerto Rican player (Vieques Libre, 2000a). In Times Square, thousands of people gathered to protest the detention of protesters in Puerto Rico. Jesse Jackson, speaking in Chicago, condemned the federal government’s actions against the camps in Vieques, and protesters gathered in such diverse places as Springfield, MA, Hanover, N.H., Tucson, AZ, and Orlando, FL. U.S. Representative Jose E Serrano of the Bronx had himself arrested at the White House (Sealy, 2000; Waldman, 2000).

From May 5, 2000 through my research period, protests and press coverage around Vieques, Puerto Rico, and the United States continued to intensify. Rallies and marches were held throughout the United States, movement leaders continued to travel and speak throughout the world, and organizations spread information about Vieques by using the news media, the Internet, and their activist networks. As more people were arrested, especially in New York City, Puerto Rico, and Vieques, some judges either dismissed cases against protesters or, upon delivering a sentence, immediately suspended it. However, in the federal court in Puerto Rico, protesters were charged with trespassing on federal property. Since the removal of protesters from the EMA, activists continued to

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59 As noted earlier, Orlando has a large population of Viequense.
enter the range as an act of defiance; at times the action was undertaken to disrupt military exercises and at others it was to declare their ‘ownership’ of the property. While the federal court generally gave first-time offenders probation, repeat offenders and those that had prior arrests for other acts of civil disobedience were fined up to $1,000 and handed sentences ranging from a few days to six months in federal prison. Despite the severity of these sentences, the protests intensified, and as the anniversary of the protesters’ removal from the range approached while I was in Vieques, organization leaders planned for another resumption of military exercises as well as a celebration of the expansion of the Vieques Libre movement.
Figure 3.1: Vieques, Culebra, and Puerto Rico (Global Insight, 1998)
Figure 3.2: Vieques (Mullenneaux, 2000)
Figure 3.3: Water Pipe and Electricity Cable
Figure 3.4: Live Impact Area from Observation Post 1
Figure 3.5: Mock Airstrip in Live Impact Area
Figure 3.6: Mock Convoy and Roads in Live Impact Area
Chapter Four

Vieques Libre: A Movement in the Contemporary World

This is a political situation. It’s a moral situation. This is a human situation. This is an anti-Christian situation. This is against the law to have [the Navy] here doing what they’re doing now.

Angel “Tato” Guadalupe, Vieques based activist

As with previous manifestations, the recent campaign to evict the Navy from Vieques centered on the island itself. However, unlike earlier mobilizations of the movement, this one was not contained by the geographic borders of Vieques or even those of Puerto Rico. This manifestation reached far beyond these boundaries to include diverse communities throughout the world. The enlargement of the campaign to end Navy maneuvers on Vieques was achieved by the strategic engagement of media and heavy use of the Internet as a major outreach tool. The movement deliberately expanded its discourse to create a more mainstream and accessible image. Its commitment to non-violent civil disobedience and its incorporation of the global discourses of human rights and the environment expanded the pool of movement participants. These strategies successfully created a popular appeal for the campaign. The mainstream media, such as 60 Minutes and the New York Times, sympathetically profiled the campaign and its issues reverberated in the halls of governments throughout the world.

Research Design and Methods

The ethnographic research for this thesis was conducted over the two-month period from February through March of 2001. Because of the wide geographic span of

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the movement, my research was multi-sited, examining four geographic locations: Vieques, San Juan, Washington, D.C., and New York City. These sites were chosen after a review of the contemporary literature and news reports on the Vieques movement of the 1990s revealed that each was a geographic center of the movement’s activities. The physical space of the island was used for practice Naval maneuvers and as such, was the actual space around which the movement was centered. Numerous rallies, visits from dignitaries, and gatherings of activists took place in this geographic and social space. In Puerto Rico, political lobbying and public education efforts were based in San Juan. In the continental United States, the Puerto Rican lobbying firms in Washington, D.C. addressed the issue in the offices of the U.S. Congress and in the streets near the White House. New York City’s substantial Puerto Rican population embraced the issue of Vieques, and organized marches, engaged the local media, and arranged trips to shuttle activists back and forth from Vieques.

I conducted a total of 40 semi-structured interviews with people active in the Vieques movement. Approximately half of the interview subjects lived on Vieques with the other half residing at the other three research sites (Figure 4.1). The number of interviews conducted in each site reflects the amount of time that I spent in each place. I spent the largest percentage of my research period in Vieques, visiting the island for approximately three weeks. I conducted interviews in New York City for ten days and worked in Washington, D.C. and San Juan, Puerto Rico for five days each. In each location I divided my research into three elements: interviews, literature and historical review, and attendance at various campaign rallies and events.

Initial interview subjects were chosen because they were listed as a contact person for a group supporting the Vieques campaign. At the conclusion of each interview,
subjects were asked to identify other potential persons to be interviewed and their contact information. These people were then contacted and, if willing, participated in an interview. While this chain of association may skew the data presented in the thesis, it was necessary to have an introduction from another activist when contacting people for interviews. Given the political significance of this issue and the history of persecution by the federal government, many movement participants felt more comfortable sitting for an in-depth interview with me after a phone call, email, or introduction from someone that they trusted.

Each semi-structured interview was based on a format of 30 questions, with the average interview lasting approximately one hour and fifteen minutes (Appendix A). Order of the questions differed depending on the direction of the interview, and I frequently inserted other questions that I felt were necessary for a more complete analysis. The five topics covered by the original 30 questions included personal proximity to Vieques, involvement in the movement, history of the movement, classification of issues within the movement, and personal history. While much of analysis presented in this thesis rests upon these interviews, I also include in my presentation information gathered at meetings and demonstrations of various activist groups, literature distributed by these groups, news coverage, websites devoted to the issue of Vieques, and a review of historical and political literature. Data presented in this thesis also originates from more casual conversations held with activists.

The movement as a whole employed a message of unity and an overarching discourse of “Vieques sí, Marina no.” Yet, each group engaged in the Vieques movement became involved for different reasons, and the language and images used to describe the situation on Vieques reflected this diversity. The general factors that influenced
participation in the campaign can be split into four areas: the environment, health, human rights, and identity and political determination.

These tightly interwoven factors were identified during a literature review prior to my field research. Movement propaganda generally included information about all four; a Vieques Support Campaign flyer (1999) declared “the people of Vieques - and all of Puerto Rico – continue to fight against the Navy’s expropriation of lands, the forcible removal of the native population, and the contamination of the environment which has caused numerous health problems.” In the context of Vieques, none of these issues could be examined in isolation from one another; each topic informed the others, and nearly every interview included a discussion of all of them. For example, responding to a question about a health study conducted in Vieques, one person mentioned each of the four issues:

The way that we look at it is human rights and health. Of course, there is the bigger issue of the political relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico… It has to do with environmental racism. It has to do with the lesser status of Puerto Rico because the Navy was just able to do what it wanted in Vieques… This is really an issue of [the] human rights of the 10,000 people who live there, human rights and the environment.61

During interviews, movement supporters were asked about the history of the Vieques movement, the reasons that they chose to participate in this mobilization of the movement, and specifically how they would classify the issue of Vieques. Following the transcription of the interviews, this information was broken into categories and considered against factors such as political affiliation, ethnicity, and age to determine how this group of participants framed the Vieques movement so that these categories could be compared to the participants’ locations. The classification of issues depended primarily upon two things: the specific identification of one topic as the most significant

factor in their participation in the Vieques movement and the language used throughout the interview to describe the situation on Vieques. Interview participants were asked to identify the most important reason that the Navy should leave Vieques. If an answer contained more than one topic, I asked them to pinpoint exactly one reason. For analysis, these answers were compared against the rest of the interview to see if the answer to this one question was aligned with the language used to describe the Vieques situation in the remainder of the interview. The topic that assumed the position of the most significant reason for the Navy to leave Vieques and the reason that propelled an individual’s involvement in the Vieques campaign depended upon the speaker’s locations.

**Environment**

Clearly, an area that was being bombarded with large weapons has suffered extensive environmental damage. One protester recalled her visit to the bombing range, “There’s one place… that we saw that looked like blown up lace, a piece of lace where it had holes all over it.” Following the death of David Sanes, movement participants scrutinized the environmental integrity of the Navy lands. Previously, the majority of the criticism leveled against the Navy’s treatment of the environment focused on how the bombing and training maneuvers adversely affected the marine environment and, thus, the fishermen’s catch. In this campaign, however, activists expanded the environmental rhetoric of the movement, portraying Vieques as an island paradise under siege by the Navy. In reference to the environmental destruction, one protester simply stated, “The Navy kill[ed] this island.” In a press release, PIP President Ruben Berríos wrote, “Next to the idyllic beach from which I write lies a lunar wasteland of unexploded ordnance and

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depleted uranium-tipped radioactive shells littered about in dead wetlands and lagoons, scorched earth and devastated marine turtle nests” (1999:2).

The assessment of the Navy lands began with noting the large amount of debris and unexploded ordnance scattered throughout both the land and water areas of the EMA, where they posed a potential hazard for island residents as they leached dangerous chemicals into the environment. The Navy stopped bombing the island’s coral reefs in 1980, yet many recently deployed weapons were located in the waters surrounding the LIA because they were dropped off of their targets.

A Puerto Rican sponsored environmental assessment also located bombs in the waters outside of the bombing areas. These included spent ammunition as well as live bombs that had the potential to explode if hit by another weapon or a boat. Older ordnance, often encrusted in coral, was not necessarily a threat because of the possibility of an explosion, but rather because the bombs’ eroding detonators released a suspected carcinogen into the water. Dr. James Porter, a professor of marine biology at the University of Georgia, noted extensive damage to the reefs of Vieques. He and the explosive experts contracted by the government of Puerto Rico also located a sunken ship that had been exposed to several nuclear weapons tests in the 1950s; it was surrounded by a ‘dead zone’ devoid of vegetation and marine life of approximately 20 to 25 feet (Mullenneaux, 2000; Owens, 1999; Puerto Rico State Department, 1999; Ruiz, J., 2000; U.S. District Court, 2000). While it acknowledged its responsibility to clean the land area every six months, the Navy noted that under federal law it was not responsible for any ordnance and fragments located in the water (Owens, 1999; Puerto Rico State Department, 1999).
Both the marine and terrestrial environments in the Navy’s lands are habitat for several endangered and threatened species, and the Navy was accused of doing little to protect them; these species include sea turtles, brown pelicans, manatees, whales, and some plants (U.S. District Court, 2000). In a personal tour of the Navy lands in Vieques, the Public Affairs Team pointed to the brown pelican as an indicator of its success in protecting these species. However, a lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court accused the Navy of causing a higher than average mortality rate for the pelicans as well as causing the deaths of turtles and whales during bombing practice (2000). The local marine ecosystem was further damaged when, during practice maneuvers, the propellers of Navy ships cut the lines on fishermen’s nets, allowing them to sink to the ocean floor where they would collect and kill up to 5,000 pounds of fish (Vieques Solidarity Network, 2001).

The environmental damage extended to the land areas in both the western and eastern areas of Vieques owned by the Navy. Middle aged and elderly interview subjects that have lived on Vieques since their childhood contended that the climate and hydrology of the island have changed because of the Navy’s activities. Many of them recalled the lands in the EMA being lush and green with plenty of water. This area is now dry, with damaged wetlands and several desiccated lagoons that have been destroyed by the bombing and other Navy activities (Haase, 2000; Mullenneaux, 2000; Puerto Rico State Department, 1999; Ruiz, J., 2000; U.S. District Court, 2000). One activist showed me a photograph of the LIA and then stated, “I was there. This is a picture. That’s a tropical island! And there is nothing growing there!"\textsuperscript{64}

People commonly noted that the island once exported agricultural crops, but after the arrival of the Navy, the agricultural industry completely died.

\textsuperscript{64} Statement taken from an interview in Washington, D.C. on February 15, 2001.
God gave us an island to live in and to produce out of it. We used to have a lot of sugarcane. We used to grow our own things… When the Navy came in they took our sugarcane, which I remember because I lived right in front of a sugarcane plantation. And they took that away from us.65

When asked what he would like to see happen with the land that was occupied by the Navy, another protester stated,

Once they leave, once we throw them out of here… I would like to put all of those scientists’ minds to work to see if we can find a way to get rid of the contamination… And that’s the first thing I would like to see, my land clean so that when I eat a grapefruit I can take the seeds and throw them on the ground and know there’s going to be a tree there. Even if it’s not there for me, but it’s going to be there for generations to come… That’s if the land is healthy; it’s not contaminated… So that’s what I would like to see, my land healthy again.66

Studies have indicated an elevated presence of heavy metals, sulfates, nitrates, and other chemicals in the soil and water of Vieques. The class action suit filed in the U.S. District Court charged the Navy with negligence in the handling of hazardous wastes in both the EMA and the NSAD under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (2000). Discussing the environmental degradation on the island, one protester proclaimed, “Here the land is contaminated. Everything is contaminated! When the Navy leaves, we will insist that they repair this [sic] damages, but we don’t trust them. They say that they have been good neighbors, but they have done nothing to earn our trust.”67

When speaking about the popular support garnered by the current movement, one Vieques resident noted, “The difference now is that people know about the contamination.”68

Health

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65 Statement taken from an interview in Isabel Segunda on March 14, 2001.
In interviews and movement propaganda, health was projected as the main reason that the Navy should leave the island (Figure 4.2). This reflected the overarching discourse of the Vieques campaign, which promoted the view of the Navy’s activities as devastating the health of island residents. Movement leaders strategically deployed the rhetoric of health to address some of the more radical issues that they believe exist in Vieques. Health was emphasized by movement leaders not only because there seemed to be a connection between the Navy’s use of Vieques as a bombing range and high disease rates for island residents, but also because the issue of health had broad appeal. Rather than articulating dissatisfaction and frustration with the Navy through the political language of independence, which may have alienated a large percentage of the general population, leaders shifted the campaign’s rhetoric to the health of island residents.

The issue of health was only incorporated into the Vieques Libre campaign in its most recent manifestation, yet it became the dominant topic when people discussed Vieques. The rhetoric of health emerged for two reasons. In the 1990s several epidemiological studies were conducted by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and by faculty from the University of Puerto Rico. They discovered ostensibly high rates of diseases such as asthma and cancer on the island. In addition, following the death of David Sanes, the Navy was forced to admit the use of less-conventional weaponry, such as napalm, Agent Orange, and depleted uranium bullets, all of which may act as carcinogenic agents; the Navy previously had denied the use of these types of weaponry during their training exercises in Vieques (Owens, 1999; Mullenneaux, 2000; Santos, 2000; Vieques Solidarity Network, 2001; U.S. District Court, 2000). A New York based activist stated,

Before that the Navy would always pooh-pooh this cancer stuff and there’s none of this, but the evidence is so overwhelming right now and
now with the depleted uranium issue. I mean, I saw a tank, that had been shot with depleted uranium bullets and it’s like, it’s almost science fiction because you see the outskirts of like a star where the bullet hit and then it sort of melted everything away…

A protester who has lived on Vieques since childhood recalled the use of Agent Orange, “You could see it, but people thought it was for killing the mosquitoes. Now a lot of people are sick from it. Before they didn’t know about the chemicals or the health problems.” Activists coupled the studies and the new information from the Navy with the death of Sanes to portray life on Vieques as unsafe (Figures 4.3 & 4.4). One organization’s informational handout directly states “The people of Vieques are in danger!” (United for Vieques, 2000).

A comparative study of heart defects found that 49 of the 50 research subjects living on Vieques had an enlarged pericardium and more than three-fourths have valve defects; the combination of these defects correlates with vibroacoustic disease, a syndrome caused by repeated exposure to loud noises (Becker, 2001; Brown, 2001). Also, activists noted the psychological stress of living on an island that is used as a bombing range. Movement participants cited higher than average rates of asthma, cancer, elevated blood pressure, heart disease, kidney problems, and diabetes (CPRDV, 2001a; Haase, 2000; Mullenexa, 2000; Owens, 1999; Ruiz, J., 2000; ViequesLibre.com, 2000b). A leaflet distributed by the Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques lists the ways in which the Navy affects islanders’ health:

Alta incidencia de cáncer; alta mortalidad infantil; alta incidencia de enfermedades pulmonares; alta mortalidad por diabetes, enfermedades del corazón, enfermedades del hígado; daños en el sistema cardiovascular, posible alta incidencia del syndrome de vibroacústica. (CPRDV, 2001a)

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69 Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 9, 2001.
71 The control population in Ponce, Puerto Rico showed no of these defects.
Activists and environmentalists directly connected these debilitating and potentially life-threatening health issues with the Navy’s bombing of Vieques, noting the high concentration of dangerous chemicals and substances released during training exercises. Many activists asserted that these chemicals traveled not only through the food chain and water system, but also by winds that blow from the eastern tip of the island where the LIA was located towards the west, where the population lives (Delfin, 2001; Mullenneaux, 2000; United for Vieques, 2000; U.S. District Court, 2000; Vieques Solidarity Network, 2001; Vieques Support Campaign, 1999). Many of the contaminants in the soil and water in the EMA are proven factors in the development of several diseases exhibited by the Viequense population (U.S. District Court, 2000).

A study released in 1999 by the Puerto Rican Department of Health noted an exceptionally high rate of cancer on Vieques in the 1990s. The death rate from cancer in Vieques was 20% higher than the rate on Isla Grande, and the incidence of cancer was 26.9% higher (Zavala-Segarra, 1999). One movement supporter in San Juan concluded that the Navy should leave Vieques because of “[Lasalud (The health). The children with cancer. There is too much cancer. It is really sad. Such a high percentage of people have cancer compared to Puerto Rico, to the world.” In his testimony to Congress, Governor Roselló led his discussion of health with the statistics on cancer, and the Puerto Rican Legislature appropriated funds to investigate the cause of the high rates (Navarro, 1999; Puerto Rico State Department, 1999). These figures became the central talking point when movement participants discussed health on the island; nearly every pamphlet that addresses Vieques health prominently displayed the 26.9% rate, and cancer became the leading example of how the Navy was “responsible for the health crisis on

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the island” (CPRDV, 2001b). One New York activist summarized the significance of cancer to the Vieques movement:

> These people are living in a sandwich where the bombing range is here and the fallout goes right over them to the western area, every day, every day. They’re breathing that stuff in. The kids are getting sick. Their parents are getting cancer. They’re getting cancer. And some people have gotten onboard just because they’ve been so shocked: how can our government allow this to go on?\textsuperscript{73}

Viequenses often enumerated the cancer cases surrounding them, and at least one person that I interviewed was diagnosed with the disease. He summarized his experience with the Navy by saying, “Now at 73, I’m tired. I’m sick. And I am still fighting against the Navy.”\textsuperscript{74}

**Human rights**

In speaking about the Navy’s activities on Vieques, protesters often stated that the situation was “a matter of basic human rights” (Haase, 2000), and they referred to several different aspects of the Navy’s relationship to Viequenses to explain their stance.

Participants sometimes mentioned that Navy’s presence created a context of violence for families and children. Because they were surrounded by Navy land used to house weapons and to practice using them, some island residents felt that they were under siege or living in a war zone (Figures 4.5 & 4.6). Five of my interview subjects were teachers, and they noted that many island children expressed fear that they or their families would be injured or killed if there was another accident. This was especially pronounced during training periods when jets flew over the towns and the bombs were heard and felt as they detonated. One informant explained these periods of insecurity for island residents:

> How many times [are] the children of Vieques studying in their classroom and they have to stop because of the bombing? How many times do they

\textsuperscript{73} Statement taken from an interview in New York City on February 9, 2001.

\textsuperscript{74} Statement taken from an interview in Isabel Segunda, Vieques, Puerto Rico on March 15, 2001.
have to stop because the jets keep going… over their schools?… How many times does an accident happen where a bomb has been dropped in the civilian area?75

When explaining the history of the Navy’s presence in Vieques, movement participants invoked the language of repression, violence, and abuse (Figure 5.3). They specifically referred to the harassment of women in the 1950s and 1960s and the state sponsored persecution of movement leaders, especially fishermen. One woman who grew up in Vieques recalled the violent atmosphere in Vieques: “When it was getting dark we had to lock our doors because they [the sailors] would start drinking, and they would start going looking for the senoritas in their homes. I’m not talking about… 20 or 30 soldiers. This is in the hundreds; hundreds and hundreds of soldiers all over.”76 Another woman, who was a child in the 1950s, labeled the atmosphere in Vieques during this time period as “psychologically exhausting.”77 One man who remembered fighting the sailors as a teenager simply stated, “They abused the people of Vieques.”78

The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court referenced threats made by U.S. government and Navy officials to Vieques and the Commonwealth regarding previous protests. These included retaliatory actions such as pulling economic support from the Puerto Rican government, the closing of Roosevelt Roads Naval Base (which employed a large number of Isla Grande residents and supported the local economy), and the withdrawal of political support for either increased autonomy or a more complete incorporation into the U.S., depending upon the political leadership in Puerto Rico. The lawsuit also noted the dehumanizing and disrespectful language that the Navy leadership used to describe Viequenses to their subordinates; in one case they commented that

75 Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 10, 2001.
76 Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 10, 2001.
sailors should “be on constant guard around Viequenses” whom they describe as “thieves and uncivilized” (U.S. District Court, 2000: 29).

These sentiments and actions by government officials continued through this manifestation of the movement. Since the inception of the recent protests, Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma consistently threatened to close Roosevelt Roads if the Vieques training range was closed. He also entertained the idea of issuing Vieques an autonomous status more completely controlled by the U.S. and called Puerto Ricans “near-sighted, ill-informed, and ungrateful” (Quoted in Mullenneaux, 2000: 80; Younes, 2001).

Many movement participants believed this political manipulation was part of a racist policy of colonialism by the United States. They considered the people of Vieques as hostages on their island and frequently framed the discussion by referencing other repressed peoples or groups. For example, one New York participant compared the Viequenses to the American Indians:

> The people that have stayed [in Vieques] are the people that have said this is our land. We are not going to leave. It’s like when you take the indigenous communities and… forced them from their land. [The government] took everything away from them to push them out. But they said no. We are so connected to this land that nobody’s going to make us move. That’s what has been the history of the indigenous community in the United States. That same thing is happening in Vieques. ⁷⁹

Because of past plans to expropriate the entire island of Vieques and resettle the population, other protesters employed more extreme language (Figure 4.7). They believed the high disease rates demonstrated another attempt by the Navy to abolish the municipality of Vieques. One activist based in New York articulated this view:

> The accidents, the genocide, and then what I… personally call a death sentence to the municipality of Puerto Rico, of Vieques. When I say a death sentence it is because… there’s so much contamination that people

⁷⁹ Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 11, 2001.
are actually dying. It’s a genocide also. So it’s actually knowingly carrying out a death sentence to a municipality… You know the contamination could only come from one source, and this has to be the training weapons they use in this area… Knowing that these highly contaminated weapons that they are using… are actually killing. And it’s slow and painful and it’s a cruel death. It’s a very cruel death. And [the Navy] keeps on training.\textsuperscript{80}

Another Puerto Rican activist passionately declared, “Beyond any reasonable doubt we have proven that what they [are] doing is carrying out a genocide against our people. And genocide is a crime against humanity.”\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{80} Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 10, 2001.
\textsuperscript{81} Statement taken from an interview in Monte Carmelo, Vieques on March 12, 2001.
Political Determination

Puerto Rico’s political status is closely linked to the identity of Puerto Ricans, both in the Commonwealth itself and in the mainland United States. Enrique Fernandez-Toledo, Senior Policy Advisor to Congressman Luis Gutierrez of Illinois, summarized that sentiment:

When it comes to how people feel about what Puerto Rico is, who they are, and what is their relationship…at an emotional level… with the United States, there is no doubt that the majority of Puerto Ricans today feel there is a relationship of them and us. … It is not a relationship of them, the enemy, and us, the good people. I’m talking about the same way that you feel about England. It’s them and us. It’s [that] the British are the British and we are the Americans. It’s not [that] they are the enemy. It’s just [that] they’re different. Or we are different than them.\(^{82}\)

Previously, the status question fractured the Puerto Rican population into different camps with very different political views. However, the issue of Vieques united these factions with a common cause, and in the process, reinforced a collective identity for Puerto Ricans. One Puerto Rican activist noted, “There is a consensus to put aside the political status and say that this is not about the independence of Puerto Rico. This is about peace for Vieques.”\(^{83}\)

For many participants, even those that did not favor an independent Puerto Rico, the relationship between the Navy and Vieques was a salient example of the ambiguous and somewhat awkward relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. It demonstrated the difference in citizenship status of Puerto Ricans, who cannot vote in Presidential elections and do not have voting representation in Congress, from those of other Americans. A Puerto Rican lobbyist in Washington, D.C. explained,


\(^{83}\) Statement taken from an interview at Campamento Justicia Y Paz, Vieques, Puerto Rico, on March 1, 2001.
One reason that I’m involved is that the right out disrespect that this nation… is [showing] this small island of 9,000 people [by bombing] under the pretext that it serves the national security interest. I don’t see them doing that in other parts of the United States… It indicates that our relationship with the United States is somewhat lopsided. That it’s not one that is based on respect or equality. It is… colonial and that is very evident in what’s occurring in Vieques at this moment. The vast majority of Viequenses do not want the Navy there.\(^84\)

Independence activists labeled Vieques as “the epitome of U.S. colonialism.”\(^85\) One activist summarized the significance of Vieques to the Independence Party: “Vieques is just a miniature Puerto Rico… It represents everything the main island is struggling for. It’s just on a microcosm [sic] level. And so if they can get it, if they can be free, then the rest [of Puerto Rico]…can be free.”\(^86\) Another activist openly connected the Vieques campaign to the Puerto Rican independence movement:

What Vieques has done is it has strengthened the position of independence. It has strengthened independence. Because those who advocate an increased relationship with the United States, which is really a covert form of advocating colonialism, have taken a serious look as to the source of everything that has been revealed of how the Navy’s presence in Vieques. So, for the Puerto Rican masses to feel resentment towards the Navy this automatically reflects itself on how they view the relationship with the United States. So it brings up the question of what is the cause and effect of the U.S. Navy’s presence in Vieques. You have to have colonialism in order for that to go on. And that’s precisely what’s been revealed.\(^87\)

Thus, for a section of the movement, Vieques was a symbol of the struggle for an independent Puerto Rico. However, in the most mainstream segments of the Vieques movement, expression of this stance was generally diminished. As one activist explained, “Nobody really wants to talk about there being a relationship to the status of Puerto Rico

\(^{85}\) Statement taken from an interview on the Lower East Side, New York City, February 9, 2001.
\(^{87}\) Statement taken from an interview on the Lower East Side, New York City, February 9, 2001.
and the Navy’s presence here. But there is. They just don’t want to talk about it because they want everybody from all of the different parties to support the Vieques cause.”  

The other political parties in Puerto Rico also used Vieques to highlight the vague political status held by the Commonwealth. A New York activist explained, “So on the one hand Puerto Rico is part of the United States when it’s convenient. And when it is also convenient to use depleted uranium weapons Puerto Rico all of the sudden [it] is not … within the jurisdiction of U.S. territories.”  

In interviews with the American press, Governor Roselló, a supporter of incorporating Puerto Rico as the 51st state, emphasized that Puerto Ricans are American citizens. He and other protesters maintained that the Navy would never use other areas in the United States as it uses Vieques because the Congressional delegations representing those areas would not allow it (Owens, 1999). One Viequense described this feeling of impotence to a *New York Times* reporter: “Nobody would allow this in the United States. I don’t have a problem with the Navy, but it seems illogical to me that they conduct exercises so close to citizens. To them, we’re cockroaches” (Quoted in Navarro, 1999). Demonstrations about Vieques allowed Puerto Ricans to shape American policy to meet their demands in a way that they could not through conventional political pathways.

**Examining the Issues**

In examining the variety of locations of the actors in the Vieques network and comparing them to the variety of topics incorporated into discourse of the movement, my overarching conclusion was that nearly all participants incorporated the topics of health, environment, human rights, and politics in their discussions, although individuals tended

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89 Statement taken from an interview on the Lower East Side, New York City on February 9, 2001.
to emphasize one topic over the others. For example, one New York activist described the situation in Vieques by employing references to colonialism, health, and the environment:

Because without the colonial relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican government and the Puerto Rican people would have a say about the military bases and what the military could or could not do in their country… Within Vieques the main issue is one of survival for the people of Vieques and the people of Puerto Rico: Survival from cancer, from contamination, destruction of the environment. [It’s about] their right to develop an economy that meets the needs of the Viequenses and not meets the needs of the U.S. military.  

Within the broad array of movement participants and discourse, there were trends that demonstrated how social, geographic, and political locations influenced the movement’s discourse.

The interviews demonstrated a connection between the more tangible issues of health and the environment and between the more abstract issues of human rights and politics. This is especially pronounced for the people who emphasized the health of island residents; for the vast majority of them the issue of secondary importance was the environment (Figure 4.8). They articulated the causality between a polluted environment and degraded health.

The impacts environmentally are obvious, and they’ve pretty much become common knowledge. The air in Vieques is contaminated… There not any longer any trees in Vieques… The soil blowing into the town is toxic. The waters used to be one of the greatest places for fishing… And, of course, that has had an impact on the health situation.

One activist in New York, whose family lives in Vieques, commented on the connection between cancer and environmental toxins: “Vieques people are dying of cancer right and left. My brother’s wife just died of cancer. Two children were born with cancer… It’s

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90 Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 9, 2001.
strange that they are born with cancer, which means probably it’s… because the food and the air." For those who cited the environment as the most important factor in their participation, the connection between health and the environment was also emphasized. Because of the link between these issues, movement participants generally united them, pushing the movement to include demands that the Navy not only evacuate Vieques, but also that it rehabilitates the polluted environment so that island residents could live in “peace and health” (Figure 4.12). A conversation with two elementary school teachers about how they would like to see the struggle in Vieques conclude yielded this response:

Woman A: Oh, number one in priority. They gotta leave. The Marines got [sic] to leave.
Woman B: Y limpiar, limpiar el area este.93
Woman A: Clean up the damage that they have done94

The less tangible issues of politics and human rights were associated for many activists (Figure 4.9). Individuals who used the language of politics to describe Vieques tend to support this rhetoric by emphasizing violations of human rights in Puerto Rico and Vieques. However, many activists considered Vieques solely a political issue relegating the health, environmental, and human rights issues to symptoms of the politics of colonialism. For example, a non-Puerto Rican New Yorker stated, “You can make a list of the other problems, but the root of it is a process whereby one country takes over another one and tells it what to do. And… does anything it wants to without addressing the people.”95

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93 This translates to “And clean, clean the east area.”
95 Statement taken from an interview on the Lower East Side, New York City on February 9, 2001.
Cultural production is dependent upon the different “locations” of a culture’s participants; this is especially pronounced in the case of a movement like the Vieques campaign that crosses national borders where actors bring different life experiences and perspectives with their participation. Locations are the spaces that individuals and phenomena inhabit, such as geographic area, political affiliation, and social position. The locations of actors influence, but do not determine, individual and collective identity, as well as the trajectory and momentum of the social movements to which the actors belong. Actors can maneuver within locations and the parameters of both the “local-scapes” and the “global-scapes” influencing these movements (Appadurai, 1991; Brosius, 1999b; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997a; Marcus, 1995; Peters, 1995).96

For individual activists in the Vieques campaign, many of these locations overlapped. For example, one interview subject spent her childhood on the island, but moved to New York City during her adolescence. Though she still resides in New York for most of the year, she returns to a house she owns on Vieques periodically, hoping to relocate permanently upon her retirement. She organized a group of activists in New York City who focused upon improving the physical and psychological health of the island’s children. Several of her family members have died of cancer or have heart problems.97 Her husband was involved in the Vieques movement in the 1960s and was labeled a Communist by local political officials.98 This variety of locations affected her decisions of when and how to participate in the movement.

96 The terms in quotation are based upon Appadurai’s “ethnoscape,” defined in his 1991 article “Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology” as “the landscape of persons who make up the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and persons constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of and between nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (192).
97 Protesters link the high incidence of both of these diseases on Vieques to the practices of the Navy.
98 This was a common tactic of U.S. and Puerto Rican officials and agencies to discredit their political rivals during the tense years of the Cold War.
The location of an individual within a social network affects his or her perception of group structure and function, identity, and classification of issues or objects. For this research, interview subjects were chosen because of their location within the general Vieques protest network as well as their social and geographic locations. Prior to my research, I hypothesized that those individuals interviewed on Vieques would employ a fairly strict discourse of environmental and health degradation as their basis for demonstrating against the Navy and that those protesters interviewed off of the island would focus on the broader issues of human and civil rights. Within my first few days of interviews I realized that this was a rather simplistic notion, one that ignored the variety of other locations in which the campaign was situated.

To engage this plurality of locations in the Vieques campaign, I designed my research as a multi-sited ethnography. As changes in the world system have altered “the locations of cultural production,” many anthropologists have shifted their research from traditional ethnography, rooted in a single geographic site to a more encompassing, multi-sited ethnography where the researcher travels to several geographic sites “to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space” (Marcus, 1995: 96). In his article on this trend in anthropology Marcus continues,

Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography. (1995: 105)

While traditional ethnography situates cultures, people, and phenomena to a single location within a bounded social and geographic order, multi-sited ethnography acknowledges the shifting foci of cultural production in the modern, transnational world.

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99 This phrase is taken from Marcus 1995.
(Brosius, 1999b; Marcus, 1995; Rosaldo, 1993[1989]). While this reference to multiple sites for ethnography refers primarily to geographically situated phenomena, multi-sited ethnography may explore multiple social and cultural locations as well.

Traditionally social scientists have assumed cultures to be fixed in a specific geographic location. However, in recent decades this assumption has loosened, with location now considered to be a broad term that encompasses more than simple geography. People share identities, values, and culture across geographic and political boundaries, and anthropologists have responded to this by altering their traditional approach of place-based ethnography. Within the web of shared cultural experience, the identity and community are malleable; individual actors belong to multiple communities and often claim multiple identities (Appadurai, 1991; Brosius, 1999a; Brosius, 1999b; Brosius, 1999c; Escobar, 2000; Goode, 1998; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Lavie & Swedenburg, 1996; Marcus, 1995; Malkki, 1997a; Peters, 1997; Rosaldo, 1993[1989]; Seidman, 2000; Watts, 1999; Zerner, 1999).

Multi-sited ethnography is especially important in research of global activism because communities of activists are not necessarily based in specific geographic spaces. For instance, in the Vieques movement the connections between geography, residence, and ethnicity were complex. Interviews that were conducted in Vieques were not limited to Viequenses, but rather included individuals from Long Island, New York and other areas of Puerto Rico (Figure 4.10). While the majority of interviews were conducted on Vieques, the geographic location of actors shifted when considering individuals' areas of residence. For example, two of the movement participants that lived in Vieques during the campaign had actually moved to the island so that they could more fully participate in the protests on the Navy lands. Moreover, the geographic location of actors did not
necessarily correlate with ethnicity (Figures 4.11 & 4.12). This was especially prevalent in the ethnically Puerto Rican population; while a large number of interview participants labeled themselves as ethnically Puerto Rican, they resided in the United States so their ethnicity and interview location and location of residence differed.

Moreover, the virtualscape\textsuperscript{100} of the Internet proved to be an invaluable “space” for the Vieques campaign, with numerous listservs and websites dedicated to evicting the Navy from the island.\textsuperscript{101} Although much action occurred in defined geographic spaces, such as rallies in New York or political lobbying efforts in Washington, D.C., a community of Vieques activists flourished on the undefined space of the Internet. For example, on June 13, 2001 the Electronic Disturbance Theater and the Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques\textsuperscript{102} organized a “Virtual Sit-In” in protest of the bombing of the range scheduled for the following day. Through email exchanges and solicitations, these two groups organized over 1,300 people to contact the U.S. Navy’s recruitment website with the message “Que se Vaya… la Marina…de Vieques, Coño!”\textsuperscript{103} in the online enlistment form. A listserv message declaring the action successful noted, “Why a Virtual Sit-In? To support the demand that the US Navy cease its war games and leave Vieques in peace. To add our virtual bodies to the presence of the physical bodies of Puertorican [sic] activists who will occupy the bombing ranges of la Isla Neña” (Vieques Libre, June 12, 2001; Vieques Libre, June 14, 2001). Any individual with Internet access could act in support of the Vieques community despite geographic or political separation that would have prevented it only a decade earlier. The activists were not a community created through geographic proximity but rather through shared ideology.

\textsuperscript{100} Based upon Appadurai’s “Global Ethnoscapes” (1991)
\textsuperscript{101} Some of the most accessible sites include www.viequeslibre.com, www.redbetances.net, and www.palfrente.tripod.com.
\textsuperscript{102} The Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques, a Vieques-based grassroots organization.
\textsuperscript{103} “Get out of Vieques bitch!”
The advent of the Internet does not render the concept of space obsolete, however. The geographic spaces that Vieques inhabits shape the trajectory of the movement. As Gupta and Ferguson note,

In the pulverized space of postmodernity, space has not become irrelevant; it has be reterritorialized in a way that does not conform to the experience of space that characterized the era of high modernity. It is this that forces us to reconceptualize fundamentally the politics of community, solidarity, identity, and cultural difference. (1992: 9, emphasis original)

Though experience is no longer spatially confined because of increased access to transportation and improved communication across political boundaries, people inhabit specific geographic spaces that shape their worldview. Individuals must be able to see the world “bifocally,”

\footnote{John D. Peters coined this term in his 1997 article “Seeing Bifocally: Media, Place, Culture.”}
to maneuver in both the “localscape” and the “globalscape” at the same time (Castells, 1997; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Marcus, 1995; Peters, 1997; Rosaldo, 1993[1989]).

For a more complete understanding of cultural phenomena, an ethnographer must examine these local spaces and their relation to the global landscape (Brosius, 1999b; Gupta, 1997; Marcus, 1995). Although anthropologists traditionally have studied people in “faraway” places, little attention has been paid to the actual physical space that these people inhabit. Most social science work considers space as a natural background to culture, with definitive borders and ruptures. Thus, history and time generally are privileged over space (Boyarin, 1994; Foucault, 1984; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Gupta, 1997; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Malkki, 1997a; Soja, 1989). Place is assumed and therefore generally remains unanalyzed in the discipline.

\footnote{Appadurai, 1991}
\footnote{This issue has been addressed recently by anthropologists and human geographers.}
Yet, the meanings of specific spaces are culturally delineated. An activist explained the importance of the island Vieques to the Puerto Rican population:

We have a nickname for Vieques. It is called La Isla Neña… It is the Girl Child Island. And you know, Puerto Ricans, we all think it’s our daughter… I mean every part of Puerto Rico is dear to Puerto Ricans including Vieques. I don’t know how to explain [it] to you. It’s a member of the family.  

This sentiment is not limited to the Puerto Ricans living within the borders of the Commonwealth, but is shared among Puerto Ricans scattered throughout the world. Divisions such as national boundaries are definitively ‘unnatural’ and laden with power. Foucault notes,

Space is fundamental in any exercise of power… I think it is somewhat arbitrary to try to dissociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand. Each can only be understood through each other. (1984: 242, 246)

Thus, culture is dependent upon both space and time; cultural phenomena occur in particular places at particular times and as such can only be understood through an examination that includes both history and geography (Boyarin, 1994; Brosius, 1999b; Foucault, 1984; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Malkki, 1997b; Peters, 1996; Watts, 1999).

The geographic location of interviews did relate directly to the discourse of the movement. The issue of health was emphasized more heavily on Vieques while the issues of human rights and politics were more important to movement participants in Puerto Rico and the United States (Figure 4.13). This reflected the proximity to the issue of health for protesters in Vieques; when movement supporters are on the island itself they interact with Viequenses that are sick or have sick friends and family members. Moreover, compared to the other geographic areas where the movement has an active

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presence, Vieques is a relatively small space, and it is filled with signs and symbols reinforcing the connection between islanders’ poor health and the Navy’s bombing range (Figures 4.14 & 4.15).

The connection between the ethnic ‘location’ or participants and discourse was even more pronounced (Figure 4.16). As a group, those people that identified themselves as Viequenses, even if they lived in New York, almost unanimously stressed the significance of the health crisis in Vieques as the reason that the Navy should leave the island. Many of the Viequenses interviewed for this research have sick family members, and at least one was currently struggling against cancer. Most of these people’s families have interacted directly with the Navy, and stories about these interactions have become part of their families’ oral histories. Because of studies correlating the Navy’s maneuvers with serious health problems, Viequenses believed that they were experiencing a health crisis and that this was the overwhelming reason that the Navy should leave. The movement was a personal crusade for the Viequenses and one that carried urgency because of the serious health consequences for them and their families. One Viequense woman expressed this sentiment from her apartment in New York, stating

We have nothing to lose anymore. If we don’t have health, what else do we have? Health itself is life. And if they are taking our life away, what else to we have to lose? So right now we have nothing to lose and we’ll keep on fighting. Because the one thing they will not destroy is our dignity, our pride of who we are and what we are. And we are very proud of being Puerto Ricans and we are very proud of being Viequenses. And that’s something that [I am] committed not to let it happen, to disappear.

Americans and Puerto Ricans tended to relegate health to a lesser role in the movement. Overall they locate the situation on Vieques within the global dialog on human rights. One Puerto Rican activist visiting Vieques explained,

\[\text{Statement taken from an interview on the Lower East Side, New York City on February 10, 2001.}\]
This is about peace for Vieques. And what that means is a couple of things. It means that people from all economic, social strata, ideological, religious, sexual orientations, from all types of backgrounds, lifestyles, opinions have put that aside and said “Okay… this is about basic human rights, the violation of human rights. So we’re going to work together. We’re going to form different coalitions. We’re going to organize and we’re just going to support the Viequenses in the struggle to keep the Navy out!”

The health problems in Vieques are considered one factor in the overall list of alleged human rights abuses suffered by Viequenses. Many also cite the health problems on Vieques as an example and consequence of the political limbo in which Puerto Rico is situated. Americans and Puerto Ricans involved in the Vieques campaign may have been attracted to the movement because of the health crisis, but they ultimately are involved because they see this within the larger context of human rights. Many of them have been active in other human rights and political movements, and Vieques is another cause that they can support. One activist explained her involvement was an extension of her work with the Puerto Rican community in New York:

> Since I graduated from college in ‘91 I’ve basically been an activist in the Puerto Rican community. So whatever issues are of concern particularly to this community, I’ve become involved in. So for the past ten years that’s what I’ve been doing. You know, I’ve been working really strongly on this issue. I’ve worked in non-profits that worked with the Puerto Rican community. I’ve worked in a youth development organization that worked with Puerto Rican youth. I’ve worked in another organization that did employment training for the Puerto Rican community. So that’s been really my area of focus and that’s what I’ve been wanting to do. So, whenever an issue comes up, I get involved in whatever way I can.

Thus, the center of discourse was influenced by ethnicity because it reflected an individual activist’s personal proximity to the issue of Vieques as well as his or her personal experience with the U.S. Navy.

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Politically, the issue of Vieques also was realized in a variety of locations. Many activists viewed Vieques as a symbol of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico, and they became involved as an extension of their affiliation with one of the Puerto Rican independence parties. Participation in this movement was often an expression of Puerto Rican identity, especially for people of Puerto Rican descent that reside outside of the Commonwealth; for many, this is a salient expression of their membership in the Puerto Rican community. Within the national political scene of the United States, Vieques was located in a landscape of increasing Latino power and as such, became a political issue not only for Puerto Ricans but for the greater Hispanic-American community as well.\textsuperscript{110} As one elderly activist stated, “Now we have power.”\textsuperscript{111}

The ways in which actors’ locations affected and reflected discourse had significant consequences for the Vieques Libre movement, especially as it worked to portray a united front against the Navy. The importance of the diversity of movement’s discourse laid in the Navy’s exploitation of tension in the movement’s diverse membership base. The wide array of participants in the movements considered themselves a community united against a powerful adversary. As they connected with each other across geographic and traditional social boundaries to form a social network, individual activists adapted the movement’s discourse to their personal worldview. The struggle for the movement as a whole was not just to evict the Navy from Vieques, but also to maintain a consistent message and strategy among its participants that were spread across the world.

\textsuperscript{110} The rise of Latino political power is associated with the rise in Latino populations in the United States. In the 2000 census, Hispanics constituted 12.5\% of the population in the U.S; Puerto Ricans living in the U.S., outside of Puerto Rico, accounted for 1.2\% of the population (Greico & Cassidy, 2001; Guzman, 2001).

\textsuperscript{111} Statement taken from an interview in Isabel Segunda, Vieques, Puerto Rico on March 15, 2001.
Figure 4.1: Geographic Location of Interviews
Figure 4.2: Primary Classification of Vieques. When speaking about the Navy’s activities in Vieques, health was the dominant theme for interview subjects.
Figure 4.3: Symbolic Cemetery at Camp García. The crosses represented the Viequenses that were killed in exchanges with the Navy or by the pollution caused by the Navy’s practices.
Figure 4.4: Sticks and Stones: This sign was posted along the main road traveling between Isabel Segunda and Esperanza. It was one in a series of signs.
Figure 4.5: Local Artwork. The artwork was created by the owner and hangs in his bar in Esperanza.
Figure 4.6: Local Artwork. The artwork was created by the owner and hangs in his bar in Esperanza. The author of the poem is unknown.
Figure 4.7: Marina Asesina. It reads, “Leave Navy, assassin of Vieques.” Similar signs lined the roads in Vieques and in Puerto Rico similar graffiti was painted in San Juan and along roads.
Figure 4.8: Health and Environment. For the interview subjects that primarily employed the rhetoric of health, the issue of secondary importance was the environment. A few participants almost exclusively concentrated on the issue of health.
Figure 4.9: Politics and Human Rights. The people that used the language of politics to describe Vieques either claimed the issue of human rights as the next important factor to evict the Navy or they held that politics is the sole reason for the Navy to leave, with the other factors being symptomatic of the political condition of Puerto Rico.
Figure 4.10: Comparison of Interview Location, Current Residence, and Permanent Residence.
Figure 4.11: Percentage of Interview Subjects By Ethnicity.
Figure 4.12: Ethnicity Vs. Interview Location. The geographic location for interviews did not necessarily reflect the ethnicity of interview subjects. This was especially prevalent for Puerto Ricans. For these figures, those individuals that identified themselves as Viequense were not included in the Puerto Rican population, and Puerto Ricans who live in the United States were not included in the American population.
Figure 4.13: Geographic Location and Discourse. A comparison of the geographic location of interviews with the classification of issues reflects the significance of health to those people interviewed on the island compared to the emphasis of human rights for others.
Figure 4.14: Paz y Salud. This painting, reading “Peace and Health for Vieques” hangs on the outer gates of Camp García. The artist relocated to Vieques to more fully participate in the movement’s civil disobedience on the bombing range.
Figure 4.15: The Big Bad Wolf
Figure 4.16: Ethnicity and Discourse: A comparison between ethnicity and discourse displays the association between those people who view themselves as Viequenses and their emphasis on health. For this chart, the category of Puerto Ricans includes people of Puerto Rican descent that live in the United States but does not include Viequenses. Americans are those individuals who are not of Puerto Rican or Viequense descent.
Chapter 5

**Unidos Para Vieques: A Multi-Dimensional Movement**

_We see no separation between the struggle to get the U.S. Navy out of Vieques and let’s say the struggle against racism and police brutality here in the United States… Vieques is yet another manifestation of oppression._

Carlitos Rovira, New York City based activist

Like many social movements, the campaign to evict the U.S. Navy from Vieques was situated within the global/local dialectic that encompasses the contemporary experience. The campaign spanned geographic and social boundaries, creating a sense of community among a set of activists scattered throughout the world. The Navy accused the participants of manipulating the situation on Vieques for their own political agenda of an independent Puerto Rico, but many were not independence activists or even ethnically Puerto Rican. The Navy challenged the legitimacy of their participation in the affairs of the small island, raising issues of localness and identity. Activists openly acknowledged and embraced these issues; as the breadth of the movement’s base widened, the activists felt their case against the Navy was strengthened. One New York based activist commented,

_We also have environmental people that are not Puerto Rican who will be concerned… and that’s good because you have… different people or you have different groups…. We have people that are concerned because of religious ideas or anti-military [ideas]. They want world peace. And you have people that are more [concerned] about the reef and the fish… And that’s cool. That’s not my idea of values, but some people are concerned about that. Some people are concerned about the problem of colonialism, imperialism… We have onboard different people for different reasons._

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112 Statement taken from an interview at CHARAS community center, New York City on February 9, 2001.

113 Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 12, 2001.
As the movement absorbed this expanding collection of activists, the diversity of the movement’s discourse broadened. Participants actively worked to maintain a common message in their campaign, often subjugating their primary goals to those of the campaign; this phenomenon was especially prevalent within the community of independence activists who supported the campaign.

When considering the Vieques movement, it is important to remember that “social movements must be understood in their own terms: namely, they are what they say they are. Their practices (and foremost their discursive practices) are their self-definition” (Castells, 1997: 69-70, emphasis original). In the case of Vieques, this translated into a tiered definition for the movement. First, the movement was defined by its internal rhetoric, which shifted because of strategic campaigning and internal politics. Individuals and groups that participated in the campaign had their own motives and goals that initiated their support and participation. Yet, despite the differences that existed within the movement, differences that were easily exploited by its opponents, the movement “was what it said it was:” a collection of activists who united to defend the people of a small Puerto Rican island who felt they were under economic, social, and environmental siege by the United States Navy. This was their common purpose and consistent message throughout their campaign, and participants often relegated their own motives for participation behind the discourse of unity.

**Discourse As Social Reality**

Community, identity, and location are interwoven cultural phenomena, each dependent upon and reflective of each other. Discourse reflects, creates, and reinforces all of these cultural manifestations, and any discussion of them must include an exploration
of discourse. Escobar succinctly summarizes the significance of discourse for ethnography:

> Poststructuralism focuses on the role of language in the construction of social reality: it treats language not as a reflection of ‘reality’ but as constitutive of it… Discourse… is the articulation of knowledge and power, of statements and visibilities, of the visible and the expressible. *Discourse is the process through which social reality inevitably comes into being.* (1996: 46, emphasis added)

Because of this monumental importance, an analysis of discourse provides insight into all of the aforementioned cultural phenomena.

> Discourse encompasses more than language; it includes signs, symbols, and silences (Escobar, 1996; Marcus, 1995; Rosaldo, 1993[1989]; Taussig, 1992). To attain any semblance of understanding of social relationships, structures, or articulations, an ethnographer must ask more than simply who is saying what. She must investigate the circumstances influencing these expressions and also consider what is not being expressed and why someone else is not expressing it. Silence does not simply exist; it is consciously created (Rosaldo, 1993[1989]; Taussig, 1992).

This is vital when studying new social movements because of their political nature. At one level, new social movements challenge the powerful silences created by hegemony. Yet within a movement, silence also exists as certain members’ voices and actions are frustrated by the whole. As independent groups ally themselves, the movement as a whole projects a distinctive discourse of unity of purpose. Yet, there can be a plurality of discourses within a movement, reflecting the various locations and identities of its individual members (Flores, 1993 [1990]; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Marcus, 1995; Tilly, 1994). In his discussion of multi-sited research, Marcus writes, “the persuasiveness of the broader field that any such ethnography maps and constructs is in its capacity to make connections through translations and tracings among distinctive
discourses from site to site” (1995: 100). In other words, a multi-sited ethnographic research project may examine how discourse varies from site to site and how this influences culture.\textsuperscript{114}

As the base of the Vieques campaign grows larger and more varied, the creation of a consistent and united message becomes exponentially more difficult. As Escobar noted in his presentation on anti-globalization movements at the 2000 American Anthropological Association meetings “No matter how seamless it might look at times, reality is the end product of an actor-network which has been put together after a lot of work.” The construction of this reality, this merging of identities, is infused with power dynamics, as some expressions of identity are projected while others are repressed (Boyarin, 1994; Brosius, 1999b; Calhoun, 1994; Escobar, 2000; Guidry, Kennedy, & Zald, 2000; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Mennell, 1994; Peteet, 2000; Ribot, 1996). Calhoun explains this with an example from the ‘gay rights’ movement in the United States (1994: 25-26):

Internal to the various identities on behalf of which political claims are made are various differentiated subgroups. Thus within the gay community there are gay men and lesbians, and many different sorts of communities of each. For identity politics to work, these must not all accentuate their differences but rather adopt a common frame of reference within which their unity is more salient.

The ways in which actors’ locations affected discourse had significant consequences for the Vieques Libre movement, especially as it worked to portray a united front against the Navy. The unity of the disparate groups engaged in the movement was a dominant theme for the participants, and the names of the groups supporting the Navy’s eviction reflected this: United for Vieques, Todo Puerto Rico con Vieques, Todo

\textsuperscript{114} Chapter Four provides a discussion of some of the connections between social and geographic location and the discourse of the Vieques campaign.
Nuevo York con Vieques, Todo El Barrio con Vieques, and the Vieques Solidarity Network. People frequently mentioned the union of the three political parties in Puerto Rico in fighting for a free Vieques. Historically, these parties agreed on very little, yet they united for the Vieques cause. There was also a very strong and active coalition of different religious organizations as well as a unification of different social groups that had very different agendas: Independistas, environmentalists, and Vieques residents. As one of my informants, a neighborhood activist in New York, expressed, “And then in terms of the solidarity with other people. That we’re not alone. And then that we join forces. And that strengthens the resistance to the Navy.”\textsuperscript{115} Another activist noted the strategic importance of a united front against the Navy: “A lot of people… have come to believe that in order to get a powerful and strong adversary force [against the Navy] on the island then we have to be united.”\textsuperscript{116}

Yet, within this unity, each group had its own agenda. While many people are involved in this cause with the sole intention of improving life on Vieques, others placed the struggle on Vieques in a larger context. Different groups located in different places with different membership bases used different language and advocated different actions to address the Navy’s practices in Vieques. Thus, the construction of the discourse of unity in the Vieques campaign was an active process that was based upon relationships between the diverse set of actors and the repression of some supporters’ voices. As a religious supporter of the movement expressed, “Everybody wants to stop the bombing. Everybody. But different organizations have different strategies.”\textsuperscript{117} For example, the commitment to non-violent and relatively non-confrontational action and the distancing

\textsuperscript{115} Statement taken from an interview in New York City on February 10, 2001.
\textsuperscript{116} Statement taken from an interview at Campamento Justicia y Paz, Vieques, Puerto Rico on March 12, 2001.
\textsuperscript{117} Statement taken from an interview in San Juan on March 26, 2001.
of the movement from the language of independence frustrated some more radical members of the independence movement; yet they currently have accepted this course of action in order to maintain the projected image of unity.

Collective identity is a fluid construction. The formation of a common frame of reference for a global movement requires that the dominant identities of some participants be ignored within the overall objective of the movement. Participant identities that are projected and those that are repressed may fluctuate depending on the particular situation. For instance, the leaders of the Vieques campaign often strategically emphasized the identity of one group of activists over another. When speaking to independence activists in New York City, leaders of the campaign stressed the relationship between Vieques and the colonial domination of Puerto Rico by the United States. However, when speaking to the popular press in the United States the movement dissociated itself from the independence movement, instead identifying the movement’s primary concern as the physical and psychological health of the local people of Vieques. As the movement continued to expand with the inclusion of a wider array of individuals attracted to the issue of health, the discourse of health was reinforced, and the movement could distance itself to some degree from the independence activists, even though they constituted a large portion of the movement’s support (Figure 5.1). One Viequense stated,

Before Sanes, everyone in the struggle was labeled as an Independista. Now it’s different. Now the people of Vieques have come together and realized that the Navy is killing us. There’s too much cancer… And right here we don’t have any factories or nothing to pollute there… So there’s no doubt about it’s coming from the Navy bombing Vieques.\textsuperscript{118}

This strategic deployment of discourse may cause friction in social movements because these discursive politics have concrete consequences, both for groups within a

\textsuperscript{118} Statement taken from an interview in Isabel Segunda, Vieques on March 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2001.
movement and for the established social order that may be challenged by that movement (Brosius, 1999c; Calhoun, 1994; Crain, 1997; Guidry, Kennedy, & Zald, 2000; Malkki, 1997b; Tilly, 1994). One activist expressed her frustration at the prevalence of the politics of independence in the community of Vieques supporters in New York City:

> And I know that the political people are going to take care of the political part of it but they’re overlooking the human rights. I mean, I feel like they’re just looking over that and they’re going into the politics of it, dealing with the politics rather than dealing with what’s needed right now… I think they’re fighting more for Independence and to get the Navy out [of Puerto Rico].

Calhoun notes that “[Identity politics] are struggles, not merely gropings; power partially determines outcomes and power relations are changed by the struggle” (1994: 21). A social movement must not only weave a coherent identity from its collective parts, but also must work to insure that identity predominates over the identities of the participating sub-groups. This does not mean that the identities of the sub-groups are extinguished, but rather that they become secondary within the movement itself. For example, a Puerto Rican Independista generally identifies himself or herself as working to achieve an independent Puerto Rico, but within the Vieques campaign he or she consciously subjugates that identity to one as a Vieques activist who also happens to be an Independista.

For the Vieques movement, each group within the campaign actively resigned its primary identity to the collective identity of the movement; only through this cooperation, with concessions made by all parties, could the movement act as a unified whole. Gupta and Ferguson comment on this phenomena (1997: 13): “We might better conceive of identity as a ‘meeting point’ – a point of suture or temporary identification –

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120 An exception to this may be the Vieques residents because their identity as ‘locals’ grants them a legitimacy that other activists may lack when viewed by individuals outside of the movement.
that constitutes and re-forms the subject so as to enable that subject to act” (emphasis added). A Puerto Rican activist visiting Vieques explained,

[The Vieques movement] created a space where people did a lot of networking who were doing individual political work in different municipal towns but were not in the same place... [Vieques] brings together people from, not just from Puerto Rico who are doing different political things - artists, writers, musicians, environmentalists - but it also brings people from the States, from South America, from Mexico, from Europe, from Africa, from Okinawa.\textsuperscript{121}

\textbf{Unity}

The appearance of unity was important to the Vieques campaign for several reasons. By demonstrating that it welcomed participation from such a diverse set of actors, the movement was able to recruit even more individuals to support its cause. In explaining the name of her organization, a New York based Viequense stated, “Why United for Vieques? United because it has no frontiers. It doesn’t have only one center of the community... Everybody’s welcome.”\textsuperscript{122} As more individuals and organizations supported the Vieques movement, they exposed their social networks to the cause and the support for the campaign grew. As the social breadth of the movement increased, the more difficult it was for the Navy to discount the Vieques campaign as a group of radical, anti-U.S. activists.

The heterogeneity that is inherent to many international social movements can be problematic. An alliance of several diverse groups may enrich a social movement with a multiplicity of perspectives, allowing for a wider base of participation and support. Yet, within the political web of a social movement, groups and individuals may feel their particular concerns are not adequately addressed or factions of the movement may

\textsuperscript{121} Statement taken from an interview at Campamento Justicia y Paz, Vieques, Puerto Rico on March 1, 2001.
\textsuperscript{122} Statement taken from an interview on the Lower East Side, New York City, February 10\textsuperscript{th}, 2001.
disagree about strategies and directions that the movement is taking. This leads to tension among the groups in the movement that could lead to its eventual disintegration. Opponent organizations may exploit these fragile alliances by magnifying the differences within coalitions. In an attempt to position groups against each other, opponents may accuse participants of manipulating a movement for their individual causes or question the authenticity of the participation of a particular group.

The issues of authenticity raised by opponents often reference issues of localness, labeling authentic participants as only those who reside in the contested geographic space (Brosius, 1999b; Brosius, 1999c; Forbes, 1999; Oates, 1995; Rabben, 1998). Forbes notes that “pointing out who is the ‘real’ local and who is not has become an important tool for opponents seeking to undermine these movements, an endeavor assisted at times by anthropologists also on the look-out for disingenuous identity claims” (cited in Brosius, 1999c: 195). In the postmodern landscape the classification of groups as legitimate or illegitimate stakeholders is difficult, if not impossible, and quite often is directed by political motivations (Bellah, 1983; Brosius, 1999c; Forbes, 1999; Malkki, 1993; Oates, 1992; Peters, 1996; Ribot, 1996; Rosaldo, 1993[1989]; Tilly, 1994; Watts, 1999; Wolfrum, 1998; Zerner, 1999). For example, one method used by the U.S. Navy against the Vieques campaign was to criticize the high percentage of non-island residents dedicated to the movement, generally labeling them as independence activists. By doing this, the Navy effectively discredited the Vieques campaign by identifying the movement as a group of political radicals manipulating the circumstances of an economically

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123 Issues of ‘authentic’ participation may also be raised from within a movement’s alliance.
124 Those who challenge the non-localness of movement participants may not be local themselves. The Navy may insist that the majority of the supporters of the Vieques campaign do not reside on the island and therefore should not have input on the future of the Navy’s presence there. At the same time, the Navy believes that it is a valid stakeholder on the island although it is not historically local either!
depressed island for their own political aims rather than as a group concerned with the social, economic, and physical health of island residents.

Because a large percentage of the Puerto Rican population in New York supports an independent Puerto Rico, the Navy manipulated the rhetoric of the Independistas to discredit the social justice and health issues on Vieques itself. Yet, the movement’s activities in New York were necessary in dissemination of information to the American public and garnering support for the eviction of the Navy within Congress. A non-Puerto Rican New York activist described the Navy’s tactics and his own uncertainty of the motives of some of the Vieques campaign’s leaders:

[The Navy will] say that this is a group taking advantage of the situation and that this really is not democratic because these people [the Viequenses] don’t want it… [The Navy will] point out that most of the protestors come from the outside. That’s kind of the issue down there… If [Vieques] were just an issue [where] the only people involved are the people down there [on the island], if it were just an issue of dropping bombs on the people and health impacting, I think [the U.S.] would say, or course it should stop. But obviously [the activists are] connecting with the bigger issue [of status]. So it gets very foggy, very foggy.125

Yet, if it had maintained a decidedly “local” base, the Vieques movement would not have been so successful in its protests against the Navy. Earlier manifestations of the campaign were composed primarily of residents of the island and did not gain the political power of the recent protests. While creating a target for criticism, the expansion of the campaign beyond the geographic borders of the island allowed the movement’s supporters the opportunity to achieve their goal of evicting the Navy. An activist insisted that the global Vieques campaign was built to support the Viequense population:

The bottom is the most solid because that’s what holds the whole thing [together]. And I feel that the base is the Viequenses. They’re the ones who basically started this. And you added up floors and each level represents different communities, different organizations, different people.

125 Statement taken from an interview in East Harlem, New York City on February 13, 2001.
from the world, from Puerto Rico, from whatever you want to interpret it… I would not be here if I didn’t feel it was the Viequenses who were [the base]… They feel that they are getting support from local government, from people around the world, and they appreciate that.\textsuperscript{126}

Thus, though it may lead to such insidious consequences as economic subjugation and environmental degradation, globalization also allows for an easier flow of images and improved communication. Globalization may assist traditionally underrepresented communities, such as the Viequense, in reaching larger audiences and gaining more prominence in the global arena. While it generally may favor Northern nations and corporations, globalization may also empower ‘local’ communities who frame their cause using global issues such as the environment and human rights (Appadurai, 1991; Brosius, 1999a; Brosius, 1999b; Brosius, 1999c; Escobar, 1995; Watts, 1999; Zerner, 1999).\textsuperscript{127}

In imagining strategies for local justice and empowerment, activists and analysts also need to take into account the ways in which communities seize and transform transnational movements into local opportunities, and, conversely, the ways in which transnational movements deploy representations of local realities on the national and international political stage. (Zerner, 1999:12)

These identity politics play a large role in the Vieques campaign because many activists living in the U.S. have referred to their participation in the campaign as an expression of their Puerto Rican identity.

\textbf{Identity in the Modern World}

Malkki observes that “to plot only ‘places of birth’ and degrees of nativeness is to blind oneself to the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imaging them” (1997a: 72). This is particularly relevant to refugee and immigrant populations, such as the Puerto Rican population in New York, whose

\textsuperscript{126} Statement taken from an interview at Campamento Justicia y Paz, Vieques, Puerto Rico on March 1, 2001.

\textsuperscript{127} The concept of localness will be discussed later in the chapter. Here it is used in the broadest sense of the term.
identities often reference homelands and nations (Appadurai, 1991; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Malkki, 1997a; Peteet, 2000). Gupta and Ferguson offer a cautionary statement: “We suggest that it is fundamentally mistaken to conceptualize different kinds of non- or supralocal identities (diasporic, refugee, migrant, national, and so forth) as spatial and temporal extensions of a prior, natural identity rooted in locality and community” (1997: 7). To equate the diasporic population’s identity to that of the “prior, natural identity” is naïve, denying the effect the diaspora has in shaping the group’s current identity. Nevertheless, one must acknowledge that these border zones where cultures and communities connect and intermingle are fertile areas of cultural production, places where these ‘natural’ identities encounter other cultural values, assimilating with some while disregarding others (Flores, 1993 [1985]; Flores, 1993 [1990]; Franco, 1993; Rosaldo, 1993[1989]). The identity of diasporic population is filled with memories of their homeland, even for those individuals who were born outside of that space. People continue traditions, reference the events and history of their previous community, and carry cultural values with them. They identify themselves with both their homeland and their new experience.

In the United States this phenomenon is referred to as ‘surfing the hyphen,’ alluding to the hyphen in ethnic identities in the U.S., such as Asian-American, Irish-American, Mexican-American, and so forth. This term references the experience of these as they identify themselves with their homeland and with American cultural values and norms. In this complicated fusion of identity, individuals are often not recognized as fully one or the other identity. Puerto Ricans living within the continental United States often face these challenges; ‘Nuyorican’, the label claimed by Puerto Ricans living in New York, expresses this identity dilemma – partially defined by their residence in New York
and partly defined by their Puerto Rican heritage (Flores, 1993 [1985]; Flores, 1993 [1990]). While much of the Puerto Rican community on the U.S. mainland identifies strongly with its island heritage, its affiliation with Puerto Rico is often challenged by both residents of the Commonwealth and people in the U.S. Flores explains the Nuyorican experience in terms applicable to other immigrant communities: “Neither the migration itself nor the cultural encounter with U.S. society is a one-way, either/or, monolithic event. Rather it is one marked by further movement and the constant interplay of two familiar yet contrasting zones of collective experience” (1993 [1985]: 192).

Identity is both consciously and subconsciously constructed through processes of authentication, exclusion, and spatial and historical circumstance. In her discussion of identity among Rwandan Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Malkki writes, “They [the refugees] suggest that identity is always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield, a fund of memories, and so on” (1997a: 71). This example of identity as multi-dimensional highlights its flexibility of meaning, perspective, and production. Castells builds upon this idea, noting, “It is easy to agree on the fact that, from a sociological perspective, all identities are constructed. The real issue is how, from what, by whom, and for what?” (1997: 7).

Another significant consideration when examining the construction of identity is why a particular expression of identity emerges at a particular time (Calhoun, 1994; Castells, 1997; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Malkki, 1997a; Peteet, 2000; Peters, 1996; Watts, 1999). Specific events may solidify a group’s identity. The most recent manifestations of the Vieques protests were instigated by the death of island resident David Sanes on the bombing range on April 19, 1999. Prior to this tragedy only a few
individuals and organizations were dedicated to expelling the Navy from the island, but on that evening in April, a group of island residents spontaneously gathered at the entrance gates to the eastern Naval area. The majority of the people whom I interviewed cited the death of Sanes as the reason that they became involved in the movement and as the event that permitted the union of a diverse set of activist groups. The identity of each of these groups then shifted from an identity based upon their individual focus to a more consolidated identity united as the Vieques campaign, working together to expel the United States Navy.

Participation in the Vieques campaign has become an expression of Puerto Rican pride. A New York based activists noted, “This issue involves the whole Puerto Rican diaspora, wherever they are, so it’s also an issue of Puerto Rican-ness, whatever that is.” As such, symbols of Puerto Rico, especially the Puerto Rican flag, are prominent at movement events and in propaganda. The flag of Puerto Rico is displayed next to the flag of Vieques, or even in its place; oftentimes, an image of the Puerto Rican flag is superimposed on a map of Vieques (Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, & 5.5). For Puerto Ricans living outside of Vieques, visiting the island has become an important a source of pride and a way to assert their identity; as one New Yorker boasted, “I’ve been to Vieques I’d say five times. And now, you know, it’s like a pilgrimage every time you go to Vieques.”

While the movement includes people who are not Puerto Rican, many participants view Vieques as a fundamentally Puerto Rican issue. In a video documentary one woman asserted, “My message to the Viequenses and to all Puerto Ricans is that we fortify

128 Mollie Lee, personal communication, June 2001
ourselves with valor, with courage, and that we struggle for what is ours because this is not of the Americans, nor of the Japanese, nor the Chinese. It is of the Puerto Ricans. And enough is enough” (Quoted in Ruiz, J., 2000). Richard Danzig, Secretary of the Navy, seized upon this sentiment of ethnic unity and pride, declaring after the Clinton Directive: “Now the people of Puerto Rico and the people of Vieques in particular should embrace a process of reconciliation that is peaceful, law-abiding and doesn’t allow for trespassing on the range” (Quoted in Becker, 2000).

A Battle Over Discourse

The struggle to determine the legitimacy of each side’s claim to the island fell into the realm of Foucault’s power/knowledge paradigm. Both the Navy and movement supporters sponsored scientific studies on health and environment and accused the opposing studies of being biased. Each party charged the other of misinforming the public about the conditions in Vieques. As one movement leader noted, “In terms of the environment, the problem is the studies, you know. There is [sic] always politics about the science… Who writes what because he is working for the Navy, and he is working on the data. And then you have all of these stories [that are] unreliable, and the Navy will rely on the studies that they feel are favorable to themselves.”

Thus, the Navy and the Vieques Libre movement engaged in a battle of words, images, and studies that each side hoped would sway public opinion. Either the Navy’s or the Vieques movement’s discourse would eventually emerge as dominant, influencing the ‘social view’ of Vieques by the U.S. community and ultimately determining the fate of the island. One Vieques-

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based participant noted, “I believe the eyes of the whole world are on Vieques right now.”  

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132 Statement from an interview in Vieques on March 12, 2001. Similar sentiments were expressed in interviews in New York City and Washington, D.C.
Figure 5.1: Political Loyalties of Interview Subjects. A large number of activists did not state their political party. This may have reflected a conscious effort on movement participants to distance their participation in the Vieques campaign from the independence movement.
Figure 5.2: Waiting For The Caravan. The cars are lined up waiting for the beginning of a car caravan that will leave from Isabel Segunda and travel throughout Vieques. Note the Puerto Rican and Vieques (blue and white) flags on the blue van.
Figure 5.3: Statue of Liberty. A painting hanging on the fence surrounding Camp Garcia depicts Tito Kayak on top of the Statue of Liberty. He climbed onto the Statue’s crown to display both the Puerto Rican and Vieques flags and was subsequently arrested.
Figure 5.4: Flying the Flag. Rather than flying the Vieques flag, the owner of this truck opted to prominently display the Puerto Rican flag when participating in a car caravan on Vieques.
Figure 5.5: Flags in the Square. After a protest, these two Viequense children rested on a bench in the main square of Isabel Segunda. The girl held the Vieques flag, and the boy held the Puerto Rican flag.
EPILOGUE

“We just want to have some peace. We want our children to have a healthy environment… But the only way to have some peace is if the Navy goes once and for all.”

Gloria Maldonado, Vieques-based activist

In June of 2001, the White House and the U.S. Navy announced that the military would leave Vieques in May of 2003. While they welcomed this unexpected announcement, protesters challenged the Navy’s commitment to continuing exercises in Vieques until their departure. The consensus within the activist community was that the White House’s decision was strictly a political calculation meant to bolster the political standing of several Republican officials soon to be up for re-election. One article noted a connection between a campaign finance director from the Bush campaign in 2000 and a luxury resort that was scheduled to open on Vieques. More significantly, the decision to pull the Navy out of Vieques was viewed as an attempt to preempt the Puerto Rican sponsored referendum that was to be held in July. Activists noted that the Navy was trying to escape the embarrassment of huge loss in that referendum (Campo-Flores & Isikoff, 2001; Chicago Tribune, 2001; Lytle, 2001).

On July 29, 2001, the people of Vieques voted on the fate of the Navy in the Puerto Rican sponsored referendum. Of the 80.5% of registered voters that participated in the election, 68% voted for the Navy to immediately end their activities and leave Vieques forever. As the votes were counted, people gathered to celebrate in Isabel Segunda. The following day a group of protesters marched to the gates of Camp Garcia. They carried a black coffin painted with the number three to symbolize option #3 in the

133 Statement taken from an interview in Isabel Segunda, Vieques, Puerto Rico on March 1, 2001.
referendum. This option allowed the Navy to stay and continue its activities indefinitely. They buried the coffin at the gates (Gonzalez, 2001; ViequesLibre.org, 2001). The protesters wanted to convey that the Navy was leaving and that it had been evicted by the people of the island.

On May 1, 2003 the Navy departed from Vieques and the people celebrated once again (Indymedia.org, 2003). The land in the western section of the island had been transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in May of 2001. With the transfer of the lands in the east to the agency in May of 2003, the Vieques Wildlife Refuge became the largest wildlife refuge in the Caribbean Basin (USFWS, 2005). The USFWS is charged with restoring the ecological character of these lands, but the U.S. Navy is responsible for cleaning contaminated areas and gathering the ordnance scattered throughout the area. In 2004, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed the addition of Vieques to the Superfund National Priorities list and several sites within the new Vieques Wildlife Refuge were officially listed as Superfund site in 2005 (EPA, 2004).

The Vieques campaign was successful in its mission to evict the Navy from the island. The campaign’s success rested largely on its claims connection the Navy’s activities to elevated health risks for island residents. Yet, in the months since the Navy has departed from Vieques, this connection has been called into question (McPhaul, 2001; Novak, 2004; Scarborough, 2001). However, when the head of epidemiological research for the American Cancer Society commented that the high cancer rate on Vieques was likely connected to the small population on the island, he was forced to

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134 Later that year, Congress followed through on its threat and closed Roosevelt Roads Naval Base in Ceiba, Puerto Rico.
modify his statements (Novak, 2004). The Navy may have departed, but the politics of health and science continued.

The protesters have left Vieques. So has the Navy. But do the people of Vieques finally feel that they achieved the peace that they were fighting for? With the transfer of the military lands to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, the listing of several areas as Superfund sights, and the beginning of clean up efforts by Navy and other federal agencies, the political landscape of the island has changed. The new challenge for the island is coping with the economic development of their island. Magazines such as Condé Nast Traveller and National Geographic Traveler have featured the relatively undeveloped island as a quiet alternative to other hyper-developed Caribbean islands. Land prices have skyrocketed. The tumultuous history of land ownership in Vieques has left few residents with titles to their properties, complicating land transfers, sales, and development (Martinez, 2004). With the influx of visitors that the island will receive in the next decade, the challenge for the people of Vieques will be developing the economy of their island while maintaining a sense of their community and its unique character.
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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Where do you live? Where are you from?

Have you ever lived in Puerto Rico? If so, where did you live? For how long? When?

Have you ever lived in Vieques? If so, for what length of time, when, and why?

Have you ever visited Vieques? If so, for what length of time, when, and why?

How much time have you spent of Vieques?

Please describe the situation between the people of Vieques and the United States Navy.

Please describe the history of that situation.

How did you become involved in the Vieques movement?

When did you become involved in the Vieques movement?

How did you first learn about the issue?

What spurred you to begin participating?

Have you participated in movements in the past?

Please describe this past participation. Why were you involved or not involved?

Does any of your family participate in the Vieques movements? Have they been involved in the past?

Please describe your participation in these movements. Do you organize protests? Do you attend protests?

Why have you chosen to participate in this particular way?

Please describe some of the protests in which you have participated. How many people attended?

Do you ever protest on the island of Vieques? Do you partake in protests outside of the island of Vieques?
Please explain the other people that take part in these protests. Are they from certain interest groups, of certain ages, or from a particular place?

What are the goals of your participation?

How would you classify the issue of Vieques?

What do you see as the main issues in Vieques?

What is the primary reason that the Navy should leave Vieques?

Where did you learn about these issues?

How did you learn about these issues?

What is your goal in participating in this movement?

What is your hope for the resolution of these issues?

What do you think the outcome will be? Why?

What other types of activities do you participate in?

Do you view these activities as connected to Vieques?