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Culture, Power and Struggle: Anti-Military Protest in Vieques, Puerto Rico

by

Katherine T. McCaffrey

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1999

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Abstract

Culture, Power and Struggle: Anti-Military Protest in Vieques, Puerto Rico

by

Katherine T. McCaffrey

Advisor: Professor Ida Susser

This dissertation examines a decades-long conflict between a Puerto Rican community and the U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico. The dissertation examines how culture is mobilized in struggle as it considers the significance of an anti-military movement led by local fishermen. In a highly charged and politically divisive colonial setting, the image of the fisherman allows Vieques Islanders to express local grievances in terms that are "authentic," i.e. untainted by a broader political agenda. Fishermen draw attention to the material basis of local grievances on an island where the U.S. Navy controls two-thirds of the land. Fishermen emerge as key cultural icons in Viequenses' conflict with the Navy because they are important and meaningful expressions of the island's working class culture and rural past. At the same time, the leadership of fishermen in Vieques' anti-military movement demonstrates the way colonialism constrains other forms of more overt political expression. Conflict surrounding the U.S. military thus brings to the fore the struggles, contradictions and ambivalence that are generated by Puerto Rico's colonial status.

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In New York, I had the great fortune to be surrounded by stimulating teachers and classmates at the City University of New York Graduate School, who both challenged and supported me along the way. Leith Mullings, Jane Schneider, May Ebihara, Glenn Peterson, Joan Mencher, and June Nash were among those who trained and encouraged me. I was fortunate to have studied with the late Eric Wolf who impressed me with the fact that even the most brilliant of thinkers can be humble

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and kind people. Special thanks go to my dissertation committee. First, I thank my advisor, Ida Susser, for sticking with me all these years, for encouraging and directing me. Many thanks to Marc Edelman for his support, for his thoughtful comments, and his careful criticisms that sharpened and focused my writing. Thanks to William Roseberry for his interest in my project and for serving as an outside reader of my thesis. It is with a heavy heart that I thank the final member of my committee, Delmos Jones, who passed away shortly before I finished this dissertation. Del was the most constructive of critics, who carefully read and thought about my work as a package, found the positive, and encouraged me to build on it. He was a sharp thinker and demanding teacher, while at the same time a gentle and kind person. To use a Yiddish term, he was a mensch. I am grateful for the kindness he showed me and all that he taught me.

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have challenged my thinking and offered me their friendship throughout this long haul of graduate school.

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Rico she had a pot of chicken soup waiting for me, a sure tonic for a queasy stomach. When I apologized that I was a vegetarian and couldn't eat the meal she had thoughtfully prepared, she took my quirks in stride. For the next year she prepared and shared with me rice and beans, noting that a vegetarian diet was probably good for her as well. With all these meals, Matilde communicated to me a great warmth and generosity of spirit that still moves me and connects me to Vieques years after I have left the island. I am very thankful for the gift of her friendship and all the help and emotional sustenance she provided while I was in Vieques. My thanks and appreciation to her brothers and sisters, especially, Raúl, Isolina, and Nery for keeping me on my toes and teaching me so much about Vieques.

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all. My mother came through in the final minutes to proofread the final copy of the thesis and pronounced it not only readable, but to her surprise, interesting. And my dearest friend and companion spent most of the winter weekends of 1999 bleary eyed and disheveled, schlepping our children all over town so I could have the quiet I needed to finish this. Thank you all.

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Maps

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Abbreviations and Spanish Terms

agregado	squatter on private land, landless tenant
central	sugar processing complex, including mill and land
independentista	supporter of Puerto Rican independence
mayordomo	overseer
PPD	Partido Popular Democrático (also known as the pro-commonwealth party)
PIP	Partido Independista Puertorriqueño (also known as the pro-independence party)
PNP	Partido Nuevo Progresita (also known as the pro-statehood party)
PSP	Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño (Puerto Rican Socialist Party)
pípilo	a member of the PIP
popular	a member of the PPD
público	a privately owned van that operates as a communal taxi service
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
ROTHR	Relocatable-Over-The-Horizon-Radar
VEDCO	Vieques Economic Development Corporation
VCHT	Vieques Conservation and Historic Trust

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Outline of Conflict

1941-1943

U.S. Navy expropriates majority of Vieques land to construct a sea wall and ammunition depot. Residents are evicted and relocated to resettlement tracts called Montesanto and Santa Maria. Work on base ends abruptly in 1943.

1943

Demonstrations in Vieques over lack of work on island.

1947

U.S. Navy expropriates additional land in western Vieques. Residents evicted and relocated to resettlement tract Tortuguero.

1950's-1960's

Thousands of troops train on island. Periodic riots and fights point to tension between military and civilians.

1961

U.S. Navy covertly plans to usurp island and relocate residents to St.Croix. Puerto Rican Governor Luis Muñoz Marin asks President Kennedy to intervene to stop project.

1964

U.S. Navy plans to expropriate southern coast of Vieques. When Mayor Antonio Rivera learns of plan, he organizes the "Committee to Recover Vieques," to oppose military project. Mayor travels to Washington to stop plan.

1970-1973

Anti-military movement erupts on neighboring Puerto Rican Island of Culebra culminating in eviction of Navy from Culebra and transfer of bombing and intensification of maneuvers in Vieques.

1974-1976

Demonstrations organized by leftist activists in Vieques against military participation in patron saint festivals.

1977

Navy seeks aviation easement on southern coast of Vieques, a move that would block economic development. Local heads of four Puerto Rican political parties unite in opposition to the proposal.

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Viequenses United founded, a community organization opposed to military activity on the island. Quickly collapses.

1978

Members of the Vieques Fishermen's Association confront warships off southern coast of Vieques.

Crusade to Recover Vieques is founded as a grassroots movement with the objective of evicting the Navy and recovering all of Vieques' land, and obtaining compensatory damages for the people of Vieques. The Crusade's tactics combine direct action, civil disobedience, and law suits.

1983

Memorandum of Understanding signed between Puerto Rican Governor Carlos Romero Barceló and Navy Secretary James Goodrich. Navy promises to be a good neighbor and lessen environmental destruction of island. The Memorandum effectively diffuses the anti-military movement.

1989

Organized land recovery of 800 acres of military land.

1993

The Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques is founded with the mission of using legislative means to achieve the recuperation of land and socio-economic development of Vieques.

1994

Romero submits legislation to Congress to close the ammunition storage facility on the west of Vieques and turn over land to the municipality.

Navy proposes "Relocatable-Over-The-Horizon-Radar" (ROTHR) installation on Vieques, part of which would be on the western part of the island.

1997

Five hundred people rally in Vieques against ROTHR installation, the largest anti-military demonstration in twenty years.

Fishermen confront Navy warships on Mother's Day off the southern coast of Vieques.

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Introduction

"They expropriated me when I was eight years old," remembered Santiago Meléndez. "The Navy expropriated me from the Barrio Punta Arenas" [a neighborhood on Vieques' westernmost tip].

"Did your parents work on Playa Grande [sugar *central*]?" I asked him.

"My old man was a farmer. A World War I veteran. They expropriated us from Barrio Punta Arenas."

"To expropriate" technically means "to take away (something owned by someone else), often for public use and/or without payment." To expropriate is a power and privilege of the state, evoked during times of peace to build dams and highways, and during times of war to claim strategic resources. But in Vieques the word takes on new meaning born out of the experience and legacy of the 1940's. In 1941 the U.S. Navy expropriated the majority of land on Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, dissolving the island's sugar company and dislocating the people who lived and worked on sugar cane land. The Navy's intent was to build a large military installation that would cross the waters from Vieques to the Puerto Rican mainland. Most residents were landless tenants, but their experience of the usurpation of the island land by the military is often described in terms that are both vivid and personal. When people use the term expropriation, they speak of themselves as being expropriated. Thus although in reality, the Navy confiscated the land that don

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Santiago's family occupied, he says "*me expropriaron*," they expropriated me. The use of expropriations in this way transforms the act of usurping property into a viscerally felt personal experience and a deep-seated grievance held against the Navy.

This study analyzes a decades-long conflict between a Puerto Rican community and a U.S. Naval base. Vieques is the site of one of the most significant military installations in the Western Hemisphere and is plagued by continued tension between the local civilian population and the military. Vieques is unusual in the persistence of its conflict, and in the varied, often highly confrontational manifestations of popular discontent. Protest in Vieques has been both spontaneous and organized, ranging from riots, to collective squatting, to blocking military maneuvers and other acts of civil disobedience. The focal point of this study is an organized anti-military movement, "The Crusade to Recover Vieques," that erupted on the island in the late 1970's. Spearheaded by local fishermen who claimed the military interfered with their right to make a living, the movement lasted for approximately five years. At its height, the mobilization gained international attention and received extensive support from religious and leftist organizations in Puerto Rico, the U.S. and abroad.

The conflict between residents of Vieques Island and the U.S. Navy is one of the many struggles that have erupted between military bases and their host communities. When organized protest developed in Vieques in the late 70's, it

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preceded a wave of anti-base movements across the globe. From Manila to Madrid, anti-base protestors burned American flags and effigies of Uncle Sam. These conflicts bring to the fore a major concern of American foreign policy analysts: that U.S. overseas bases act as lightning rods for anti-American sentiment, thus threatening U.S. political and military hegemony abroad. Indeed, the U.S. Navy has repeatedly asserted the centrality of the Vieques installation to the training and support of the Atlantic Fleet and has regarded protest and agitation on the island as a threat to its operations in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and the Western Hemisphere. These concerns obscure one of the most unusual aspects of anti-military protest in Vieques: despite highly confrontational tactics and dramatic imagery, the Vieques struggle was distinguished by its political moderation. The David and Goliath-like insurgency, in which small wooden fishing boats confronted massive fighter vessels, was led by fishermen who expressed pride in their U.S. citizenship and support for the U.S. military—somewhere else.

The conflict surrounding the Vieques Naval installation brings to the fore the struggles, contradictions, and ambivalence that are generated by Puerto Rico's colonial status. Within Puerto Rican society there is perhaps no institution or symbol as charged with meaning and contradiction as the U.S. military. The U.S. military is simultaneously viewed as an instrument and agent of colonial oppression, and the provider of opportunity and American identification. It is at the core of Puerto Rico's

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colonial status and embodies the complexities and contradictory tensions that are fundamentally part of Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States.

The U.S. military has been a major power broker in Puerto Rico's political and economic destiny since 1898 when the United States Navy took the island as war booty in the Spanish-American War. The military exercised direct jurisdiction over Puerto Rico for 35 years; the Department of War controlled the island until 1933. Even after the military relinquished formal control over Puerto Rico, its interests have long been paramount in the governance of the island. In San Juan, down the street from the Capitol and Forteleza, is the walled complex of the U.S. Navy--a short distance physically and symbolically from the Puerto Rican political center. With numerous military complexes throughout the island, the military directly controls a significant portion of Puerto Rican arable land (García 1991:85). Analysts have noted Puerto Rico's long standing strategic importance to the United States. The U.S. established military supremacy in the Caribbean region through the acquisition of bases in Puerto Rico and Cuba in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War (García and Rodríguez 1994). Puerto Rico continues to function as a keystone of U.S. strategy in the region, acting as a center of control for naval activities and protection of maritime routes, aiding in the defense of the Panama Canal, and providing a base of operation for military interventions throughout the region (Meyn and Rodríguez 1982, Enders 1985, García 1991).

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Historically, issues surrounding the military have served as lightning rods for anti-colonial sentiment in Puerto Rico. Independence advocates have pointed to the imposition of U.S. citizenship on Puerto Ricans in 1917 as a thinly veiled attempt to draft islanders into military service during World War I (Gautier-Mayoral 1990:12). Political controversy continues to surround the issue of the draft and the fact that Puerto Ricans can be conscripted into military service, but lack the political power to vote for the President that sends them to war. In the 60's, 70's and 80's independence advocates focused on the issues of the draft, the war in Vietnam, R.O.T.C. on campus, and anti-military protest in Culebra and Vieques as rallying points for the movement for Puerto Rican independence. Charges that during the Vietnam War, the U.S. military covertly tested napalm in El Yunque, the Puerto Rican rainforest and national park beloved by islanders, provoked considerable controversy and nationalist sentiment (Steinsleger 1986: 87).

Despite the antagonism that the military provokes, military service also inspires awe and is considered an important avenue of social and economic advancement. Although a 1984 study showed that Puerto Ricans were not represented in the U.S. armed forces in proportion to their population, the same study also documented a near doubling of Puerto Ricans in the armed forces between 1976 and 1984 (Martin 1984). Analysts have pointed to high unemployment rates and the expansion of recruitment efforts as factors contributing to this rise (Colón 1985). And

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while military contracts are small in comparison to those received by states, military expenditures in Puerto Rico are nonetheless considerable. Of particular importance are veterans' benefits which are paid directly to individuals. According to the same 1984 study, "veterans' compensation in Puerto Rico in 1981 was 12% more than the payroll of the Island's largest manufacturing industry, apparel, and was 24% greater than the payroll in the electronics industry, and 30% greater than the pharmaceutical payroll" (Martin 1984:11).

Military service and support for the military are often viewed as demonstrations of allegiance to the United States. Activism against the military is commonly construed as anti-colonial or anti-American in orientation. "My old man was a farmer," Santiago Meléndez asserted, "A World War I veteran." Here don Santiago signals his patriotic credentials, despite the fact, we will learn, that he is a leader in anti-Navy struggle. Viequenses' direct involvement in and familial relationship to the U.S. military foster considerable ambivalence. Consider Fernando Torres, a U.S. Army veteran and anti-Navy activist. Torres discussed the harassment of women in Vieques during the 1950's when sailors on pass would flood the town. Harassment of women by troops is often a key grievance in anti-military struggle (Enloe 1989, Camancho 1991, Wolf 1969), but in this case we hear the divided loyalties don Fernando feels as a Viequense and a serviceman:

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> They would come to town on pass and say 'Hey señorita, look! I'll give you five dollars right now!' They would offer women five or ten dollars to sleep with them. They would harass women. Do bad things. Because of this we didn't want them to come to town.
>
> Some of them were brought to court. The judge was easy on them. People talked about how he sided with the Navy. He would say 'Oh well, they're only here for a short time.' He would tell the sailors to improve their behavior, but he wouldn't punish them. Some Viequenses said, 'Well let's see what happens if we kill one of them.' But I, Fernando, said, 'No, we don't have to kill them. They're here for only one reason: democracy and justice. The Navy, the Airforce, and the Army, they are here for just one reason: defense. When they discharge them, they can't do what they're doing in Vieques. The law in civilian life is very different from military life.

Conflict surrounding the military base in Vieques, then, exposes one of the major fault lines in Puerto Rican society: a population that demonstrates a strong sense of Puerto Rican cultural identity and nationhood while at the same time expressing widespread popular support for continued political and economic association with the United States.[1] When in the late 1970's Viequenses confronted the U.S. Navy, they invoked symbolism from the island's rural past to develop a culturally meaningful and emotionally resonant campaign against the control and destruction of their island by the military. In struggling to regain control over the island, Viequenses inevitably raised the larger political implications of the case: the United States' colonial control of Puerto Rico. Yet residents were deeply ambivalent about translating their local grievances into a broader, anti-colonial struggle. While strongly identified as Viequenses, and militantly committed to defending their homes against military incursions, islanders simultaneously viewed themselves as American

[1] Dávila (1997) explores the complexity of cultural politics within this ambivalent colonial context.

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citizens, albeit citizens of second class. Thus, an anti-base movement developed with the peculiar quality that it sought to confront the agent and symbol of the colonial state while sidestepping the issue of Puerto Rico's political status as a U.S. colony.

Culture, Power and Struggle

In the late 1970's Viequenses rallied around local fishermen in a bid to evict the Navy from the island and reclaim land the military had expropriated in the 1940's. Fishermen claimed that the Navy's heightened maneuvers and restrictions of the seas prevented them from making a living. They argued that they had no choice but to rise up in opposition to the Navy in defense of their community and way of life. One of my main interests in this study is to understand the form of this struggle. How is it that an anti-military movement came to be led by fishermen? Why is it that a conflict that is rooted in the land became expressed in a battle of the seas? Understanding the form of struggle, I argue, becomes an opening to understanding the dynamics of colonialism. Under what conditions do the oppressed contest their subordination? Where do subordinated groups find spaces to assert themselves? In what way does the colonial state shape and constrain popular expression?

Vieques' conflict with the Navy revolves fundamentally around issues of subsistence. The Navy's usurpation of two thirds of island land, the liquidation of Vieques' economic base, the military's control and destruction of land, sea and air

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define the terms of conflict. Theorists have pointed to the sphere of social reproduction as an increasingly dynamic one for political mobilization. Environmental destruction, massive unemployment, poor housing and health care have been examined as forces that spark people to protest (Menzies 1998; Sinclair 1995; Stephen 1992; Jones, Turner and Montbach 1992; Susser 1986,1992; Nash 1990; Bolles 1983). Nash predicts that in the world crisis of capitalism, collective organization will increasingly be based not on the threat of withdrawing labor, but on issues of survival and the right to live (1990:348).

Vieques' crisis of subsistence is political in nature, rooted in unequal relations of power between the United States and Puerto Rico. The usurpation of inhabited land for military purposes, efforts to forcibly remove the human inhabitants, the bombing of a populated island, all speak to a people's subjugation by a colonial power. Yet Viequenses are reluctant to frame their conflict in terms of colonialism. It is significant that Vieques' anti-military movement is led not by independence activists, whose motives might be impugned by a politically conservative population, but rather by fishermen, trying to carry on a way of life that they represent as having existed for generations. Other efforts to spearhead an anti-military movement fail.

The formation of a fishing association, we will see, is a key factor in the development of Vieques' anti-Navy mobilization. Resource mobilization theory provides insight into the importance of pre-existing structures and organizations in

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the development of protest (Tilly 1978, Skocpal 1979). While it is my assertion that fishermen rose up against the Navy for material reasons—to resist a threat to their livelihood—and that the fishing co-op was an essential vehicle for communicating these grievances, structural or organizational factors alone cannot explain the development of the movement. I argue that the fishermen's campaign was so successful because it crystallized grievances in a culturally resonant form that avoided the larger issue of Puerto Rico's sovereignty.

Fishermen signal the resilience of local culture; to use Scott's (1985) phrase, they embody the "everyday resistance" to military occupation. In the past decade we have seen an explosion of research on the role of cultural representations, meanings and identities in social protest. Theorists of the so-called "new social movement" perspective have argued for placing culture at the center of the study of social movements (Melucci 1985, 1989; Touraine 1988; Brand 1990; Eyerman and Jamison 1991). Yet this literature has been criticized for depicting culture, ideology and politics as separate from economics and class relationships (Wood 1986, Nash 1995). There has been a call for an historically informed analysis of movements, rooted in an understanding of the cultural context of political and economic struggles (Nash 1995, Hale 1997). I am interested here in examining the relationship between the form of Vieques' movement, its basis in the lived experience of members of a working class community, and its unfolding in a colonial context characterized by

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unequal relations of power. In a highly charged and politically divisive colonial setting, I argue that the image of the fisherman allows islanders to express local grievances in terms that are "authentic," i.e., untainted by a broader political agenda

A recent trend in social movement theory attempts to develop a political process model of social movements, connecting the development of movements to a successful melding of "political opportunities," "mobilizing structures" and "cultural framings" (Harvey 1998; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 1997; Tarrow 1994; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996). I am particularly interested in the notion of "cultural framings," developed by Snow (1992) and advanced by Tarrow (1994). Tarrow discusses the way in which movement organizers work to find symbols that will successfully frame a movement's message and set a "strategic course between its cultural setting, its political opponents and the militants and ordinary citizens whose support its needs" (1994:123). Fishing operates as such a cultural framing in Vieques, although it emerges more as an organic expression of grievances than a symbol "selectively chosen from a cultural tool chest and creatively converted" by "political entrepreneurs" (Tarrow 1994:119). I do not argue that Viequense activists concocted a cultural identity to serve political purposes.[2] Nor do I argue that fishermen were

[2] In a struggle against the extension of a military camp in Larzac, France, Alland with Alland (1994) argue that protestors attempted to establish their legitimacy by rallying around a mythic peasant status. In Hawaii, Linnekin (1983) examines how urban based Hawaiian nationalists mobilized against U.S. Naval training on an uninhabited island activists claimed was the sacred ground of their ancestors' graves. Linnekin argues that activists invented a mystical significance for an island she argues had a "not-so-glorious" past (1983: 247-248).

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relics from yesteryear. Rather, I suggest that men constructed identities as fishermen in relation to the military presence. They found cultural meaning in an "authentic" livelihood that drew on their working class experience at a time when the Navy stifled the island's economy. While the salience of the fisherman as an expression of Viequense cultural identity emerges from a specific historical context, it is no less real or legitimate than other identities. As Friedman argues, "all constructions of the past are socially motivated and have, thus, to be understood in positional terms." So called "objective" history, Friedman notes, "is just as much a social construct as any other history" (1992:854-855).

The fishermen emerge as key cultural icons in Vieques' battle with the Navy because they are important and meaningful expressions of the island's working class culture and rural past. The fishermen's battle, symbolizing a traditional way of life under siege, communicates Viequenses' desire to protect and preserve their island: its environment, its traditions and way of life. At the same time, the fisherman embodies Viequenses' desire to claim their future. The fishermen's claims are not limited to the specific losses of their trade, but speak to broader concerns of the stifling of economic development and the future of Vieques' youth. Friedman notes, "the authentically constituted past is always about the transition from today to tomorrow" (1992:846). Long after the organized social movement dissolves, we see that this struggle over the

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past and the future continues on the island. Charged debates over the events and interpretations of the past are expressions of conflicting visions of the island's future.

I argue that Puerto Rico's colonial status constrains the form of political expression that develops in Vieques. Rallying behind the fishermen, Viequenses argue that their struggle is not about politics, but about the right to make a living. Defending themselves against accusations of anti-American, communist-inspired agitation, protestors suggest that they are not really opposed to the Navy, but rather to the bombs that the Navy drops.

This type of discourse can be read as both a reflection of the nature of power and the possibilities of resistance. Again, I am drawn to Tarrow's work, because he makes relations of power central to his analysis of the dynamics of symbolism in collective action. Tarrow argues that : "only by inscribing our analysis of movement discourse in a structure of power relations can we understand why movements employ particular symbolic practices and not others, and whether they are likely to carry the day" (1994:123). Tarrow suggests that organizers strategically select symbols to transmit messages in a field of power. Yet I am also interested in the way in which that field of power defines the perceived choices and possibilities of actions, the terms of debate. Wolf (1999) describes this as "structural power," which he describes as "the power manifest in relationships that not only operates within settings and domains but also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves, and

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that specifies the direction and distribution of energy flows" (p 5). This notion of structural power is also present in recent debates over the Gramscian concept of hegemony. Roseberry describes hegemony as akin to a "field of force" that constrains the actions of subordinate groups. Moving away from conceptualizations of hegemony that describe a mechanical imposition of the dominant ideology of the ruling class on the subaltern class, the manufacturing of consent (see Scott 1990), Roseberry argues that hegemony is best applied not to an understanding of consent, but of struggle, of

> the ways in which the words, images, symbols, forms, organizations, institutions, and movements used by subordinate populations to talk about, understand, confront, accommodate themselves to, or resist their domination are shaped by the process of domination itself (1994:360-361).

In examining the anti-military mobilization, then, I am interested in how activists rely on notions of the "traditional" and the "authentic" in order to articulate their grievances. I am interested in how they eschew a more militant nationalist and anti-colonial discourse in favor of a discourse that talks about second-class citizenship. I consider activists' legal strategy, and their acceptance of a state-authored accord as factors that contributed to the dissolution of organized protest on the island. The ideology and discourse of the movement become expressions of the divided loyalties and ambiguities of colonial rule.

Roseberry argues that "what hegemony constructs, then, is not a shared ideology, but a common material and meaningful framework for living through,

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talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination." This framework, he notes, is in part discursive: "a common language or way of talking about social relationships that sets out the terms around which and in terms of which contestation and struggle can occur" (1994:361). The last part of the dissertation looks at the significance of current popular discourse pertaining to the military expropriations of the 1940's. Though the debate ostensibly pertains to the historical record, the expropriations discourse in a broader sense addresses the legitimacy of ownership of the land, cutting to the heart of the colonial relationship. Historical debate becomes charged because it closely parallels political struggle by different actors for control of the island. Furthermore, it connects to the military's historic attempts to usurp the entire island and evict the human inhabitants.

As Stoler (1985) argues, the colonial order is maintained through a combination of "direct coercion and subtler subversion," what may generally be conceived of as violence and consent (p 9). Recently, theorists have tended to dismiss violence as secondary to hegemony in the maintenance of power (Sider 1994:109). Yet violence clearly underlies the colonial regime. In Vieques, anti-Navy activists were tracked and harassed by the police, activists were jailed, and one murdered in prison. Individuals were fired from their jobs for involvement in the movement. There were conspiracies to bomb supporters of the movement. These factors acted to dissuade people from joining in protest and helped perpetuate the

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status quo. Weber asserts that every state is founded in the final analysis, on force (Quoted in Sayer 1994:377). In confronting the Navy, Viequenses confront the essence of colonial rule. Perhaps what makes this and so many other anti-base mobilizations so charged is that they give form to the abstract: while the military gives substance to the " colonial state," the movements provide a corpus or collective voice for the subaltern.

Field Research

One night in the fall of 1993 I was awakened with a jolt. The house shook hard and fast and then there was stillness and the quiet chirping of *coquis.*[3] An earthquake had struck Vieques, but I had grown so used to bombing punctuating the otherwise tranquil nights that I assumed the tremor was a bomb and rolled back under the covers. There was a certain surreal quality to conducting fieldwork in this place, at this time. In the spring of 1994 international tensions flared over Haiti, and Vieques was quite literally the world's stage. Helicopters buzzed overhead. As I set about my daily routine, warships prowled the coastline. While I was safely ensconced in the local Catholic Church reviewing marriage records, the air around me was filled with the dull reverberations of shelling and automatic weapons fire. The U.S. Navy

[3] The *coqui* is a small frog, native to Puerto Rico, that fills the night with a chirping sound similar to that of a cricket. For many Puerto Ricans, the *coqui* is symbolic of the Puerto Rican natural environment.

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rehearsed a military invasion of Haiti on the shores of Vieques; scores of mock invaders penetrated the island's sugar-white beaches. All of this unfolded while school children in starched uniforms laughed and played at recess in the town's plaza. We anthropologists are often reminded to situate our inquiry in relation to wider political and economic processes. But in Vieques, the cliché "global village" takes on new meaning on an island community that has been transformed into a living theater of geopolitics. It is here, locals remind you, that the U.S. Navy rehearsed invasions of Korea, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and Grenada. The international and the political are the inescapable stuff of daily life.

I entered Vieques roughly ten years after its anti-Navy mobilization subsided. The political atmosphere was relatively calm yet charged. During the first few weeks of my stay, in a botched training exercise, a Navy jet dropped five 500-pound bombs six miles off target, on the buffer zone between military and civilian territory. This incident sparked a great deal of outrage and inspired a newly formed anti-Navy political group, "The Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques" to organize a small demonstration against the military on the island. The Committee was formed the previous year with the mission to close the base and shape the course of the island's social and economic development. I set out to understand the rise and fall of a movement ten years earlier and the current contours of conflict on the island. It was clear to me before I undertook this project that conflict between residents and the

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Navy was by no means resolved, despite the dissolution of the organized protest movement. Over the past decade there had been a series of "skirmishes" between Viequenses and the Navy. Although I might have focused mainly on current day events, it was my contention that these smaller outbursts of conflict were different expressions of the same underlying issues left unresolved by the anti-military movement of the late 70's. By observing and participating in everyday life, I hoped to gain a fuller appreciation of the context from which protest emerged, that current state of grievances, and the direction in which conflict was headed.

Several basic concerns guided my research strategy. The first was an interest in understanding the local political, economic and cultural context that has been such a fertile ground for protest and discontent. The second was an interest in analyzing the anti-military movement that was a key expression of conflict. Finally, I was interested in understanding the current status of conflict and its implications for future action.

I initiated my study with documentary research conducted largely at the Archivo Histórico de Vieques. The archive was born from the momentum of the Crusade to Recover Vieques. It is a small research center devoted not only to preserving the island's history, but in particular, the legacy of conflict between islanders and the Navy. The archive contained pamphlets and newsletters produced during the Crusade, articles, and copies of municipal ordinances from the 1950's

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chronicling abuses against Viequenses. There were copies of the 1981 Congressional Hearings about Naval Training Activities in Vieques, and scores of cassette tapes with interviews of elderly residents who were dislocated by the military expropriations of the 1940's. I spent my first months poring over this data, familiarizing myself not only with the contours of the conflict, but the names and backgrounds of individuals involved, their alliances and connections. This gave me good grounding in the particulars of the conflict, and a strategy for deciding whom I would interview and what questions I would ask.

While I was conducting this research I also engaged in participant observation, the mainstay of anthropological research. I lived with a local family, which connected me to a broader network of kin and neighbors. This also provided me with a unique vantage point from which to observe and understand first-hand relations between Viequense and North American island residents, who form the cornerstone of support for the military on the island. When I arrived in Vieques, as a North American I was instantly inserted into pre-existing ethnic and class relations. The fact that I lived with a Viequense family challenged many unstated assumptions about "gringo" behavior and gave me insight into and personal experience of the issues that divide the two groups.

Participant observation in these first months and, indeed, throughout the year I spent in Vieques, was essential to understanding relations of power, and patterns of

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alliances and conflict on the island. I attended demonstrations, political meetings, cultural activities and festivals in order to understand who participates in such activities and the points along which political divisions emerged. I traveled to and from the island by ferry and airplane, quickly gaining a sense of Vieques' transportation problems. I visited island cultural sites (churches, museums, library), arranged for a tour of both Roosevelt Roads Naval Station in Ceiba, Puerto Rico, and the Vieques military installation. I shopped in local stores, ate in restaurants, and chatted informally with people on the street, in the post office, at the ferry dock, and over coffee, giving detail and depth to my observations. I visited important economic sites, arranging interviews with local restaurant, hotel, and business proprietors, as well as the managers of Vieques' two factories. These interviews and visits were conducted in order to gain introductory information about the local politics, the economy, society and the military presence on the island. In addition, I interviewed the Mayor of Vieques, the superintendent of schools, the commander on base, the head of the Sea Cadets, a military youth league, the monsignor at the Catholic Church, and the editor of the island's only newspaper. I started to gain a sense of the island, its geography and pace, and to meet people whom I would later interview more systematically, or who could point me in the direction of others to interview.

When I felt confident that I had sufficient background in the details of the conflict with the Navy and a grasp on the timeline and major events of the anti-Navy

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mobilization, I began interviewing. I was particularly interested in the politics and ideology of a new group, "The Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques," that formed with the stated mission of recovering Vieques from the Navy and developing it for its people. The group deliberately modeled its name on the anti-Navy mobilization of the late 70's, and included a variety of newly politicized members and old-time anti-Navy activists. I interviewed 14 current anti-Navy activists about their activities, their aspirations, their grievances, and the connection between their group and methods with previous efforts to organize the community for social change. In this way I started my analysis in the present and worked backwards in time. I was especially interested in a handful of current activists who had also been at the forefront of the 70's mobilization. I elicited extensive and detailed information about their earlier political commitments.

My interest in the anti-Navy mobilization of the 1970's naturally led me to the doorsteps of the fishermen and community activists who had organized and sustained this movement. Although all of these individuals shared opposition to the military presence on Vieques, they were a diverse group including the former Mayor of the town, the former head of the Fishing Association, teachers, laborers, and a number of fishermen who probably never considered themselves politically involved except for time they took to the sea to block Navy warships. I traveled to Puerto Rico to interview several leading members of the support groups that helped sustain the local

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movement. Recognizing that my understanding of both the movement and the conflict with the Navy would be distorted if I sought information only from the perspective of anti-Navy activists, I also interviewed pro-Navy activists and North American residents of Vieques. I will discuss the politics of this work next. I also interviewed witnesses to the mobilization. Here I drew on the network of kin and neighborly relations I entered by living with a local family. I was interested mainly in eliciting the opinion of people with some knowledge of local politics and events, who could comment intelligently on the events of the past even though they had not been drawn into the heart of the controversy. In sum, I interviewed approximately 20 fishermen and anti-Navy activists about their participation in and analysis of the vicissitudes of the Crusade to Recover Vieques and 16 more witnesses of the event. I also elicited from the fishermen more detailed and specific information about the fishing economy and the impact of the military on their livelihood.

I was interested in the perspectives of a handful of activists who had become disillusioned and had drifted away from political engagement. In particular I was concerned with the collapse of the fishing association and the friction and conflict that emanated from that divide. Ortner (1995) has exhorted anthropologists to explore these types of internal divisions and conflicts as a way of developing a richer, "thicker" ethnography of resistance. This issue brings up the broader issue of the politics of research, made so salient by a case like this one where politics are

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explosive and volatile.[4] At what point does ethnographic scrutiny become interpreted by our so-called "subjects" as meddling intrusion? To what extent are our social laboratories for theory people's open wounds? Ortner suggests that literature on resistance suffers from ethnographers' "failure of nerve" to question the internal politics of dominated groups (190). I would argue that this perceived "thinness" of description stems from a more fundamental problem that emerges from resistance studies, one which Friedman calls a conflict between "the academy and the street" (1992: 853). Friedman argues that the academic quest for objective truth is fundamentally at odds with a sensitive politics (852). In Vieques, where activists expended so much effort on building a consensus, on building unity, there was little enthusiasm for an anthropologist arriving on the scene to dissect it. One clear way this was expressed to me was in my exclusion from meetings of the Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques. I was told quite bluntly that the group did not want an outsider observing and recording the internal differences that were expressed in meetings. Given the sensitivity of the political context, I did not pursue my investigation into the depth of the divide of the fishing association. While my ethnography may suffer from ethnographic "thinness" in this area, I believe it

[4] Wilson (1995) describes the highly charged political context she encountered while conducting research on U.S. military activities in Belau. Here, women activists opposing U.S. military proposals were threatened with violence. While Wilson did not sense any threat herself, she felt the context was too fiercely polarized to discuss politics directly.

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benefited more broadly from the rapport I maintained with a cross-section of fishers and activists.

Other problems emerged in my efforts to seek out the perspectives and opinions of Navy supporters and activists. On a small island with deep political rifts, interviewing anti-Navy activists hindered my access to the pro-Navy camp. I quickly discovered that there was no such thing as an "objective researcher" in Vieques. From the beginning of my fieldwork people wanted me to take a position on the Navy conflict. When I went to observe a picket organized to protest the bombs dropped in the Navy's botched training exercise I was handed a placard. What to do? Refuse to picket and alienate myself from the activist links I had cultivated? Participate and be photographed in the local newspaper and cut off access to interviews from the pro-Navy camp? In the absence of any definitive ethnographic guidelines, I went with my conscience and joined the picket. Ultimately it was not instances like this that mattered to the pro-Navy forces as much as the nature of my "snowball."[5] My network and contacts began in the anti-Navy camp, and snowballed in that direction. Once I was seen talking to certain "inflammatory" characters, people on the other side of the fence refused to talk to me. I had at least four doors all but slammed in my face, all by pro-Navy activists. Already there was a smaller pool of players since there were not nearly the number of Viequenses who adamantly supported the military

[5] In snowball sampling, a researcher locates a group of key individuals to interview and asks those individuals to identify further people to interview.

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presence as there were those who opposed it. While I talked to many Viequenses who were ambivalent about the Navy, I formally interviewed only three who might be described as militantly pro-Navy.

There is another factor that undoubtedly affected my ability to solicit the opinions of pro-Navy individuals, which is the nature of studying power. Nader's (1974) exhortations aside, it is much easier to study the oppressed and downtrodden than it is those enveloped in power and privilege. Simply put, why would pro-Navy individuals be interested in participating a project that studied the Naval presence on the island? While anti-Navy activists sensed at least an opportunity in my study to air their grievances and broadcast their struggle, pro-Navy forces felt no comparable compulsion to raise questions about the status quo. As a result, I relied more heavily on interviews with Vieques' North American residents in order to develop my understanding of the pro-Navy position. Here my own social position substituted for established networks as a way of building contacts. I did encounter some of the same hostility I met with pro-Navy Viequenses, but on the whole my inquiry was accepted because of my perceived social position and "insider" status.

My reliance on the North American perspective does not appear inappropriate as it became apparent from an analysis of historical data that the crux of support for the military on the island emanated from the North American residents. While few North Americans would consider themselves pro-Navy activists, the large majority of

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the resident population belongs to the Navy League, a civilian organization expressly devoted to supporting the Navy. Furthermore, most resident Americans believed that the Navy played a positive role in island life. I formally interviewed five North American residents, while I engaged in more informal, yet nonetheless extensive conversation with ten other resident North Americans.

By the time I finished my interviews, I felt a need to clarify some historical questions that had been raised in the course of my conversations. I spent my last weeks in Puerto Rico at the University of Puerto Rico library examining articles from *El Mundo* on the longstanding conflict between Viequenses and the Navy, as well as the 1936 agricultural census of the island, to gain a clearer sense of what Vieques was like on the eve of the military's arrival. When I returned to the States and began to analyze my data, I had more questions pertaining to the island's fishing economy. I was interested in the idea that the fishing economy developed in relationship to the military occupation of the island. I returned to Vieques in May of 1995 for a visit and interviewed five more fishermen, and elicited more information about family and work histories from several fishermen I had interviewed earlier.

Finally, in the spring of 1995, while I was in the process of writing this thesis, I conducted additional research on the role of U.S.-based support groups in sustaining the anti-Navy movement in Vieques. I interviewed ten U.S.-based activists on their involvement in support work and their perceptions of the movement in Vieques

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(McCaffrey 1998). This research sharpened my understanding and analysis of the politics of the local movement.

Overview of Chapters

The dissertation is organized around several basic concerns. One is to examine the historical context and material basis for conflict between Viequenses and the Navy, rooted in the Navy's control of two-thirds of island land. Another is to consider the development of a strong local identity in response to the experience of military occupation and the way that identity is mobilized in Vieques anti-military movement, "The Crusade to Recover Vieques." Finally, it considers the aftermath of that struggle, the current contours of conflict, and the future for organizing for social change on the island.

Chapter One, "The Struggle for Land and Survival," introduces the island's physical landscape as an avenue for understanding the material basis of conflict. I address here basic questions about the nature of the military presence and the concrete problems faced by the civilian population. Chapter Two, "Cultural Identity and Class Experience" links the development of a strong local identity to the nature of pre-Navy social formations and the history of military occupation of the island. Viequenses greet the Navy with an ambivalence rooted in the class experience of the

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majority as *agregados*.[6] Rather than a strong nationalist consciousness, a resilient local identity develops in response to the military presence that becomes a bastion of resistance to the Navy.

Chapter Three, "Fishing and Fishermen" interprets the significance of the particular form of Vieques' anti-military movement by examining the history, transformations and social meaning of fishing on the island. Fishing emerges as both a subsistence strategy and a form of cultural resistance to the Navy. The chapter considers how fishing changed over time, its symbolic importance heightened and its economic viability challenged by the military control and degradation of the island. It considers the constellation of factors that turned a newly-founded fishing co-operative into the crucible of the anti-Navy movement.

Chapter Four, "Politics and Protest," examines how culture is mobilized in struggle as Vieques fishermen lead an anti-military movement called the Crusade to Recover Vieques. The presence of fishermen at the vanguard of Vieques' movement allowed islanders to shape a case with explosive political implications in economic and cultural terms. The fishermen-led movement was an effort to focus on local grievances and avoid a more charged confrontation with the colonial state. Nonetheless, the political and symbolic dimensions of the case expanded beyond the control of local activists and contributed to the unraveling of the movement. Of

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[6] *Agregado* roughly translates as "landless tenant" or "squatter on private land." See Chapter Two, footnote 1 for a more detailed discussion.

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particular interest is the fact that Vieques' anti-military movement emerged on the heels of another anti-Navy mobilization on the neighboring Puerto Rican island of Culebra. The chapter will consider the relationship between the two movements and the significant differences that distinguished them.

Chapter Five, "The Battle of Vieques," examines politics and culture on the island approximately ten years after the Crusade to Recover Vieques subsided. To the extent that the underlying conflict with the Navy remains unresolved, the issues, the politics, the contradictory messages of the Crusade find expression in contemporary political discourse and activity. The chapter focuses on how and why people talk about the military expropriation of land in the 1940's. I am interested in how a turn to the past, a focus on the military expropriations, is connected to both the unresolved issues of the Crusade and current struggles to control the island, its resources, and its future.

Chapter Six considers current efforts to organize on the island in light of shifting geopolitics, streams of disillusionment and renewed optimism among islanders. My main interest is in examining how activists seek a new framework for articulating their grievances. Finally, in the Conclusion, I discuss the implications of Vieques' conflict in light of recent theorizing about social movements and collective action.

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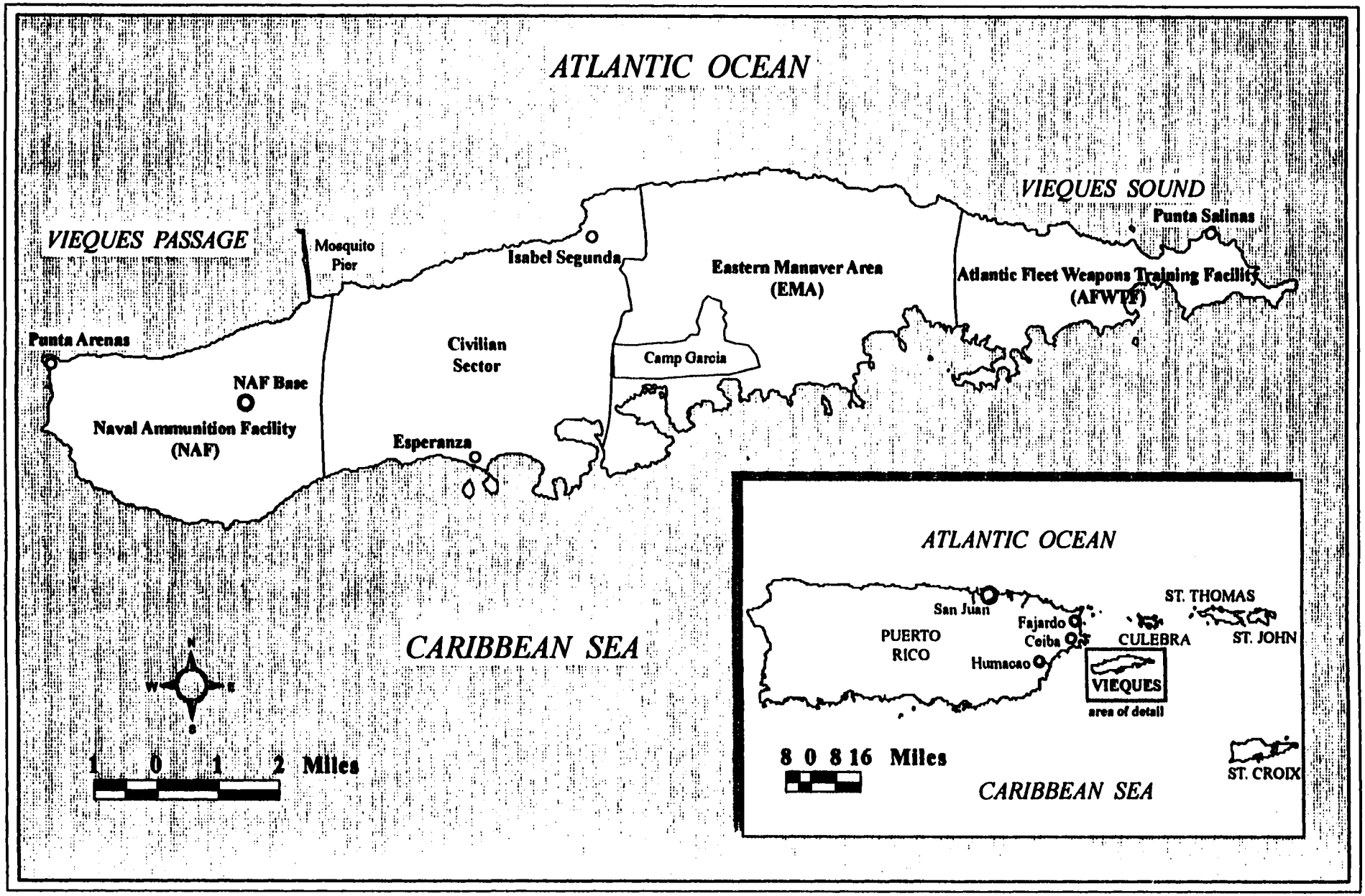

Map 1. Vieques, Puerto Rico

Doug Williamson, Hunter College, 1999

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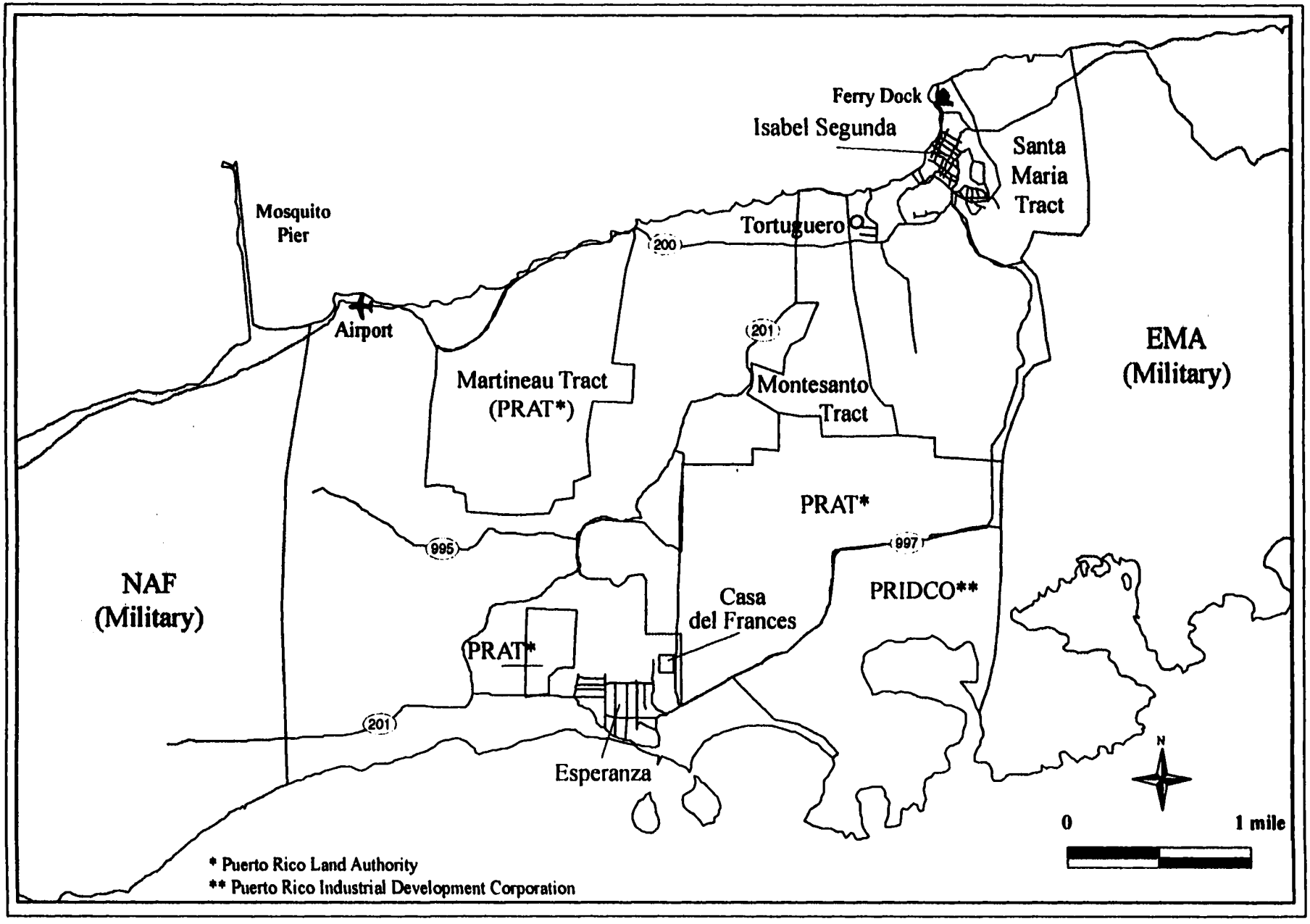

Map 2. Vieques, Civilian Sector

Doug Williamson, Hunter College, 1999

Chapter One: The Struggle for Land and Survival

> There are places in the world, on American soil, where one cannot do certain things because there are animals, flora and fauna. Nonetheless we are people and no one takes us into account. We are a species in danger of extinction. We, the people of Vieques, are in danger of extinction. And nobody hears us.
>
> *Radamés Tirado, former Mayor of Vieques*

Vieques' problems are material, involving food and shelter, transportation and health care facilities, places to work and play. They are expressed in crowded housing settlements, empty factory shells, and most viscerally, in the gates that define the entrance to the U.S. Navy base. Vieques' conflict with the U.S. Navy is rooted in the land. Two-thirds of the island is consumed by a base that, in acreage, is the largest military installation in the world. More than half of that land is reserved for maneuvers and bombing. The civilian population lives in tension with the military, sharing living room with tanks, missile fire and invading forces.

Most popular discourse in the United States concerning military bases assumes that they are community assets, bringing work and spending to local constituencies. In Vieques, residents more often perceive the base as a strangling gargantua, slowly but surely squeezing the lifeblood out of the island. To understand the nature of conflict, then, we begin here by looking at the island's physical landscape, to see what it reveals about the social problems that affect islanders.

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Vieques: A Panorama

Vieques is an island municipality of Puerto Rico, located 10 miles southeast of the main island. Vieques is long and narrow: roughly 20 miles by 4.5 miles at its widest point. Its area is approximately 51 square miles. It is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the North and the Caribbean Sea to the South. The island is dry, with topography characterized by low hills. Politically, Vieques is part of Puerto Rico, though geographically it has been argued that the island is the start of the Lesser Antilles (Picó 1950:200). The island is divided into civilian and military territories, which are described below.

The Military Sector

Vieques is part of the Roosevelt Roads Complex centered in Ceiba, on the eastern shores of Puerto Rico. When construction began on Roosevelt Roads in the 1940's, military strategists envisioned a base of the size and significance of Pearl Harbor. The plan involved excavating rock from Vieques to build a ten-mile protected road, or anchorage, between Eastern Puerto Rico and Vieques. A mile-long abandoned pier juts off the North coast of Vieques towards Ceiba, a testament to these unrealized ambitions.

Today Roosevelt Roads is a U.S. Naval Station that has functioned as a training facility since the early 1960's. It includes a deep harbor and dry dock, a

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power plant and airfield. The base has a population of approximately 3,000 military men, women and their families. Its residential services and facilities include a U.S. Naval Hospital, Navy Exchange, a primary and secondary school, a chapel, a library, a bank, a McDonald's, temporary and permanent dormitories and single-family homes. While the troops and the activity are centered in Ceiba, the majority of base land is in Vieques. In fact, it is the approximately 23,000 acres that the Navy possesses in Vieques that establish Roosevelt Roads as the largest military installation in the world. Despite its size and reputed strategic significance, however, the Vieques installation appears more as an abandoned no-man's land than a keystone of the U.S. military presence in the Western Hemisphere.

Navy land, which constitutes two-thirds of the island's 33,000 acres, engulfs the civilian sector of Vieques. Residents frequently refer to Vieques as a ham sandwich and see themselves as lunchmeat wedged between thick slices of bread. The Navy is less metaphorical in its description of land usage. It breaks down the base into three units: The Naval Ammunition Facility (NAF), which constitutes roughly 8,000 acres on the island's West coast; and the Eastern Maneuver Area (EMA) and the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility (AFWTF), which together comprise about 15,000 acres to the east of the civilian sector.

The Naval Ammunition Facility

NAF land was expropriated in the early 40's as part of the Navy's

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original plan to build a docking station for the Atlantic Fleet. It is here that the uncompleted pier lies, now functioning as a fishing dock where serious fishers and novices alike cast lines into the surf. This westernmost part of the island historically was part of the Playa Grande sugar plantation, which in the 1930's possessed Vieques' last operational sugar mill. Today this part of the island serves two major functions. First, it acts as an ammunition storage area. 122 magazines are cut into the sides of hills containing a wide variety of ordnance. Second, it is the site of a small base, the organizational center of the skeleton crew that operates in Vieques. Just under one hundred sailors staff the military facilities in Vieques. One third of these sailors are housed in rudimentary barracks at the base on a one-year, unaccompanied (i.e., no spouses or children) tour of duty. A handful of sailors work on "security detachment," patrolling the base in co-ordination with 69 civilian guards. The rest of the soldiers are "Sea Bees" (derived from an acronym for construction brigade). They are stationed at Roosevelt Roads and spend much of their time in Vieques bulldozing earth and breaking rock in the Eastern Maneuver Area.

In 1994 the NAF land was the topic of political debate when former Puerto Rican Governor and current Resident Commissioner Carlos Romero Barceló proposed legislation that would transfer control of the land from the Navy directly to the municipality of Vieques. In October of 1994, Navy Rear Admiral Ernest Christensen appeared before Congress to testify to the value of the land to the military. Despite the Navy's insistence on the land's value, to the outside observer it

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appears strikingly desolate and underutilized. Indeed Navy maps designate most of this land as set aside for grazing and conservation. The fact that the Navy labels certain tracts of land within the base "conservation zones" provokes considerable controversy and outrage among islanders. This controversy shapes the opinion expressed by Radamés Tirado in the beginning of the chapter, that Viequenses themselves are in danger of extinction.

Eastern Maneuver Area/Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility

Most of the Navy's landholdings and activity are concentrated on the east of the island, which is reserved for amphibious warfare training. Like the western part of the island, the Navy's landholdings in the east strike one as abandoned. Much of the base land is quiet, rolling scrub -covered hills. The Navy distinguishes distinct areas within the eastern military zone: the Eastern Maneuver Area (EMA) and the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility (AFWTF). The distinction the Navy makes between these two areas on the east and the terminology used to describe these facilities masks the controversy that is at their core: the eastern part of the island is used for bombing and maneuvers. Because of the great outrage provoked by the bombing of Vieques, Naval maps further specify a specific "impact area" within the AFWTF to dispel the notion that the entire eastern part of the island is continually bombarded. This impact area, Naval officials stress, is composed of only 980 acres which constitutes less than three percent of Vieques' landmass. This area is, however, larger than New York

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City's Central Park. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the entire eastern area serves as a training ground. In practice this means that while planes and ships aim to bomb the impact area, they very well might miss. I noted that in October, 1993 a fighter jet dropped five 500 pound bombs on the military designated "buffer zone" six miles from the target area specified by military maps, and approximately one mile from a densely populated residential area.

At the heart of the eastern baseland is Camp García, a deactivated marine training base. Camp García operated from 1959-1978, and was closed during the height of anti-Navy protest in the 70's. At its peak 300 marines were stationed here on five-month tours of duty. Today Camp García is small and nondescript, comprised of aging barracks and old sugar cane warehouses. At any given time the barracks may be occupied by a handful of Sea Bees on assignment. On the weekends, the Sea Cadets, a military youth league that recruits young Viequense boys and girls, conducts classes and training at the camp. Most of the time, however, the camp is empty, its gates guarded by a pack of feral dogs.

Several miles down the dirt road from Camp García lies the Eastern Military Observation Post, which not only surveys the shelling of the target area, but affords spectacular views of Vieques and the eastern Caribbean. Most of the daily military activity is focused here at the target range, which is bombed by ship and plane with live and inactive ordnance throughout the year.

The Navy stresses the importance of Vieques in providing amphibious

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warfare training to the Atlantic Fleet. In the 1940's and 1950's Vieques was regularly inundated by as many as 90,000 sailors at once. Today thousands of troops continue to flock to Vieques for large-scale maneuvers. In 1993 it was Ocean Venture, an international war game that brought 20,000 troops to Vieques' shores. In 1994, Vieques served more pressing purposes as the Navy prepared for a possible invasion of Haiti. Warships surrounded the island's coastlines, helicopters buzzed overhead, and the sound of artillery fire filled the night. During maneuvers, the base land comes to life. Thickly tangled mesquite challenges troops and tanks that practice mock invasions. The crystalline waters and quiet white shores ringing Vieques are docks for amphibious tanks and divers.

The Civilian Sector

The municipality of Vieques is wedged between Naval facilities. The boundaries of the civilian sector are marked by the Atlantic Ocean to the north, the Caribbean Sea to the south, the EMA to the east, and the NAF to the west. The civilian sector covers approximately 10,000 acres. According to the 1990 census, the population is 8,602.

To many visitors, Vieques feels like an island history left behind. It lacks the strip malls, chain stores and Burger Kings that have transformed the landscape of much of the rest of Puerto Rico. There are no casinos, big hotels, golf courses, or other markers of tourist development. Horses graze along the road and roosters crow

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at dawn. The island's slow pace, framed by the idle hills on the base land, give the illusion of a pristine, timeless island.

Isabel Segunda and the Northeast Coast

At the turn of the century Vieques Island was comprised of eight barrios and a single town, Isabel Segunda, named after the Queen of Spain. Today residential life remains focused on the island's capital and principal town, Isabel Segunda and residents have been concentrated in an area roughly equivalent to two and a half barrios of years past. Isabel Segunda's layout is that of a classic Spanish colonial town: at the center, a plaza flanked by a Catholic Church on the east. A Methodist Church, a later addition to the plaza, lies opposite the Catholic Church on the western side of the Plaza. To the north is the *Alcaldía* (Town Hall), to the south an elementary school whose children pour into the plaza during recess. Perched above the plaza on a hill is an unfinished nineteenth-century Spanish fort, a reminder of the island's strategic significance over the years. Isabel Segunda is the island's administrative center, home to many of the government agencies that provide most of the island's employment. It is a sleepy town, where most of the stores are humble, dusty and locally owned: a hardware store, a pizza place, a pharmacy, a grocery specializing in a WIC clientele.[1] Much of the daily activity bustles around the U.S. Post Office. Fifty years after the military arrived, the majority of residents lack title to the land they occupy, and as a consequence, have no formal addresses and receive no mail delivery

[1] WIC is a federally funded nutrition program for women, infants and children.

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to their homes. The post office has become the town center, a lively spot in this quiet, sun washed, dusty town, the one place on the island where traffic jams at noon.

On the outskirts of Isabel Segunda, on the town's Atlantic coast is the ferry dock, the island's major port of call. The dock is an easy walk from town, past the small library and firehouse, turning right at the Hotel Ocean View, where Viequenses and Marines danced together in the 50's, past a stark modernist obelisk dedicated to *Hijos Ausentes* ("absent children," a reference to those Viequenses who have left the island) overlooking the harbor. The ferry is at the heart of the Viequense experience, embodying the coming and going that governs life, symbolizing the frustrations of political isolation and economic underdevelopment. The ferry is the major link between Vieques and Puerto Rico. It is not the only way on and off the island: an airport that services small propeller planes lies further down on the island's north coast. The ferry, however, is the most affordable way of regular transportation, and the major way in which people and cargo shuttle back and forth. Crowds line up in the early morning hours, preparing for the passage to school, the doctor, clothes and grocery shopping. Gasoline, trucks of produce, and paychecks arrive here by boat. Before the Navy arrived Vieques was served by two ferry lines: one from Isabel Segunda to Fajardo, and another from Punta Arenas on the island's westernmost point, where boats followed the sugar barges that ferried between Vieques and Ceiba, a six mile trip. Because of military restrictions on the seas, the only ferry line now runs 22 miles from Isabel Segunda to Fajardo. The passage is extended to avoid Navy

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traffic and bombs and cuts through the rough waters of the Vieques Sound. Political indifference has further distanced Vieques. The Puerto Rican government dedicates few resources to the ferry link. The trip today takes one and one-half to two hours and between overcrowding and breakdowns, passage is never entirely certain. The state of the ferry has long been a source of great controversy on Vieques because it is at the heart of the island's economic malaise. A very vocal group organized locally to push the Puerto Rican Port Authority to designate more resources and commitment to running Vieques' ferry service. In 1996-1997 a new, faster boat went into service.

To the east of the ferry landing, one quickly reaches the eastern boundary of the civilian zone. There lies a closely settled neighborhood of small, boxy concrete homes; a small Pentecostal church; a little blue lighthouse. Chickens squawk and scurry across the road. This is one of the few remaining original areas of settlement and titled land in Vieques. Beyond this point, about one half mile down the road, one enters what the Navy calls the "Santa Maria Tract," one of the major areas where Viequense families were resettled during the 40's.

Santa Maria abuts the northern part of the EMA, but boundaries here are disputed and settlement chaotic. When the Navy moved families here it never established a resettlement policy and thus left unresolved issues of property rights, land transfer and inheritance. Over time, families and individuals fanned out, squatting by accretion and organized *rescate* ("recovery"--described by opponents as "land invasions") within the Santa María tract and then into what the Navy labels its

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buffer zone. These settlements vary in age and in acceptance. Older settlements have now received some grudging legitimacy from the government in the form of water and electrical service, telephone lines and lampposts. Many houses are "in process": half built, half painted, half paid for. This reflects the inability of residents to qualify for mortgage money, the legacy of living without title. Yet foundations laid in concrete and large satellite disks point to an expectation of relative permanence among residents. Newer squats are more tenuous in their existence. Houses are built of wood, some displaying Puerto Rican flags in an implicit challenge to military land tenure. Generators provide light and buckets catch rainwater in this no-man's land without electricity, roads, running water, or telephone service.

Controversy surrounding these settlements is explosive. Objections are raised by the municipality, which is charged with providing service to chaotically settled land. Pro-military factions claim that settlers are lawless, communist-inspired, anti-American free loaders. While most of the homes in the resettlement tracts and buffer zone are primary residences for Viequenses, there is growing concern about a rash of illegal land speculation that is turning desperately needed living space into rental property, vacation villas and seasonal businesses owned by non-Viequenses (*Vieques Times*, March 1995). The Puerto Rican government has perpetuated the chaos. In the late seventies the Navy turned the original resettlement tracts over to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, beginning a confusing process through which the tracts of land were passed back and forth between various governmental agencies

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without ever issuing land rights to the Viequenses who occupied the land. In 1994 the Puerto Rican Housing Authority ignited a firestorm when it charged occupants the current market price of the land residents believed they already owned, threatening those who couldn't pay with eviction (Rivera and Torres 1996: 56-57, and *Vieques Times*, September 1994 and March 1995).

The Northwest Coast

The road that runs along the north coast of the civilian sector ends at the small airport that borders the NAF. The road passes the Middle School, police station, local court, and hospital that is at the center of significant controversy. One of the most pressing social problems in Vieques today is the lack of adequate medical facilities. As part of a Puerto Rican government plan to regionalize medical services, many of the services that used to be provided by the local hospital are now provided only in Puerto Rico, forcing sick and elderly residents to travel to Fajardo for basic care such as laboratory work, x-rays, and injections. Pregnant women, furthermore, must travel to Fajardo not only for prenatal care, but to deliver their babies, a situation undoubtedly contributing to the fact that Vieques has the highest rate of infant mortality in Puerto Rico. What was billed as a new medical regionalization plan amounted to the downgrading of a hospital, perceived to be an adequate, to little more than a first-aid station.

Beyond the hospital is territory owned by the Puerto Rican Land Administration. Most of this area is what the Navy called the Montesanto tract, which

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borders the Atlantic Ocean on the north, and cuts into the island's interior. Montesanto, like Santa Maria, was established by the Navy during the 1940's, relocating residents into land used largely for sugar cane cultivation. As mentioned before, the Navy ceded this land and the Santa María tract to the Commonwealth government in the early 1980's. This area is of mixed industrial and residential use, reflecting Vieques' chaotic development. For example, baking in the sun on one of Vieques' most heavily traveled roads, lies a recently completed public housing project, "The Gardens of Vieques," the long awaited local response to the chronic housing shortage on the island. Right up the street is a neighborhood called "Tortuguero" that represents another smaller military resettlement tract, comprised of families moved mainly from the eastern part of the island in the late 40's. This area is hot and dusty with small plots of land and few trees to filter the intense Caribbean sun. Interspersed within this residential area are a variety of industrial parks, most of them abandoned. Next to Tortuguero is a vacant tract of land where the incumbent mayor's hopes to build an industrial park were dashed because it was impossible to secure adequate water. Across from Tortuguero is a General Electric factory flanked by a handful of abandoned industrial sites. Next to "the Gardens" lies Caribbean Novelty, or the "lace factory," which with GE represents one of the few successful industrial enterprises ever established in Vieques. Again, this enterprise is surrounded by vacant buildings. Over the years countless enterprises have come and gone on Vieques, leaving the island awash with the empty factory shells.

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The road up to GE is dusty and hot. There are no trees and little beauty, lots of traffic and dust. Past GE, the traffic and settlement thin out. One passes a sewage treatment plant on the island's north coast before entering the Martineau tract, roughly 1150 acres of land, again owned by the Puerto Rican Land Administration. There are trees and vegetation, grazing cattle, goats and horses. Up until the 1980's, this land was owned by the Navy and leased to the Commonwealth government for agricultural purposes. When the Navy ceded this land to the Commonwealth government in the early 1980's, its intended purpose was to remain agricultural. In 1994, however, a politically connected San Juan developer bought a chunk of this land and planned to build a luxury resort on one of the last undeveloped strips of the island's northwest coast. This proposed resort was in many ways typical of the type of political maneuvering and poor planning that have afflicted Vieques for decades. What little land was left in the civilian sector of Vieques was sold to outside private interests for personal gain. Residents had doubts about the tourist potential of a luxury resort dubiously located between the island's airport and sewage treatment plant, and were angered that local needs and interests were once again discounted.

The Antonio Rivera Rodríguez airport, owned by the Puerto Rican Port Authority, defines the northwestern limits of civilian territory. Because of the short landing strip, this airport services only small planes, and there are no lights for evening landings or take-offs. It is the home base of Vieques Air Link, a privately owned airline that provides service from Vieques to Puerto Rico (Humacao, Fajardo,

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San Juan), St. Croix, and St. Thomas. It has the atmosphere of a small town train station, where taxi drivers waiting for passengers receive personal telephone calls on the airplane's business line.

Eastern Interior and Esperanza

Traveling along the eastern perimeter of the civilian sector to Esperanza, a village on the southern coast of the island, one quickly develops a sense of the haphazard nature of development and the untapped potential of the island. The road winds up into the hilly interior of Vieques, where just outside of town, construction was underway for a new hospital, a controversial response to the underfunded health center. In the hills above the razed earth of the construction site, a Puerto Rican flag waves from a settler's home in Villa Borinquen.[2] Continuing on, one reaches a small neighborhood called Destino. The housing here is mixed, mainly concrete homes, of varying size and quality. The vegetation and hilly terrain make this area more pleasant than other neighborhoods. Just beyond a small evangelical church that sits on top the hill's summit, the road bends and there are spectacular views of the eastern baseland and the Caribbean Sea. From here one can see the ecologically unique bioluminescent bays that ring Vieques' southern coast, and the miles of empty base land, once cane fields and pasture for work oxen. During maneuvers, it is not uncommon to see warships prowling the coast, and helicopters and fighter jets cutting across the horizon.

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2. Villa Borinquen is the name of a village adjacent to the Santa Maria area established in the 1970's by land "recovery."

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As the road winds downhill, settlement thins out and one passes the gates to Camp García, the main entrance to the Eastern Maneuver Area. These gates are the symbolic heart of the military presence on Vieques and have been the site of numerous pickets throughout the years. Across from the gates, on the opposite side of the street, is an abandoned factory and 200 acres of idle land owned by the Puerto Rican Land Administration. This site was occupied in the late 1980's by South Bronx Greenhouse, which opened a farm operation with the encouragement of a military economic development program. After securing economic assistance from a Navy defense contractor and the Puerto Rican government to open a farm and food dehydration plant, SBG filed for bankruptcy and shut its doors within four months. No public explanation was given for the company's demise. SBG left its fields contaminated with toxic waste and its unemployed workforce extremely discontented.[3]

Past the abandoned factory and the gates to Camp Garcia, the road starts to cut westward towards Esperanza. Hundreds of acres of underdeveloped land to the east and west of the road are owned by the Commonwealth government. One sees bony Brahman cows--yesterday's solution to Vieques' economic malaise--grazing dry fields littered with Budweiser cans. These largely empty lands, formally under the jurisdiction of the Puerto Rican Industrial Development Corporation (PRIDCO) and

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3. See Grusky (1992) for a detailed account of the failure of the Navy's economic development program, implemented as part of a "Memorandum of Understanding" signed in 1983.

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the Puerto Rican Land Authority (PRAT), are linked to historic efforts to rehabilitate Vieques' economy. PRIDCO land, to the east of the road (which includes environmentally reserved swampy areas surrounding the bioluminescent Mosquito Bay), was promoted for tourist development in the 1960's. The Woolnor Corporation leased the site, seeking to build a tourist community on the south shore of Vieques that would include a 100-room hotel, a marina, gold course, and 300 one- acre homesites for private development. Later, I will tell the story of how the Navy squashed this development project. PRAT land to the west of the road was part of a government effort to resuscitate the sugar cane industry. In 1947, the Puerto Rico Agricultural Company (PRACO) purchased the Eastern Sugar Corporation's last holdings in the south, east of Esperanza, and tilled cane with limited success until the collapse of the Puerto Rican sugar industry in the 1960's. No substantial development projects have assumed the place of cane, and much of the land is overgrazed by cattle.[4]

Traveling past these lands, one reaches the outskirts of Esperanza. If Isabel Segunda is considered Vieques' administrative and residential center, Esperanza, the small village on the island's south coast, is Vieques' tourist zone. On the outskirts of the village is a public beach, Sun Bay, which locals proudly proclaim to be one of Puerto Rico's finest beaches. Just up the road is the *Casa del Francés*, or

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4. There are several small-scale projects here including a farm owned by a North American and a bee farm. Neither employ many workers.

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Frenchman's house. This elegant Creole mansion was built at the turn of the century by Gustavo Mouraille, the French owner of the sugar plantation Esperanza. Now the Casa is a private hotel at the epicenter of the Anglo dominated tourist trade, owned by an eccentric Bostonian, and catering to a largely North American clientele. Never fully recovering from damage incurred by Hurricane Hugo, the hotel is in a state of disrepair which is befitting its self-proclaimed image as an "anti-hotel", and emblematic of the slightly scruffy, "laid back" tourist scene.

Esperanza lies on Vieques' southern, Caribbean coast and is defined by a single strip of low-budget restaurants, guest houses and small shops, and a short boardwalk facing the sea. Despite a host of Puerto Rican establishments and blaring *merengue* music, Esperanza has a decidedly North American flavor. Anchoring the tourist strip is an establishment called Bananas. A rotating staff of sunburned, Northern escapees create an imagined tropical paradise here, serving burgers and piña coladas into the late hours to a lingering, mostly Anglo crowd. Next to Bananas is a squat, white concrete Museum of the Vieques Conservation and Historic Trust, the pet project of a network of Vieques' affluent seasonal North American residents.

Despite efforts to create here a timeless tropical escape, monuments to Vieques' past cut across the landscape of Esperanza. The town's name itself is that of the old sugar plantation that once included these shores within its boundaries. At the town's entrance is the facade of the old pineapple factory, part of a promising yet failed project initiated by PRACO in the 1940's to start a pineapple industry in

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Vieques. Beyond the ruins of the pineapple factory, a barnacle encrusted pier juts into the surf. This pier was used by the Eastern Sugar Associates, and later the Commonwealth government, to load sugarcane on barges to be ground at Pasto Viejo Central in Humacao. And perhaps the most haunting element of Esperanza's landscape is the ruins of the Vieques Fishermen's Association, situated directly across the street from barflies at Bananas. This is where local fishers organized their movement against the Navy in the late 70's. Today the fish house is in shambles, the plot contested by divided factions of the defunct association. Beer cans and broken glass litter the site. But the concrete walls are graffitied with anti-Navy slogans in homage to the movement that was built at this site.

Beyond this tourist strip, Esperanza is a densely settled residential neighborhood of Vieques. This area expanded dramatically in the aftermath of the housing crisis created by the Navy's takeover of the island. Homes are extremely modest, small and square, built mostly of concrete. Esperanza is one of the few neighborhoods in Vieques where the streets actually have names.

Western Interior

Travelling around the island, to this point, the visitor has been impressed by several trends. One is that despite the island's relatively small population, the residential areas are extremely congested, characterized by modest housing and often barren, exposed land. Second, contrasting these tightly settled areas, are numerous empty tracts of land and abandoned buildings, mostly under the jurisdiction of the

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Commonwealth government. In fact, the Puerto Rican government is the second largest landowner in Vieques after the U.S. Navy, owning roughly half of the land in the civilian sector. But the western interior of Vieques demonstrates a different pattern of settlement. Here in areas called Puerto Real and El Pilón, are some of the largest land holdings and most expensive housing in Vieques.

The western interior of Vieques contains most of the island's private property. Historically this area of the island neighboring the sugar plantation Playa Grande was tilled by independent small and medium sized farmers who cultivated sugar cane and pasture land. Today, this area of Vieques has a large number of vacation homes owned mostly by the island's seasonal North American residents. These vacation homes, carved from idle farm lands, are a testament to the romantic imaginations of their owners: one house, for example, is built with a two story wall of glass that offers unobstructed views of the Caribbean Sea. These vacation houses contrast sharply with the humble, concrete boxy homes of most Viequense families who are more concerned with the ravages of tropical storms than the romance of the landscape. And, as might be imagined, considerable tension is generated by the fact that these homes sit vacant for half the year on the green hills of Pilón and Puerto Real, while the majority of Viequenses live without title in small shoeboxes in military resettlement tracts.

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Social and Economic Profile

Vieques is one of the Commonwealth's poorest municipalities. According to the 1990 census, the per capita income of islanders was $2,997, compared to the Puerto Rican average of $4,177. 6,192 people, or 73.3 percent of the total inhabitants of the municipality fell below the federal poverty level. These statistics are distorted by the fact that they do not measure the amount of wealth of the island's North American residents, most of them seasonal. These residents are a kind of expatriate bourgeoisie, who control the most valuable land and wealth on the civilian sector, but who officially plant their roots off-island. The island has among the highest rates of unemployment in Puerto Rico, hovering officially at 43 percent according to the 1990 census.

It is a source of great controversy that the base, which consumes so much of the island's land and productive potential, offers so little employment to the civilian residents of Vieques Island. Because the troops' presence is so minuscule, and because the sailors are so insular, there seem to be few if any local industries that are sustained entirely, or even substantially, by the military presence. Only 22 residents are hired by the Department of Defense to work as public works employees. Another handful of individuals are contracted to cut grass, work in the kitchen and clean the barracks. The bulk of work on the base is provided through a civilian organization, Action Service Corporation, which hires 69 civilians to work as security guards on the base. Prior to the protest movement of 1978, the Navy used its own personnel as

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security guards for the base. As a result of the controversy over the military presence, and presumably in an effort to build greater civilian support, the Navy started hiring civilians instead.

The tourist industry, small to begin with, is also disappointing for the lack of employment it offers to Viequenses. Though one study (LMI 1992) funded by the Department of Defense, estimated that as many as 61 people were employed in the tourist trade in January 1991, constituting 1 out 5 local jobs, the study's analysis did not take into account the nature of the workforce. Many of the island's most important tourist establishments are owned by North Americans who employ seasonal workers from the United States. Even when locals are employed in these establishments it is often in the kitchens and backrooms as opposed to the restaurant floors and reception areas. A recent study suggests that Viequenses are disadvantaged in gaining a foothold in local industry because they lack collateral with which to establish businesses. Without title to land, the aspiring Viequense entrepreneur cannot borrow against a deed to secure funds to start up a business. The study suggested that this constraint has contributed to a gradual take-over of the island economy by non-Viequenses (Rivera and Torres 1996:57).

The largest employer on Vieques is the government: in this way, Vieques is like the rest of Puerto Rico. A 1991 estimate placed public sector jobs in Vieques at 650. Of these, the Department of Education was the biggest employer, followed by the municipal government. The two largest private employers are General Electric

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and Caribbean Novelty, each employing about 100 people.[5] These two factories, the centerpieces of the island's private economy, offer low wages (an average wage of $5.81 per hour) yet have no trouble finding employees in Vieques' bleak economy, and managers cite Vieques' hard working labor force as one of the island's greatest attributes. Average wages have been estimated to be 17% higher in mainland Puerto Rico than those in Vieques (LMI 1992:3).

In the context of this underdeveloped economy, workers have learned to survive through two major strategies: "occupational multiplicity" and outmigration. Describing life in rural Jamaica, Comitas (1973) coined the term "occupational multiplicity" to refer to the way "sheer survival obliges those at the lowest economic levels to pursue several occupations at one time" (p 156). This pattern readily applies to Vieques' work culture. For example, during the town's annual carnival, I recognized a man operating a food concession stand in the plaza, toiling into the late hours. This man worked full- time nights and weekends as a clerk at the airport, in addition to his full-time position as a teacher in the local school. This individual was unusual in that he had two positions in the formal sector. Others individuals, with less access to the formal economy, learn a variety of skills in order to piece together the equivalent of a living wage: a person might fish, fix bicycles or cars, make *pasteles*, clean houses, cut grass, occasionally work in construction. In Chapter Three we will consider the way Vieques' fishermen maintain this type of work pattern. It is

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5. Caribbean Novelty's labor force is entirely female.

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also not uncommon to find people who are serial workers: one man I interviewed held down seven different full-time jobs in the formal economy in a period of about eight years.

Outmigration, ironically, is the other major strategy employed by individuals in order to live on the island. Significant theoretical attention has been devoted to Puerto Rican migration, focusing on the circular nature of Puerto Rican migration, and on the ensuing transnational character of the population (History Task Force 1979; Bonilla 1989; Bonilla and Campos 1981, 1983). Vieques has long been an island of coming and going, with a history of seasonal agricultural migration to and from the island. While Viequenses are rooted in the U.S. mainland, following a pattern of migration and return migration that mirrors other Puerto Ricans, the close relationship that Viequenses developed with the neighboring islands of St. Thomas and particularly St. Croix is a distinct aspect of the Viequense migration experience (Rabin 1993). In the 40's and 50's, after the military occupation of Vieques, many men migrated to St. Croix for seasonal employment in the cane fields and in construction. This seasonal work closely approximated work patterns of the sugar era, and enabled Viequenses to remain rooted to their island, returning home in the off-season. In addition, many men and women migrated to the U.S. during this same time period for work in factories and the service sector. Yet migrants left the island with dreams of returning upon retirement, or better yet, earning enough capital to start new lives in Vieques. These strategies seemed to pay off, as return migrants

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have bought *públicos* (private vans that operate as a communal taxi service), built cement houses, and erected satellite dishes, all with money earned during years in New York, Chicago, Worcester, MA and San Juan. Census data, which document a growing elderly population, support the perception that a large number of Viequenses return home in their golden years.

Supplementing low wages are federal transfer payments. Half of the population receives some sort of economic assistance for food, and about a quarter of the population receives Social Security benefits. Government pensions, unemployment compensation, and other social programs (for example Federal Disaster Relief after Hurricane Hugo) also contribute to a lesser degree to the local economy. There are no statistics on remittances, but money sent from workers employed off-island to family members in Vieques undoubtedly forms an important source of income in a community of transnational character.

Drugs are the source of great anxiety in this tranquil community that prides itself on the safety of its streets and its relative freedom from serious crime. The drug economy in Vieques is not as developed as it is in Puerto Rico or the neighboring Virgin Islands. As Puerto Rico is gripped with violence, middle-class communities close their streets and erect gates, and a heavily armed National Guard invades and patrols San Juan housing projects, Vieques is a world apart. Residents can walk the street at night and gather to chat in the Plaza. Though residents point surreptitiously to homes built with drug money, to date drugs have not been a governing force in the

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local economy. There is evidence, however, that times are changing. In 1994 and 1995, authorities discovered that Vieques was being used as a cache for multi-million dollar drug shipments. Drug traffickers took advantage of the island's uninhabited base land to stash their loot. There was a frightening incident in 1996 when a base security guard was accosted and tortured by a drug dealer who believed that the guard had stolen a drug shipment dropped on base land. Hotel owners have started to complain of drug peddling on the boardwalk in Esperanza.

Living in Vieques

Rosa Moreno is a classic example of how Viequenses get by. Rosa is a 60-year-old widow who lived and worked in New York City for 25 years. Rosa returned to Vieques in the late 70's, fulfilling a dream to return to the island and build a beautiful house there. She left her adult children in Brooklyn. Rosa staked a piece of land in a squatter's zone and constructed a large concrete home on land to which she held no title, and thus did not formally own. She built the house with savings, a personal loan, and money from her son. Rosa shifted through a variety of bureaucratic jobs over the course of several different political administrations, before leaving work due to a disability. Out of work, Rosa lives on food stamps and SSI while her son pays her electric and phone bills. Family and friends play a crucial role in helping her maintain an independent lifestyle. During the hurricane season, Juan Velásquez, the son of a childhood friend, put up wooden planks over Rosa's windows

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in exchange for coconut custard. When her washing machine broke down, her daughter ferried over a used one from Puerto Rico. Visitors from New York shuttle stereo equipment, CD's, books and videotapes from the children to Rosa. But the remittances go both ways. When Rosa's son, a clerical worker in a large university, had his heart set on a co-op in the Bronx, Rosa took out a personal loan to send him money to buy the co-op.

Population

Vieques is characterized by high rates of outmigration, particularly of the island's youth. This is an extremely sensitive issue in Vieques, and parents mourn the dissolution of their families as their children search for opportunities off the island. One 1989 article estimated that 90 percent of high school graduates leave the island (Capo 1989). This outmigration may be partially responsible for two demographic features that distinguish Vieques from rest of Puerto Rico: a declining birth rate, and a disproportionately aged population. Vieques, in the words of an informant, is a place where people return to die.

The 1990 census marked an increase in the island's population, from 7,800 in 1980 to 8,602 in 1990. This gain stood in contrast to a widespread perception that the Vieques population continues to plummet. Concern for Vieques' population decline extends back to the 50's, and as we will see, is a central grievance held against the Navy. It is worth noting here, however, that the perception that Vieques' population is

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at risk may be shaped in part not only by the exodus of the working age population, but also by the growing presence of North Americans on the island.

The history of the North American presence will be explored in the next chapter. In 1993-1994 the population was diverse, including elderly "snowbirds" who spent winters on the island in vacation homes; younger entrepreneurs who ran hotels, restaurants, and real estate agencies; and young hippies who worked the bars and slept on the beaches, accepting low wages for a bit of "paradise." The community is markedly introverted. This impression was built not only on my observations of the community (its incompetence in Spanish, frequent lack of information about pressing political issues in the community, and low attendance at community events such as the cultural festival, and patron saint festival) but also on my own experience interacting with Vieqenses and North Americans alike. Viequenses were constantly taken aback when I spoke Spanish, regardless of my grammatical shortcomings. When I went to town with a Viequense friend and we purchased groceries together, the clerk carefully separated our items, not understanding that we could possibly be shopping together. A number of times I was walking near my home on the northern part of the island, North Americans would stop and ask me if I needed a lift to Esperanza. Never mind that this was easily a seven-mile walk, an unlikely mid-day jaunt. The perception was that I must be on my way to Esperanza. What would a *gringa* be doing in a Viequense neighborhood?

I found that I was constantly being offered real estate by Viequenses. This

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gets to the heart of the tensions between the two communities. North Americans are buying up land that Viequenses are selling because the Viequenses no longer see the land as economically viable. Property includes agricultural land that lost significance with the decline of sugar cane, and homes that people can't keep because there is no work on the island. North Americans with greater resources--money to invest in hotels, pensions to spend on vacation homes--are able to purchase the land that Viequenses can no longer afford. North Americans push up the market price so that impoverished locals have little hope of ever buying a titled piece of land on the island, and either remain in the resettlement areas or squat on disputed land. Middle- and working-class Viequenses who return from years working in the United States and St. Croix gamble and buy squats, rather than titled land. While some North Americans also own squats--some of them quite luxurious--the point is that the island's titled land is concentrated heavily in North American hands. Despite their desire to keep "Vieques for Viequenses," middle- class Viequenses can't turn down the prices that North Americans will pay. Thus a conflict between the upper class seeking vacation property and the working class seeking living space takes on a colonial element. It is interesting to compare Vieques with Salinas, Puerto Rico, where Berman Santana (1996) notes that politically well-connected San Juan professionals have been building summer homes and a marina, in the process dispossessing local residents and destroying the coastal environment. Berman describes this process as indicative of the widening of the social gap in Puerto Rico in

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the post-Operation Bootstrap years. Working- and middle- class Viequenses, indeed, are also concerned about people from "*afuera*" buying up the island, and many Puerto Ricans have vacation homes on the island, particularly in squatter settlements. Nonetheless, the process in Vieques is characterized by the North American component, making Vieques, on its face, appear more like the neighboring U.S. Virgin Islands than mainland Puerto Rico.

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Chapter Two: Cultural Identity and Class Experience

"In Vieques, the U.S. government is engaged in the vivisection of our nation."

Pedro Albizu Campos, *El Imparcial*, January 1948.

Between 1941-1943, in the midst of World War II, the United States Navy expropriated two-thirds of Vieques Island. The plan was to build a base in the Caribbean of size and significance comparable to Pearl Harbor. As part of this process, in 1941, the Navy evicted Radamés Tirado and his family from their home in Barrio Resolución in Western Vieques. Don Radamés went on to become Mayor of Vieques, but in 1941 he was seven years old. "I remember everything completely," he said. "The Americans began over there in the east, before they got to the west. I could see them practicing between the rows of cane. This was around the end of 1939, the beginning of 1940. By 1941 they evicted us from there."

Radamés' family were *agregados*, living on land that belonged to the Playa Grande sugar *central*. [1] He had seven brothers and four sisters. His father worked for

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1. Mintz (1956:326) elaborates some of the varying definitions for the term *agregado*. The first he considers is based on Article 78 of the Land Law of Puerto Rico, enacted in 1941: "any family head residing in the rural zone, whose house is erected on lands belonging to another person or to a public or private entity, whose only means of livelihood is his labor for a wage can be defined as an *agregado*." Mintz is dissatisfied with this definition as it collapses into one category individuals who squat on government land and those who live on company land. He prefers a more nuanced definition and cites Howell, a former member of the Puerto Rico Board of planning: "The term *agregado* as used in Puerto Rico does not exactly correspond to share cropper or farm laborer....there are three types of *agregados*: 1) for whom the farm owner provides a house in exchange for an unwritten but vigorously enforced promise to serve him, 2) who live off the farm, but not on property of their own, and 3) who,

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the *central*, loading boats with cane. His mother was a housewife, who earned some cash washing clothes and making lunch for the sugar cane workers. His family cultivated subsistence crops and raised animals on the land they were allotted by the *central*.

"How did your parents react to the expropriations?" I asked him. "In this time period, people lived in a state of ignorance," he responded. "They understood that an order given by the Navy was something they had to obey. Most understood it this way. Most people in this time period did not go to school, did not have any academic preparation."

The Navy tore down the Tirados' wooden house, and loaded it in pieces with the rest of the family's belongings onto a truck. "One was expropriated without being given a house," don Radamés explained. "We had to look for four pieces of zinc to construct a house and it was five or six months before you had a house again...They gave us a plot 50 feet by 80 feet. Everyone had the same. Later people tried to get a little more." "And you weren't given title to the land?" I asked. "No, and we still don't have it," he noted. "They brought us here with the condition that in 24 hours if they needed to expropriate the land, they would do it."

"In these years after the expropriations," don Radamés remembered, "the base gave work on the breakwater. Immediately after the expropriations the people were

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in addition to the house, have the use of a small plot of the farm owner's land for cultivation of food and for raising animals.

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content, because they knew there was work on the base. For a little while. My father worked on the base, on the breakwater and different projects over there."

"And after that what did he do?" I asked. "Besides the work that the base provided, the only thing left in Vieques was some cane in Esperanza, and some belonging to *colonos* [small cane farmers]. He worked there in the cane and the pineapple. So did I when I was 16." In 1945, however, don Radamés' father left his family in Vieques and went to work for many years in St.Thomas and St. Croix, sending remittances back home. "We stayed here. It was very difficult in those times because there were no airplanes, so we had to use boats. There were times when he was away for four or five years." Eventually, four of don Radamés' brothers and sisters also left Vieques, finding work in factories in New York City.

Don Radamés' story is similar to that of many Viequenses who lived through the 1940's. While the United States did not enter World War II until December 1941, for Viequenses the war began earlier that year when the Navy took over their island. When war broke out in Europe, the Navy envisioned the possibility of another front of battle erupting in the Caribbean region. Washington strategists planned to build a massive Naval installation off the East Coast of Puerto Rico, a base that would provide anchorage, docking, repair facilities, fuel and supply sources for 60 percent of the Atlantic Fleet. They viewed the Vieques Sound as key to the defense of the entrance of the Caribbean and the Panama Canal. Furthermore, with the threat of a

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German invasion of Great Britain looming, strategists conceived of the base and its harbor as a possible point of supply, repair and refuge for the British Fleet. The proposed Naval installation would stretch across the Sound. The plan was to excavate rock from Vieques and build a sea wall between Ensenada Honda in eastern Puerto Rico and Vieques Island. Huge magazines would be cut into the hills of Vieques, a Marine camp established on the neighboring island of Culebra, and a home port established at Ensenada Honda (Langley 1985:271-275; Tugwell 1977:68).

For the people living on Vieques Island, the Navy's strategic designs elicited both fear and hope. However uncertain they were about the meaning of the base, the arrival of the military signified change for a desperate people. By the mid-thirties, Vieques' sugar-based economy shaped a society characterized by stark inequalities of wealth and the dire poverty of the masses. Two sugar corporations consumed 75 percent of Vieques Island: to the west, Playa Grande, the last operational mill on the island, owned by a Puerto Rican, and to the east, the defunct Esperanza sugar mill and sugar cane lands, owned by Eastern Sugar, a large U.S. based sugar corporation. The majority of people in Vieques were landless, living as *agregados* on the sugar estates or smaller farms. When the Navy arrived, Vieques' economy was on the brink of disaster. The *Central* Playa Grande, the island's only sugar mill, had declared bankruptcy. Unemployment, endemic to Puerto Rico, found its most extreme expression in Vieques where 65 percent of the working male population was without

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employment. Vieques, once a magnet for seasonal migration, now hemorrhaged its population to St.Croix. A PRAA team, charged by the Puerto Rican government with the rehabilitation of Vieques described the island's crisis in 1937:

> The tragedy of Vieques Island is analogous to the tragedy of Puerto Rico, only much more serious. 33,000 acres of land are hoarded, for the most part, by two large sugar corporations. 11,000 inhabitants are living on what little remains of the land. A very rich island, with every kind of fruit, fish, and livestock is impeded from developing its full agricultural and industrial potential. The per capita income scarcely reaches the ridiculous level of $22 (Jesús Castro 1937:14).

The establishment of the base involved the usurpation of vast swaths of land. Vieques' stark social inequality and overwhelming poverty facilitated the military take-over of the land. The concentration of land in the hands of two corporations and a handful of wealthy farming families eased the transfer of two thirds of island land from private hands to military control. The landless majority that lived on these lands had little political clout with which to counter the Navy and were summarily removed from their homes. Between 1941-1943 the Navy dispossessed 825 families, or 3.620 people, and transported them to resettlement strips (known as Santa Maria and Montesanto) where they were assigned parcels of land. These individuals were not given title to their plots, nor were they allowed to transfer lots, and were told that they would be required to vacate if the Navy decided it needed the land (U.S. House 1981:3; Picó 1950: 213). Thus it was apparent that the establishment of a base would not offer a panacea for the island's woes. Carlos Zenón, who in the 1970's would

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become a leader in Vieques' campaign against the Navy, recalled his family's dislocation by the Navy:

> I was four years old when the expropriations began... I remember the day we received the notice giving us 24 hours to move because we were being expropriated. My parents were divorced and I lived with my mother, a brother and a sister. At first my mother could not believe that after living her entire life there, they could suddenly tell her to leave... she did not know where to go or what to do with the house. Our house was made of wood and zinc, rather small for us but comfortable. She decided not to believe what was happening and to remain. But the following day they returned and told her that they had warned her.
>
> They told my mother that she had to leave immediately. She asked to where. She explained that she had three small children and no means of transportation. They simply gave her a form indicating that in the barrio Santa María a small lot of land had been set aside for her. The form had on it Santa María and four numbers indicating the four corners of the lot. Nothing more. Some people say that the expropriated were given tents. Well, those relocated to Santa María did not receive anything. They told her to leave because they were going to tear down the house that instant. They had brought a bulldozer with them. At the moment I remember thinking that it was a huge toy. I had never seen anything like it. I was extremely happy with the bulldozer until I saw the fear on my mother's face and the way she was hurriedly putting things together to take with us. She thought they were going to tear the house down on top of us. At that time there was a fear of federal authorities that does not exist today. I remember vividly that many Puerto Ricans, including Viequenses, believed that the penalty for a violation of federal law was imprisonment in Atlanta.... My mother, I am sure was thinking just that. She quickly put some dishes, our possessions, and whatever she could, including something with which to heat up food or milk for us in a blanket. She tied it up and left with the three of us. I remember looking back and being fascinated as the bulldozer tore down our home. My mother, on the other hand, was crying, not knowing where to go (Zenón 1982).

Yet social outcry over the military takeover of the island was tempered by enthusiasm

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for the potential for work. The Navy's project was ambitious and proceeded at breakneck speed. The military constructed an ammunition depot, consisting of more than 100 magazines carved in the hills of the island. Thousands of men broke rock and worked around the clock to build a massive stone and cement breakwater that would extend across the rough waters of the Vieques Passage, connecting Vieques to Puerto Rico. Many more women and men found work fishing, cooking and washing for the laborers. A San Juan Star article recounts that frantic pace of construction in the early 40's:

> In late 1940 and early 1941, the German air blitz over London and Coventry intensified the construction to make Ensenada Honda and Vieques another Pearl Harbor Naval Base. So great was the pressure to advance the pier a few more yards every day towards Puerto Rico that, except for saving the driver, any truck that slipped or tumbled off the pier would not be salvaged but left to be entombed under tons of stone and cement, and eventually become a part of the pier.

Don Raúl Pérez, now in his mid-seventies, came to Vieques in 1940 to work on the breakwater. He was an employee of the Rondel Corporation, which had a contract with the Navy to construct the port and facilities on Vieques Island. Don Raúl remembered:

> We began working on the breakwater. The first thing we did was construct a port at Punta Arenas. This was so they could bring the heavy equipment over to construct the breakwater. We began with this provisional port. We brought all the material here for the construction of the breakwater. In the beginning there were about 1,000 people working on this project. But later, there were around 7,000... The large part of the [managers] were Americans. There were very few Puerto Ricans. There weren't more than 20. The majority of those who

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> directed the work—the engineers, the technicians—were Americans.
>
> In the beginning, everyone was happy because they thought that a lot of money and work was coming. In the beginning they were content. It was the base of millions. There was a lot of work, a lot of money. A lot of rum, a lot of parties. But as soon as this period passed, the laments came. There was no land, there was no property, there was no work, there was nothing. It was the worst.
>
> [In the beginning, there were a lot of people from Vieques who worked on the base?]
>
> Yes! It was all the people from Vieques because there was no other work in Vieques. But not only from Vieques. People came from Puerto Rico— a lot more people than from Vieques. Because in Vieques there was not a sufficient number of people. There were so many people here who had nowhere to sleep and nothing to eat.
>
> [What type of jobs were there?]
>
> For the natives, most worked as workers. Most worked as day workers, as carpenters, plumbers, electricians. In terms of work in supervision, among civilians—as I said before, there weren't 20 civilians in supervisory positions. All went to the Americans. They were "B.A." Born in America.

As don Raúl notes, initially many Viequenses welcomed the base. Jobless cane workers found employment as laborers on the massive construction project. Dolores Torres, now 62 years old, was a child when the Navy came to Vieques. She remembered:

> When they came, there was a lot of movement, a lot of work because they were constructing the base and all. They brought in trucks of coffee and apples. People benefited. They were throwing coins in the air. Children would collect them and bring them to their mothers.

Justo Pastor Ruiz, the Episcopal pastor of Vieques in 1942, describes the optimism of the time:

> The town swam in gold for a while during these years. Rents increased three

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> and four times in value and people bought good clothes and treated them with little care and liquor was consumed without end. There were those who tried to wash the floor with beer and who bought a $35 suit on Saturday and on Monday wore it to work and spoiled it within two hours. The base is here and gives more, they said (Pastor Ruiz 1947:206).

Yet the construction of the base stopped almost as quickly as it had begun. Though German submarines were active in the Caribbean, by 1943 naval planners concluded that the Caribbean would not be the center of the war and that a major naval base in Puerto Rico was unnecessary. The experience of Pearl Harbor challenged the wisdom of concentrating a fleet at one massive installation (Tugwell 1977:68). The construction of the breakwater from Puerto Rico to Vieques was suspended and Roosevelt Roads was placed on maintenance status at the conclusion of World War II (Langley 1985:272-273).

The abrupt halt of construction had a devastating effect on Vieques' economy. Without the military project, there was no work left on the island. The Navy's expropriations of land had effectively liquidated the sugar cane industry. Playa Grande's *central*, the last operating mill in Vieques, was dismantled and sold off to a company in Florida. Most sugar cane lands had become military property, either part of the base or the resettlement tracts where tenants were relocated. Though some small and medium independent farms remained, the farmers had no mill to which they could sell their harvest, nor did they have access to transportation to ship their cane to the mainland to be ground. In the summer of 1943 there were marches in

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town in which Viequenses raised black flags and clamored for work and attention to the suffering of the working class (Pastor Ruiz 1947:203). The economic boom that many Viequenses had hoped for did not come to pass:

> This flood of cash—this golden illusion—never compensated for the many setbacks caused by the Naval base. The most fertile and rich land was expropriated by the Navy and the neighborhoods of Tapón, Mosquito, and Llave disappeared. All the inhabitants and small landowners disappeared and left to form new neighborhoods in Moscú and Montesanto. Families that had a little house, cows, a horse and farmland came to have nothing but a makeshift house, a fistful of coins and the sky above them. Those who had their subsistence plots or who lived happily as tenants among farmland and fruit trees today lived piled up and lack even air to breathe (Pastor Ruiz 1947:206).

In 1944, in response to mounting pressure from the Puerto Rican government, the Navy leased some of the property it acquired on Vieques to the Insular government for the agricultural rehabilitation of Vieques. At the end of the war residents pressed the Navy to return land in the hope of developing the local economy. In 1947, however, the military drew up new plans for Vieques. The Navy decided to use Roosevelt Roads as a training installation and fuel depot and redesignate the base as a Naval Operating Base (Langley 1985:273). As part of the strategic shift, the Navy planned to convert Vieques into a training site, to be used for firing practice and amphibious landings by more than 25,000 sailors a year. The Navy revoked its lease to the Puerto Rican government, throwing into disarray the overall economic rehabilitation of Vieques (Picó 1950:217). Moreover, the Navy planned to expropriate additional land, approximately 4,340 acres, from the eastern part of the

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island. The Navy estimated that 130 families would be displaced by the new round of expropriations (*El Mundo* 6/6/47 p 24).

To the Navy's surprise, the government of Puerto Rico and the Federal Department of the Interior opposed its plans to expropriate additional land. The military and the government conducted closed door meetings. Officials considered compromises that included a proposal from the Department of Interior to relocate the entire population of Vieques. In a letter dated August 8, 1947, and later declassified, Irwin Silverman, the Acting Director of the Department of Interior, wrote with enthusiasm of a potential solution to the problem of the displaced thousands: transport and resettle the population of Vieques to the Island of St. Croix. So encompassing was the proposal that it included a provision for removing the graves from the cemetery, severing all human connection to the island. Of course such a move was not unprecedented: the Navy had just usurped several islands in Micronesia and dispersed their inhabitants[2] (*El Mundo* 6/6/47 p 1). In later years when this proposal came to light, it would come to be regarded as one of the most inflammatory offenses committed by the Navy. In the end, the Navy's original project prevailed. The government's lease on land was revoked, additional families were dispossessed, and the Puerto Rican government agreed to build housing for the dislocated in a resettlement tract that came to be known as Tortuguero. The only concession the

2. Kiste (1972) discusses the plight of the Bikini Islanders in the aftermath of U.S. nuclear testing. Alcalay (1987) discusses the effect of the U.S. military presence and nuclear testing on the Marshall Islanders.

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Puerto Rican government won from the Navy was that the military would provide materials from which the new houses would be built. Thus the Navy came into possession of over three-quarters of the island's land. A provision was made that allowed grazing cattle to remain on military property in the western area of the island that would be used for ammunition storage. The rest of the island was considered too dangerous to enter because maneuvers would include the launching of live bombs. The Navy justified the establishment of the base and the dislocation of more people by pointing to a "changed international situation," namely what it perceived to be the threat of communist infiltration of the world (*El Mundo* 10/16/47 p 1).

Class Dimensions

The expropriations are an important reference point in the narrative Viequenses construct about their relationship with the Navy. Anti-military activists have viewed the usurpation of island land as the original atrocity committed by the Navy against the Viequense people, the source of communal outrage against the military. But interviews with elderly Viequenses and with families who were evicted by the Navy reveal considerable ambivalence about the experience. Social class often colors the interpretation of events. On one side of the spectrum are individuals like Clara Serrano, 85 years old, the daughter of a wealthy sugar cane farmer. Doña Clara has strong links to the local PPD political machine and is an avid proponent of Puerto

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Rico's "free association" with the United States. She lived through the upheavals of the forties and defends the Navy against charges that it callously evicted Viequenses from their dwellings. In fact, she argues, most Viequenses were not really "expropriated" from their homes:

> The people lived in homes that the *central* provided for them. That means that when they expropriated the *centrales*, they didn't expropriate the people; they had nothing there. All of the houses belonged to the *central*... They expropriated only the owner. But when they expropriated everyone had to go, because all of the houses were within the *central*. But they were so good, those Americans. To each one who lived there, they gave a house to live...to each one they gave an acre of land. When were these people going to have houses? When they came to take land, they expropriated nothing from them, nothing. When the Navy came, the poor made out better than the rich!

Doña Clara's analysis turns on an interpretation of the word "expropriate." As noted earlier, the word "expropriate" technically refers to the forced seizure of property, but in Vieques, the term is more often used to refer to the forced removal of people. People refer to themselves as having been expropriated. Here it is interesting to see the way doña Clara interprets "expropriate." She argues that the poor were not really expropriated, and indeed she is right, since it was land that was expropriated by the Navy. That, however, is not her point. Rather, she argues that the rich were the ones who lost when the Navy came; they were the ones who were "expropriated." The poor, she believes, benefited from the Navy and support the military:

> Don't talk bad about the Navy in Montesanto [one of the resettlement tracts]. Everyone there supports the Navy. There are some, yes, who are against the Navy, who remember, alas, when we were thrown out

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> of there we suffered. But [the Navy] gave them a house, gave them land. The truth is that they are ungrateful. I tell you, I have never seen so many cars in Vieques before. Before, there were almost no cars here. And nowadays, if you need a lady to clean your house, she comes driving an automobile. A car. Yes, that's right.

In doña Clara's defense of the Navy one can read a defense of her own class position. Doña Clara's land was untouched by the military expropriations, and while her family did not directly benefit from the Navy, it rose to political prominence during the military's tenure on the island. She resents the argument that the working classes have any claim to the land that she believes is the rightful heritage of the rich. Later on in conversation, she defended the Navy's presence in Vieques with the same vigor with which she defends Puerto Rico's political relationship with the U.S. She is, essentially, in favor of the status quo. Doña Clara holds the common view that criticism of the Navy is fundamentally anti-American.

Yet doña Clara's opinion is only one part of the spectrum of popular sentiment towards the military. She overstates, it seems, the enthusiasm with which the working class greeted the Navy. When the Navy arrived in Vieques, *agregado* families often perceived a double-sided nature to the military take-over. On one hand, the Navy signified dislocation, usurpation and loss: the bulldozer, the dismantled home, the razed cane fields. Yet those who were *agregados* lived in desperate poverty and were hopeful that the Navy would usher in a new era, with work, with a secure future. Thus Dolores Torres associates the Navy's arrival with

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luxury: trucks of apples and money thrown in the air. Radamés Tirado and Raúl Pérez recalled Vieques' economic boom and the widespread enthusiasm for work. We consider here the lives of Leonardo Gómez and Nilda Figueroa, an elderly couple who were evicted by the Navy from homes on sugar cane land. As *agregados*, their experience was that of hundreds of Viequense families who were removed from their homes in the forties. Their memories reveal the ambivalence with which many Viequenses regard the Navy.

Don Leonardo was born in Vieques, on the Playa Grande estate in 1911. His father worked in the Playa Grande central, grinding cane. His family lived on the land of the central as *agregados*. They lived in a wooden shack that belonged to the central. Doña Nilda was born in 1921 in Puerto Negro on the opposite side of the island. Her family were *agregados* on the estate of Miguel Simons, one of the wealthy farmers on the island. When I asked don Leonardo about his life as a youth, he did not wax nostalgic about the past, but rather succinctly identified himself as a worker. "When I was young I was a worker. A cane worker. I cut cane. I weeded and planted cane. I only worked a bit in the *central*. Two nights. I started working at 16 or 17, the age boys worked in these times." "How much did you earn?" I asked him. "Twelve dollars a week. We worked from 7 to 4. Eight hours..In the fields the sun was fire." Don Leonardo's memories of the past were stark. "In 1930, 31, almost no one could eat...Life was not very good." He recalled that during the dead time, the

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months that would stretch between planting and harvest, it was a struggle to eat. People would fish or collect mangoes. Some work could be found on the Esperanza estate, owned by a big U.S. sugar corporation. "They paid fifty cents for half a day's work, one dollar per day," he recalled. "How many hours for a half a dollar!" doña Nilda interrupted. "A dollar a day! A half a dollar for four hours, five hours!" she exclaimed with indignation. "That's what they paid! A man worked and had to buy from a store. One dollar for a family to eat!" "What type of work did women do when men were working in the cane," I asked doña Nilda. "Washing and ironing for the rich," she responded.

In 1941 the Navy expropriated the land that don Leonardo lived on and transferred his family to a military resettlement tract in the Barrio Montesanto. "They threw us on a truck and brought us to Montesanto. No one could return. No one helped me. The Navy did not help me," he recalled. I asked him if his family had been compensated for the home that they lost. "They did not give money," don Leonardo noted. The shack he had been living in was bulldozed and the family was given the wood pieces to build a new home on an assigned lot. The transition from plantation land to resettlement tract was not easy. For many *agregado* families, the loss of animals and subsistence crops was traumatic because it represented a family's insurance policy against hard times. Doña Nilda reflected on this experience. She and her family were evicted from their home in the second wave of military

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expropriations in 1947. "Those who were living as *agregados*....I also was living as an *agregado* when the Navy came," doña Nilda explained, "The land we lived on the owners of the land gave us to live on. But we didn't receive money [when the land was expropriated]. I had chickens, pigs, all of this I had to let go. I had to let the animals go because in Tortuguero there was no place to raise animals. As *agregados* we could raise them on the land." "How did you learn of your eviction," I asked doña Nilda. "The owner of the land told us," she responded. "As we were *agregados* they just told us to leave."

While those who owned land received some kind of compensation for seized property, those who were evicted from it were left in a kind of limbo, languishing in squalid conditions in the resettlement tracts without title to property, without a sense of what the Navy's plans were for the future. The lack of title to land made it impossible for individuals to secure loans to build decent homes. Furthermore, it left unanswered issues of inheritance, raising questions as to whether an individual's child would hold any rights to the house or land on which he or she was raised. These conditions created great anxiety within a context in which the Navy's purposes and intentions were always shifting.

After he was evicted from his home on Playa Grande, don Leonardo found work on the base, constructing the breakwater. The work was constant for about two years, he remembered. After that, like many Viequenses, don Leonardo traveled to St.

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Croix to find employment. Doña Nilda found work in Vieques washing and ironing for the soldiers. The pay was good, she recalled, $3.50 per dozen shirts. She could wash and iron 4 or 5 dozen a day, earning as much as $17.50 per day. "Was the work regular?" I inquired. "When there was a maneuver, when the troops of gringos came, there was a lot. They came to my house with their clothes." I asked her when the work stopped. "It ended when the Puerto Ricans from here, the *independentistas,* started fighting with the Navy."

Doña Nilda implicitly blames local Viequenses for conflict with the Navy. Like Clara Serrano, she construes anti-military activity as being pro-independence, and by extension, anti-American in nature. Yet doña Nilda's choice of the disparaging word *gringo* reveals a lack of respect for the soldiers whose clothes she washed and ironed. Doña Nilda and don Leonardo are not really "pro-military" in orientation. When I asked how they would describe their quality of life before and after the Navy came doña Nilda replied, "It was better because they were helping." Don Leonardo was confused. "Who?" he asked. "Them, the Americans," she retorted, with annoyance. "Well, they paid for the land," she explained. "They paid," she stressed. Here doña Nilda espouses some of the ideology advanced by pro-military factions: that the Navy has a right to the land since it "bought" it. At the same time, she really offers no opinion of how the Navy has helped Vieques. Instead, she directs anger at the Puerto Rican government. "Not a cent went to us, it went to the governor

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over there [in Puerto Rico]," she argued, "The government sold the *central* here and the people who were working in the cane went without work. They lived as they could, fishing and so forth." When I asked don Leonardo if he thought the quality of life in Vieques was better or worse he answered, "Better because we have food stamps and social security now. There's no work. I collect social security."

Don Leonardo distinguishes between the Navy's influence on the island and the effect of the expanded welfare state—social security and food stamps that dramatically improved Puerto Ricans' lives. Frequently, however, the arrival of the Navy is associated with the end of rural squalor. We see this idea in doña Clara's comments about all the cars that are driven in Vieques: a sign, in her opinion, of wealth and progress. Doña Nilda, too, is like many Viequenses who were impressed by the casual generosity of individual soldiers, with the handouts of food from the mess hall. Such feelings of gratitude are juxtaposed with bitterness directed at the Puerto Rican government. Doña Nilda, like many Viequenses, believes that the Puerto Rican government does not intervene in Vieques' interest because it benefits from the military installations on the island. She puts forth the idea that the government receives money directly from the military, an assertion the Navy flatly denies.

The feeling that Viequenses are pawns in negotiations of power between the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the U.S. military echoes the feelings of

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powerlessness people reveal as they describe their lives as *agregados*, living at the whim of the plantation owner. "As we were *agregados* they just told us to leave," doña Nilda remarked as she described her family's eviction from sugar cane land. Radamés Tirado, too, described a fear of federal authority that gripped his parents when they were confronted with bulldozers and orders to leave their home. Although anti-Navy activists have sought to link contemporary anti-military protest to nationalist sentiment in the 1940's, we find that more often people responded to eviction notices with resignation. This does not mean that all Viequenses passively complied with orders to leave their homes: remember the way in which Carlos Zenón's mother ignored her eviction notice until the Navy showed up at her house with a bulldozer. But Viequenses did not rally against the Navy or have a sense of their collective identity or power to resist. Rather than viewing their experience as a Puerto Rican tragedy, they focused on the ways in which they were abandoned by the Puerto Rican government. Over time, rather than developing a strong sense of national identity in response to the travails of military occupation, Viequenses evolved a more circumscribed, parochial identity, in which the defense of community and the local became paramount to assertions of national identity.

Economic and Social Instability

Though the Navy argued that the military installations in Vieques would bring

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work and opportunity to islanders, Vieques' economy sputtered during the 50's and 60's. The number of troops permanently stationed on the island was not large enough to promote the development of a service economy. Vieques was used primarily for ammunition storage and maneuvers, and secondarily as a Marine base (1959-1978). Though thousands of troops would pour onto the island in the 50's and 60's, their visits were so sporadic and brief that they could not sustain the local economy. Furthermore, the island had been reduced to little more than three resettlement camps and lacked the necessary infrastructure to accommodate the sudden arrival of tens of thousands of men.

The influx of soldiers created significant social tension. Bar owners and prostitutes profited the most from the soldiers' visits. It is hard to estimate the importance of Vieques' red light district. It was certainly not of the scope of the cities of brothels that sprung up in Asia (Sturdevant 1993; Enloe 1989), but it was significant enough to draw sex workers in from the Puerto Rican mainland to satisfy the demand created by thousands of lust-struck sailors. A number of male informants reported working as "mules" in their youth, bringing soldiers to brothels or places in the countryside where they could find prostitutes. When mules were unavailable to bring soldiers to their trysts, groups of men would wander through residential neighborhoods, banging on the shuttered windows of private homes, calling for "Margarita," a generic name for any Puerto Rican woman, to satisfy their drunken

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lust. Women like Dulce Silva, a 58 year-old nurse, recall the ways in which their public lives were circumscribed by the presence of gangs of drunken men:

> Many years back there were many problems. Because in the beginning, when they gave passes to everyone after being on boats for so long, they came running into town on their own to get drunk. It was a natural thing because when a sailor goes out, he goes out to enjoy himself... They were looking for women and to get drunk. Because they need to enjoy themselves and that's the truth. The only problem is that they get drunk and start trouble, destroy things.
> [Did you have problems with the sailors in these times?] Well, I didn't have problems. It was in the late hours of the night that there would be problems. I was in bed. After 6:00 at night I kept the house all closed up, well closed up. Because many passed by fighting. They were looking for businesses that were opened and women to go with them. Well I kept my house all closed up. All closed up. And they passed by and I didn't have any trouble. They were drunk and running by. Because Destino [where the entrance to Camp García is] is close by. We lived in constant terror.
> [Were they on pass often? For example, how many times a month would you have to close your house?] They passed by every day. We closed the house for protection and out of terror. When there were maneuvers they would be running out in the evening. They were hot to leave for the mountains [a place where illicit sex took place].

The fights and occasional riots provoked by intoxicated soldiers created great controversy. A number of municipal resolutions were passed in the 50's and 60's condemning the soldiers' conduct, and chastising the handful of local businessmen who profited from such behavior. In a case frequently recalled by anti-Navy activists, Julián Felipe Francis, the elderly owner of a local bar, was murdered by a group of eight sailors when he came to the assistance of a woman being harassed by soldiers. A military court acquitted the two sailors charged in the case.

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With the promised service economy evidently a failure, a number of attempts were made to bring industry to Vieques, yet this proved to be an economic strategy impeded by the geography of the military control of the island. The land the Navy usurped contained the island's major aquifers. Although in the 1970's the Puerto Rican government spent millions of dollars to run a pipeline from the main island to Vieques, augmenting the water supply, the lack of access to local water resources was a major obstacle to local development. In 1989, for example, plans for a jewelry industrial park collapsed in part because of inadequate water and sewage facilities.

More significant than the aquifers were the transportation routes that the military expropriations disrupted. The expropriations and subsequent military control over the waters surrounding the Naval installations created a transportation crisis for the island. Until 1941, Vieques' major commercial port lay on the westernmost tip of the island, Punta Arenas, where cane was shipped on a six-mile route to the Puerto Rican town of Ceiba. The military expropriations on the western part of the island closed this port, thus distancing-- functionally and symbolically--Vieques from the rest of Puerto Rico. The island's remaining port near Isabel Segunda, off the north central coast of Vieques, became the only point of transit between Vieques and Puerto Rico. Because of military restrictions on the waters surrounding Vieques, the ferry traveled a 22-mile route from Isabel Segunda to Fajardo. Both the distance and the beating the boats took in the rough waters of the Vieques Passage made ferry

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costs high.

By the 1960's, Vieques' hopes had turned towards tourism as the brightest possibility for resuscitating the island's limping economy. Though tourism may seem an unlikely development strategy on an island used for large-scale military maneuvers, over the years entrepreneurs consistently harbored ambitions of making a mint on the island's tropical shores. The same processes that had depeopled the island left Vieques' white sand beaches and turquoise waters relatively untouched. In 1960, the Puerto Rican government approved the Woolnor Corporation's plans to build a multi-million dollar resort on Commonwealth lands on the South Coast of Vieques. The proposed resort would feature a 100-bed hotel, a marina, and golf course, and, it was hoped, act as an anchor to local development. Yet the Navy blocked the plan, arguing that tourism was "incompatible with large-scale amphibious training activities." A Navy Captain was blunt in his opposition to tourist development in Vieques:

> The U.S. government has spent more than $100 million in developing Vieques and Roosevelt Roads. We're not going to throw away such an investment so that Vieques should be converted into a Mecca for tourism.[3]

Woolnor eventually abandoned its plans for the resort, after spending over $1 million for promotion of the project. There were two major reasons for this. First, the Navy refused to cede lands necessary for the expansion of the airport, essential for a steady

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3.Captain Howard Hunt, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations of the 10th Naval District, quoted in "Vieques: Tragic Island," *San Juan Review*, June 1964.

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flow of tourists. Second, the Navy refused to provide assurances to Woolnor that the resort would not later be expropriated.[4] The failure of this project reinforced local fears. The fact that a powerful investor was unable to win assurances from the military that its land would not be expropriated left a politically disadvantaged populace skeptical of its own leverage. The Navy's obstruction of Vieques' tourist economy, the island's last hope for development, reinforced notions that the military sought to expropriate the entire island. It is important to stress that these perceptions are grounded in fact. In the 1940's, as noted above, the Department of Interior considered a proposal to relocate the entire population of Vieques to St. Croix. Later, in early 1964, the populace's fear of the covert take-over of the island was transformed into a real threat to expropriate the south coast of Vieques. The Navy leaked news that it planned to expropriate land on the south coast, consolidating the two bases and removing any possibility of tourist development on the island. This crisis sparked the first organized resistance to the Navy in the form of a group called the "Committee to Rescue Vieques." Mayor Antonio Rivera led this group in a vociferous campaign to block the Navy's plans. In the aftermath of this campaign, declassified documents showed that the 1964 plan was only a scaled down version of a broader 1961 proposal to expropriate the entire island and transfer all civilians to St. Croix. So complete was the 1961 plan that it included provisions for removing the

4. "Vieques: Tragic Island," *San Juan Review*, June, 1964.

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graves from the cemetery and transferring them to St. Croix, severing any human connection to Vieques. Puerto Rican Governor Luis Muñoz Marín called upon President Kennedy to intervene to stop these plans, which eventually were halted. In 1964 political considerations also precluded the Navy from carrying out its agenda. But in these calculations the Navy demonstrated its latent hostility toward the civilian population, and its belief that any type of economic development threatened its interests. The crisis showed that military strategic interests extended to the island itself, and that the removal of the civilian population--outright or de facto--was desirable to preserve the military's investment and to ensure military hegemony on Vieques. The specter of removal, as we shall see, continues to haunt Viequenses.

Identity in Formation

Although the Puerto Rican nationalist leader, Pedro Albizu Campos, rallied anti-colonial sentiment around the cause of Vieques in the 1940's, it did not generate a groundswell of nationalist sentiment in Vieques itself. Individuals did not maintain a strong sense of Puerto Rican national identity, probably because of their class position as *agregados*. With this position there were feelings of powerlessness and resignation. Over time, perceptions of abandonment by the Commonwealth government increasingly replaced a strong national consciousness with resentment and alienation. Yet the experience of living with the U.S. Navy generated a strong

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local identity that over time developed into a bastion of resistance against the Navy.

As Vieques' economy sputtered, residents found unsettling changes spawned by the military presence. Outmigration continued unabated, since job opportunities on the island remained scarce. Men found limited seasonal work in the cane fields of the government-run Esperanza plantation, or migrated to St. Croix to find work. Increasingly women and boys assumed importance as wage earners, laundering soldiers' uniforms and polishing their boots. As Chapter Three will explore, the changes in women's work patterns were particularly unsettling to established gender relations. Carlos Quintero, a 41-year old school teacher and anti-Navy activist, describes the effect these changes had on his family:

> My father left Vieques out of necessity. When the Navy arrived in Vieques he had no place to work, he was a carpenter. He went to the Virgin Islands. He spent some time in St. Croix, but then later settled down in St. Thomas. He worked for the government and supported the family. The only thing that happened to the family was that he didn't return. One summer he brought us over to St. Thomas, we passed the summer and returned to Vieques. There came the moment when he stayed over there and my mother stayed with us. My mother had to struggle to raise the family. [What did your mother do?] She was a housewife, the work that there was was washing and ironing. Listen, the contradiction of my life is that my mother washed and ironed clothes of the *militares* from the base! My mother washed and cleaned for civilians, but there was a time when the large benefit we received from her work was the work from the sailors. As was the case with many housewives at this time.

Carlos's story speaks to another social problem that residents identify to be the result of the military occupation of the island: the dissolution of families. It is worth noting

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that Vieques' economy historically fostered seasonal migration and that family structures had been flexible in the past. However, it is not uncommon for people to point to the military expropriations as triggering the dissolution or dispersion of their own families. As Ada Martínez put it succinctly, "The family is disintegrating. You can't share a cup of coffee with your grandchildren because they are with others."

Over time, the process of outmigration triggered significant demographic changes on the island. Large numbers of Vieques' working-age population left the island in search of ways to make a living. Reflecting this exodus, the island's total population dropped or failed to grow through the 1980's. Between 1980 and 1990, however, Vieques registered a population growth spurt in the 18-64 age population. Two major factors seem to have triggered this recent change: the return migration of older residents to their homeland after years of working in Puerto Rico or the United States; and a process of gentrification whereby U.S. mainlanders, Canadians, Europeans, and Puerto Ricans from the main island have come to Vieques to build vacation homes (Rivera and Torres 1996). Overall, this has produced a gradual greying of the island: Vieques' population not only shrunk but changed in character, marked by a gap between an expanding elderly population and a declining younger one.

Residents interpret these changes through the lens of displacement. As we have noted, the experience and continued threat of expropriation colors their

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perception of the Navy and of social change on the island. A focus on Vieques' declining population has become a preoccupation of island life, described in casual conversation, political speeches, and cultural festival programs. Anti-military activists pinpoint the declining population and the loss of the island's youth as among their primary reasons for opposing the Naval presence. Rafael and María Cruz, two leaders of the Crusade of the 1970's, elaborate a commonly espoused position:

> RC: Vieques at this moment has 8,000 inhabitants. In 1932,33,34,35,36 it had 14,000 inhabitants. Why doesn't it have 50,000 inhabitants like St. Thomas? If there were 14,000 inhabitants in the 30's, why don't we have that many now? The Navy won't allow it. They want the island to maintain around the same number of inhabitants. Because if there are more people, the bigger the protest. It would be an ugly problem for the Navy because we need more land to develop.
>
> MC: The other ugly thing is that the most productive people have to leave. They are the ones who augment the population by reproducing. There is a lack of these people. The people who are here are all retired.
>
> RC: The people here are all retired. When you retire, you come to die. But there is nothing...I think that in the United States of North America, what's going on in Vieques is craziness. We say crazy. They spend four years in high school. When they finish four years of study, they go to the big island. Then they start whatever opportunities there are over there. Whatever. After they study they have to stay over there because over here there's unemployment. They stay over there, they work over there. They get married. They have their family and when they return to Vieques--they retire. We lose our kids at the age of 18. As simple as that.

There is another element to this gradual transformation of the island population that contributes to a sense of disquiet among Viequenses. As previously

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mentioned, the island is undergoing a gentrification that is partially responsible for an increase in both the numbers of people on the island, and the number of elderly, as many of the arrivals are "empty nesters" and single-person households in the 18-64 age bracket. This process, however, is linked to a much older, more established process of ethnic and class transformation unleashed by the military takeover of the island. In short, Viequenses perceive their island as being taken over by North Americans. As one informant said, "Vieques has the threat of the base, and the threat of American civilians."

The ethnic and class transformations of the island can be linked to the death of sugar cane on Vieques. When the Playa Grande's sugar mill closed, independent farmers no longer had a place to grind their cane. Oxen and horses that were raised to work in the sugar cane industry lost their importance. Beginning in the 1950's, the decline of cattle and small-scale farming--in essence, Vieques' middle-class occupations-- encouraged small and mid-size property owners to begin selling off idle farmland. A number of wealthy North Americans with connections to the military, and interest in buying Caribbean vacation land, bought up the old cane fields, building villas and turning pastures and fields into manicured lawns and flower gardens. Some of the largest tracts of non-military land thus passed into hands of individuals interested in leaving it undeveloped. Many of Vieques sugar, cattle, and farming families left the island only to be replaced by this new North American

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expatriate bourgeoisie who own much of Vieques' valuable titled property, while the majority of Viequenses remained landless and concentrated in the military resettlement tracts.

While Puerto Rico as a whole experienced class transformations in the 1950's and 1960's with the decline of cane and the rise of an urban industrial elite during Operation Bootstrap (Berman Santana 1996) the social transformations in Vieques were quite distinctive. First, Vieques' class transformations had a decidedly ethnic component. Rather than an indigenous elite, expatriate North Americans were attracted to Vieques through loose connections with the military. Second, this new elite invested in the idleness of the island. The original North American residents viewed Vieques as a seasonal vacation spot, less traveled and more affordable than neighboring Caribbean islands. They earned their money elsewhere and came to Vieques to relax. To the extent that the military was responsible for the current state of the island, they were supporters of its presence. Over time, the North American community has expanded and diversified from this original constituency of "Snow Birds," but in general the community has come to be characterized by an attraction to the island's apparent "tranquility" (i.e., lack of hotels, casinos, beach front development) and a support for the Navy as a guarantor of this condition.

As particular as the circumstances were that spawned this community, so, too, was the local response to the growing presence of North Americans on the island.

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The North Americans gave a face to the feelings of displacement Viequenses experienced. They symbolized change on the island. Ada Martínez spoke of the changes she perceived during her lifetime:

> The Viequense is the type that likes to share with people who come to Vieques. Now that we have so many people coming who are not from Vieques, it's losing that--the sharing. It's another rhythm of life. This worries us. This worries us.

Mario Vega, a 48 year old anti-Navy activist evoked images of genocide to describe the process of gentrification on the island:

> The Americans who come here are very distinct. Economically, they're well off. The first thing they do when they buy a place in Vieques is construct a wall. They absorb the beaches; they don't want us to enter. In the Caribbean, there are not many people who can afford to buy. It bothers the natives. It's like when the Spanish came and killed the Indians. In the same manner, they are killing us, little by little.

As we will see, during the height of the anti-military movement in Vieques, the North American community was instrumental in defending the military's interests on the island. The North Americans' links to the military arouse suspicion and fuel conspiracy theories about the nature of the community's presence and intentions on the island. Carlos Quintero told me:

> Listen, I have observed this, Kate, in the last ten years. There has been an influx of older, retired North Americans. Filling up Vieques. I see them as having the purpose of helping the Navy maintain control of Vieques. I tell you this because simply observed--and some compañeros from the struggle have said the same--the areas in which their houses are situated, are areas near the base..there are houses near the *borders* of the Navy's territory! How did they manage to get that land there with all the problems I encountered with a little piece of land in Bravos de Boston [a "rescued" area]? I am certain that no

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> *independentista* or one of us would be permitted to have a house there...These people who are in those mountains near the military area are sailors, retired from the Navy. This I see as dangerous. I see it as dangerous because they have allowed all of those communities to have water, light, permission for construction, while we Viequenses from here in our area cannot build. I think that these people who are situated in this area could be positioned there tactically with the purpose of helping the Navy, making it more difficult for the people of Vieques, achieving the conquest of our land.

These kinds of responses to the North American community are very much wrapped in feelings of displacement and a fear of total removal from the island. Social change is interpreted through a lens in which fear of usurpation is always paramount.

One of the themes that frequently surfaces in dialogue about the Navy in Vieques is the omnipotence of the military and the collusion between the Navy and the Puerto Rican government. Note, for example, how Rafael Cruz argued that the Navy "won't allow the population of Vieques to grow" because the military wants to be able to control the residents. Cruz believes that the government of Puerto Rico refuses to intervene in the conflict between Vieques and the Navy because the main island derives benefit from the status quo:

> In Guam, in the Philippines, in these places there are military bases belonging to the U.S. They had to pay millions of dollars to be there. It is different with Puerto Rico. So what happens? Here we are only 8,000 people and we don't matter to Puerto Rico. When it comes to an election we don't signify anything. Nobody in Puerto Rico is going to win because of 8,000 people in Vieques. 50,000, 70,000, people maybe, but 8,000 inhabitants in Vieques, that doesn't mean anything. So what happens? Thanks to the two bases in Vieques, the people of Puerto Rico are receiving millions of dollars. Millions of dollars for tons of things that we Viequenses aren't receiving. But we are receiving the bombs. They are receiving the money. If they say

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> anything against the Navy, the federal aid that comes to Puerto Rico will be ended. This is clear. This is very clear that in Puerto Rico it is very important to assure the federal aid. If a governor says "No, the Navy has to go tomorrow," the government over there would say there is no federal aid. Puerto Rico would be an economic disaster.

Cruz asserts two ideas here: one, that Puerto Rico derives financial benefit from the Vieques installations, and two, that Puerto Rico has the power to remove the Navy if it so desires. The first assertion is flatly denied by the Navy. A Navy lieutenant commander told me: "They believe we're paying Puerto Rico. We own the land. We don't pay fees to anyone." Yet there is evidence to suggest that the Navy has strong armed the Puerto Rican government about political tensions in Vieques, linking statehood to the maintenance of military bases on the island.[5] The second idea, that Puerto Rico has the political power to leverage a military pull-out from Vieques, is debatable. Nonetheless, we will see that the Commonwealth government has bargained with the Navy over the future of Vieques Island in ways that have furthered the political agendas of Puerto Rican politicians, while negatively affecting Vieques. Thus the element of truth in charges of conspiracy and collusion fuel an environment where conspiracy theories flourish. Note, for example, how Carlos Quintero sees patterns of North American settlement of the island as part of a tactical strategy by the Navy to conquer Vieques. The Navy has, in fact, enlisted the help of

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[5] In a declassified document entitled "Vieques Community Action Plan," the U.S. Navy outlines its strategy for "shoring up relations on Vieques." In the event of possible loss of facilities on the island the plan states: "Point out to the Governor that if Navy does not have ground targets in Puerto Rico, the value of Roosevelt Roads to Navy, Puerto Rico to Defense and Puerto Rico to the U.S. diminishes significantly. Therefore, economic support of Puerto Rico by the U.S. is not as strongly justified and

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North American residents to further its political agenda. Thus Quintero takes but a small leap in imagination to speculate on hidden designs at work in North American residential patterns.

Conspiracy theory merges with anxiety over the future of the island in discussion about Vieques' hospital. As discussed in the last chapter, the Vieques hospital was downgraded to little more than a health center when the Puerto Rican government regionalized medical services throughout the Commonwealth. Residents must travel to Fajardo for lab work, x-rays, and any kind of "specialty" care. Among the services no longer provided by the local hospital is prenatal care and childbirth facilities, forcing pregnant women to travel to the main island for check-ups and to deliver their babies. Vieques has the highest rate of infant mortality in Puerto Rico, a fact that has been attributed to the lack of care and facilities on the island. It is not surprising, therefore, that the poor state of medical facilities is one the most controversial topics on the island. Yet how people understand the crisis of the hospital is uniquely colored by the conflict with the Navy.

Margarita Sánchez, a 35 year-old elementary school teacher, is one the casualties of the hospital crisis. Margarita lost her first child in her seventh month of pregnancy. She had been traveling from Vieques to Fajardo via a 22-mile ferry ride on rough seas to receive treatment for intermittent bleeding throughout her pregnancy. Yet she was in Vieques one day in her seventh month of pregnancy when

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Puerto Rico statehood would have less support.

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she started hemorrhaging. The hospital in Vieques was unable to manage her case, and by the time she was transferred to Fajardo the baby had died. Margarita remembered that she lost so much blood she threw away her clothes.

Margarita eventually did give birth to a full-term baby, María, who is now six years old. When she was pregnant with María, Margarita's doctor ordered her to bed in her fourth month. Still, she had to travel to Fajardo for check-ups which, she noted, was extremely dangerous. She traveled this time by airplane, a considerable expense for her. When she went into labor she took the ferry to the hospital. She didn't know she was in labor at the time. Thank goodness, she reflected, she didn't run into problems on the boat.

What was most surprising to me about Margarita's tale was the focus of her sadness and regret. She expressed little anger at the circumstances surrounding her child's death, or frustration at the risk or expense she assumed traveling to Fajardo for care. Instead her sadness was focused on another issue: the place of María's birth. "María was born in Fajardo," she told me wistfully. "She's from Fajardo, not Vieques. Little by little, soon there will be no one from Vieques." I took note of Margarita's experience and perceptions, finding them unusual. But her story took on new meaning for me when I spoke to Eduardo Negrón.

Don Eduardo is a 78 year-old retired fisherman who lives on his wife's social security check. Don Eduardo's wife, Elena, suffers from debilitating arthritis and has

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to travel to Fajardo for medical care. She is usually accompanied by a son, which leaves don Eduardo free to spend most of his days reading newspapers on his doorstep. He is very up to date on politics and current events. One day I was discussing with don Eduardo the Mayor's proposal to turn Vieques into a free port. This economic strategy, don Eduardo felt, was better than nothing, and could be initiated regardless of whether the Navy pulled out Vieques. He paused and added:

> One belief is that the Navy could help us by giving us a decent hospital here in Vieques, so that we do not have to go to Fajardo. So that women should not have to travel there to give birth. Children are not from Vieques, they are from Fajardo. Clearly.

I was interested in the fact that don Eduardo brought up the hospital and implied that the Navy had a responsibility for the state of health care on the island. I thought it curious, furthermore, that the focus of his concern was women traveling to Puerto Rico to give birth, rather than the plight of his own wife, who had to endure exhausting travel while she suffered with a chronic illness. Furthermore, it was apparent that don Eduardo was concerned more with the fact that children were being born off island than any personal risks the mothers might assume traveling in labor. I asked him why he thought there was no decent hospital in Vieques. He responded:

> I do not know what is going on. It is crazy. There are no doctors. I do not know if it is because the doctors do not want to come to live here. It should not be this way. There are a lot of residents. If you get cut you have to call the priest! [You are doomed]... This is what I think about this. This is what I hear people saying. The United States helps Puerto Rico and Puerto Rico gets money from all these other nations that do maneuvers here. One would think that it would be just, that

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> there is sufficient money to pay for a hospital and that all the money would not go to Puerto Rico. Because they get the money and we get the bombs. Look up there! [He points to cracks in the ceiling of his home]. Do you understand? Few houses don't have this. The whole house is cracking. They keep shaking the foundation of the house; if an earthquake comes it will collapse.
>
> By law we need the money, because we have no industry here. Why don't they help us? They get the money and we get the bombs. The government itself, the big chiefs are sold...

Don Eduardo's words echoed the assertions of Rafael Cruz that Puerto Rico derives financial benefit from the Navy for the military installations while Viequenses suffer, and that the government is corrupt, selling out the interests of its own people for payoffs from the Navy. The state of the hospital thus becomes another instance of collusion and neglect Vieques has suffered at the hands of the Navy and the Commonwealth government. Nowhere were these theories more striking than as they are expressed by Rosa Moreno, a 60 year-old former school secretary, put out of work by crippling osteoporosis.

Doña Rosa is a widow who lives alone in a section of town one mile from the ferry (her three adult children live in the United States). The process of commuting to Fajardo is exhausting. To make a 10:00 A.M. doctor's appointment, doña Rosa rises at 5:00 A.M. On a good morning, she can reach the ferry on foot in an hour, walking slowly with a cane. (There is no public transportation in Vieques). The ferry departs at 7:00 A.M. and arrives in Fajardo between 8:30-9:00 A.M. From there, doña Rosa takes a *público* to the hospital to keep her appointment. Doña Rosa's illness

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requires her to make frequent visits to the hospital for check-ups, and often she stays with a sister in Fajardo overnight, to lessen the impact of the grueling trip.

Given these circumstances, it was not surprising to me when Doña Rosa pointed to the hospital as Vieques' single most pressing social problem. She was quite passionate in arguing that the hospital situation was a disgrace. Yet Doña Rosa's concerns centered not on her own struggles for adequate health care, but, like don Eduardo, on the hospital's lack of a maternity ward. Like don Eduardo, her concern was not for the health of the mothers, but the fact that babies were being born off-island. Doña Rosa explained to me:

> The fact is we had no problems until the Navy came. We were fine. But when I see now that no babies are born here; when I see the high unemployment, I believe there is some subtle hand at work. It's like there is a plan—it's like some hidden hand is orchestrating this... We want a hospital: we've been asking for one. We used to have a hospital with everything, a dentist, specialists. Now we have nothing and it's getting worse.

Doña Rosa's conviction is that Vieques' lack of a maternity ward is part of a plot by the Navy to eliminate Viequenses. What the Navy had not accomplished by expropriating land, doña Rosa maintained, it would achieve by gradually squeezing the life-blood out of Vieques. One expression of this was the Navy's squelching of the economy. The other, more sinister effort, was the shut down of the maternity ward.

Discourse surrounding the hospital represents the most dramatic of conspiracy

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theories that surface in Vieques. Yet the hospital issue is more than just another conspiracy theory. The hospital becomes the locus of anxieties about loss and continuity, powerlessness and victimization. It is also an expression of Viequense identity, formed in relationship to and conflict with the Navy. Consider the words of Andrés Moreno, age 26, the youngest member of a committee opposed to the military presence on the island. Andrés's comments here capture the underlying anxiety of the hospital conspiracy theory:

> That which worries me the most about Vieques is that-- before anything else-- there are no more Viequenses anymore. In Vieques you don't find Viequenses anymore. People aren't born in Vieques. The other is---those who were born here have had to leave. In Vieques there is no place to work. There is no place to study. You have to leave. This is one of the things that worries me the most, that really bothers me. That people have to leave from Vieques. They have to leave out of necessity, out of obligation. Not because they want to leave, you understand.
> [And when you say that there are no Viequenses here, what do you mean by that?] Because you are from the town where you are born. If you are born in Vieques, you are Viequense. If you are born in Fajardo and raised in Vieques, you are Fajardeño. People aren't born in Vieques anymore. This hurts, this is really sad. You have to leave your land out of obligation, because it is inevitable. This is the saddest of all.

One might conclude from these comments that the community of Vieques is disintegrating, that its people have scattered, and that there is little left but a skeleton community of old timers tenuously clinging to survival. Yet these charges point instead to an important legacy of the military occupation of Vieques: the strengthening of links to the island, the creation of a resilient, stubborn identity. One

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effect of the military's presence on the island and its hostility to the civilian population has been a reformulation of the way people think of themselves, of their place in the world, of their cultural identity. Andrés's comments, in particular, point to a new conception of what it means to be a Viequense. In Andrés's schema, birthright alone confers identity and belonging. On one level, this assertion seems reductionist and exclusionary, an interpretation of identity that denies the history of migration and diversity that has long characterized the island's people. Yet today, in a context in which the military seeks to evict the civilian population, where residents struggle to eke out a living while wealthy outsiders come in and buy up land for vacation homes, identity is seen increasingly in stark, essentialist terms. To be a Viequense is to be born on the island. This emphasis on connection to the island speaks to an obstinate resilience of the people in the face of efforts to remove them. This identity is inherently oppositional, yet so too is life on Vieques. As the next chapter will consider, a strong sense of Viequense identity becomes an important tool in the mobilization against the military presence on the island.

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Chapter Three: Fishing and Fishermen in Vieques

> During the dead time there was work, but not much in the cane. It wasn't sufficient to live from--it paid only fifty cents per day. Because there wasn't anything else we ate crabs and fish. That sustained us. There were a lot of fish...
>
> *Pedro Vales*

> In Vieques, there were *pitirre* (a type of bird). It's been a long time since I've seen one. In Vieques, we used to have nightingales. It's been years since I've seen one. Vieques used to have coconut palms all along the coast. Today that would be a very good industry. They cleared them all. They destroyed that beach. And the *cacao* (cocoa). And look at the coral. They've completely destroyed the coral. There used to be eight streams. Now there are only three or four. And they're very small. You can notice.
>
> *Radamés Tirado*

Santiago Meléndez is a fisherman. He was born in 1933 on the Playa Grande estate, to a family of *agregados* who lived on and cultivated a small piece of land that belonged to the *central*. In 1941 the Navy evicted his family from their home. Don Santiago's father worked on a variety of military construction projects before migrating to St. Croix to find work. His mother set up her own business in Vieques, laundering for some of the thousands of sailors who would pass through on maneuver. Don Santiago grew up on an island with no clear future and shifted through a variety of manual jobs before turning to fishing to make a living.

Don Santiago had humble beginnings, like most Viequenses, but in 1978 he became a local hero. In February of that year, don Santiago led a flotilla of small wooden fishing boats into the path of NATO warships off the south coast of Vieques. Positioning his fleet in the direct line of missile fire, don Santiago effectively halted

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international military maneuvers, infuriating the U.S. Navy and seizing international attention. "It was the struggle of a people," don Santiago remembered. "It was the struggle of a group of parents, like us fishermen. We struggled and defended our rights. History will remember us as the people who really struggled for our rights."

The story of the next two chapters is how men like Santiago Meléndez, the son of *agregados*, a displaced cane worker and manual laborer, became self-identified fishermen. It is the story of how Viequense fishermen came to lead a protest movement against the U.S. Navy. "I started fishing for a living in the 1950's. I began fishing when I was a boy," don Santiago remembered:

> I fished at Punta Arenas, near the tanks where molasses was loaded by Playa Grande. There were boats that came to pick up the molasses in this area. I fished since I was a little boy. Then from here [Esperanza] since the 1950's. When I got married in 1951, I was working in the cane at harvest time. During the dead time, when there was no work, I had to reach for the seas.

When I asked don Santiago if he had ever worked in St. Croix, a virtual rite of passage for men of his generation, he responded quickly and with vehemence:

> Never! I never earned a cent outside of Vieques. Thank God. (Pause) Years ago I picked cane, I carried cane, I stripped cane. I was a driver in the cane fields. I've been a fisherman all my life. I worked in the cemetery making tombs, I broke rock. I've made charcoal. I've done everything.

Fishing has long been important in providing economic and cultural sustenance during times of hardship in Vieques. Much in the same way Comitas (1973) describes rural Jamaicans combining fishing with sporadic wage work, in Vieques working class men combined fishing with other types of employment. Yet

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fishing changed over time, its symbolic and economic importance heightened by the military control and degradation of the island. Increasingly, men like Santiago Meléndez came to identify themselves as fishermen, although they were simultaneously involved in other forms of wage labor.

In this chapter we see how fishing is an important expression of Viequense cultural identity and "everyday resistance" (Scott 1985) to the military occupation of the island. While theorists of social movements have increasingly depicted identity as autonomous and independent of any social basis (Laclau and Mouffe 1985a), we see here a cultural expression that is rooted in the subsistence strategies of proletarian life on a sugar cane island. Fishermen draw attention to the material basis of local grievances. As we will see, this focus on issues of subsistence, framed in culturally resonant terms, becomes crucial to sustaining a highly charged confrontation with the colonial state.

Fishing in Historical Perspective: Life in the Dead Time

The contemporary Vieques fishing economy has its roots in a way of life shaped by sugar cane production. In the early twentieth century, sugar cane provided the main source of cash in an economy where workers relied on wages to purchase staples like rice, beans and salted cod. Yet as much as cane defined life, it was also seasonal, providing work only a few months out of the year. The end of the cane cycle put an abrupt end to most opportunities for wage work on the island, and intensified the poverty that characterized rural life. During this seven month off-

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season, known as the "dead time" or "the witches' time," working people struggled to piece together a living.

In his classic ethnography of a Puerto Rican sugar town, Mintz (1956) describes fishing as one of the major "subsidiary economic activities" working people in a southern Puerto Rico sugar town used to piece together a living. In Vieques, idled workers also turned to the seas. Fishing, Mintz writes, was an almost exclusively male activity. And as Mintz argues, and as interviews from Vieques suggest, fishing held not only economic, but cultural significance.

Mintz maintains that subsidiary activities could not be full-time alternatives to labor in the cane fields:

> Supplementary activities, for the most part, are of minor importance in terms of cash income but are valuable in terms of the meals they provide, the ceremonial obligations for which they may afford means of fulfillment, and the meaning and motivation they lend to the cultural life of a people. Work in the cane has lost much of its cultural meaning, while supplementary activities continue to be rich in it (1956:360).

Mintz describes how raising livestock such as goats, pigs, chickens; fishing; trapping land crabs; gathering (including the making of charcoal); playing the lottery, and making bootleg liquor were major ways in which the working people sustained themselves during the dead season.

Giusti (1996) critiques the dichotomies Mintz draws between harvest and dead time, wage labor and non-wage, so-called subsidiary activity. Giusti suggests some of the ways in which rural life was more fluid in its proletarian and peasant dimensions, and argues that "peasant activities may have been 'subsidiary' in terms of cash

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income, but not so in terms of their importance for subsistence, or for the social autonomy of the laborers" (Giusti 1996:81). In Vieques, this opposition of wage labor/ harvest time and peasant (subsistence) work/dead time raises additional problems in that it acts to obscure women's wage work in the needlework industry that constituted an important contribution to the household earnings during the dead season.[1] Despite problems in Mintz's analysis, he draws our attention to an important point: that activities such as livestock tending, fishing, and trapping land crabs were important in both economic and cultural terms. People in Vieques frequently described these activities as they recollected a way of life before the Navy came to the island. They remembered fishing, in particular, with affection and detail as an important means of subsistence during the dead time on this small island with fertile coastal waters. Manuel Rosario, 78 years old, worked as a cane cutter during the sugar cane harvest. During the dead time, he used to tend cattle for a wealthy farmer, make and sell charcoal, and fish:

> You could go to the beach and find conch and snails off the shore. You could catch them in ankle deep water. It could be one person. You could have a little trap and a little boat. There wasn't anyone to sell to as everyone found. There weren't that many people who dedicated themselves to fishing, only three or four people. We all fished for ourselves.

---

[1] Baerga (1984) argues that the few pennies women earned doing home needlework often were the household's only cash during the dead time. According to the 1935 census, out of an economically active population of 2,424 men and 370 women, two men and 77 women were employed in home needlework in Vieques. Needlework thus constituted the second largest employment category for women, behind "domestic and personal service" in which 191 women found work.

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In southern Puerto Rico, Mintz identified several different forms of fishing. First, there were a handful of individuals who fished year round as a full-time occupation. The majority (four out of six) of these full-time fishers had large sailboats that signified both an investment of capital and expertise unavailable to the average working man. In Vieques, Manuel Rosario, remembered only three or four people who dedicated themselves fully to fishing. The 1935 census suggests a slightly higher number--18 individuals were identified as full-time fishermen. According to informants' recollections, at least a handful of these fishers had large sailboats that enabled them to stay at sea for weeks at a time and travel long distances on rough waters to Puerto Rico, Culebra, and the Virgin Islands. More common in both Mintz's account and informants' recollections of Vieques were a second group of fishermen, idled cane workers, who turned to fishing during the dead season. Mintz describes these fishermen in Cañamelar:

> These men, about forty of them, fish from rowboats or along the shores and use their catches for food, to maintain social relationships via gifts of fresh fish, or to provide a small, extra cash income. The importance of fishing as an economic activity varies in each case with the zeal, good fortune, and skill of the fishermen (p 362).

In Vieques, the coastal ecology of the island, which was ringed with numerous bays, mangroves, and lagoons, encouraged this form of low-investment, low risk fishing. Snails and crabs were abundant and people could simply walk the coastal areas and gather these creatures by hand, filling sacks.[2] A number of informants

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[2] It should be noted that the British called Vieques "Crab Island" for the preponderance of these crustaceans.

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recalled that in the 30's and 40's, large schools of fish would congregate by the shores of Vieques where the ferryboat now docks. In the evening, when the fish went out to sea again, hundreds of pelicans would swoop in to catch them. At these times, residents were able to fish with nets off the shore, standing in the shallow water.

Fishing in the lagoons was particularly popular. Here men would fish from small rowboats or simply stand in the shallow waters and cast nets. People described the lagoon environment as more accessible and predictable than the sea. While there were days when fishermen could not go to sea because of strong waves or winds, the lagoons were always calm and safe to fish in. A number of neighborhoods bordered lagoon areas and men might go out for an hour, cast a net, and supplement the family diet. The lagoon environment supported a variety of fish: *sábalo* (shad), *robalo blanco* (haddock), *jarea*, *moniamas*, *pargo cubera*, *pargo prieto*.

Eduardo Negrón, a 78 year-old retired fisherman, recalled that lagoon fishing never appealed to him. He disliked wading in the mud and complained about a small shelled creature that cut one's legs. Don Eduardo preferred to fish at sea. He said that there were many good places to fish near the island where one could catch snapper, grouper, and other fish. Don Eduardo recalled that like most fishers, he had a small, open wooden vessel, measuring only six feet in length. According to don Eduardo, most fishing boats were fairly primitive, constructed by the fishers themselves, or bought for a moderate fee. Some of the small vessels might be guided by a single square sail stitched from flour sacks; others operated only by oars. The distance from

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shore that these fishers traveled was determined by their enthusiasm for rowing home at the end of the day.

It is difficult to measure the dollar significance of Vieques' fishing economy as a source of cash or subsistence. At the height of Vieques economic crisis in the 30's, a PRRA team describes Vieques as an island population on the brink of starvation, despite the fact that it was rich in fruit and fish (Jesús de Castro 1937). It seems important, therefore, not to romanticize fishing as eliminating or compensating for the dire poverty of the sugar era. Fishing did provide meals, however, to a desperately poor populace, and as Mintz argues and interviews with older residents suggest, fishing was important in cultural terms. Fishing was an integral part of working class culture in Vieques. It was an economic pursuit that supplemented or complemented sugar cane production, yet provided autonomy and meaning for its participants. Eduardo Negrón remembers a way of life that no longer exists in Vieques:

> Those who lived around the central were *agregados*. Something like a slave. These people had to work on the *central*, they were obligated to do different tasks, whether it was weeding, planting cane, cutting cane, loading it to be ground at Punta Arenas and sent to the U.S. Here the main source of income was sugar cane. To survive during the dead time, many people had a piece of land to plant yams, bananas, *yautia*, corn, pigeon peas. All of this until the harvest time arrived again. There wasn't any type of benefits for workers. And also they fished. Not like us. They would fish in the lagoons of Punta Arenas with open nets. They sold that fish or consumed it at home, or dried it, or salted it, smoked it, packed it in boxes or barrels, whatever they had. That's how we lived in Vieques.

Social Transformations: Fishing and Fishermen

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On the surface, there is much that seems "traditional" about the small boats, hand stitched nets and wooden traps used today by local fishers. In an era of the industrialization of the world's fishing industry, industrial trawlers, and mile-long drag nets, Vieques' fishermen seem quaint. In fact, a popular history of Vieques Island written by a North American seasonal resident describes fishermen of Vieques as living vestiges of a time gone by:

> The fishermen of Vieques had been fishing these coastal waters in much the same manner as they do today, for one really hesitates to say how long, perhaps 2,000 years. They are people of tenacious habit, not given to innovation (Langhorne 1987:67).

Yet the fishermen of Vieques are not relics of yesteryear. Just as life in Vieques was radically changed by the military expropriations and occupation of the island, the fishing economy underwent significant transformations as a result of the Naval presence on the island. Increasingly men turned to commercial fishing as the economy stagnated, but then faced new challenges when the military use of the island degraded the local environment. Fishing, in a sense, developed in opposition to the Navy, much in the same way Mintz describes peasant culture in the Caribbean breaking forth, "like blades of grass pushing up between bricks" (Mintz 1985:131). The Navy's usurpation of sugar land, closing of Playa Grande's *central*, and obstruction of alternative development schemes encouraged idled cane workers to turn to fishing as a primary means of employment. To understand how sugar cane workers came became fishermen, let us consider the life of Pedro Vales.

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Pedro Vales was born in Naguabo, Puerto Rico in 1915. His father brought him to Vieques in 1922, to work with him cutting cane in fields of the *Central* Santa María. There were three children in the family. Don Pedro's brother was sent to school; don Pedro was sent to work. He was seven years old. "In those days, a boy of ten was a man," he recalled. "I was really skinny. I worked a lot." In 1944 at the age of 29 don Pedro left Vieques to look for work on the big island. He found a job as a carpenter's assistant in Santurce and worked there for one year. When work dried up, he returned to Vieques and was fortunate to find employment as a cane cutter in the Esperanza sugar fields, a government run agricultural project. When the project failed, and sugar cane operations ceased in Vieques, he was left without a way of making a living on Vieques. He turned to the seas:

> When the cane was over I said to my wife, 'The cane has left--what are we going to do to live?' She said, 'Well, fish.' Well in 53 or 54, around then, I went to fish. I fished for 30 years. I made a living off of fishing.

Pedro Vales' life demonstrates the way in which residents turned to fishing to compensate for the lack of formal employment in Vieques. In doing this, Viequenses drew on an older cultural tradition, in which fishing functioned as an occupational safety net. It was not uncommon for men to turn to fishing after work place related injuries left them unable to continue working in the sugar cane industry. Now fishing offered respite to those left jobless by the liquidated cane industry. A 38-year-old return migrant reflected on his family's history:

> [My grandfather] was a *mayordomo* for all of the *centrales*, sugar. He was a big man here. He was considered important.. I think he went into

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> fishing, because he had nets... When I was 17 years old, when I was living here 4 years, there were still nets here on the fence, the barbed wire fence that was here. And I used to ask them and they said that was my grandfather's net. He used to hang it there and work on it. And when he died, it just stood there and rotted away. There was still stuff hanging there after 15 years...He must have gone into fishing. He was left without work at Playa Grande, in the sugar cane, and two of my uncles followed his steps, went into fishing.

While fishing assumed increasing importance, fishermen were never just fishermen. Consider the life of Eduardo Negrón. Don Eduardo was born in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico in 1915, and came to Vieques with his parents at the age of one. His family were *agregados* on the Playa Grande estate. His father was a carpenter, who made yokes for oxcarts. At harvest time the *centrales* relied on oxen to carry cane from the fields to the mill, and don Eduardo's father would make as many as 40 yokes a month. When he was not carving yokes, he cultivated tobacco on a small plot (with the permission of the central owner) and rolled cigarettes. He never fished. Don Eduardo picked up fishing on his own. "It was like a sport when I was a boy," he remembered. "I started fishing at 12. By myself. In different places. I had a little wooden boat. It was a present from a friend of mine." Later as an adult in the 1940's don Eduardo fished during his free time. "I worked on the base for three years. When we were not working on the base, we went to the docks to fish. I used to fish a lot off the breakwater. There were good *sama* (mutton snapper), *pargo* (grey snapper), *carite* (kingfish), *tiburones* (shark)."

Don Eduardo was emphatic that he never worked in the cane. "No! I preferred fishing," he declared. "I worked full time. I went to Salinas [Vieques' eastern tip]. I

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took a couple of rowboats, some food and water. I would tell my wife, 'I'm going.' I didn't know when I was coming back." Don Eduardo would go out for a week at a time, fishing and "storing" fish, as he described it. He would set up traps (*viveros*) on the reefs, where he would catch and cultivate live fish. "I would separate the bad and good guys [potential predators] in separate compartments. Then I had to feed them. In these years, the deepest I set a trap was three or four arms length. In that depth there was no danger. There were fish in abundance... During the weekends, I had my coffee and at 3:00 A.M. I started harvesting and storing my catch. If I had snails, conch, lobster, I would bring it back. We fished for all of these fish."

Yet while declaring himself to be a fisherman, don Eduardo also noted that he worked as a carpenter's assistant, repairing and building houses in town.

> I did many odd jobs. One couldn't say "I was doing this." You did what was available. Even the government provided jobs. There were no permanent jobs. It was necessary to grab them. I knew how to do so many things. I also loaded sugar. I did carpentry, using a saw. Sometimes. We earned more or less. That's the way it was. No one could say they had a job for the whole year. If they said they had a job, it's a lie. We worked for two or three months. The buildings here were so small. When we finished building a house, we stayed jobless for a week.

What is interesting, then, is not just people's increased reliance on the seas, but on men's self-identification as fishermen. While the 1935 census lists 18 men as full-time fishers, the 1990 census lists 50. In interviews, residents consistently estimated a number closer to 100 full-time fishermen on the island. If this number is correct, then there are as many fishermen in Vieques as there are people employed in the island's largest private industry, General Electric. Residents also pointed to an

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increased number of fishers from the past. It should be noted that this increase in fishing occurs within a context of a declining population, making the number of fishers proportionally larger from the past.

Men's self-identification as fishermen is noteworthy because we see through various testimonies that they were simultaneously engaged in other forms of formal and informal productive activity. Santiago Meléndez declares that he's been "a fisherman all my life," while chronicling a list of other jobs he has held in the sugar cane industry. Eduardo Negrón, likewise, speaks of fishing full-time, but notes that he worked in carpentry as well. The census tells us that this identification is a significant change from the past when there were only 18 self-identified fishermen in Vieques. The assertion of being a fisherman, then, is less an objective description of work life and more an important expression of cultural identity, forged in relation to the military occupation of the island.

The significance of becoming a fisherman must be interpreted in light of the dramatic changes of the island. Despite initial enthusiasm surrounding the construction of the base, by the time the breakwater project was terminated it became clear that the base would bring only continued poverty, joblessness, and economic insecurity. Only bartenders seemed to find prosperity in the new era. Although Viequenses were familiar with economic hardship, there were new, unsettling dimensions to the military occupation of the island. First, outmigration, a process that began in the early thirties with the downturn of sugar, continued unabated. Although Vieques had always been characterized by mobility, the exodus of the island

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population seeking economic opportunity in St. Croix, St. Thomas, Puerto Rico and the United States became an intensely emotional issue and a deep-seated grievance against the military. Second, many of the traditional/supplementary activities that provided economic sustenance and cultural meaning to the populace were undermined by military control of two-thirds of the land. When the Navy restricted Viequense access to most of the land and coastal areas of the island, it effectively curtailed residents from engaging in the important productive activities: planting, raising animals, gathering fruit and coconuts, woodcutting and charcoal making, crabbing, collecting snails, coastal and lagoon fishing that were fundamental to island cultural and economic life. When I asked Santiago Meléndez how he would compare the quality of life in Vieques before and after the Navy arrived he responded:

> The food was lost. Those were the days when food was abundant. There was more than enough food. There was an abundance of fish. There were a lot of crabs, a lot of fish. The coastal area below was agricultural. There were bananas, yautia, everything. There was a lot of food. Now came the moment when the Navy arrived. When they arrived they put up the gate. We, the members of the household, had to get a pass with our names on it in order to enter and leave. If it was lost it was problematic.

These restrictions on land created both economic hardship and resentment from Viequenses who increasingly described themselves as caged in, imprisoned, and sandwiched by the boundaries of the base. Finally, the Naval presence challenged existing gender relations. During maneuvers, thousands of troops flooded the island, often drinking, carousing, and harassing Viequense women and girls. While it was widely expected that the base would bring jobs to male agricultural laborers desperate

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for work, the primary wage work the base ended up generating was for women who worked as laundresses and boys who worked as bootblacks. While men struggled to piece together a living, finding some work cutting cane in the government run Esperanza cane fields, or migrating seasonally or permanently to St. Croix or the U.S., women assumed increasing importance as wage earners. Luis Figueroa's life history suggests how these changes were manifested in one particular family, and how social change clashed with existing gender ideologies.

Luis Figueroa, 45 years old, is a government worker in a Commonwealth agency. He was born in 1949 in the Tortuguero neighborhood of Vieques, where people were resettled after the second round of military expropriations in the 40's. He was the youngest of seven children born to José Figueroa and Eva Ledru. According to Luis, before the military expropriations, his father, José, worked as a milkman for one of the wealthy farmers in Vieques. During hard times and the dead time, Luis remembers, José worked making and selling charcoal. After the military arrived, José worked in the Esperanza cane fields. He worked for four months--March, April, May and June. During the dead time he continued to work as a charcoal black. The job was relatively lucrative, and José could earn as much as $100 to $120 a week. Cane cutting would only net $1 per hour, no matter how much cane was cut. But charcoal-making was limited, seasonal work. [And increasingly limited by military ownership of land]. During the charcoal season, José would sometimes ask Luis to help him at night, rather than shining shoes.

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Luis remembers that the years of his adolescence were very busy because he had to help his family economically. When he was 12 years old Luis brought lunch to his father and other cane workers for "una *peseta*" [a quarter] per week. At night, he and his brothers polished the shoes of the "Yankees." Luis worked every night polishing shoes. During the school year Luis worked every weeknight from 6:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. when there was a curfew for children under 18. He earned the most on weekends. Soldiers would come to town on pass. Luis would work from 6:00 to midnight on the weekends, earning around $20-$25 a week.

Luis did not talk about his mother, Eva, or her activities, so I asked him if she worked. No, he responded, she was a housewife. Luis said that his sisters helped his mother around the house. I asked if Eva washed clothes for the soldiers. Yes, Luis responded, she washed clothes for the sailors and his father cut cane and then he changed subjects. After we talked for a while more, I returned to the topic of clothes washing. "So your mother worked washing clothes for the sailors?" No, he responded, my mother was a housewife. The washing was something she did on the side, to have extra spending money. The children helped with the cleaning around the house, he remembered. Again Luis shifted the conversation, yet I was intrigued by the economic significance of this "pocket money" to the family income. I returned the conversation to the topic of earnings and he estimated that his weekly income polishing boots was $20 to $25 a week, as mentioned above. Then I asked him to estimate how much his mother earned washing clothes. "Weekly?" he asked. He had to think about it a bit. Maybe $100-$130 per week. Sometimes she earned more. And

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your father, how much did your father earn? Around $80-$85 he said. Luis paused. "Sometimes my mother earned more than my father," he noted with genuine surprise.

Luis's story suggests both the increased importance of women's wage labor to the sustenance of households and the difficulty men faced in absorbing the significance of this social change. Luis was blinded by his vision of his mother as a housewife from perceiving her cash contributions to the home. Luis's inability to recognize his mother's wage labor stems not from some individual deficiency, but rather, a deeply ingrained cultural expectation of men and women's appropriate spheres of activity. These cultural expectations were clearly jostled by the economic realities of the military presence. The story of Ursula Córdova provides another example of this economic and cultural shift.

Ursula Córdova was born in 1955 in Vieques, the oldest of five children born to Matilde Delgado and Roberto Córdova. She works as an administrative assistant in the local hospital. Both of her parents were born in Vieques in the 1930's. Ursula's father is currently employed at a local supermarket, where he has worked for 33 years, and her mother is a veteran employee of Caribbean Novelty (the lace factory), where she has worked for 35 years. Ursula has childhood memories of her mother ironing for the sailors, though she remarked that she was so young that she doesn't remember what her mother charged. Matilde washed and ironed for three or four years. Ursula remembered her mother getting up early and ironing and ironing. Matilde was paid only a few bucks, Ursula remembered, but it was a lot for them.

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This was before her mother found work in a factory. The Navy gave out food and milk, which helped in the days before food stamps.

I asked Ursula if the work of her mother ironing and her father at the supermarket generated sufficient income to support the family. No, Ursula explained, because when her mother washed and ironed, her father was out of work. What work he found was in the cane fields, Ursula explained. Roberto cut cane, Ursula said, because there was still cane at this time, while Matilde ironed the shirts of the Americans. With this they supported the house. By the early 60's, Ursula's mother found work in the lace factory.

Like her mother, Ursula has acted as the primary breadwinner of her household, anchoring her family with a stable well-paying job, while employment opportunities for her husband have proved fleeting and unstable. She is following the pattern of her parents, where her mother's work ironing and later at the lace factory was crucial to the stability of the household. The women's labor, both within and outside the home, has been more than a "little" supplementary work, but for a number of years the household's primary source of cash income. It is important to understand this context in order to interpret the significance of the island's fishing economy.

The turn to fishing is more than a purely rational economic choice. At a time when people's future on the island was uncertain, when rumors abounded about military covert and overt plans to depeople the island, fishing acted as an assertion of people's links to Vieques. At a time when land was fenced off and restricted, men

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turned to the seas that had always signified autonomy and relative freedom from the oppressive cane. At a time when Viequenses were being drawn into northern factories, or the sugar estates and construction brigades of English-speaking St. Croix, fishing forged links to the Puerto Rican rural past and its traditions. At a time when men's ability to earn a living on Vieques was severely circumscribed, fishing drew on a meaningful cultural repertoire, and offered work in a decidedly male arena. The turn to fishing was an assertion of links to land, to a people, to a history, to an identity. It was a form of cultural resistance that anchored people in Vieques despite the bleak economy and political uncertainties generated by the Naval presence.

Yet making a living from fishing was not easy. The fishing industry in Vieques was extremely underdeveloped, lacking centralized facilities for meeting and storage and basic equipment such as diesel, fiberglass boats, refrigerators and freezers. Fishers had tenuous links to a commercial market, hawking their catch in town or the Virgin Islands, but complained of exploitation. More significantly, perhaps, fishers were turning to the natural environment to provide them with sustenance at a time when military activity was eroding the local ecology.

Military activity and environmental crisis

Recent studies and news coverage have pointed to the pernicious ways in which military bases affect their surroundings.[3] In Vieques, the Navy's arrival had

[3] See for example, Shabecoff, Philip. Military is Accused of Ignoring Rules on Hazardous Waste. *The New York Times*, June 14, 1988: C4; Pollack, Stephanie and Seth Shulman. Pollution and the Pentagon. *Science for the People*. May/June 1987:5-12. Seager, Joni 1993. *Earth Follies: Coming to Feminist Terms with the Ecological Crises*, London, Routledge.

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significant and detrimental consequences on the human and natural environment. Not only did the Navy restrict access to land: its maneuvers and activities began to degrade the local environment. Coconut groves were an early casualty of Naval maneuvers. A soldier's memoirs of his participation in maneuvers in Vieques in February 1950 offer a window into the type of havoc the Navy wreaked on the Vieques' environment. The soldier describes here preparations for maneuvers:

> We had also noted on these reconnaissances that the growth of coconut trees extended almost from the water's edge to a line about a hundred yards inland. We decided to use them in our defense of the beaches. We would cut them down, leaving about a seven-foot stump, and not completely sever the trunk so the entire thicket could be interlaced with barbed wire and demolitions. We hoped to make this the initial obstacle which would stop the landing forces at least long enough for us to place heavy concentrations of artillery and mortar fire on them (Harris 1980:20).

The coconut groves had ringed the beaches along the coasts of the island and were a significant source of cash and subsistence prior to the arrival of the Navy. A number of older residents remember that coconut was a staple of the local diet, appearing in dishes such as coconut rice, coconut johnny cakes, coconut custard and candies. In addition, coconut husks were used for fuel and as brushes for cleaning clothes. Giusti (1993) describes coconuts as a "poor man's crop" and writes that in Piñones, Puerto Rico, wages earned husking and selling coconuts rivaled wages earned in the cane. A 1935 report notes that coconuts were the second largest export crop on Vieques Island after sugar cane (Picó 1950:211). Though in the 1930's, an insect infestation devastated the island's coconut palms, the Insular government sent an agricultural team to Vieques to rehabilitate the crop, a tacit acknowledgment of the importance of

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coconuts to the island. One elderly resident described the coconut palms as "the life of Vieques." Many older people, interviewed independently, mentioned the beautiful coconut palms of Vieques and lamented the loss of these trees, which were largely eliminated by the Navy.

Most people tended to explain the changes they saw in the natural world primarily as the result of bombing, and secondly as a result of the bulldozers the Navy used to clear land for maneuvers. Although bombs and bulldozers are perhaps the most visible and obvious ways the Navy has affected the island, environmentalists suggest that there are other elements of military activity that have shaped Vieques' environment over time. For example, the Navy's construction of roads along the coast and interior of the island closed channels between lagoons and the sea. The changing equilibrium of the water flow altered salination levels, leading to the slow destruction of the lagoons. The construction of the pier off the north coast of Vieques may also have affected tidal flows and salinity in the lagoons. Mangroves suffered from elevated water levels, hypersalinity, and sedimentation as a result of a complex interaction of factors including the extraction of subterranean water by the Navy, erosion, and the closing of channels to the lagoons. The Navy's "cattle program" in which cattle from the Vieques' Cattle Co-operative were allowed virtually unrestricted and unsupervised access to eastern base land for grazing, contributed to the destruction of grasses and unchecked growth of mesquite. The overgrazing by cattle combined with the abandonment of irrigation ditches on military land caused erosion, loss of topsoil, desertification of land and sedimentation and destruction of

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coral reefs. A recent study prepared under a federal mandate addresses contamination caused by toxic dumping by the Navy on the western part of the island.[4]

Whatever the scientific explanations for the degradation of the ecology, fishermen recognized the destruction. Though they might not have been able to explain the full constellation of factors, they understood that they were witnessing destruction of their environment and that this was a threat to their livelihood. To hear Eduardo Negrón describe his experience fishing is to hear a story of both the immediate destruction and the long-term erosion of the fishing waters and marine life of Vieques. Don Eduardo quit fishing in 1989 and lives off his wife's disability income. "Before, there was an abundance of fish," he commented, "Now you don't find anything."

> You can see the difference. Now there are no fish. They used to fish in these waters near the shore. Before people didn't have to go offshore. I used to set a trap over here [points to a nearby beach] in water a foot and a half deep. And the trap would be full of fish. All living things near the coast have disappeared. The first were the sea urchin. The food. They fed off this. Then the *peje puerco* (pigfish) *el cotorro* (parrot fish), *el médico* (doctorfish), *el colirrubia* (yellowtail snapper), *el pargo* (grey snapper), this was their food. But if there is no food, if

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[4] There are numerous studies and environmental reports that discuss the Navy's impact on the ecology of Vieques. Among those that examine the effects of bombing: Rogers, Caroline, Gilberto Cintrón and Carlos Goenaga. The Impact of Military Operations on the Coral Reefs of Vieques and Culebra: A Report Submitted to the Department of Natural Resources, San Juan, Puerto Rico. September 12, 1978; Cruz Pérez, Rafael 1988. Contaminación Producida Por Explosivos y Residuous de Explosivos en Vieques, Puerto Rico. *Dimensión* 8: 37-42. Reports that look at the broad-reaching environmental effects of military activity: García, Neftalí, Vieques: Consecuencias Histórico-Natural de la Presencia de la Marina en Vieques. Reproducido por el Comité Nacional Pro Defensa de Vieques, Apartado 376, Hato Rey, Puerto Rico; Díaz Soltero, Hilda, Secretaria del Departmento de Recursos Naturales, Memorando a Junta de Calidad Ambiental. Vistas Celebradas Por la Junta de Calidad Ambiental Sobre el Problema de Vieques, 20 de julio de 1981; Informe Ambiental 1985. Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico, Junta de Calidad Ambiental, Oficina de Gobernador, 1985, pp 23-26; Seguinot Barbosa, José, Vieques: Ecología de una isla acosada. *Claridad*, del 25 al 31 de mayo de 1990. All of these documents are available at the Archivo Histórico de Vieques.

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> it's killed, then they go. The big fish left when their food source was destroyed. When they killed the smaller fish the big ones left--that's the situation.

According to don Eduardo, the size of fish diminished as well. Whereas he used to catch 30 pound *sama* (mutton snapper), *pargo* (grey snapper), *colirrubia* (yellowtail snapper), *médico* (doctorfish) off the northern coast of Vieques, he was now lucky if he found these same fish weighing more than a half pound. Crabs and snails, important sources of sustenance and income, were also affected:

> We lived off this, catching snails. They would stick to the rocks. It's good food. We also caught crabs. And when the crab season arrived, we caught them and sold them at very good prices---better than fish-to hotels. All of this is gone because of the bombs. The crabs lived in the lagoons. The lagoons were dried out by the bombs. The crabs went running away, looking for fresh water to drink. The lagoons have dried up. The crabs have almost disappeared. The ones that remain now are small--not as they used to be.

The destruction of the coastal ecology and the military restrictions on land changed the type of fishing Viequenses practiced. Fishers went further and further out to sea. For this they needed sturdier boats, traps, and gasoline. In more recent years, many fishers turned to diving for conch and lobster, fish that used to be available closer to shore, but which now could only be found in the ocean's depth. Lobster and conch are lucrative fish, particularly on the tourist market, but diving requires scuba gear, tanks, spearguns, and other equipment. Fishing became more capital intensive and fishers were obligated to net a larger catch to meet their costs.

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Santiago Meléndez has six sons, most of whom fish in some capacity. He is keenly aware of the pressures faced by fishers, and contrasts his sons' experience with that of his father:

> My old man fished, but in those days fish were abundant. He would fish with an open net and with a hook and line from a rowboat close to shore. Now the fish are only in the deep waters, you have to go there to fish. [Turning to his son] These people went out to fish today, how much did you spend? (Eight tanks, he responds). Eight tanks, and they didn't even earn $100. (Muchacho, no. We caught 42 lbs of *carrucho* (conch), 2 pounds of *peje puerco* (pig fish) and 2 pounds of *mero* (sea bass). Now they spent $24 on each tank and spent more on gasoline.

Don Santiago's 35 year-old son Ivan has been fishing since he was 14 years old. Iván has a B.S. in marine biology and a full-time job in the municipal government, but identifies himself as a fisherman. Ivan emphasized the toll the fishing crisis has produced for Vieques' conch/lobster divers and spear fishermen. According to Iván, divers experience the brunt of the fishing crisis, pushed by financial pressure into deeper and more dangerous waters where they test the limits of their oxygen tanks and end up coming to the surface too quickly and suffering from the bends. He explained:

> There are times when you take your tank to 100 feet and there are no fish--neither lobster nor conch. You have your tanks, you have spent two hours or more...do you go back to your house with nothing, having spent that money on gasoline? You know that you can't go up rapidly, but there are many times that fishing is bad, bad. And come the last tank and by chance you find a good amount of fish. With this single tank the fisher tries to recuperate what he couldn't with the other three tanks. And he stays until the last minute. This is the problem--trying to recuperate.

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Throughout Vieques, fishers described bends as a virtual epidemic on the island, and continually referred to colleagues who died or were crippled when they came up for oxygen too quickly and were stricken by the bends.

Even though the fishing stock is declining and the cost of fishing rising, people turn to the seas to make a living because of the limited opportunities for employment on the island. Yet the intensification of fishing only compounds problems, as more and more people fish in an ecosystem that is growing increasingly fragile. Pedro Vales gave up fishing, but pointed to the fact that despite the declining catch, more and more people were turning towards fishing.

> Now, to fish, to support your family, you have to go 10 miles off of Vieques, to St. Thomas and St. Croix. Now in the waters off of Vieques there are no fish. [Before, in the days of my father one could fish] very close, very close. In three feet of water. In all the areas there were a lot of fish, a lot of fish, a lot...All kinds of fish. Before, with five traps you could feed your family and sell. Now it would have to be 50 traps. There are no fish. The fish are all gone.[Why?] One--the abundance of fishers. The other--the bombs. Every time a bomb falls in the water it wipes the fish out. There are too many fishers. Before in this area, there were about 15 fishers. Now there are about 50 or 60. And before when there were 15 fishers, they had 10 traps. Now the fishers have 40, 50, 60 traps....Now they fish all year. With traps, nets, diving, they fish with everything. Before it was traps, nothing else. We fished for five months.

Yet while don Pedro suggests that the increased number of fishermen and overfishing of waters are major contributing factors to Vieques' fishing crisis, it seems improbable that one hundred artisanal fishers could deplete the ocean. It is necessary to look instead to fifty years of maneuvers, the Naval occupation of the island, the

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military restrictions on land and water, and the ensuing economic stagnation of Vieques.

This chapter thus far has argued for understanding the fishing economy as a product of the military presence, and as a strategy for cultural and economic survival in dire circumstances. Yet during the 1970's a particular constellation of factors contributed to making fishermen not only emblems of cultural resistance, but as primary actors in an organized political campaign resisting military maneuvers.

The formation and politics of the fishing co-op

In the mid-1970's there were new efforts in Puerto Rico to foster community development through the creation of fishing co-operatives. As part of a federally funded program administered by the commonwealth government, fishing associations were organized with marketing, docking, storage, and meeting facilities. The goal was to encourage fishers to organize, centralize, and stabilize their markets, and gain access to credit and training (Griffith, Valdés, Johnson 1992:58; Berman Santana 1996:124-126). A number of new co-operatives sprung up throughout Puerto Rico, including one in Vieques. Vieques' fishing co-operative became the crucible of the anti-Navy movement. Organized during a period of military consolidation, it became the primary vehicle through which Viequenses articulated their grievances against the Navy and organized for social change.

The initiative for Vieques' fishing co-operative came largely from several individuals---among them a skilled fisherman and a local bureaucrat----who learned

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about newly available federal funds for fishing co-operatives. In Vieques, there was no existing association and fishers sold on an individual basis to a wholesaler. "Sometimes after a whole day diving for conch, you'd have to peddle house to house because the wholesaler was not giving a fair price," Arturo Santos, a founding member of the co-op remembered. The co-op, at its most basic level, was an economic arrangement that sought to support an extremely undeveloped fishing industry. Fishermen were generally poor, hesitant to take risks, and frequently described themselves as members of an individualistic profession. The fishing association promised a guaranteed buyer and the opportunity to gain a better price. It would provide a place to store gear, a freezer, and importantly, better equipment. Many fishers were operating out of wooden boats. With federal funds, the new association would be able to purchase a number of fiberglass, diesel boats. The co-op supplied the members with materials to make traps and money to buy fishing gear. These incentives, coupled with the organizing capabilities of a handful of individuals, were sufficient to overcome the reluctance of individual fishers. In 1975 a co-op with 40 members was founded.

It should be noted that the fishing co-op not only supported fishermen, but made them. By providing structure, stability and resources to a tenuous trade, the co-op attracted young men who were seeking a way to make a living in Vieques. Juan Jiménez was 19 years old in 1975 when the co-op was founded. It offered him the opportunity of steady work. He was born in Vieques in 1956, the youngest of 12 children. "I learned to fish from my father and when my father couldn't continue, I

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fished with other people. Then I started fishing with the association," Juan recalled. Though Juan learned to fish from his father, the type of fishing the two men engaged in was quite different.

> My father was a fisherman. But he also worked wherever he could. He worked in the cane. He was even the manager of a work crew. He mostly fished in the lagoons. I mostly did my fishing out at sea. Fifty years back people could fish mostly in the bays and lagoons. It was easier to fish close by, and the fish were there. Fish were abundant; it's not like now when we have to go out to sea. Fish was there, close to us. There was *jarea, róbalo, machudisa.* All these fish from the bay. Sometimes my father went with a neighbor and fished at the shore's edge. And they got a good catch.
>
> My father fished with a small, hand cast net and another small net that he dropped from his boat. But our way of fishing is with traps, hook and line, and even diving. [Diving] is most dangerous, but we are being pushed by the situation. We are forced to look for food for our families.

Eventually Juan left fishing when he obtained a coveted government job. While fishing provided him with work in Vieques, he was discouraged. "There is no production. It wasn't worth it. It was too much sacrifice." Yet Juan's memory of the association was largely positive. "It helped us. It gave us money for material to make traps and for fishing gear. In that sense we benefited. On the other hand, it also bought from us, so we didn't have to go elsewhere. It supplied us with boats... We contributed with our work."

Significantly, not only did the co-op organize the fishing industry, it provided a context in which individuals were radicalized in opposition to the military.[5] Juan

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[5] Griffith et al. (1992) argue that Puerto Rican artisanal fishers have brought to their fishing experiences a class consciousness developed on the factory floors of the formal economy. I do not dispute the idea that proletarian experiences have influenced local ideology, but I see the fishing co-op

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Jiménez articulates the consciousness he developed through his involvement in the fishing association:

> We have a perspective that is different from that of our grandparents. In the sense that those who are born in Vieques are feeling that this is ours. Therefore we're seeing the Navy as usurpers. They have usurped what belongs to us. That happens when you're robbed of what is yours and you can't fully develop yourself. Many times they take away what is ours.
>
> Our grandparents were more submissive. Not that they agreed totally with what was going on, but they were more submissive in those times than they are now. I repeat, not that they were agreeing with the situation, but back then there was extreme poverty, a difficult situation. They didn't have authority, there was no one who supported their decisions, their issues. Many times, as they say, they had to comply. But not now. In that sense, we are fighting back now. We are demanding something that is ours. It's not that it's not ours. It belongs to us. Something that we didn't give away, but that they took from us.

The founding of the Fishing Co-op occurred at a crucial moment in Vieques' relationship with the Navy. Just as the fishermen were developing an economic co-op with shared interests and a coherent political structure, they were faced with increased damage and intransigence by the Navy. In the early 1970's an anti- Navy protest movement erupted on the neighboring Puerto Rican Island of Culebra. The details of this movement will be explored in the following chapter. The result of the protest, however, was that the Navy transferred its bombing practices and consolidated its training activities in Vieques. The effect was devastating to fishers in Vieques. Bombing and intensified maneuvers caused great damage to coral reefs, fish, and an already fragile marine environment. Ship traffic increased and the Navy boats severed

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itself as an important vehicle for the development of political consciousness and organization in opposition to the Navy. In Vieques, consciousness was not imported but home grown.

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buoy lines from the traps they marked, effectively destroying fishing gear and the monetary investment the traps represented.[6] The Navy's byzantine requirements for filing damage claims for the lost equipment ensured that few fishers would be reimbursed.[7] Lost traps became a particularly volatile issue, the significance of which will be explored in the following chapter. The co-op became the primary locus through which fishers experienced the Navy and formulated a response.

Yet it was not this most catastrophic of destruction-the bombing and intensified maneuvers---that became the focus of fishermen's organized struggle. Rather, new restrictions on the seas sparked protest. In 1977 the Navy established new guidelines, blocking fishermen from access to most of the island's waters during times of maneuvers. Don Santiago remembered:

> The Crusade was organized because the Navy had so many restrictions that we decided to organize ourselves into a united front. To demonstrate to the world that there was a people oppressed by the United States Navy... They restricted [the waters] from the northeastern part of the island to the southern part. On February 7, 1978 we stopped the maneuvers to show the Navy that we didn't agree with the pressure they were putting on us.

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[6] In 1978, the President of the Vieques Fishing Association estimated that a single trap could capture between 3,000 and 4,000 pounds of fish and lobster over the course of a year. When Navy ships severe the buoy lines, he charged, the trap was effectively lost, while it continued to trap fish. During one in maneuver in February, 1978, he claimed the Navy had destroyed 220 traps. This controversy continued on into the 1990's. One fisherman estimated that in 1994 a single trap cost between $135-$150 and that in one maneuver he and his wife lost nearly 60 traps.

[7] Although fishermen acknowledged instances when they or their colleagues received compensation for lost traps, in general, most fishermen were dismissive of the Navy's efforts to indemnify them. One fisherman commented:

> They have never given me a cent, never in my life. I know people who have gotten money, but you have to struggle. I've never done it because they want me to tell them the exact time I lost the trap, the number of the boat that cut the line, and all of this. And to take a camera and photograph. I can't do this, it's impossible. The hour that the trap is lost-I'm on the island. The number of the boat-this happens over 3 or 4 days. I don't know which boat, which bomb destroyed the trap.

The Navy attributed delays in settling claims to "the necessity of translating the documents, validating receipts, and valuing the lost traps." (U.S. House 1994:128).

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Indeed, the economic repercussions of these restrictions were significant. Fishermen were losing access to the best fishing waters for extended periods of time, and consequently, their source of livelihood. Their overconcentration within a limited area of water was environmentally unsound. In 1978, the director of Puerto Rico's Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Project testified in federal court that restricting Vieques fishermen to waters south-central and north-central of the island threatened to deplete commercial fish. Comparing yield figures between Vieques and Cabo Rojo over a ten-year period, this official noted that Cabo Rojo's catch had remained constant over a ten-year period, while the catch of Vieques' south-central coast had dropped 50 percent in the same time period (*San Juan Star* 10/9/78; p 5).

Yet the symbolic importance of the military's new restrictions cannot be ignored. The Navy, which had usurped so much of Vieques' land, was now extending its reach to the seas. The gates and boundaries that cut across Vieques' landscape were now being established in the waters. Don Santiago describes the organization of an anti-military movement in Vieques as islanders' last stand against the Navy's increasing encroachments. The military's restrictions of access to water, he asserts, were the ultimate blow that left Viequenses with no choice but to organize in opposition to the Navy. Yet the military restrictions of the seas were infused with symbolic significance, echoing earlier seizures of land. They challenged the frontier the fishermen had established of relative freedom and autonomy, of working class male identity and cultural continuity. To understand Vieques' anti-military movement

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as the inevitable result of an accumulation of abuses does not do justice to the complexities of the political situation in which it unfolded. Indeed, just weeks before the Crusade was successfully launched, another effort to organize islanders in opposition to the military collapsed.

While the Navy had easily gained a foothold on the island, usurping property and effortlessly evicting *agregados*, its efforts to extend its jurisdiction to the seas met with formidable resistance from Vieques' newly organized fishers. The co-op became the locus of political organization against the Navy's incursions. While there were numerous fishers scattered across the island, not all were organized into the association. On the north coast of the island a second association was formed which residents described as primarily kin-based and not co-operative in structure. Significantly, the impetus and organization of protest came not from independent fishers, nor the north coast association, but rather from the fishing co-operative on the south coast. Fishers from around the island would join in protests, and several fishers from the north coast association were active participants in the anti-Navy movement, but the force and organization of protest was rooted in the south coast fishing association.

Thus Viequenses' longstanding conflict with the military over land became translated into a battle of the seas. Vieques fishermen became leaders of an anti-military movement of international proportions. These fishermen were not living relics, motivated by stubborn conservatism to recapture a lost way of life. They were men who turned to fishing for cultural and economic reasons within the context of the

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military occupation and degradation of the island. Their identity as fishermen, we will see, provided them with the strength and legitimacy to battle the U.S. Navy. As the next chapter details, when fishermen joined together in protest, their struggle was able to transcend specific occupational grievances to become a larger movement to evict the Navy from Vieques, joined by a diverse coalition of people. That fishers were at the forefront of this movement is important to understanding the nature and decline of conflict. As the next chapter will also consider, other efforts to organize the populace in opposition to the military failed. Fishermen came to symbolize the nature of Vieques' problems in economic, political and symbolic terms.

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Chapter Four: Politics and Protest

"Does one have to give up being Viequense, being Puerto Rican, being an American citizen to reclaim what belongs to us?"

Crusade Pamphlet

In 1978 Santiago Meléndez was arrested for trespassing on Naval property during a series of confrontations between fishers and the military off Vieques' south coast. To don Santiago, this arrest is a badge of honor, proof of his passion and commitment to the cause of Vieques and evidence of the abuse fishermen have faced at the hands of the Navy:

> We went out to fish. I was arrested. Why? For looking for bread for my children. And it was with pride that I stood before a Federal judge with my hands bound and my head held high. Because I had not committed any crime. To the contrary, there was prejudice against me because I was not permitted to look for bread for my children in my own land, in my own nation.

Don Santiago here speaks with evident pride of his struggle to feed his family. He points to the injustice of the fact that he is arrested, as he sees it, for trying to make a living. The irony of the situation, in don Santiago's opinion, is that he is denied this freedom and liberty, "in my own land, in my own nation." As became apparent in later conversation, he is not referring to Vieques or to Puerto Rico. Don Santiago's nation is the United States of America, and he is indignant that the U.S. Navy is interfering with his rights as an American citizen. Here we begin the story of

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the fishermen's battle against the U.S. Navy.

As we have noted, Puerto Rican politics are characterized by conflicting feelings of Puerto Rican cultural identity and political identification with the United States. When anti-military protest erupted in Vieques in 1978, it dramatized decades of conflict between residents and the U.S. Navy. The movement also acted as a crucible in which these contradictory pulls of cultural identity and national citizenship were expressed. Fishing in Vieques acted as a cultural assertion of links to the island, to its history, to a local identity. The struggle of fishermen like don Santiago to provide for their children appealed to the sentiments of Viequenses who struggled to remain on their island in spite of the Navy. Yet the emphasis on economics is, in part, a product of the politics of the situation. Within the context of this fisherman's war, don Santiago confronts the political: he argues that he is denied the freedom to fish "in my own land, in my own nation." The message he conveys is politically palatable: he is a loyal American citizen, struggling to defend his rights. The context of his protest is beyond reproach: he is a working man seeking his rights, not some left-wing radical, seeking to dissolve or take over the state.

In this chapter we explore several ideas. First, we look at how culture is mobilized in struggle. The last chapter demonstrated the way in which fishermen's identity emerges from working class culture as an assertion of autonomy and resistance to military occupation. Here, examining the fisherman at the vanguard of Vieques' struggle, we see the way in which issues of identity and subsistence are

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simultaneously asserted. Second, essential to understanding the importance of this expression is a recognition of relations of power. In challenging the Navy, Vieques fishermen confront the image and essence of the colonial state. Their protest is shaped by this "field of force" (Roseberry 1994). Fishermen lead a highly confrontational struggle with the Navy with rhetoric that retreats from full collision with the colonial state. For example, one fisherman protestor explained his participation in a rock-throwing flotilla that blocked a Navy admiral from disembarking in Vieques:

> I don't have anything against the Navy. As a fisherman, they bomb while we're in the water. It's not the marines we're against; it's the manner in which they bomb. When they miss their target, the bomb goes to another place; it ends up in the sea. When it explodes it kills everything around. We'd have nothing against them if they hit their targets.

Thus a somewhat paradoxical phenomenon develops: Vieques' anti-base movement emerges infused with pro-American sentiment. Yet a challenge to the U.S. Navy inevitably raises questions about the justice and legitimacy of the colonial order. In asserting local claims to the land and waters of Vieques, islanders found that they became entangled in broader political controversies that they sought to avoid. The significance protestors invest in declaring their loyalty as American citizens points to a deep ambivalence within the movement about confronting the colonial state. This ambivalence, and the sheer power of a formidable foe, the United States Navy, led to the disintegration of the movement.

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Background: The Battle of Culebra[1]

The Vieques' anti-military movement burst forth several years after a parallel anti-Navy movement on the neighboring island of Culebra. Like Vieques, Culebra was part of the Roosevelt Roads Complex and had been used since World War II as a Naval bombing and gunnery range. Culebra is smaller than Vieques—seven miles long and three miles long at its widest point, with a population of approximately 750. Unlike Vieques, the Culebra mobilization was militantly anti-colonial and linked to the Puerto Rican independence movement. And, significantly, unlike Vieques, the Culebra cause succeeded in evicting the Navy from its shores. Here we will consider the Culebra mobilization as background to the development and shape of the anti-Navy mobilization in Vieques.

In the early 1970's, hundreds of protestors massed on the beaches of Culebra, forming a human shield against the ship-to-shore missile fire of U.S. Navy ships. Protestors responded to an intensification of military maneuvers and efforts by the Navy to expand its bombing range. While organizers stressed that protest in Culebra was non-violent, it was, nonetheless, quite militant and charged with anti-colonial rhetoric. Activists called attention to the Naval presence and bombing of Culebra as part of the United States' oppressive colonial regime in Puerto Rico. Dramatic demonstrations occurred over a period of five years. U.S. Congressional hearings

[1] See Delgado (1989) for a detailed account of this movement.

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were held over the status of military activities in Culebra, and ultimately an accord was signed in 1975 putting an end to military activity on the island.

Vieques and Culebra make an interesting comparison because of the parallel experience of the two islands and their very different battles and resolutions with the Navy. A number of activists in Vieques expressed great admiration for the people of Culebra, particularly for their unified front, which they saw as the source of their strength against the military. If only we in Vieques were as unified as the people of Culebra, we could kick the Navy out, they lamented. But the fact that these Viequense activists perceived Culebra's victory to be connected to the unity of the townspeople says more about Viequense politics and ideology than the political reality in Culebra.[2] The success of the Culebra movement had more to do with the political moment when the struggle erupted and the alliances that were formed to support the movement. And significantly, Culebrenses won because of a cynical sleight of hand, in which the Puerto Rican governor agreed to a transfer of military activities to Vieques.

The Culebra conflict erupted at a time of widespread anti-military and pro-independence mobilization in Puerto Rico. Student demonstrations against the Vietnam War, military conscription, and ROTC on the campus of the University of Puerto Rico drew large crowds and media attention. While the Culebra conflict

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[2] During the Culebra anti-Navy mobilization, dissident Culebrenses organized a pro-military group called the "Sons of Culebra." The group marched under the banner of the American flag, demanding that outside agitators depart and leave islanders in peace.

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developed locally in response to military encroachments into civilian life, the anti-Navy mobilization developed into a forceful movement only through broader political alliances and the activism of outside groups. The Culebra cause was picked up by the independence movement in an effort to link the issue to the wider struggle against U.S. domination and colonialism. The Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP) and other pro-independence groups played instrumental roles in the anti-Navy movement. The PIP led the non-violent direct action campaign in Culebra and the PIP president, Rubén Berríos, was arrested and jailed for trespassing on military property.

The Culebra mobilization was a highly politicized movement that became the subject of intense political jockeying. The different Puerto Rican political parties, measuring public response to the issue, all positioned themselves in support of the Culebra movement and spoke at U.S. Congressional hearings on behalf of Culebra. This outpouring of support masked a history of backstage political maneuvering at Culebra's expense: in 1969, for example, Governor Luis A. Ferré secretly negotiated with the Navy to turn over the entire island to the military (Delgado 1989:19). The Culebra issue became central in the 1972 gubernatorial elections. Ferré, the PNP (pro-statehood party) governor who was perceived by the Navy as one of their staunchest allies in Puerto Rico, publicly backed efforts to evict the Navy from Culebra to prevent the PPD (pro-commonwealth party) opposition candidate Rafael Hernández Colón from seizing the issue. Nonetheless, Hernández Colón won the

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elections, and his backstage negotiations with the Navy changed the dimensions of the conflict. Documents revealed that Hernández Colón offered the Navy unconditional use of the southern shores of Vieques as leverage to stop the Navy from bombing Culebra.[3] The Navy gradually ceased the bombing of Culebra--an apparent victory for the Culebra cause-- only to transfer its activities to Vieques, intensifying the bombings and maneuvers on the island. In the words of one Vieques anti-military activist, "Vieques was sacrificed for the cause of Culebra."

The political compromise reached by the Hernández Colón administration led to intensification of maneuvers in Vieques. In Vieques, the Culebra compromise contributed to a distrust of the Puerto Rican government, of partisan politics, of the Hernández Colón administration, and fed a perception that Vieques was little more than a pawn in Puerto Rico's political negotiations with the United States. Finally, Culebra was a direct frame of reference in forming the tactics and ideology of anti-military protest in Vieques.

Vieques: Prelude to Protest

By the mid-seventies, it became apparent that Vieques received the brunt of the Culebra "solution," in the form of intensified bombing and maneuvers and new military restrictions. Nonetheless, while discontent with the military was on the rise,

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[3] On November 3, 1977 the PNP administration of Carlos Romero Barceló disclosed a memo of November 13, 1973 written by Richard Copaken, the attorney for the Hernández Colón administration. In this memo, Copaken, acting on the behalf the Puerto Rican Governor, offered the Navy the unconditional use of the southern shores of Vieques for military maneuvers. See *San Juan Star*,

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activists were not yet able to harness sentiment into a coherent anti-base movement.

The quality of life on Vieques, already affected by three decades of military occupation, deteriorated more rapidly. Residents began to complain about the impact of maneuvers: roaring planes interrupted classes and bombing cracked the foundations of homes. In response to these heightened maneuvers, individuals from the political left, party activists from the local PIP and PSP branches in particular, started organizing against the Naval presence on the island.[4] Activists took aim at the Navy's participation in the annual patron saint festival, a ten-day community event of central importance on the island. Demonstrations were organized in 1974, 1975 and 1976 blocking the Navy from joining in the festival parade. Carlos Quintero, the 41 year old school teacher and anti-Navy activist mentioned in the previous chapter, explained:

> The people began to organize. Make groups. Organize. Really what happened in this situation, in this type of struggle, was that the consciousness-raising came from the Left... We considered the participation of the Navy in the carnivals, the patron saint festival, to be a social and cultural aggression. It added to the constant assault of the maneuvers, the disorder, the lack of respect for the ladies in the street, to the marriages, to the children. It was all a type of aggression. Well, how were we going to let them participate in our patron saint festival?

These demonstrations signaled a changing political climate on the island: however

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February 1, 1980, pg 23.

[4] While the local PIP was active in Vieques, the PIP on a national level did not demonstrate a sustained interest in Vieques, nor did the party connect the anti-military struggles on both islands. Time proved that it was easier for the PIP to achieve a "victory" by focusing solely on Culebra, rather than linking the

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tense relations had been in the past, there had always been cultural interchange between the military and residents. Now activists were raising questions about the participation of the military in various aspects of civilian life. Carlos continued:

> We made a committee to confront all these problems relating to the Navy: their participation in the carnivals, their participation in these things, in school, and all of this. For example, as children, the school system allowed us to be brought to the military base in military trucks to see how they made military exercises. [There is outrage in his voice. KM: This happened?] Yes, not only this. They took us in helicopters to teach us, to give us the impression of how good the Americans are. This teaches us how to fight in wars, supposedly to defend democracy. We learned this as children... This participation at the base and all... there was never a movement against this because ... It was a process of consciousness raising in many people. There was a small group that had consciousness that this shouldn't happen. Nonetheless, little by little we became aware of the way in which they were buying us, buying the consciousness of the children. It was a birth of an understanding in general of the problems of the Navy.

In 1977 there were new political developments in Vieques that inspired outrage against the Navy and encouraged the formation of new political alliances. In the aftermath of the Culebra compromise, Vieques politicians discovered that new deals were being negotiated in San Juan about Vieques' future. The General Services Administration offered to sell the Vieques resettlement tracts to the Commonwealth government in exchange for an aviation easement over the south coast of Vieques, an area regarded as having the greatest tourism potential on the island. Vieques politicians viewed the GSA as acting as the handmaiden to the Navy and were outraged at the real estate negotiations. Securing title to the resettlement land that

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struggles of the two islands into a united front.

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residents had occupied since the forties was a long sought after political goal, but not for the high price the GSA sought, and not attached to an aviation easement. An aviation easement would intensify military traffic over the south coast of Vieques and put restrictions on construction and development. Coming on the heels of the attempted expropriation of this same area in 1964, and the recent increase of maneuvers, the Mayor of Vieques, Radamés Tirado, declared the negotiations to be part of a subversive campaign of the Navy:

> The Navy has attempted to take measures, that if successful, would have the ultimate effect of evicting the entire population of Vieques at little or no cost to the Navy. Through the systematic elimination of opportunities for the development of the island and the destruction of its economy, the Navy hopes to force the entire population of Vieques to migrate involuntarily to other islands. The Navy could then gradually acquire all the land that remains at very little cost (U.S. House 1981:204).

The response to this crisis has generally been viewed in Vieques as a political turning point in local politics. Opposition to the military, traditionally regarded as the cause of the left, of independence advocates, was expressed by the presidents of the four electoral parties in Vieques in reaction to the proposed aviation easement. A rally was held in front of the gates to the Camp García Base in Vieques. Presidents of each of the four parties denounced the proposed aviation easement and gathered widespread public support. The politicians traveled to San Juan to lobby against the signing of this agreement.

That four presidents of the different electoral parties should come together in

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opposition to the military's proposal was hailed as a major achievement, an indication of a new political unity in Vieques. Over the years, activists recalled this moment in efforts to reinforce political solidarity, and to point to the political unity that underlay Vieques' struggle with the Navy. What is interesting, however, is that despite the significance attributed to this moment, to the "unified" political opposition of the four parties, the conflict over the aviation easement was not able to unify and mobilize the populace. This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that a comparable political moment in Culebra--the extension of the bombing range--was the basis of a movement on that island.

In Vieques, activists formed an organization, "Viequenses United" (*Viequenses Unidos*), that sought to build on the political momentum generated by the four presidents and bring together Viequenses of all different persuasions in opposition to military activity on the island. The organization collapsed. The unity that Viequenses United sought to build upon was short lived at best. At the base of the group's collapse was its desire to challenge the military without changing the status quo. This type of ambivalence foreshadowed some of the problems that faced the Crusade. During a formative assembly, Viequenses United expressed a distrust of the political left and sought to prevent Mario Martínez, a prominent local leftist activist from speaking. Yet at this same meeting, convoked to address problems with Navy, organizers had invited a Navy official to attend. Conflict erupted. Martínez remembered:

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> In '77 Zenón [head of the fishermen's association] and the fishermen were having problems with the Navy's ships and the maneuvers. I had the opportunity to talk with Zenón and strategize how we could coordinate their claims together with our claims. Viequenses United didn't think much of their struggle. Well, Viequenses United collapsed at an assembly to which they invited a Navy official. They wouldn't let me speak at the meeting. They attacked me. Therefore, Carlos Zenón demanded to know how it could be that at a meeting in which we were to discuss the Navy's treaty, how could we speak in front of a functionary of the Navy while we were organizing to fight against them? It was as if the Navy invited us to their house to discuss the treaty against us. This would never happen. Therefore the meeting collapsed. The people didn't like it and it disappeared.

Although anti-Navy activists often point to Viequenses United as an important political precedent to the formation of the Crusade to Recover Vieques, this organization is perhaps better seen as the counterpoint to the successfully organized Crusade. While Vieques United was organized at a key moment, or "political opportunity" in Vieques' conflict with the Navy, it lacked an effective framework for translating islanders' grievances into a movement for change. Basing struggle on the unified front of the different electoral leaders, Viequenses United dissolved into partisan politics. It was only the activism of the fishermen that was able to pull together a movement that would successfully confront the military. The fishermen succeeded in drawing Viequenses together in large part because they avoided the partisan politics that had proven so divisive and instead anchored community struggle in the realm of the economic.

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The Fishermen's War

In February 1978 a rag-tag contingent of 18-foot fishing boats halted NATO warships off the coast of Vieques, Puerto Rico. The U.S. Navy organized an international training program, bringing together the navies of several countries to engage in amphibious exercises, electronic warfare, missile firing and mock invasions. The training program would prevent local fishermen from fishing for 30 days of scheduled "war games." The fishermen instead blocked the Navy. Positioning themselves in the direct line of missile fire, local fishermen successfully interrupted international military maneuvers. It was a triumphant moment in Vieques. With media headlines broadcasting David's battle with Goliath, international attention was riveted on the case of the humble fishermen of Vieques locked in combat with the U.S. Navy. Photographs showed bare-breasted fishermen waving their fists from wooden boats and throwing stones as military helicopters attempted to buzz them out of the water. Fishermen declared their campaign to be a "fish-in," echoing the rhetoric of the civil rights protestors' "sit-ins" at segregated lunch counters in the U.S. South in the 1960's. They lambasted the Navy for interfering with their ability to make a living.

The fishermen's war erupted in response to new restrictions the Navy imposed on the seas, blocking access to some of the island's best fishing waters, and bringing to a head conflict that had intensified with the Navy's stepped up bombing of Vieques Island. We have noted that these restrictions, while economically damaging,

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were not the most catastrophic of the Navy's effects on the island. The restrictions on the seas held symbolic significance, resonating with the usurpation of land, barriers and barbed wire the Navy had erected on the island. The fishermen's war became the "cultural framing" of a response to these restrictions, to the Navy's occupation, stifling and control of the island. Through the fishermen Viequenses were able to articulate local grievances and avoid entanglement in broader issues of colonialism. The fishermen sparked a movement that lasted over five years and linked together diverse peoples in a unified campaign for the recuperation of land and eviction of the military from the island. Why the fishermen were able to unify a movement while earlier efforts failed may be explained by considering their position and symbolism in Vieques and the colonial context in which their movement developed.

First and foremost, the fishermen's campaign grounded a movement with explosive political implications in a domain outside status politics. Rafael Cruz, a fisherman leader of the anti-Navy movement, clearly defined the struggle as one of subsistence, of economic necessity. Like Santiago Meléndez, he described the Crusade as the inevitable culmination of years of abuse:

> The struggle began in 1978 because for years Vieques had been mistreated by the Navy. Women were raped. Men were killed in the streets fighting sailors in years back. I lost a friend on the base when a bomb exploded. But they continued with the abuse and the abuse eventually reached the sector of the fishermen. They bombed the most productive fishing areas. Dropped live bombs. Destroyed many fishing traps.....The situation in Vieques is that the fishers have families to support. The only factory that has its door opened to whomever wants to work is the sea. If you have a boat you can go fishing. And no one asks you if you are pro-Navy, anti-Navy, what political party you are.

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> No one will ask you that. It's the only foundation of ample employment in Vieques. And here comes the Navy saying for 30 days, you can't fish. This is terrible. Because fishers have bills to pay, they have families to support.

While other conflicts with the military in Puerto Rico had been waged by independence advocates in political campaigns for Puerto Rican sovereignty, the fishermen focused attention on the concrete needs of working people on the island. This emphasis distanced the movement from taking a position on Puerto Rico's lack of sovereignty and Vieques' secondary status in Puerto Rico. In the aftermath of the Culebra "compromise," in the context of intensely divided partisan politics, this focus was crucial to the success of the movement.

The fishermen's success in mobilizing a broader community-based movement around issues of subsistence stemmed from their position as cultural icons. We have noted the way the military occupation promoted a fierce attachment to Vieques and a resilient local identity. Fishermen were the embodiment of those links and sentiments. On an island delimitated by boundaries, fishermen signified autonomy and freedom. At a time when outmigration and poverty were perceived as eroding the fabric of social life, fishermen represented a traditional way of work that firmly rooted the people on the island and in its traditions. Fishing, furthermore, resonated as a cultural archetype because it was an identifiably male activity. At a time when migration and poverty were eroding families, when there were high rates of male unemployment and when women were as likely--if not more likely than men--to be

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wage workers, fishing was a reassertion of male identity. Movement literature showed pictures of wives clutching their husband's waists in small boats at sea. Fishermen emphasized that they were struggling to feed their families, promoting an ideology of a single bread-earning male in a place where this model hardly existed. In the context of profound social and economic change that was challenging established gender relations, of growing dependency on public assistance, such a cultural archetype was appealing. Rafael Cruz remembered with great indignity a Navy official's suggestion that fishermen turn to public assistance to make ends meet. The idea that an able bodied working man turn to government hand-outs deeply offended him :

> We had a meeting with Robert Flannigan who was at Roosevelt Roads in 1978. The Mayor of Vieques, Radamés Tirado, who helped us, who was there for the struggle, went to Roosevelt Roads on a medical helicopter. And he said to the military, and 90 percent of them are arrogant, 'Mr. Flannigan, Vieques has a level of unemployment of about 50 percent. About 75 percent of the people are living on food stamps. If you close the beaches of Vieques, restrict the area, especially where the fishermen fish, for 30 days, what will the fishermen do to support their families?' And do you know what he said? He said to Radamés, 'Do you have food stamp service in Vieques?' He said 'Yes, we do.' 'Well you people can go to the food stamp line because we are bombing here for the war games.' I said, 'Look, never before in the modern history of Vieques have we had problems.' Can you imagine the power of the Navy, the abuse? We have an immense problem. I came to Vieques and met with the fishermen and established that it was important that we fight this maneuver. On February 6, 1978 at 6:00 in the morning we were on the beach. And we went out to the maneuvers. There were about 95 of us. This attitude on the part of the Navy, that they wouldn't let the fishermen go out to the sea for 30 days while they were doing their maneuvers. It's not possible. We had to fish.

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While women were active in the movement, they frequently articulated their identity as that of wives and mothers, supporting their husbands and sons in struggle. Drawing on the fishermen's battle was a way of staking the legitimacy of their claims, the authenticity of their grievances. For example, Blanca Ortiz, wife of Santiago Meléndez commented:

> I have been involved in the struggle to evict the U.S. Navy from Vieques from the beginning. Mainly, because my husband and sons are fishermen, but if they weren't fishermen I'd back it because I am the mother of six sons, and my thoughts are always with the future of my sons and Vieques. I don't think Vieques has a future with the Naval presence here. I've participated in all of the pickets they've had here, at the Federal Court and at the *Fortaleza* (Governor's Residence). I've had a great experience, or suffered a great experience, when my husband and his two fishermen friends were the first three arrested in this struggle (PRISA 1984).

The simplicity and clarity of the fishermen's cause appealed to the local populace. Fishermen emphasized that they were not interested in politics, but simply in making a living. This message resonated on an island with high rates of unemployment and uncertainty about the economic viability of the community. Roberto Rivera, 63, became involved in the Crusade to Recover Vieques. A return migrant, don Roberto worked for eight years in a Chicago factory while sending remittances to his wife and children in Vieques. He drifted in and out of work in Vieques, while his wife found permanent work in a clerical position at the local hospital. He was attracted to the fishermen's struggle:

> The restrictions of the sea, the bombing, the boats, the destruction of traps. The Navy didn't want to pay [for the destroyed traps]. The

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> fishermen couldn't fish in certain areas. And the fishermen live off this. The fishermen have to fish in good weather and bad. They go out to fish. It was a big problem that they couldn't go out. And these maneuvers were every day. When one ended, the next began. When they lost a trap... the other thing is when they lost a trap it became a death trap. It did damage. Killing fish. The fishermen began struggling. It was heroic.

The focus on work, on the right to make a living, channeled the rage people felt over the way the island's children were steadily leaving because they lacked economic opportunity in Vieques. We see this sentiment expressed in Blanca Ortiz's concern about her sons' future in Vieques.

The fishermen's struggle over the right to work, furthermore, was intimately connected to an effort to halt environmental destruction. The environmental dimensions of the message had both emotional and pragmatic import. Santiago Meléndez spoke with passion about the environmental destruction:

> It begins on land and ends in the sea. Because here in the 1940's when the Americans came to do maneuvers—before going to Korea, the infantry came here-- they destroyed the coconut groves. On land, on sea, in the air, everything is contamination... This is tremendous with the Navy here. This is the worst plague. The Bible speaks of seven plagues and this is the worst plague that has fallen on Vieques. [The snails, the conch, the crab] they don't exist anymore. The Navy destroyed everything because they destroyed the mangroves and the lagoons. They brought bulldozers and tanks into the lagoons. The fauna—they destroyed everything.

The Navy's bombing of reefs, bulldozing beaches and lagoons, destruction of coconut groves, napalming the countryside, were destroying an island to which

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people were deeply attached. This type of destruction not only eliminated a people's home and way of life, but the future of the community. Most proposals for the island's economic development centered on a vision of Vieques as a tourist magnet. When fishermen complained that reefs were being destroyed and beaches ruined, this threatened not only the island's present, but any hope for economic viability in the future.

It is interesting to note that a great deal of the fishermen's rhetoric and environmental claims centered on the issue of lost traps. Fishermen claimed that not only were they prevented from entering the most fertile fishing grounds by maneuvers, but that Navy boats were deliberately cutting the buoys that anchored and identified the traps. To the fishermen, this signified more than a callous disregard for their way of livelihood. The result, they claimed, was environmentally devastating:

> When a boat cuts a trap, this trap falls to the depth of the sea. Fish die in the trap and continue to die. They go in and continue to die, continue to die. And neither I, nor my children, nor the children of my children, nor the grandchildren of my children are going to participate (in fishing in the future). What kind of effect will this have? This is total destruction. The complete destruction of marine life.

Yet Menzies (Menzies, Charles, letter to author, July 24, 1994) points out that such claims should not go unexamined. It is a cheap, straightforward procedure to modify traps so that they do not become death traps for countless fish. If fishermen were truly concerned about the environmental consequences of lost traps, they could easily make these modifications. It is possible that the fishermen were not aware of such

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modifications. These were fishers that did not come from an established fishing culture; perhaps skilled trap fishing was not part of their cultural repertoire. But it is also possible that the controversy surrounding the traps was more emblematic than economic. The charges leveled against the Navy for deliberately destroying the traps and annihilating marine life connect to broader charges leveled against the Navy for deliberately conspiring to annihilate the community of Vieques. Fishermen, signifying the island's authentic past, thus clearly also embodied fears surrounding the island's future: the future of its youth in a context of economic stagnation; the sustainability of the environment in light of continued bombing; the future of the entire community in face of efforts to remove them. This may provide an additional explanation for why the fishermen were such effective spokespeople--because their claims and their campaign had multiple layers of significance.

Finally, the image and struggle of fishermen were significant because they easily translated in a variety of contexts outside of Vieques. This was important because the efforts of support groups were central to the success of the movement. Though in the United States, the particular cultural resonance of fishing might be lost, the image of a small fry confronting warships was dramatic and appealing. In the words of one U.S. activist:

> Vieques was one of the sharper expressions of Puerto Rico's lack of sovereignty. If you wanted to name it imperialism or colonialism you could. The ways the people's lives were delimited by the Navy-- and they were engaged in a fight back. They were out there. It's not that frequent that you see that graphic and vivid an example of the incursion against a people's everyday lives and their resistance against that incursion.

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For religious groups who took up the cause of Vieques on an international level, the fishermen's struggle exemplified the plight of peaceful folk confronting the violence of the military-industrial complex. In sum, the fishermen evoked all of these images--the rural past, the underdog, the working man, the peaceful citizen. The imagery, the focus on the economic as opposed to the political aspects of the case, and the organization were key in developing a successful movement.

The Crusade to Rescue Vieques: Politics and Ideology

In 1978, the Crusade to Rescue Vieques was founded with the objective of regaining the entire island of Vieques from military control. Drawing momentum from the fishermen's struggle, the Crusade sought to unite and mobilize people on the island who were opposed to the military presence. Many of the same individuals who had participated in Viequenses United took part in this new organization. What was different from past efforts, and what established the success of the Crusade, was that it functioned as a coalition movement, bringing together a variety of people--teachers, businessmen, workers-- and anchoring struggle in the cause of the fishermen.

Tarrow (1994) has suggested that political "entrepreneurs" mobilize their constituencies by selecting symbols to advance certain messages in strategic ways. In the case of Vieques, cultural expression was more organic. The movement erupted from the grassroots, propelled by members of the fishing co-operative, who initiated

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protest around work-related grievances. Fishermen were essential to setting the framework of a movement that translated so successfully to a variety of contexts and bridged together a diverse constituency. Political activists built on the momentum established by this group, but in no way did they consciously choose the fisherman as a symbol. Rather, they rode a wave of unrest already in motion. They took advantage of a "political opportunity" as Tarrow would describe the crucial moment in which a social movement coalesces.

On the surface, the Crusade echoed the Culebra mobilization. From the outset, civil disobedience was an important tactic. The fishermen's blockades of maneuvers, like Culebra's human blockades of missile fire, used weakness as a strength. Since the fishermen clearly could not combat the Navy on its own terms, their blockades dramatized the inequalities at the root of the conflict: the Navy's seemingly wanton acts of destruction and disregard for human life, military control over land, and fishermen's inability to enter their own waters. On land, the Crusade complemented the fishermen's campaign. On one occasion, demonstrators marched into military controlled territory in order to plant a tree, drawing attention to Viequenses claims to the land, and to military destruction of the environment. On another occasion, hundreds of demonstrators massed for an ecumenical religious service held on a beach used for amphibious assaults, juxtaposing peaceful and war making activities. This service drew clear links to religious and pacifist elements of the Culebra mobilization. One of the focal points of the Culebra mobilization was the

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construction of a chapel on Flamingo Beach, the Navy's target range, where protestors conducted religious services.

In Vieques, protestors combined their civil disobedience campaign with a legal line of attack. The first blockade was coupled almost immediately with a suit filed in Federal Court against the Navy, charging the Navy with ecological destruction. Though the focus on the Navy's ecological impact was in part tactical, based on an assessment of the strength of the legal claims, it also displayed a pragmatic, moderate approach to the conflict. It demonstrated a commitment to using legal channels and fighting the Navy in Federal Court rather than calling into question the U.S. presence and position in Puerto Rico.

Like the Culebra mobilization, the Vieques movement attracted considerable attention and support. A network of well-organized and committed support groups sprung up throughout Puerto Rico and the United States. The head of the Vieques Fishermen's Association testified before the U.N. Decolonization Committee about the negative impact of the military presence. A Congressional Subcommittee traveled to Vieques to hold hearings on the state of military activities on the island. Activists marched on Washington D.C., on the Governor's residence in San Juan, and picketed outside the Roosevelt Roads Naval Installation in Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican Governor, Carlos Romero Barceló intervened into the conflict, filing a lawsuit against the Navy for environmental destruction in an effort to both back the movement and direct the form of the struggle.

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In many ways, therefore, the Vieques movement was similar to the Culebra mobilization. Yet in the realm of the political, differences were apparent. Despite the potent symbolism of a popular struggle waged against the U.S. Navy, the Vieques movement did not become a nationalist movement. Vieques lacked the fiery nationalist rhetoric and clear association with the independence movement that characterized the Culebra mobilization. Vieques activists were committed to a pragmatic, moderate approach to conflict and a focus on the local economic effects of the military presence. This was an extremely delicate and fragile position: the U.S. military was both an agent and symbol of the colonial state. But activists struggled to narrow the focus of their movement to economic issues. Carlos Quintero explained:

> The abuse, the abuse of the bombing and maneuvers really affected the fishermen the most economically. The areas where there were maneuvers were where there were the best fish.... We organized the people in general with the idea that the fishermen were suffering the most, because in reality they were the most affected. [The Navy] damaged the ladies, they damaged the education, the children with the bombing. They damaged the marine life, the fauna, the reefs. But the economic point of view, they were affecting the families of the fishermen. They had to go out all day fishing and find areas closed off, boats on the beach, this affected the fishers and they organized themselves. The people in general got involved.

The Vieques movement drew on the example of Culebra's bold demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience, but was circumscribed by its own political ideology. In effect, the Vieques movement challenged the legitimacy of the colonial state while relying on it to deliver substantive justice. This contradiction was expressed was in

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inconsistent tactics. For example, when protestors trespassed on Naval property to plant trees and hold ecumenical services, their actions effectively challenged military jurisdiction over island land. Yet the Federal court case that was at the heart of the movement's efforts sought only to extract compensatory damages for environmental destruction, leaving untouched the broader issue of military control of Vieques.

Despite their lobbying, picketing, lawsuits, and demonstrations, Crusade activists rejected the characterization of the movement as in any way "political." For example, Santiago Meléndez elaborated:

> We had all different parties here, but we never made a decision based on political ideology. It was a people's movement. Our concern was and is Vieques. Vieques is practically being strangled by the Navy, and the American flag is flying overhead.

Thus the irony arose that a grass-roots movement in a U.S. colony that confronted the symbolic gargantuan of the U.S. Navy, the very movement that lobbied its case before not only the U.S. Congress, but the U.N. Decolonization Committee, should declare itself as "apolitical." This position can only be understood within the context of Puerto Rico's complex status politics.

To local activists, political was widely understood as synonymous with partisan. To assume a political position was to situate oneself in relation to one of Puerto Rico's four electoral parties and status options: PNP (statehood); PPD (commonwealth); PIP (independence within current constitutional framework); PSP (independence and revolutionary socialism). While historically in Puerto Rico

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struggles involving the military had drawn support from independence advocates and leftists, organizers in Vieques focused on building a movement that drew on a constituency that included all parties and more militant leftists. Carlos Quintero commented:

> We invited the presidents of PNP, PPD, PSP, PIP--all so that there would be an authentic representation of all the parties and leaders that there were. This was not only *independentista*. We always had..we had the vision that what the people want is not really a political movement, or simply a movement...that simply what we wanted was to get the Navy out of Vieques because, well, we are *independentista*, we don't want Americans. This was never the idea. There existed problems; there existed authentic problems about the military presence in Vieques.... Therefore we always tried to bring in the people, the population. The people came little by little. We always had this perspective that the more people we brought from the town, the better.

Crafting a movement on the local level that avoided politics--that is, a partisan affiliation, and a position on Puerto Rican status-- was effective in keeping a diverse constituency together. In Vieques, party unity achieved the level of the sacred, recalling the days of Committee to Recover Vieques, when Mayor Rivera called for Viequenses to put aside political affiliation and battle the Navy's project. Leaders emphasized that the local movement was not about politics, but rather the "authentic" problems of the Viequense people--- the concrete material needs of the people that seemed to be ignored by maneuverings of politicians. Keeping the struggle focused on local needs meant, in part, keeping Viequense leadership at the helm of the movement and preventing it from spinning out of control and becoming merely a platform for the cause of Puerto Rican independence, or subjugated to the

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interests of politicians. Again, this explains why fishermen were so crucial to the success of the movement, because they characterized the movement as based on issues of quality of life and economic opportunity as opposed to colonialism.

Nonetheless, despite local efforts to contain the movement, confronting the military inevitably evoked the larger issues of Puerto Rico's political status and the military's divisive position on the island. As mentioned earlier, the U.S. military is seen both as an avenue of opportunity, prestige and American identification, and the agent and symbol of national oppression. Issues surrounding the U.S. military have been at the heart of many political controversies in Puerto Rico and have frequently been the rallying point of the nationalist and independence movements. One of the most controversial moments of the Crusade occurred when members of a support group in Puerto Rico burned an American flag during a demonstration in support of Vieques. Rafael Cruz explained why this was so controversial:

> On the national level, in the big island there were some who didn't approach the struggle as a socioeconomic one of the island of Vieques. They approached it as a political problem. We had a different vision. The large majority of us in the struggle, especially the leaders, considered and believed that Puerto Rico should be free, but that this struggle was our struggle. It is not a political issue. It is a matter of recovering Vieques. Because we want Vieques for our children. And many of them didn't understand this.

In the 1990's a number of former activists, soured by the continued conflict with the Navy, attributed the downfall of the Crusade to the influence of activists from Puerto Rico who infused politics into the movement. Whether this is accurate or

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not is debatable, but the perception that Viequenses would have won if they had limited the scope of the movement is a telling indicator of the political tensions that characterized the movement.

The Crusade sought to challenge the Navy while leaving unquestioned broader inequalities of the colonial order. Coming on the heels of the Culebra campaign that had been characterized by such militant, anti-colonial rhetoric (and that was arguably successful), Vieques' "apolitical" approach was particularly striking. Demonstrators frequently distinguished between their activism against the Navy and their general support for the United States, for Americans, and for the military. Fernando Torres, a Crusade activist and PNP loyalist declared:

> We're not against the American civilians. Nor are we against the Navy. The Navy can stay here [in Puerto Rico]. Roosevelt Roads can stay there forever in Ceiba. Or if they want to go to Mona, that's okay. But not here, we don't want them here. We want them to leave so that Vieques can develop.

The example of Culebra shows that such an approach was not inevitable. In Culebra, a strong movement with strident anti-colonial rhetoric and a solid base in the independence movement, successfully mobilized a large number of people against the military presence. While one effect of the Culebra mobilization was to transfer bombing practices to Vieques, it was never the goal of the movement. In Vieques, the sentiment was more parochial, a "not in my backyard" response to the injustices of the colonial order. Furthermore, the support groups in Puerto Rico and the United States that were so essential to the vitality of the Vieques movement were almost

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entirely *independentista* or sympathetic to the cause of Puerto Rican independence. If anything, the "apolitical" stance of the local movement was a deterrent to many of these groups and the source of great controversy. Two factors may explain why the anti-military movement in Vieques was so different from the movement in Culebra only several years earlier.

First, in Vieques, despite the professed unity of all parties in the local movement, the statehood party (PNP), which had traditionally been regarded as pro-American and pro-military, played a strong role in the Crusade. This was a significant difference from Culebra where the highest echelons of the PIP apparatus were deeply involved in the movement. In Vieques, conflict with the Navy erupted during the administration of PNP mayor Radamés Tirado. Tirado, a school teacher, the son of *agregados*, was essentially a populist candidate who strongly identified as Viequense and vehemently opposed the military presence. Tirado's supporters maintained that he was a unique individual, who was born with a consciousness of the damage the Navy inflicted upon Vieques. Tirado came to office on a protest vote against the incumbent *Popular* Mayor, Liche Castaño, and lacked unified backing from the more traditional, conservative members of his party. Although Tirado maintained that he was opposed to the cronyism and political discrimination that characterizes Puerto Rican politics, Tirado's critics maintained that his allies rose to prominence during his administration. Critics charged that the fishing co-operative, which received federal funds via the commonwealth government, was one area where PNP loyalists

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were rewarded with paid positions. True or not, PNP activists assumed prominent roles in the fishing co-operative, and in Vieques' anti-military movement in general. Their influence shaped political debate. Rather than asserting rights as Puerto Ricans to be free of the colonial yoke, activists asserted their constitutional rights as American citizens to live free and in peace. It was common to hear people preface criticism of the Navy with statements about their loyalty to the U.S., their service in the military, their belief in the U.S. constitution. Their right to protest was an American activity. For example, Santiago Meléndez, a fisherman leader of the anti-Navy movement, explained:

> I am a statehooder. I believe in the democracy of the United States. I think that with the laws of the United States itself we can protect our rights as American citizens. But not through confrontation. Because we cannot fight against the American nation. No, but with the rights that would be ours if we were a state with a representative in Congress. Yes those people would struggle for us. But not with the colonial system we have now, nor with independence either, because in Cuba, they have the Navy and are communist and can't kick them out. I think that if we were a state--look there are congress people over there in the United States struggling and criticizing the Navy's abuse against their citizens.

This discourse was an expression of a broader political ideology in Puerto Rico in the 1970's, advanced by the PNP under Carlos Romero Barceló, that fused anti-colonial sentiment with annexationist rhetoric. Romero promoted the idea that Puerto Ricans' longing for self-determination and sovereignty could be achieved only through full incorporation into the United States. The statehood movement was characterized as part of a demand for equality from second-class citizens of a U.S.

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colony (Meléndez 1993). This reformulation of the statehood agenda was quite successful in expanding the movement for annexation and was clearly embraced in Vieques. Yet within the context of the anti-military struggle, the ideology revealed the contradictions and ambivalence of the movement. Consider for example a Crusade pamphlet that asserts: "The truth is that there will not be two laws of the nation: one for the States and the other for the small island of Vieques for the sole reason that there exists a military base here." On one level, the assertion of second-class citizenship acts to reinforce a claim to the American nation; it rejects a separatist, nationalist agenda. The assertion of second-class citizenship, is after all, part of an annexationist agenda, part of a claim of full belonging in the American nation. But at the same time, this ideology elevates local concerns and raises the specter of colonialism. Suddenly Viequenses' dispute is not just about bombing and the access to waters, but about the colonial relationship and its inequalities. For Crusade activists, who struggled to keep the focus on local grievances and to contain the political dimensions of the conflict, this ideology was inherently problematic.

Another major explanation behind the differences between Vieques and Culebra was the political moment at which the conflict exploded. The Crusade erupted during a time of extensive state repression of the independence movement in Puerto Rico. In November 1977 thousands of official documents came to light that revealed a longstanding FBI counterintelligence campaign to destabilize the independence movement in Puerto Rico. Police informants, in fact, infiltrated the

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Crusade and tracked and monitored activists. Don Emerito Sánchez, an 85-year-old life-long *independentista* and Crusade activist discovered that the police maintained a 1,100 page dossier on his daily activities:

> Wherever I went there was someone after me. All the details: "He left Vieques at this time on Wednesday. He went to the main island. He was buying frozen meat and bringing it back to Vieques. Buying this and that. And the boat was in Vieques at 10:00." All the details. They spent so much money.

In one of the most notorious acts of the decade, the Romero administration framed and assassinated two young independence activists in an incident that came to be known as "Cerro Maravilla," after the mountain where the youths were ambushed and killed. Vieques was drawn into the political violence in 1979 when an independence activist from Puerto Rico, Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal, who was serving a prison term for participation in a demonstration in Vieques, was murdered in Tallahassee Federal Penitentiary. In December 1979, a Navy bus in Sabana Seca was ambushed and attacked, killing two Navy personnel and wounding ten others. Several pro-independence groups claimed responsibility for the attacks, claiming retaliation for Cerro Maravilla and the death of Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal. In 1980, a right-wing organization bombed the Puerto Rican Bar Association, which had backed the Vieques movement. The Navy's community relations officer in Vieques, Alex de la Zerda, and an alleged anti-Castro Cuban and former president of the Pro-Navy Vanguard, Roberto López González, and a third Río Piedras resident were charged in

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the bombing. The three were also charged in a broader conspiracy to bomb a Vieques Air Link flight. Although the prosecution presented, among other evidence, taped conversations that suggested that de la Zerda plotted to bomb Vieques Air Link in an effort to eliminate the attorneys representing the Vieques fishermen, a jury ultimately acquitted all three men (*San Juan Star* 7/10/80 p 1).

These events contributed to a political climate that made people hesitant to be identified with radical causes. In Puerto Rico, political discrimination is a fact of daily life, and the repression of the independence movement heightened persecution of those perceived as radicals. In Vieques, where there are high rates of unemployment and where political action is highly visible, people were particularly sensitive to this climate. In fact, General Electric, the largest private employer on the Vieques, was widely believed to have blacklisted workers who got involved with the Crusade. Mario Martínez explained:

> The repression is transmitted between parent and child. 'Don't get involved in this struggle, something will happen to you. Don't get involved in this struggle with the Navy or you won't find work. Don't get involved in the struggle because they will blacklist you, investigate you, they will get you.' Therefore this is repression. It was manifested also in the workplace. And here there was an undertaking at GE where their functionaries blacklisted people. This was a form of repression. A form of repression that occurred at many workplaces in Vieques. If the boss pro-Navy, they would look for ways of repressing the employees. They'd follow them. This was all a form of repression.

Within this context, it is understandable how building a movement that focused on economics may have been more politically feasible than one denouncing national

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oppression. Thus although people expressed strong feelings of indignation against military abuses committed on a local level, and occasionally identified the struggle of Vieques as one of Puerto Rico as a whole, few envisioned the struggle against the Navy as a precedent to the independence and national liberation of Puerto Rico. This fact was often surprising to outside supporters who perceived the Crusade as a national liberation movement against colonial oppression

Military Response

Thus far I have focused on the particularities of the movement and some of the internal contradictions that contributed to its unraveling. It would be unfair, however, to suggest that Vieques was unsuccessful in evicting the military because of some deficiency in the mobilization. It is essential to note that this rag-tag grassroots movement challenged the hegemony of a formidable foe: the U.S. Navy. While Culebrenses were able to wage a successful campaign several years earlier I have noted that: 1) Culebra's "victory" depended on the transfer of military maneuvers to Vieques and 2) the political moment was different. The timing of the Crusade coincided with a number of social and revolutionary movements sweeping the Caribbean and Latin America that the Navy regarded as threatening to U.S. hegemony. With the Panama base slated for closure in 1999, Guantánamo of uncertain status, and Culebra recently shut down, the Navy was firmly opposed to any efforts to close its installations in Vieques.

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The Navy's attack on the Crusade was two-fold. First, the military utilized its institutional resources to destabilize the movement. This involved not only invoking its power to arrest individuals on military territory, but also using its economic resources to hire civilian guards and military public relations officials. Secondly, the Navy mobilized its civilian constituency in opposition to the Crusade. For the most part, this meant calling upon the resident North American community for support. The North Americans were critical in founding and sustaining two pro-Navy organizations: the Pro-Navy Vanguard (*Vanguardia Pro-Marina)* and the Navy League. It was through these civilian advocates that the Navy was able to successfully tap into its symbolic power, calling into question the loyalty and national identity of anti-base demonstrators.

In a declassified memo, the Navy identified its design to divide and break the movement in a multi-tiered "community action plan." The strategy included assigning a Spanish-speaking public relations official to the island, undertaking efforts to establish links with perceived or potential allies, and in the event of failure, taking harsher, punitive measures.[5] As part of this strategy, the Navy's initial response to protest was to arrest demonstrators who entered military land on trespassing charges and prosecute them to the full extent of the law. Demonstrators were sent to Federal Court, which was decidedly sympathetic to the Navy. A number of protestors served

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[5] Susser (1985) describes a similar process in Yabucoa Puerto Rico, where Union Carbide assigned a Spanish-speaking official to suppress a protest movement.

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maximum sentences in Federal prisons in the United States. While these arrests may have unified the Crusade, they also sapped considerable energy from the movement and diverted attention towards court cases and appeals. The arrests may also have frightened some residents away from political involvement.

The assignment of a public relations official to Vieques sounded innocuous enough, but the man hired for the task, Alex de la Zerda, was a shadowy character who was later linked to a terrorist conspiracy against the movement. Military efforts to expand the Navy constituency on Vieques included hiring 100 residents as civilian security guards. Where there had previously been virtually no local employees on base, the hiring of 100 civilians was significant. The loyalty of these people towards the Navy was questionable, but their employment effectively silenced 100 individuals and their families. Santiago Meléndez explained:

> The Navy was looking to buy consciousness and found support from part of the people in Vieques and began to create jobs, something it had never done before. In the same manner that we [fishermen] look for our bread for our children, these people, with the economic situation in Vieques with the military presence here, that most Viequenses have to emigrate—their hearts were with us, with our struggle, but they had to look for bread for their children.

Again, the most effective element of the Navy's campaign was its ability to mobilize symbolic resources through its North American civilian supporters. Though a few North Americans had direct links to the military, by and large they rallied behind the Navy because they saw the military as the defender of their unspoiled tropical vacation-land. North American supporters of the military gathered signatures

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in favor of the Navy to be sent to Washington. They spoke to camera crews and reporters in favor of the military on Vieques Island. Most significantly, as mentioned above, North American residents were critical in the organization of two pro-Navy organizations: the Navy League and the Pro-Navy Vanguard. The Vanguard was a militant group with Viequense and North American members who organized pro-Navy counterdemonstrations. It was coordinated by the Navy's public relations officer, Alex de la Zerda. Viequense membership for the Vanguard was drawn from individuals with links to the Navy, often through marriage or employment and from factions of the PNP who were alienated by Tirado's populist, anti-Navy administration. North Americans joined because they were politically conservative and financially secure, and were upset by a vigorous anti-Navy movement. The Vanguard was linked to several violent episodes. The Navy League was different from the Vanguard, functioning more as a social organization than political group. The large majority of its members were North American, full and part-time residents, and its major project was the founding and funding of the Sea Cadet program, which provided military training for island youth. The Sea Cadet Program promised opportunity and adventure to young people on an island where the youth did not have much of a future. The intent was to win over parents through conscription of their children. This program, in fact, played an important role in dividing a population already characterized by considerable ambivalence.

These organizations were effective in dividing the movement because they

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tapped into Viequenses' ambivalence about the colonial state, about radical causes, about outside interests and influence. The pro-Navy groups' most basic function was to reintroduce politics into a movement that assiduously sought to avoid all things political. While the fishermen oriented the movement towards the economic grievances, the pro-Navy organizations refocused debate on issues of patriotism and political affiliation. Significantly, their political attacks were not aimed at the fishermen, nor at the economic grievances they raised, but at the support groups which they said were composed of outside agitators who sought to control the movement. This attack effectively tapped into people's fears of communism and of losing control of the struggle to outsiders.

If the ideology of unity, of the representation of all sectors, was a crucial tactic to building the movement, its undoing contributed to the downfall of the Crusade. The Navy sought to undermine the Crusade by depicting it as a communist insurgency run by outside agitators. The Vanguard's pickets promoted this ideology. Members carried placards declaring themselves to be "100% *Americano*." Other signs read "Navy Yes, Communists No," and "Socialists Go Home, Vieques for Viequenses." North American members of the Navy League and Vanguard testified before a Congressional subcommittee that the Crusade was run by outsiders who were socialist extremists. These tactics put members of the Crusade on the defensive. Activists continually denied that they were anti-American or communist.

The Navy acted to reinforce this message. When the Crusade organized an

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ecumenical service on the shores of a beach under military control, the Navy broke up the peaceful demonstration and arrested individuals from support groups, who were more closely identified than most Viequenses with the Puerto Rican left. Despite the fact that the demonstration was largely composed of local Viequenses, the only person from Vieques arrested was Mario Martínez, a leading activist and local president of the PSP. The point was to draw attention to the "outsiders" in the movement, to highlight the involvement of individual socialists and characterize the movement as essentially communist.

The focus of the debate shifted from the military's impact on the island, to residents' patriotism. The Vanguard, Navy League and the Navy successfully linked being pro-American to being pro-Military. One resident elaborated:

> The effect of the Crusade is divided, because there is a part of the town that is in favor of the crusade, and another that isn't. Like everywhere...even today there are people who adore Americans and who think that come Americans. come God. There are others who don't think this way. Those who are in favor of Americans are against the Crusade. Those who want to see Vieques with its own land and own industry and own progress are in favor of the Crusade...

The significant turning point for the Crusade was the 1980 elections. Liche Castaño, the PPD mayoral candidate, who in 1977 argued that he was pro-American and anti-Navy, ran on a platform that attacked the Crusade as anti-American and communist. The Crusade charged that he was bought out by the Navy. When Castaño won and PNP anti-Navy mayor Radamés Tirado lost, the elections were widely interpreted as a referendum on the Navy. And the pro-Navy side won. Santiago

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Meléndez elaborated:

> We were given the choice between god and the devil. There was a *Popular* candidate for mayor here. And he took advantage of the opportunity. He was an opportunist who divided us into groups. He pulled together a group in favor of the Navy. We were a group of statehooders who were behind Radamés and we were anti-Navy. He went and received support and help from the Navy and bought votes and so on. He won the election as the pro-Navy mayor. I would say the election was a referendum. Navy yes or Navy no. That's when the Crusade began to die down.

Don Santiago also suggests the way in which partisan affiliation began to erode the unity the Crusade had built in opposition to the Navy:

> The people were divided. People who belonged to the Crusade with us voted for the pro-Navy candidate. If it was my decision, I wouldn't have done it. We have to vote for those who are in favor of the movement.
> [K I don't understand why people from the Crusade voted for a pro-Navy candidate].
> They voted for the Navy because they didn't look at the question of the movement. They looked at the political emblem.

Castaño's tenure in office heightened divisiveness in town. In a highly controversial move, he invited Navy officials to the Vieques town square for the swearing in of a new admiral in a ceremony that would involve the participation of the Sea Cadets. Members of the Crusade regarded this event as extremely inflammatory. The change of command ceremony was hastily planned, but the Crusade was able to organize in response. The fishermen formed a blockade, and prevented the admiral's boat from docking. Local activists and support forces from

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Puerto Rico rallied. The Sea Cadets were at the dock in uniform to join in the ceremony. The Vanguard organized a counter demonstration, in support of the military ceremony. The admiral was not allowed to dock and a melee broke out with rocks and bottles exchanged between the factions. The next day, the conflict spilled over into town's secondary school. Seventy-five Sea Cadets provoked a near riot in the school, forcing officials to close the school for a day.

State Intervention

Though the movement in Vieques was impressive in its intensity and broad base, it succumbed to the pressures of time, forceful opposition from the Navy, and the difficulties of maintaining unity among a diverse population. The Navy's tactics frightened some residents, while others were tired and only wanted to see progress. The divisiveness took its toll. Blanca Ortiz spoke with bitterness of her husband's and sons' treatment by the Navy and of perceived betrayal by other Viequenses:

> They were treated as if they were criminals. But who should we call criminals but the U.S. Navy? When they were arrested, what did they have in the boat? Only fish and lobster. And what were they doing? Finding a great feast when they hardly ever found fish. Later they were arrested again. On this occasion they took my son and nephew. They were treated like animals. They abused them although they were trustworthy and honorable people who were only looking for their daily bread. Those who adored the Navy and who are capable of killing their own brothers to defend the interest of the Navy had a tremendous party, celebrating the arrest and wishing that they'd kill everyone (PRISA 1984).

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Conflicts erupted within the fishermen's association, between the leadership of the fishermen's association and the Crusade, and between the Crusade and the Support Group in Puerto Rico. When Puerto Rican Governor Romero Barceló interceded, signing an accord with the Navy in 1983, many people saw this as the solution to the island's dilemmas.

The Romero Accord, signed on October 11, 1983, dropped the Governor's lawsuit against the Navy in which he brought claims of ecological destruction against the Navy. In return, the Navy agreed to be a good neighbor and bring industry to Vieques. Time proved the Navy's promises to be empty, but in 1983 many Viequenses embraced the accord as the answer to a long, difficult struggle. The accord effectively defused the local movement.

The Crusade leadership was skeptical of the accord from the beginning. Early on in the conflict it was clear that the Navy was pressuring the governor, linking the acquisition of Puerto Rican statehood to maintenance of the military installations on the island. Questions were raised as to whether Romero was acting on behalf of the town in signing the accord, or had broader political objectives. When he dropped a multi-million dollar lawsuit for what amounted to an unenforceable good neighbor agreement, many speculated that he must have received money under the table, possibly in the form of military contracts for Puerto Rico. So while many people in town were optimistic, many activists were wary, even angry at what they sensed to be a betrayal of their interests. Rafael Cruz reflected:

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> This accord between Romero and the Navy, I think it was the most important victory for the Navy. Because it was the governor, the biggest leader to come to this town. The people believed that with the agreement, all of our problems had ended. But what happened? Even now there are few people who will get involved in the struggle. 'Let's wait because if the Navy signed this agreement with Romero..an agreement is an agreement.' With the accord began the decline of the movement. The people of Vieques have the tendency of believing in people from the outside rather than from here. We, the leaders of the Crusade and the fishers, said it's not true what they are saying. The people didn't believe before. If you interview anyone from town, they will tell you that we won. I'll tell you that not even five percent of what they offered has been completed. They did nothing.

Nonetheless, the signing of the accord is in very many ways a revealing ending to this movement that was frought with so many tensions. The Crusade sought to work within the prevailing system of justice and the accord was a symbolic victory, serving to bring the Navy to the bargaining table. In the absence of real political clout, without real leverage beyond the moral claims of their movement and their ability to broadcast them, it seemed to many Viequenses that they had achieved an important victory. The Navy admitted it had done wrong, but promised to ameliorate the situation by helping the local economy. This admission reinforced the legitimacy of the claims, called into question the anti-communism of the movement, and reinforced faith in the colonial state.

Conclusion

The movement, which struggled so valiantly to focus on the economic and on

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the local, ultimately was unhinged by the political and symbolic dimensions of the conflict. The continued tension of confronting the military while respecting the integrity of the current political relationship with the United States was overwhelming. We have seen that despite its efforts to avoid the political dimensions of the conflict, the ideology that the movement adopted, that of "second-class citizenship," in fact elevated local economic concerns into the realm of the political. True, the emphasis on second class citizenship highlighted Viequense membership in the American nation, and acted to convey loyalty and American nationality. At the same time, talking about the rights of citizens revealed that the conflict was not just about access to waters, but about the colonial relationship and its inequalities. Although the Crusade was a coalition movement with common points of agreement. ultimately there was no consensus about the political implications of the military presence on Vieques Island. The movement was not prepared to adopt a position on Puerto Rican political status. Residents were unnerved by accusations of communism and anti-Americanism, and rallied around the Accord as a way of demonstrating their good faith in the political system.

The fishermen who stood as the embodiment of the social and economic problems of Vieques Island, who directed our attention towards the nature of the Crusade, also provide us with clues to its unraveling. The fishermen point to the potency of symbolic capital. As walking emblems of the past, fishermen were able to draw on romantic sentiment and fiery opposition to forced removal and to rally

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Viequenses in defense of their island and way of life. Yet the U.S. Navy too was steeped in cultural significance and symbolic resonance. The Navy stood not only for the feared face of Federal authority, the Yankee evicting the poor sugar cane worker from his home, but for the American flag and the ideals of liberty and freedom that Puerto Ricans had given their lives to defend. The Navy was successful in dividing the movement, in part, because it polarized the debate, demanding Viequenses to choose between their American citizenship and Puerto Rican identity.

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Chapter Five: The Battle of Vieques

> For those of us who were expropriated the experience was very painful. Painful because we liked where we lived; we felt free above all. The Navy then took our land and put us where we felt practically incarcerated---like a concentration camp. Our way of life changed. We began to experience scarcity as never before. In the east we had good land, agriculture, fishing on a large scale. Even though we did not have much money there were ways to make it and to feed yourself and your family.
>
> Crusade leader Carlos Zenón, 1982

Early in my fieldwork, I interviewed don Fernando Torres, a 70 year-old life-long resident of Vieques and long time anti-Navy activist. Don Fernando had been very active in the Crusade and was now one of about a dozen activists old and new who formed "the Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques." As the name suggests, this new group was formed not only to reclaim Vieques Island from the control of the Navy, as the Crusade had attempted before it, but to design and implement a well-conceived plan for the island's economic development. My intention when I interviewed don Fernando was to find out more about the group: the reasons behind its formation, the type of people who had joined, his own ambitions and hopes for its potential. Instead, don Fernando took the reins of the interview, changing the course of my questioning to delve into the past, to discuss his experience of the military expropriation of land:

> Back then, in 1940, the owner of the *Central Playa Grande* received orders to evict the subtenants, those of us who lived here. The sugar *central* was fantastic, because it was a huge sugar factory, and everyone lived there. People came here from the big island, from Aguadilla, to get married. In 1940, the base put an end to this. One can compare the disaster to a hurricane, the evil the Navy inflicted upon us...
>
> The thirteenth of June 1943, I was 17 years old, like many others...I could never forget this experience. We Viequenses compare what the Navy

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did here with what Hitler did in Germany... They killed people in the street because they were Jews, and forced them to wear stars to identify themselves, to take them off to exterminate them. The Navy has done the same here. The same thing. When they brought the letter on this day, the 13 of June 1943, the Marshall whose name was Diego Meléndez said to us, "Fernando, read this letter to your father"—he didn't know how to read or write, neither did my mother. What is true is that I read this to them and my old man said to me, "Don Diego, what are we going to do with the farm that we have to harvest here?" He said that we couldn't harvest it, and for this he gave us $25. Just $25 for everything raised there.

They came for us in a big truck, the kind they use for heavy equipment. Well on the 13 of June at 5:30 in the evening we arrived, and many others, we arrived in a caravan. We used zinc sheets to make a shack and a bed because my wife was about to give birth. Well the bulldozer came and cleaned the land they marked to make the house. They determined the boundaries where you could build your house. It was raining a lot and many people died of colds and pneumonia. The water was running in and it was contaminated with bilarzia. The truth is that the base caused us to struggle, and we were thrown out. [He switches to English for emphasis]*They order.*

So what happened... those who were carpenters went to Ceiba to work on the base, the others were here, suffering. There was no work, there was nothing. The mayor fought. There wasn't any work. The base didn't bring anything. In 1946 they didn't need to kick out the people from up there, but they went ahead and relocated them near town. We suffered a lot. We needed everything.

The Congresspeople—Velázquez, Ron Dellums, Serrano, and ultimately Manuela [the Mayor] and the municipal assembly signed a petition saying the Navy should leave from "Punta Arenas to Punta Salinas." Because every day there is more than 70 percent unemployment. The base uses only 100 people. There are 8,802 people in Vieques.

Don Fernando drew a chronology that connected current political agitation to the trauma of the 1940's. Skipping over the Crusade and his own history of activism, he focused my attention instead on his experience as a 17 year-old boy, dumped in a razed cane field, looking for shelter for his wife who was about to give birth. The tale had an almost religious quality, emphasizing hardship and suffering, poverty and humility, floods and plague. Though the analogy to Jewish genocide seems

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overdrawn (and indeed was the only such comparison I heard), we hear in don Fernando's story the fear of annihilation, of the destruction of a people that is commonly expressed by Viequenses. Much in the same way that liberation theologians have looked to tales of biblical suffering to bolster struggle, don Fernando's narrative is constructed as a prelude to political activism. To explain to me the Committee, its mission and objectives, he felt that it was crucial to bring me back to the 40's, to the primordial wrong committed against Viequenses by the U.S. Navy.

Don Fernando's recounting was hyperbolic in its emphasis on Viequenes' glorious past and tremendous suffering (there were few people who died of the common cold). Yet the discrepancy between fact and memory is a fruitful area for analysis, for understanding how people make sense of crucial events and of history in general (Portelli 1991). I was particularly intrigued by the holes in don Fernando's memory. Even though the name of his group, "The Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques" clearly alluded to the organized movement that had dissipated just ten years earlier, "The Crusade to Recover Vieques," he made no mention of the Crusade. Yet don Fernando's emphasis on the events of the 40's was not an individual idiosyncrasy, but rather a much more common concern expressed not only by other anti-military activists, but by Viequenses of all persuasions, Navy officials, and the island's North American residents. While we have considered the significant social and economic consequences of the military take-over of the island, the discussion of the expropriations today assumes an importance that transcends the

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particulars of the original historical event. Examining the way that Viequenses talk about the expropriations offers a window into local politics and culture. While don Fernando avoided mention of the Crusade, the expropriations narrative is very much a byproduct of the anti-military movement and the failure to resolve the conflict it addressed. The expropriations narrative is fundamentally an expression of the continued conflict over land ownership and the development of the island, and the politics of the different factions that vie for control of Vieques.

The Expropriations: a History of the Narrative

The meaning of the expropriations to Viequenses is inextricably bound to the last fifty years of uncertainty and continued attempts by the military to usurp the entire island of Vieques. The threat of dislocation gives resonance to the story of the 1940's expropriations. It also connects to widely expressed concerns for the flight of the island's youth, the lack of babies born on the island, and Vieques' perceived population decline. Thus, an underlying uncertainty about the island's future becomes manifested in a concern for the past. It was during the Crusade, however, that there were efforts to organize memory and sentiment into a historical narrative that would be the rallying point for political action.

During the height of the anti-Navy mobilization in the late 1970's, activists published a pamphlet, *La Cruzada Pro-Rescate de Vieques*, that not only tracked the vicissitudes of the movement, but chronicled the history of local grievances against the military. *La Cruzada* reproduced newspaper clippings documenting soldiers'

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assaults on residents, riots and other military misdeeds. One of the central concerns of *La Cruzada* was the Navy's "unjust control of 75 percent of Vieques land" that had inhibited the island's development. Pamphlets included maps of Vieques highlighting the military borders that truncated the civilian section from the rest of the island. From this focus developed a concern about the expropriations that began to permeate movement literature and discourse. *La Cruzada* included interviews with individuals who were dispossessed from their homes by the Navy. A number of leading activists emphasized that their political radicalization was a direct response to the experience of the expropriations.

The Navy did not remain silent during this ideological campaign. It is a measure of the effectiveness of the Crusade's narrative that the military felt compelled to counter it with its own version of history. In a March 1979 issue of *Sea Power Magazine*, the Navy wrote that land had, in fact, never been expropriated in Vieques. Instead, it had been purchased:

> The Navy did not expropriate any property in Vieques... Acting according to the authority granted by Title VI of the Law of Naval Appropriations of 1941, the same law that authorized the construction of Roosevelt Roads Naval Station, the Navy bought its lands in Vieques during a period of nine years (from 1941-1950) at a total cost of $1,432,315.00.

The *Sea Power* article sparked outrage among activists, who redoubled their efforts to document and draw attention to the military expropriations. The Caribbean Project for Justice and Peace, a left-leaning offshoot of the American Friends Service Committee that provided vital support for the Crusade, launched a research project aimed at documenting the expropriations. Thus, among the litany of military abuses

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recited in movement literature, the expropriations became the central grievance raised against the Navy. It is interesting to compare this focus to that of many other anti-base movements in which the abuse of women is the rallying point for protest.[1] There were, in fact, instances of harassment and abuse of women in Vieques that are mentioned in the historic chronology of *La Cruzada*. The collective memory, however, focused not on these moments, but rather on the events of 1941-1947. It was very important to activists to connect protest to this original act of injustice. A key part of the research agenda undertaken by the Caribbean Project research team was to discover the seeds of the contemporary anti-military movement in the valiant struggle of Viequenses resisting the Naval expropriations. Nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos, after all, decried the Naval expropriations of Vieques as the "vivisection" of the Puerto Rican nation; activists aspired to find similar sentiment expressed in Vieques. In fact, their research determined that most of the dispossessed parties were too fearful of federal authority, or resigned to their subordinate positions as *agregados* to rebel. This did not stop *La Cruzada* from asserting that Vieques' struggle against the Navy reached back into the 1940's. Though conflict may indeed have extended this far, it seems clear that organized grassroots struggle was born in the late 70's. The expropriations narrative became so pervasive and influential that by the time the Vieques conflict was played before a 1981 Congressional Hearing on

[1] Just a few examples include Wolf's account of Turkey (1969) when local men rioted over the alleged rape of a local woman by American troops stationed there. More recently, tensions between civilians and the U.S. military exploded in Okinawa, Japan in September 1995 when three soldiers abducted and raped a ten year old girl. And the forceful and ultimately successful anti-base movement in the Philippines rallied religious and nationalist opposition to the existence of cities of sex workers created by American military installations. See Enloe (1989) on this subject.

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Naval Activities on Vieques Island, the Admiral began his testimony with a detailed discussion of the military expropriation of land on the island, including discussion of various payments issued to dispossessed landowners. The question arises, then, why was it so crucial to connect protest to this past injustice? Why was the focus of grievances shifted to the expropriation of land, rather than the current bombing of an inhabited island?

Interpreting the Narrative

On one level, the focus on the expropriations may be interpreted as an attempt by activists to legitimize their movement. A focus on historical chronology established a time line of who wronged whom first. Though fishermen might be trespassing on federal property and blocking NATO maneuvers, the expropriations narrative drew attention to a larger injustice. The narrative demonstrated that activists' acts of civil disobedience paled in comparison to the military's usurpation of land, destruction of homes, and dislocation of families. There was tension within the Crusade over the larger significance of this apparent injustice. As noted above, activists from the Caribbean Project , who were part of the Puerto Rican left that supported the Vieques movement, looked for the seeds of nationalist discontent in the Vieques expropriations. Locals, however, tended to seek meaning in the defense of their more circumscribed project. For Vieques activists, the expropriations narrative served as evidence of the legitimacy of local claims. When the Navy and other pro-military forces tried to dismiss the Crusade as anti-American, nationalist agitation, a

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focus on history grounded discussion in local grievances, rather than the broader and more controversial issues of Puerto Rican sovereignty.

The shift of focus to history moved the political discourse away from the overtly political to a more general, morally based dialogue. In the same way that the fishermen argued that their struggle was not about politics, but about the right to make a living, the focus on the expropriations allowed activists to elevate their struggle above bitter debates about Puerto Rico's political status. The potency of the expropriations narrative derived from the fact that it questioned the legitimacy of the colonial state, while framing the argument in terms of substantive justice rather than partisan politics.

The expropriations told a tale of injustice and suffering. It was a story of the powerful trampling on the powerless, of humble folk being cast off their land. This narrative echoed the symbolism of a fishermen-led movement, the David and Goliath struggle that was broadcast to an international audience. Yet the expropriations narrative operated on another level, conveying the sentiments of a movement that eschewed nationalism in favor of an ideology promoted by the statehood party of second-class citizenship. Recall how Santiago Meléndez, quoted in the Introduction, highlighted the fact that his father, a World War I veteran, was evicted by the Navy. Individuals frequently pointed to their experience of the military expropriations as evidence of their loyalty as American citizens. Activists described how Viequenses acted according to an emergency of war, and contributed their homeland to the war effort and the battle against fascism. They expressed the belief that their homes would

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be returned to them at the conclusion of World War II. The expropriations narrative, then, was constructed in such a way as to underscore Viequense sacrifice for the American nation. Conjuring up history highlighted how this patriotic sacrifice was disregarded.

It is debatable whether Viequenses really "sacrificed" for the good of the nation. In describing a "sacrifice," activists were implying a relationship of equality between Viequenses and the Navy. This rhetoric was in part tactical, part of a negotiating strategy to win concessions from the military by approaching the Navy on equal footing. It was also defensive. In a highly politicized battle with the U.S. Navy, where one's loyalty as an American citizen was always impugned, what better evidence of one's patriotism than sacrificing one's home for the war effort. Yet in reality, the majority of residents did not turn over land, but were evicted from property they did not own; they shifted from one landlord to the next, although with grave consequences for their quality of life. In this context, the notion of sacrifice becomes intriguing and raises questions. It becomes a coded way of attacking the colonial state while stressing loyalty as citizens.

The Expropriations Narrative and the Struggle for Land: the Aftermath of the Crusade

The Crusade thus developed a narrative about the military's unjust control of island land. It seems important to highlight the apparent incongruity of the movement's leadership and its ideology. With fishermen at the vanguard of the

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movement, on the surface it seems unusual that so much rhetoric would focus on the land, as opposed to the waters, or fishing rights, for example. Yet the expropriations narrative directs us to the heart of the controversy between islanders and the military: the legitimate ownership and control of island territory. As I explored, the controversy over fishing is intimately connected to issues of control over land. In Chapter Three I showed that displaced workers increasingly turned to the seas to make a living because military control over land eliminated other job opportunities.

Yet while the conflict over land exploded in the context of the Crusade, the controversy was never resolved by the accord that formally brought an end to the anti-Navy movement. While the movement emanated from the grassroots, the agreement that brought protest to an end, known as the "Memorandum of Understanding" or "Fortín Accord" was signed from the top down: Puerto Rican Governor Carlos Romero Barceló and Acting Navy Secretary James Goodrich signed the pact. In exchange, Romero dropped the lawsuit he had filed against the military for environmental damages against the island, a lawsuit which a number of activists charge was a diversion from the underlying conflict. The accord offered Viequenses little in the way of concrete gains: it provided vague assurances that the Navy would act as a good neighbor, mitigating the ecological damage of its activities, and helping with local economic development. There were English and Spanish versions of the document. The Spanish version detailed the specific number of jobs that the Navy would provide, a commitment noticeably absent in the English version of the

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agreement. The major achievement of the accord was that it offered some solution to what had become a protracted and contentious struggle.

According to the Memorandum, the Navy was to work together with the Puerto Rican government to seek grants and federal funds that might bring employment to Vieques. It was to work to stimulate industry and the creation of jobs. In fact, there was a flurry of economic activity in the months immediately following the signing of the Accord. The Navy invited a number of Top Ten defense contractors to visit Vieques and invited them to do business on the island. A number of business ventures were initiated: an herb farm, a graphics company manufacturing labels for pharmaceutical products, a military apparel industry. Every single project the Navy helped initiate failed for a variety of reasons. The most significant controversy was generated by the rise and fall of Dandie, a military apparel plant. Opening its doors in May of 1984, Dandie became a major force in Vieques' private economy, employing at its height about 300 workers. Families invested their hopes and their resources in the future of this company, taking out loans against future earnings to buy long coveted consumer goods. When the company declared bankruptcy in 1988 it dashed the dreams and bank accounts of people who had planned for a future, who had bought cars and new refrigerators. The closing of this plant generated anger and disgust with the military and its promises.[2]

The environmental concessions made by the Navy were shallow and stirred indignation. While bombing and military maneuvers continued, the Navy began a

[2] See Grusky (1992) for a detailed analysis of the Navy's failed development plans in Vieques.

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program collecting sea turtle eggs from beaches used for military maneuvers and relocating them to a cage on the other side of the island. Signs were erected declaring certain zones under military jurisdiction to be "environmentally sensitive conservation zones." One small island immediately off the coast from the military target range was declared an environmental reserve for nesting brown pelicans. More signs were erected prohibiting the trapping of crabs on military land and charging poachers with the decimation of these species. These signs intensified local antagonism as they only highlighted a lack of access to the land and were seen as blaming locals for the destruction of the environment.

Most fundamentally, the accord failed to redress fundamental underlying grievances about the control of land. Though it brought an end to organized protest, the memorandum did not dispel core resentment. In the absence of real resolution, conflict exploded again in 1989. The manifestation was different, and to many Viequenses, particularly old-time activists, the politics were troubling.

In the spring of 1987, the Navy commenced eviction proceedings in U.S. District Court against Carmelo Félix Matta and his family, charging them with illegally residing on Navy territory. The Félixes were one of a number of Vieques families who established residence in the so-called military "buffer zone," fanning out from the resettlement camps. Their home was modest, built of concrete with no plumbing or electricity. It was unclear why the Navy sought to evict the Félix family at this particular moment; there were a number of families who had been living unchallenged in the same area for years. In a move that showed the strong political

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undercurrents of this confrontation, Carmelo Félix sought and received legal help from the office of a leading PIP politician. The lawyer argued that Félix was willing to pay the Navy rent, and had not willingly trespassed, as there were no fences, signs, or warnings that would have alerted him that he was building on Navy land. The U.S. District Court denied the motion and issued judgement against Félix. Félix's case quickly drew attention and roused public sympathy in Vieques.

By the time U.S. Deputy Marshals and unarmed Navy reinforcements arrived at the Félix homestead to evict the family, local forces had mobilized and rallied to stop the eviction. At least 100 neighbors and protestors blocked the road to stop Navy vehicles carrying the Félixes' possessions. Tensions flared and a Navy truck was doused with gasoline and set afire. As the situation escalated, the marshals called for reinforcements. A U.S. Coast Guard helicopter was dispatched, carrying in a group of heavily armed marshals wearing bulletproof vests and brandishing Uzi submachine guns and automatic rifles. By the end of the day, the Marshals declared the Félix family evicted and order restored. The truck burned on until the next afternoon.

But the eviction of the Félix family only sparked resentment. The case received extensive media coverage in the Puerto Rican and U.S. press. Within days of the eviction, Carmelo Félix returned to his home with the support of 15 to 20 Vieques families and local and main island groups. He basked in the limelight and vowed never to leave and to personally battle the U.S. Navy, if necessary, to defend his family and home. Vieques' David and Goliath battle against the Navy was revived. The Félix case exploded tensions about the land and latent resentment towards the

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military. Though Félix had never before been active in the anti-Navy movement, and had, in fact, during the seventies, accused Crusade activists of being communists, he now became a central figure in the anti-Navy movement. With a new rallying point, and revived anti-Navy sentiment, local activists decided to use the Félix eviction as a stepping stone for reclaiming land. A handful of Crusade activists and newly inspired individuals mobilized. In May 1989, 500 well-organized people seized 800 acres of vacant military land. Called a "land recovery" by proponents and a "land invasion" by opponents, the squat was so well planned that it included registration forms and a $10 membership fee administered by an executive committee. Leaders called the take-over an act of self-defense and survival of the Viequense people. The Navy was left struggling for a resolution that would not bring about another embarrassing confrontation

Yet while many activists hoped the land recovery would revitalize the valiant struggle of the Crusade, the new movement turned out to be of entirely different circumstances and character. Though there were participants who were motivated by concerns of social justice, there were also many individuals who were interested in seizing tracts of land to sell them off as vacation lots to wealthy Puerto Ricans. The movement dissolved into infighting and speculation. Carmelo's involvement and values were viewed with skepticism. Born out of bitter disenchantment rather than idealism, the land recovery became a form of vigilante justice, a self-interested free-for-all. The cause of the recovery of the island was abandoned to cynical individualism as people looked for ways to simultaneously make up for past wrongs

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and strike it rich while they were at it. Many Crusade activists retreated from the movement in disgust. The land recovery came to a precipitous conclusion in August 1989 when Hurricane Hugo struck Vieques and wiped out the settlements. Seizing on the opportunity provided to them by chaos, the Navy quickly moved in to erect fences and reclaim jurisdiction over land. The land recovery officially came to an end.

The land recovery of 1989 can be read as a response to the aftermath of the Crusade. In the absence of a resolution of conflict, with resentment towards the Navy and the Puerto Rican government for the failure of the Memorandum, cynicism and vigilantism infused popular sentiment and activity. It is this context that informs political debate and the continued struggle to control the island. It is within this context that the expropriations narrative takes on new meaning.

The Battle of Vieques 1993-1994

The battle of Vieques since the mid-1990's centers on the control and development of island land. In 1994, Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner Carlos Romero Barceló, the former PNP governor of Puerto Rico and co-signer of the Memorandum of Understanding, submitted a bill to Congress calling for the return of 8,000 acres of military controlled land to the municipality of Vieques. This proposed legislation came on the heels of momentum established by the Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques, which collected thousands of signatures the previous year from residents on a petition to President Clinton to completely shut down the base and return the land to the people of Vieques. Both efforts built on a changed political

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climate: the end of the Cold War and the menace of communism that had long been used to rationalize the military presence in Vieques and stigmatize opponents of the Naval installation; a newly elected Democratic President in Washington D.C., and a movement to reevaluate and close military bases.

In this changed political context, therefore, it is interesting to consider the continued relevance of a narrative from a different decade. Why the expropriations remain relevant to political discourse in Vieques demands attention. For anti-Navy activists, the expropriations tale still functions as a moralistic narrative; it still allows one to talk politics in a place where politics are bitterly divisive. Also, it has been noted that this political tale has resonance for a population when there have long existed real conspiracies to depopulate the island. Yet now, as the political terrain shifts and there are hopes that the Navy will abandon at least some portion of Vieques, the expropriations narrative takes new meaning over who will control the island and what the shape of this new Vieques will be. Today the bitterly divisive debates over expropriations cannot be separated from political struggles over the future of the island. Here I will focus on the way that several of the most prominent groups--the Navy, the North Americans, the anti-Navy activists --talk about the expropriations and how that illuminates tensions in political debates over the island's future.

The Navy

Shortly after I arrived in Puerto Rico, I arranged a tour of the Roosevelt Roads Complex in Ceiba, Puerto Rico with Chief Anne Bradford, the Navy's public relations

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officer. I wanted to get a sense of the whole military complex of which Vieques was a part. Chief Bradford picked me up at the gates of Roosevelt Roads, and drove me around the base. She started the tour by providing me with an overview of the geography of the base, mentioning that the complex has 150 miles of roads and occupies 9,000 acres. I asked her if those numbers included Vieques. "No. With Vieques the complex is 33,000 acres," she said, and quickly added, "the Navy paid fair market value for the land at the time which they bought from the local sugar barons. It's not like the Navy came in and took it from the locals," she said, "which is what they like to say." Chief Bradford was adamant that land was never expropriated in Vieques and that residents who suggested this were simply ungrateful for the military's beneficence. "We do a lot of good deeds," she told me, "but I became very disappointed when I got to understand the local mentality. Everyone wants something for nothing."

Bradford's assertion that the Navy paid a fair market price for land it appropriated before and after World War II springs directly from the political struggles of the anti-Navy mobilization. As noted before, the Navy's claim that it purchased Vieques land was first put forth in a *Sea Power Magazine* article in 1979, and from that claim the Navy later elaborated that it paid a "fair market price" for land. In fact, there is no evidence to support the claim that a payment of $1.4 million, or $66 an acre, constituted the market price of land. Rather, evidence suggests that the price of land was determined by value stated in the insular tax records, notorious for underestimating real estate value. In 1953, U.S. District Court for the District of

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Puerto Rico issued a judgement awarding seven claimants substantially increased remuneration for expropriated land, lending legitimacy to charges that landed families had been undercompensated for holdings that were seized.[3]

The Navy's position was born from efforts to delegitimize the Crusade, to discount local grievances, and reassert military authority over Vieques. Yet the Navy's argument that the expropriations never occurred sparked outrage, not only over the factual basis of their claims, but because their position resonated on a symbolic level. As we have noted, the expropriations narrative derives meaning in part from the fact that Viequenses have continually been threatened with removal from the island. The Navy's efforts to erase the past resonated with a population whose presence has been threatened in a less metaphorical sense.

If we see the continued relevance of the expropriations narrative as linked to underlying questions of legitimacy and ownership of the island, it is significant to note the Navy's continued insistence that expropriations never took place. Most Navy public relations statements begin with some mention of land ownership, and the assertion that land was bought during the war at a fair market price. Yet these assertions do not obscure the fact that the Navy increasingly feels itself under pressure to rationalize its presence on Vieques Island. In the face of shifting military priorities, extensive base closures, proposed legislation to close at least a portion of the base, and continued political agitation against the military presence, the Navy has

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[3] See United States of America Petitioner Vs. 4,339.828 acres of land more or less, situate in the Island of Vieques, Municipality of Isabel Segunda, Puerto Rico, Enrique Cayere et al., Defendants, Civil No. 6108, May 7, 1953. This document is available in the Archivo Histórico de Vieques.

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adopted a defensive posture. The Navy now argues not only that it legitimately owns island land and that this land is crucial for national defense, but that the military has made positive contributions to island life. The heart of its case has been to argue its contributions towards preserving the island's environment. Arguing its commitment to the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1983 and the environmental provisions spelled out therein, the Navy stresses that it maintains seven major conservation zones on the island and participates in sea turtle, sea mammal, and brown pelican management programs (U.S. House 1994:27).

Yet local response to the Navy's assertions is very much enmeshed in the expropriations debate. To many Viequenses, the conservation zones are little more than emblems of exclusion, products of the legacy of military expropriations that has barred them from access to most island land. The Navy's stated interest in protecting the lives of endangered species is viewed with skepticism. The current Mayor stated with some sarcasm:

> Forty-four years of bombarding including napalm in Vieques has been painful to the environment of the island. The Navy nevertheless has been careful not to destroy turtles and pelicans because they are protected species but now it is time to protect the people of Vieques which to us are at least as important as turtles and pelicans. (U.S. House 1994:85).

Again we hear echoes of charges of genocide that have long been leveled against the military. In the spring of 1994, a Navy lieutenant commander began running a series of articles in the local Vieques newspaper aimed at communicating the Navy's latest plans for the economic development of Vieques, part of demonstrating the Navy's commitment to the 1983 Accord. In these articles the lieutenant commander

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suggested that the civilians recognize the good the Navy has done in Vieques—in his opinion, preserving the natural environment of the island—and that residents put aside their concern for the past (in other words, the expropriations) and focus on the future. The commander's articles, rather than building the good will he imagined, instead stirred significant controversy and a stream of angry letters and editorials in the newspaper. One resident wrote:

> The admiral (sic) claims that the Navy has maintained Vieques' beauty. Well, how would he know? He just got here today! I am a retired senior citizen who remembers before World War II, digging for turtle eggs in the sand and eating turtle soup. The turtles were never endangered, there were plenty for us. Admiral, what tore down Vieques and endangered our wildlife were the naval bombardments, military land maneuvers, and the stationing on this tiny island of 10,000 to 15,000 men in Camp García during World War II and the Korean War. The Vieques whose beauty the Admiral praises and claims credit for is nothing to what it was before the Navy got here, and can be again if the Navy leaves (Torres 1994).

In response to this barrage of criticism and angry resurrections of the past, the Navy has become more and more entrenched in its denials of history, and has portrayed itself in official propaganda and public relations material as the unappreciated caretaker of Vieques Island. Chief Bradford bristled at the charge that the Navy had interfered with the economic progress of Vieques Island. Without the Navy, she argued, Vieques would not survive. "They think that if the Navy pulled out that they would build a Conquistador or Palmas de Mar type of complex," she said referring to two large Puerto Rican resorts:

> There isn't any developer in his right mind who would develop that place. First of all, there is the problem of transportation. They'd need their own fleet of airplanes to get to the place. Furthermore, there isn't anyone with the knowledge or wherewithal there to do that. We help as best we can, but

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> they're very poor, and the island is undeveloped. They don't have the wherewithal to develop it. The Navy helps as best we can. The problem is basically a few malcontents who believe they will have paradise if the Navy leaves. They may for a while, but it's another thing to see that to fruition.

The Navy's position, therefore, that the expropriations never occurred, needs to be interpreted in this context in which the military increasingly feels its hegemony on the island challenged. The denial of the past is part of a denial of a future in which Viequenses have some say over the control of island land and development.

The North Americans

Betty and Budd Wilson are retirees from New Canaan, Connecticut, who are part of a community of self-described snowbirds who flock to Vieques for the winter. The Wilsons first vacationed in Vieques in the 1960's upon the urging of friends from Connecticut. "It was described as being less expensive than other Caribbean Islands," Mr. Wilson remembered. "And less developed because of the Navy," Mrs. Wilson added. "And that was what attracted us to it. The lack of big high-rise or fancy hotels." The Wilsons bought a 45-acre family farm with four other "rich friends" and built their winter vacation home. In those days they felt the political climate was less divisive. "I would guess that the Navy was significantly better accepted," Mr. Wilson said. "Not that more people loved them, but the reverse. Less people hated them. Hardly anyone would admit to being fond of the Navy, except for people like us."

One afternoon I drank lemonade on the patio of the Wilson's winter vacation home perched on the western hills of Vieques, admiring unobstructed, breathtaking

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views of the Caribbean. The week before, helicopters on maneuvers buzzed in their line of vision, but on that afternoon a solitary hawk circled silently, carried over acres of abandoned farmland by the tradewinds. "You can see why we don't want them to give up the land," Mrs. Wilson said, as we settled down to chat.

The Wilsons are members of the Navy League, as are most of their snowbird friends, yet the Wilsons had no personal connection to the military and expressed no deep affection for the Navy. I asked them what they thought of the Navy's development plans for Vieques, which had been much touted by a new commander at a recent Navy League meeting. They knew nothing of these development plans, had little interest in them, and spoke instead about the expropriations of land.

"Land here..." Mr. Wilson began, "the natives complain about not having an opportunity. And if I were a native I think I would complain about the lack of opportunity. I think the Navy has an uneconomic result---not planned, or looked for, or hoped for--but that's the way it works out. But I'm not surprised that there's all this "You've got to give back what we sold to you."

"It wasn't expropriated," Mrs. Wilson interjected, "You know [an activist] uses that word. They did buy the land."

"But they bought the land at a price that the government decided was a fair price," Mr. Wilson added, "Not a haggled price, if you know what I mean."

Though they seemed to suggest that land had been acquired by contract, Mr. Wilson, at least, seemed to concede that perhaps there was a perception of unfairness at the time. For the North Americans, the subject of land becomes significant, in part,

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because it cuts to the heart of the Navy's legitimacy on the island, and by extension their own presence. We have seen how the origins of the North American community were linked to the military's underdevelopment of the island, specifically the closing of the sugar mill and the decline of small sugar cane farms.

The Wilsons, like most of the older seasonal residents of Vieques Island, spoke no Spanish and had little interest in local politics. They were only vaguely aware of upcoming hearings in town where Romero would explain the legislation he proposed before Congress to return military controlled land to the municipality. Mrs. Wilson argued that Viequenses would not experience any improvement in their living standards if the Navy returned land to the municipality:

> "I don't see that it's going to help very much. I mean I think the minute they give--if they give this end of the island it's all going to be in the hands of a few people who will make a lot of money, and maybe the natives will get jobs as.. menial jobs. I don't...
>
> "Dishwashers," her husband interjected.

This pessimism seems to have been shaped by the Wilsons' vested interest in the status quo. When I told them that Romero was coming to Vieques to speak on his proposal to return part of the western end of the island, Mrs. Wilson exclaimed in mock indignation, "This is *our private property*!" Mr. Wilson was more shrewd in his assessment, "The charm of this house would disappear. The *value* of the house would increase significantly! We think. So it's kind of a fail safe. You wouldn't want to live in the house. But a lot of people would."

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What becomes of Vieques land influences the future of North American residents and their investment on the island. As the Wilsons recognize, a turnover of land might raise the value of their property, but it could also destroy their underdeveloped enclave. Thus a number of North Americans are adamantly opposed to any turnover of land, and are threatened by anti-Navy sentiment. Frank Jones, a fiery political conservative and President of the Navy League, is vehemently pro-Navy and interpreted much of the anti-Navy sentiment on the island as generated by communist-influenced outside agitators. In a diatribe against "the opposition" Jones linked what he believed to be unfounded claims against the Navy to unfounded claims to the land:

> They complain about the Navy--say they're destroying the island--say Vieques has more craters than the moon. I've been to the bombing range--it's a very small section of the base--it doesn't look like the moon. They claim that the noise is unbearable-that children are shell shocked, that they can't hold classes because of the noise from the planes. I'll tell you--it's a hell of a lot more noisy by the airport in San Juan than it is here. They hear more noise in St. Thomas--that's where they complain. There's a hill behind the place where they bomb so you hardly hear anything here... They claim that the Navy stole the land—they bought it. Bought it from the sugar plantation owners who were more than happy to get rid of it. There were people squatting on the land and the Navy built them houses.

Jones' assertion that the Navy purchased property in Vieques echoes the narratives of many North Americans and is informed by statements issued directly by the Navy. The notion that sugar plantation owners gladly sold their land to the Navy is a point worth refuting with historical evidence. First, land was acquired principally from two owners, Eastern Sugar Associates, an American Sugar Corporation, and Juan Tío. Aurelio Tío describes the wartime seizure of his family's property, and his belief that

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the land was significantly undervalued. His family put aside claims for a fair price, he notes, to accommodate national interest which was threatened by Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (Tío 1977). The rest of Vieques land was acquired from smaller estates. As mentioned earlier, many of these owners joined together in a lawsuit against the Navy, disputing the price the Navy set, which was based on values stated in the tax register, as opposed to market value. Furthermore, as Chapter Two noted, it was only after the spectacle of poor families dumped into fields of razed cane, and the Insular government's own inability to block the second round of expropriations, that the Puerto Rican government extracted from the military the promise of housing for those families evicted by the Navy in 1947.

What is particularly interesting in Jones' comments here is his depiction of Viequenses as little more than squatters, for whom the Navy built houses. This not only denies the legitimacy of local claims to land, but illuminates a major anxiety of North American residents --the specter of squatting that was raised during the land recovery of 1989. In Jones' opinion all Viequenses are little more than squatters with no rights to the land the Navy occupies. Turning over land would only open up military borders to rampant, uncontrolled squatting, one of the most intense, pervasive fears expressed by North American residents. I spoke to a local businesswoman, Hillary Clark shortly after attending the hearings held in Vieques on Romero's proposal. Though the hearings were held two blocks away from her home one Saturday afternoon, she did not attend. She asked me what had transpired and expressed deep concern that the proposal would only unleash squatting. "I don't want

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to see that happen to Vieques," she told me, "but on the other hand, if the island is going to go to squatters I want to be the first one there."

Discussion of any changes to the island's status generated a great deal of concern from North American residents. One interesting development in political expression is the way the Navy's post-Accord campaign to depict itself as the environmental steward of Vieques Island has been received by local North Americans. For example, Fred and Susan Meyers, who have operated a bed-and-breakfast on the island for several seasons, were somewhat ambivalent about the impact of the military presence on their business. Fred felt that the controversy generated by the Navy's bombing of the island probably deterred tourists, although once they arrived they could see that the Navy was not really a problem. "The Navy has kept the land pristine," he noted,

> If it weren't for the Navy, Vieques would be just like St. Thomas. On the other hand, if you talk to Carlos [his neighbor] he'll point to the areas that used to be fishing villages and where people used to live and all of that was taken from them. It's hard for us to relate, but if that had happened to us, we'd feel the same way.

Susan Meyers felt more strongly in favor of the Navy. She was upset by talk that some of the base land would be returned. "I hope if the Navy does leave that the land is turned into a National Park," she commented. The Meyers were less invested in debates over whether or not the Navy bought the land that it occupied; in fact Fred seemed to concede that there was injustice in the way the land was acquired. But the Meyers seemed convinced that a larger good had occurred: namely that the Navy had protected the island against uncontrolled development. And they favored the

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continued estrangement of Viequenses from the land, either by the military or the National Park Service, as a guarantee of the island's "preservation".

The Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques

In the Spring of 1993, a newly formed group, the Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques, launched a door-to-door campaign, collecting signatures on a letter to Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, seeking the closure of the military facilities on Vieques Island. The Committee's chosen name clearly alluded to the defunct "Crusade to Recover Vieques" and the new group saw itself as an effort to rebuild the organized struggle for the recuperation of land. The politics of the group were informed by the Crusade. One of the most controversial and divisive charges leveled against the Crusade was the assertion that the group was a communist-led, anti-American agitation. The newly formed Committee went to pains to present itself as non-partisan and representative of all of the people of Vieques, distancing itself from association with Puerto Rican independence and leftist causes. Great effort was made to point to the presence of new blood in the organization: a mild mannered GE employee, a retired doctor and son of a former Mayor, a young aspiring police officer. Yet the Committee was also formed in response to the chaos and opportunism of the land recovery of 1989. There was concern for assessing a purity of politics that translated itself into cliquishness and exclusivity. Little effort was directed at grassroots organizing or opening meetings to the broader public. Significantly, the group's greatest concern and focus was the future of Vieques Island

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in the event of a military withdrawal. In the aftermath of the land recovery, the Committee's main objective was to develop a coherent vision of Vieques' future, one in which the majority of island people would enjoy the fruits of development, rather than wealthy, off-island developers, or politically suspect local speculators. The group solicited the opinions of a variety of urban planners and development specialists from Puerto Rico and the United States in an effort to chart a thoughtful and coherent plan for the island's social and economic development.

The Committee's main problem was securing the power and authority to carry out its vision. The group organized not in the context of grassroots struggle, but in what one activist described as a "new historic moment." Specifically, Committee members hoped that with the end of the Cold War, a newly-elected Democrat in the White House, and a new effort to shut down superfluous military bases, a well organized group could lobby its way from the local municipal assembly to the U.S. Congress, to call for Vieques' inclusion on the list of military installations to be closed. Yet the Committee was not popularly elected; nor was it born out of a broader movement. Within this context, the attention activists directed towards the military expropriations of the 1940's can be interpreted as part of a larger effort to claim both legitimacy and authority.

Like the Crusade's literature, most of the Committee's pamphlets and press releases took note of the expropriations of land in the 1940's. Activists, particularly those who had been involved in the Crusade, explained their participation in struggle as the result of experiencing the expropriations. For example, when Aurora Vélez, a

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return migrant and long-time anti-Navy activist, was asked to explain why she has struggled for so many years against the Navy, she commented, "My conviction came from suffering through the expropriations. I saw the difference in how I lived before and after the Navy came. That's why I had to leave Vieques. My people didn't progress. The youth have to leave." Likewise, in the beginning of the chapter, we see that when don Fernando introduces the Committee's work he does so only after explaining the details of his family's eviction by the Navy in the 1940's. Yet don Fernando and doña Aurora are not merely rehashing an old story from the 1970's. They are establishing their own authority to struggle for the recuperation of land.

The Committee's claims to authority and efforts to recuperate land are not uncontested. Recall how Clara Serrano asserted that land in Vieques was never expropriated. She represents a class-based defense of the status quo, a position that has a basis in the local PPD political establishment that defended the Naval presence during Crusade. There are also Viequenses like Isolina Mendoza, 60 years old, whose defense of the Navy springs from links to the military. Doña Isolina is a former member of the Pro-Navy Vanguard which was organized against the Crusade to Recover Vieques. She is married to a North American retired marine and is one of the few Viequense members of the Navy League. She is vehemently opposed to the Committee and disturbed by its work. When asked her opinion about the Committee's signature collecting activities she commented:

> They are very ugly. Because here in the base there are many people working. These people are earning their bread to maintain their families. It will put these people out of work. It shouldn't be... Listen. They have been trying to kick the Navy out of Vieques for years and years and years. They haven't

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> been able to do it. Because the Navy bought the land. They have papers and everything to prove that they bought it.

Doña Isolina's comments clearly echo the assertions of the Navy and the North Americans with whom she is closely associated, in which the Navy's authority is linked to the claim that it legitimately bought island land. Yet the deference to Federal authority is widespread in Vieques, most markedly among the large elderly population, and reflects one of the most formidable obstacles activists have faced in building popular support for the recuperation of land. Many older Viequenses will agree, yes, they were thrown off the land, but then again, they argue, we were nothing but peons, what could we do? If the government decided it wanted the land, it was the government's prerogative. As we will see, Committee members are hopeful that this type of sentiment is beginning to erode in the changed political climate.

A major challenge facing the Committee is a feeling of disillusionment among former activists and people who once supported the struggle against the Navy. The heavy- handed tactics of the Navy, the collapse of the fishing association, the spectacle of the land recovery, have dampened some residents' hopes for change, despite a new climate of political openness. Pedro Vales is an example of such sentiment. Although don Pedro was at the forefront of the fishermen's struggle against the Navy in the late 1970's, today he has shifted course. Don Pedro was involved in a bitter dispute over the leadership of the fishing co-op. He left fishing and turned his attention to evangelical ministry. Don Pedro dismissed the Committee as a little group without much influence. He commented:

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> Around seven or eight years ago I changed my mind. I said to the fishermen, we have to give up the pickets, because the Navy is not going to leave Vieques. What we have to do is to picket the Navy to bring us jobs and give up land. But the Navy is not going to leave. Because 100 or 200 'cats' are not strong enough to get the Navy to leave. We can live with them. [What was your opinion before?] That they should leave.

Don Pedro's view of the present colors his understanding of the past. He argued that in the early days of the military presence, relations were good between the civilians and the military. He used to wash sailors' clothes. He remembered that the Navy brought in trucks of food, sacks of rice and coffee to town.

> At the beginning, they were very close to us. They helped the people. There was good communication with the civilians. There was no poverty. There were no problems with *independentistas* or *pipilos* [members of the PIP]. The *pipilos* got involved with the fishermen's struggle and the Navy got heavy handed.

In the midst of this discussion don Pedro asserted "The Navy bought the land. Tío [owner of *Central Playa Grande* in 1941] sold the land to the Navy." Here we see that don Pedro's assertion that the Navy bought Vieques land is less a vehement defense of military's legitimacy than an expression of resignation, and perhaps reconciliation, from an old man and disenchanted activist. "I changed my mind," he reiterated:

> I'm not a fanatic. If I am asking you something at gunpoint, you won't listen. But if I explain to you the reason, maybe you will understand and your heart will be touched. If I go to you with a threatening attitude, you're not going to listen. The Navy is not leaving. This is an important base. The Navy is part of Vieques.

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It should be noted that disillusionment affects not only those who once sought social change, but also those who in the past supported the Navy. Flora Lebredo is widely regarded as one of the most pro-Navy Viequenses on the island. Her links to the military are strong. As a child, she grew up in barracks on a U.S. military base where her father was in the military police. Later, she herself served in the Marines. Yet the failure of the Navy to live up to the promises it made in the Memorandum of Understanding has eroded her support of the military. Doña Flora asserts that she is neutral on the subject of the military presence on Vieques Island: "I have tried to stay away from this. Distance myself. Not say anything. Neither yes, nor no, in favor or against." Yet as she refused to comment, she began to talk more and more.

> My husband was the head of VEDCO [Vieques Economic Development Corporation, a civilian board that worked with the military to implement Navy initiated development projects]. The Navy was supposed to bring in factories. Everything flopped. They came, they did damage, they left. I don't have anything to do with the Navy now. I'm not a member of the Navy League. I don't go to Roosevelt Roads anymore. I do keep in touch with Admiral Knoizen. I send him a Christmas card every year.

Doña Flora dated her disenchantment with the Navy to the collapse of VEDCO projects in 1986. "I've had a lot of pain and suffering because of the situation with the Navy," she asserted, "including an employee who went to jail." Doña Flora is the head of a Commonwealth agency and some of her employees were jailed during the Crusade for trespassing on military property. "During the hard times things were really tough here," she reflected. "It wasn't worth it. It wasn't worth it." Doña Flora continued:

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> There are a lot of people here who have tunnel vision. They put blinders on and don't want to see other perspectives. Carmelo Félix Matta. He's a fanatic. He rants and raves, says he's against the Navy, and he's selling land left and right. Including one plot of land he sold three times to different people. People here say that they want the Navy to go, give back the land so that there can be tourism and development. They say they're against the gringos, but then they turn around and sell all our land to the gringos. People here all have two houses. And cars.
> All these people see only one way. Not me. This is a small island. Everyone knows one another and has to get along. That's why I don't get involved... Things were so bad. At the height of the bad times I went out and bought a magnum. Yes. That's right. That's how bad things were. Fanatical. It wasn't worth it.

Part of the Committee's struggle for authority, then, is linked to its efforts to convince the populace of its political moderation. Don Pedro and doña Flora's words reveal the reluctance of many Viequenses to further involve themselves in controversy about the Navy. At the same time, we have noted continued tension over the military occupation of the island. The newly founded Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques struggles to present itself as a voice of moderation in a battle for social change. The Committee has won support through its middle-of-the-road politics and its use of electoral channels rather than the pickets, confrontations, and demonstrations of that characterized the Crusade. The Committee mobilized the municipal government and incumbent Mayor who long portrayed herself as a "happy medium" striking a balance between the Navy and its opponents. For the first time, the Mayor came out in open opposition to the Naval presence and called for a recuperation of land. The Mayor and Municipal Assembly approved a resolution submitted by the Committee calling for the closing of Vieques Naval facilities and the

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return of lands to the people. The Committee then took its resolution to the Puerto Rican House of Representatives and Senate, where it again won approval for its initiative. Bringing its case to Washington, the Committee's cause was picked up by Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner Romero, who submitted a compromise bill before the House of Representatives, asking the Navy to return all lands in the Western part of the island to the Municipal government of Vieques. Activists varied in their understanding and acceptance of this compromise legislation. Though the Committee as a whole supported Romero's proposed bill, most activists believed that Romero was motivated by his own political concerns, probably to seek new leverage over the military to extract financial benefits for the mainland. Some activists expressed concern over the possibility that the current Mayor might exercise control over the development of recovered land. In any event, Romero's bill clearly was a response to momentum established by the Committee.

This change in the political landscape, again, is reflected in political discourse surrounding the expropriations. First, and foremost, activists noted the Mayor's new willingness to talk about the military occupation of land, and the struggle to recuperate territory from the Navy. This, again, was perceived as a major shift by a politician who had long abstained from taking a position on the military presence. Second, in a less dramatic manner, activists noted a subtle shift in sentiment among the general population. When asked if there were currently many people in favor of the Navy on Vieques, Aurora Vélez responded:

> No—I'll tell you that there are many people in favor of the Navy leaving, but they don't manifest it. But if you talk to someone now they'll say if the Navy

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> won't go entirely, at least it should give us this land we're asking for. There wasn't this sentiment before. Before they said the Navy bought this land and it's theirs. But how did you buy the land from me? I say I'll give you this land for $10,000, they say they'll give me $6,000 and I should leave. This is not bought. They threw us out.

Doña Aurora's comments highlight the complexities of political life in Vieques. Though the town spawned and sustained a militant anti-base movement, at its core the island's people are characterized not by radicalism, but rather political moderation. Yet with the Committee now lobbying before Congress, with U.S. national attention turned towards the closing of military installations, the quest for the return of land in Vieques is now perceived not as an act of radical, anti-U.S. defiance, but a reasonable, politically prudent objective. This shift in sensibility could be measured in the words of Luis Ramírez, an elderly resident who has long been antagonized by anti-Navy activism. Don Luis belonged to a faction of the local PNP that was deeply alienated by the former Mayor's anti-Navy position during the Crusade. He was loosely associated with the Pro-Navy Vanguard during these years. In don Luis's opinion, the Crusade was "anti-American antagonism more than a protest about Vieques. All that was American was bad. Except for the money, except for the money. There was no basis [to the protest]." Don Luis maintained that the majority of people in Vieques have always been in favor of the military presence. But when pressed to elaborate whether he believed Viequenses were really in favor of the Navy or the status quo, don Luis explained:

> The status quo more than anything else. Because we are in favor, not out of lack of interest, but we believe that they bought it, as you buy your house, it is yours. If they bought the land and the government of Puerto Rico seeks little

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> by little the return of all the land they are not using, I am in favor of this. Because they are not using it.
> [What do you think of Romero's proposal to return land?] Romero is saying that what they aren't using they should return. This is logical. I agree with this. And everyone agrees, because what they are not using here, should go to the people....not the people here, no, to the government of Puerto Rico. Because here, if you let them, they will grab and sell to get ahead. What have they done with Bravos de Boston? [A "recovered" barrio]What have they done? The others, from here, from Vieques have taken land to sell it to outsiders. What happened to the money they collected? If the government had that land, it would make housing plots, highways, who knows what? But here many people took land for their own benefit, not for the benefit of the people.

The next chapter will consider the Committee's efforts to revitalize Vieques'

movement in relation to this shifting political landscape.

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Chapter Six: The Past and the Present: Organizing for Change

In October 1994 Iván Meléndez testified before a Congressional Subcommittee on Insular Affairs in Washington, D.C. The Subcommittee was debating legislation to close the Navy's ammunition storage facility and turn over one-third of Vieques land to the municipality. Iván is the son of Santiago Meléndez. He is bright and enthusiastic, a self-identified fisherman with a college education and a full-time job in the PNP municipal government. Iván presented decades-old grievances between Vieques fishermen and the Navy, charging the military with bombing coral reefs and productive fishing areas and destroying fishing gear. In light of the Navy's recent claims of environmental stewardship, Iván leveled new charges that the Navy was obliterating endangered species. Iván's presentation concluded with assertions that emphasized sacrifice and patriotism, drawing on the discourse of the Crusade and the statehood party of which he is an active member:

> Vieques originally accepted the military presence to defend the world against the regime of Hitler and we could understand that this was a legitimate need considering the threat against humanity. Then we further sacrificed for the Korean War effort, followed by the Vietnam War effort, the Cold War, the Grenada invasion—then came the Gulf War, the Somalia humanitarian effort, recently the Haiti invasion—and now they're talking about the war against drugs. These may all be honorable causes, in their own right, but as the basis for original acceptance changes continually, the people of Vieques can no longer understand the legitimate necessity of their prolonged sacrifice. It must be remembered that as well as sacrificing their lands, the people of Vieques, as all American citizens, have also made the ultimate sacrifice. It has been over 50 years of giving our share, enough already---you have taken our past, give us back our future.

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Iván is engaged in new efforts to resurrect the fishing association his father once led, and at the same time, some semblance of a movement in opposition to the Navy. He reaches into the past to start anew Vieques' struggle with the Navy over the future of the island. He has formed a new group which calls itself the Vieques Fishermen's Rights Group (*Grupo Pro Derechos de los Pescadores Viequenses*). Yet whether fishermen can reemerge as the leaders of Vieques' struggle remains to be seen.

With the demise of Vieques' fishermen's association in the early 1980's came the collapse of Vieques' primary protagonist in the battle with the Navy. In the life history of Vieques' anti-military struggle, the fishing association was the primary vehicle through which people were radicalized against the Navy. Now Iván's effort to revive the association is simultaneously a struggle to resuscitate Vieques' anti-military movement, and to claim the legitimacy the association had given Viequenses to fight the Navy.

Yet the revival of this particular framework to Vieques' conflict with the Navy carries with it old and new problems. Asserting the primacy of fishermen's problems brings forth the same tension between locally based grievances and the broader, colonial dimensions of the case. Turning now to the fishermen to lead the struggle places faith in an association that dissolved into fractious infighting and still

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palpable hostility. Organizers rely on this very organization to unify a populace already informed by considerable ambivalence. So far the fishermen have not emerged as community leaders and have devoted most of their energies to struggling with the Navy over the issue of compensation for lost traps.

At the same time that Iván is trying to organize fishers, old time anti-Navy activists are attempting to revitalize the broader coalition movement that sustained the fishermen's war of the 1970's. The previous chapter introduced the Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques as a new player in the struggle to control island land. The Committee's name clearly alludes to that of the Crusade to Recover Vieques, although its concern for development can be read as a response to the chaos unleashed by the land recovery of 1989. The Committee is composed of a number of the Crusade's leading activists and newly recruited individuals interested in seeing a military withdrawal from Vieques Island. The Committee defines itself by its political moderation, expressed in a commitment to lobbying and the use of governmental channels to seek social change.

Increasingly, theorists of social change have looked with enthusiasm to these types of small-scale, local movements in Latin America. While hope for socialist transformation of society has waned with the coup in Chile, the invasion of Grenada, the electoral defeat of the Sandanista revolution in Nicaragua, the collapse of th Soviet Union and the crumbling of the Cuban state, new hope has been invested in the

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"democratizing potential" of so-called "new"social movements (Hellman 1987; Calderón, Piscitelli, and Reyna 1992). Attention has been directed to the way small movements create democratic spaces and transform the consciousness of participants (Hellman 1995, Craske 1993).

Vieques' current political activity cannot be defined as a social movement, but rather an effort to build one in a changed political context.[1] Activists recognized that the political moment is different from 1978. They regarded 1993-1994 as offering a new political conjuncture—the end of the Cold War, the closing of military installations, and apparently unified backing from different Puerto Rican political factions to close military facilities in Vieques. Locally, they saw shifting sentiment over the military presence. At the same time, with the U.S. military set to pull out of Panama, activists feared that the Navy would seek to further entrench itself in Vieques. The historical moment thus offered both new possibilities for resolving a protracted conflict, and awareness of the difficulty of achieving change.

New social movement theorists have argued that in recent decades there has been a widespread shift in the character of oppositional politics in Latin America

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[1] In defining a social movement, I will turn to a fairly traditional definition articulated by Darnovsky, Epstein and Flacks (1995: vii):
Social movements are collective efforts by socially and politically subordinated people to challenge the conditions and assumptions of their lives. These efforts are a distinctive sort of social activity: collective action becomes a "movement" when participants refuse to accept the boundaries of established institutional rules and routinized roles. Single instances of such popular defiance don't make a movement; the term refers to persistent, patterned, and widely distributed collective challenges to the status quo.

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(Hale 1997; Escobar and Alvarez 1992). In Vieques, we see, however, that current efforts to organize represent not a rupture, but a continuity from past forms of grassroots mobilizing. Activists' issues are the same: the Navy's control of land; the island's ensuing economic crisis; the military's destruction of the environment. The goals have shifted somewhat: there is a willingness to settle for a partial withdrawal of the Navy from the island. And the strategy is the same: building consensus on the problem of the Navy; working within state structures (the courts, Congress); although some of the tactics have changed, most notably the retreat from direct action.

Today's activists have inherited the fundamental contradictions that have impeded past efforts to successfully organize against the military. On one hand, there exists in Vieques deep-seated dissatisfaction with the military presence: a sense of injustice over the bombing of a populated island; skepticism over whether "national security" fully justifies the squelching of economic opportunity and residents' right to live on the island. On the other hand, as authentic and deep as are local resentments towards the Navy, so too is fear of systemic political and economic change. Agitating against the Navy continues to be construed, or perceived, as anti-American and socialist in orientation. While there exist elements locally and in Puerto Rico who wish to use the case of Vieques to convey a broader, anti-colonial message, the majority of Vieques residents are not prepared to overtly confront the colonial order.

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Challenging the Navy, then, becomes a charged act, balancing a desire for social change with the intent of preserving, by and large, the status quo.

Today's activists organize and strategize within the context of this political contradiction and with the weight of experience. As one long-time activist, 63 year-old Aurora Vélez described the dilemma:

> Viequenses don't know how to distinguish, or they don't want to distinguish---that one thing is not the other. That if you're against the Navy you're not necessarily against the American government. You're against the Navy because of what it is doing, not because you're against the American government.

Such a political context, which was so clearly illuminated during the course of the Crusade, heavily influences the nature of contemporary political organizing on the island. This chapter will examine how the experience of the past, the victories and losses, shape activists' political consciousness and visions of the possible. Activists search for a framework that will transform anti-military agitation into another organized movement. Of particular interest is the way the Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques' entry into a new struggle over a proposed Naval radar installation points to the limits and potential of political organizing on the island.

The Committee to Rescue and Develop Vieques: Politics and Ideology

Mario Martínez is a founding member of the Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques, and one of Vieques' most visible and highly respected activists. Now in his early 50's, Mario was a leader of the Crusade to Recover Vieques in the

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1970's and was jailed for trespassing on Naval property. A school teacher and former President of the local PSP, Mario remains a committed socialist, yet at the same time is a staunch defender of the Committee's political moderation. When I interviewed Mario I asked him to describe the Committee's orientation and ideology, and how he saw this group as different from groups of the past. Mario discussed the pragmatism that shapes the Committee's tactics, and explains the rationale of the group in historical terms:

> This historic moment is different from 1978 because of the new world order. The group is different from others in its tactics of struggle. The struggle and its tactics include among other things, getting the support of sectors where we never had support. Getting the support of the local municipal assembly, the legislative assembly of the U.S. and including giving much more emphasis on the Congress of the United States as a historical political reality, recognizing the existing political situation...Right now we are not saying that the Crusade was incorrect. It was correct because its tactics were correct. If there weren't a Crusade before, there wouldn't be this struggle now. We, at least, and other committees in between, consider ourselves as a continuation of that struggle, a new historic link.
>
> Another thing we can say about the difference between these groups is that we are more pragmatic---we are slower. In part because of reality. The Navy has control of the island of Vieques. The possibility that the Navy might leave entirely is difficult. Therefore we established another group, not necessarily committed to the total departure of the Navy from Vieques. We might consider the possibility of recovering pieces of land. In 1978, we were committed to the rapid departure of the Navy, and the departure had to be total. We understand that the recuperation of part of Vieques is a triumph. And that it won't impede us from struggling for more. In this sense we distance ourselves. Another element is the fact that there's a base closure commission. This gives us an opportunity.
>
> This doesn't mean that we reject the previous style of struggle. The pickets are present. The direct confrontation we can't use. At the moment we don't confront the maneuvers, the boats, etc. But it's the reality that has changed our vision.

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Mario describes the Committee's shift towards the center, its use of legislative channels, such as petitioning the local municipal assembly, and its willingness to compromise. The Committee has moved away from direct confrontation into the domain of politics—lobbying. As Carlos Quintero, another long-time activist put it:

> It is not a struggle as before. Conversation, dialogue, presenting evidence [before Congress] that they themselves have gathered! Congress did a lot of studies about Vieques, the environmental impact on Vieques. And they recommended to stop this, to cease the assault against the ecology, against the marine life, the flora and fauna.. Nonetheless, they spent the money on these studies, they presented recommendations, nonetheless [the Navy] stayed. We have to have faith to continue the struggle. This type of struggle that we are doing now of diplomacy, to bring the case of Vieques to the entire world. Because I don't think we are going back to the moments of aggression. I don't think we are going back to the type of struggle that was made necessary by those times. Now we are in diplomacy. Whether we will succeed, I don't know.

Yet while Carlos and Mario describe the Committee's more pragmatic, gradualist approach to resolving conflict, the features they describe as distinguishing the Committee from the Crusade represent more of an evolution than a radical break from the past. While in the 1970's, the fishermen catapulted themselves onto the evening news with dramatic disruptions of maneuvers, the Crusade was never purely a direct action campaign. From the outset, significant energy was devoted to the legal front, signaling a willingness to work within state structures. The fishermen filed a lawsuit against the Navy in Federal Court, and lawyers formed a key presence in the mobilization. In fact, when right-wing terrorists sought to strike at the Crusade, they

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planned to bomb the Puerto Rican Bar Association. Furthermore, like the Committee, the Crusade was always concerned with "bringing Vieques' case to the world," which is why activists traveled to international conferences and college campuses, and the head of the fishermen's association spoke before the U.N. Decolonization Committee. True the Crusade did not expend significant energy collecting signatures and lobbying the local and national governments. Yet perhaps it was less important to Crusade activists to seek the support of the local municipal assembly because the Mayor was on the front line of the battle field, expressing vehement opposition to the Navy's presence on the island, and Puerto Rican governor Carlos Romero Barceló entered the battle, filing a lawsuit against the Navy. Lobbying Congress was not necessary since at the height of the grassroots movement, Congressman Ron Dellums pushed for Congressional Hearings on the Status of Naval activities on Vieques Island. And while Mario describes the Committee's willingness to be more pragmatic and settle for a partial withdrawal of the Navy, the Crusade ultimately settled for significantly less than a full military withdrawal, in essence a good neighbor agreement. This suggests a willingness to compromise, or perhaps pragmatism within this movement.

The fact that the Committee has adopted a pragmatic, moderate approach to resolving conflict with the Navy does not deny major differences between the group and the Crusade to Recover Vieques. For one, the Crusade was essentially a

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grassroots movement. While the Committee maintains the importance of grassroots involvement, in reality, it has not focused on mobilizing such a movement. While Mario argues that the importance of organizing and consciousness raising are two key lessons the Committee absorbed from the Crusade, he points to another lesson as central:

> More than anything is that you have to work with concrete issues. We can't be very idealistic. And we have to establish alternatives. We [in the Crusade] didn't establish alternatives. We have to establish alternatives of what we want if the marines go. What are we going to do with these lands? For what do we want the marines to go? They should go because they should go, or they should go because we plan to develop economically. This is important.

In practice, the Committee's concern for the aftermath of a military pull-out has translated into a focus on planning for the future that supersedes efforts to organize the populace for political action in the present. This troubles a number of activists, who are pleased with some of the Committee's accomplishments, but dissatisfied with the group's lack of a social base in the community.

A recurring theme activists raised was the importance of organizing a unified, non-partisan group of Viequenses to work together to recuperate island lands. The Committee has concentrated on bringing together a diverse group of individuals who might be depicted as representational, if not in an electoral sense, at least in terms of the range of political sentiment present on Vieques Island. Committee members were unanimous in emphasizing their different experiences, political backgrounds and affiliations, and their willingness to work together to find a consensus about the

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problem of the military. It seems that one of the major lessons the Committee absorbed from the Crusade was the social cost of divisiveness in a prolonged conflict. In the aftermath of the Crusade, the fishermen's co-op dissolved into bitter factions and contentious lawsuits over co-op property. Activists discovered that friends and neighbors acted as police informants during the Crusade. Individuals who risked their reputations and jobs to resist the military and, as they saw it, save their island, were charged by fellow Viequenses with being controlled and manipulated by outside agitators with a communist, anti-American agenda.

The Committee's concern for unity, eschewing partisan affiliation, was clearly a response to this divisiveness. At the same, the group's politics echoed older attempts by Viequenses to organize to evict the Navy. Recall the group Viequenses United, which in the months prior to the Fishermen's War tried unsuccessfully to bring together a unified, non-partisan group to resist the Navy. Ultimately, its efforts to resist partisan affiliation revealed how powerful such associations were, and the group collapsed with charges that various members were *independentistas*. It was only the highly charged, confrontational, and emotionally resonant campaign of the fishermen that propelled a movement, giving substance and direction to the battle against the Navy without dissolving into political infighting.

In its commitment to political moderation and non-partisan unity of all sectors, the Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques seems to be the resurrection

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of Viequenses United. There exists tension within the Committee over strategy and ideology. Zoraída López is one of the new activists to join the Committee. She was born in New York, but married and settled in Vieques twenty-five years ago and raised her family there. She was not involved in the Crusade. Now in her 50's, she was attracted to the Committee in part because of her own growing political consciousness, and in part because she viewed the group as politically centrist. Zoraída noted that the Committee had been criticized recently on the local television station as being headed nowhere. The critic felt that rather than lobbying, the Committee should organize thousands of Viequenses to come forward to block the next scheduled military maneuvers, scaling fences if necessary. Zoraída was irritated by this advice:

> Who the hell are you going to get to do that? The last three times there have been demonstrations, there have been no more than 30 people. At least the cards got people to put their names on something. People aren't willing to climb fences. At least putting their name on something was a positive step. Most citizens accept this way of going about the Navy situation. The only thing that is really a unifying force is a desire for people to see Vieques whole. Many people won't come out and say "*que se vaya la marina.*" They are afraid to be labeled communist, pro-independence.

Yet Julia Ramos, a veteran activist originally from Puerto Rico, who came to Vieques after working with Puerto Rico- based solidarity movements, expressed dissatisfaction over the Committee's politics and momentum. Julia has lived and worked as a school teacher in Vieques since the years of the Crusade and is probably one of the more radical members of the Committee. She commented:

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> [All we do is talk] We don't have an ideology. (Laughs). No. I think it's a committee without ideology. Because we are so distinct. Unfortunately, unfortunately, unfortunately for *me*! (Laughs). Everyone has a different position. Some are conservative, others, less. Some more revolutionary. I don't know if we'll be successful. For me, the committee is really conservative. I'm trying to maintain myself on the line of dialogue, without controversy and without confrontation. This is the ideology you will find. Trying not to appear to have a partisan political position. The *Populares* try not to criticize Manuela. The *independentistas* try not to criticize the other leaders. Everyone is trying to keep their own political opinions and political projects to themselves.
>
> It's difficult. Because my political experience from years before is that the committee in one form or another has a political opinion. That's not what we are trying to do here. Before this, I was involved in ten different groups. But all were *independentista*. All picketed, wanted to get rid of the Navy, etc... Now nobody will say they are *independentista*. You understand? We just talk.
>
> When we started to talk about a picket, people were getting uncomfortable. We can't talk about this, because it makes people uncomfortable. We don't accept violent expressions. Only expressions of fraternity. At times it's okay, at other times it's a little difficult. But it works, because we've been together for a year. It hasn't broken up.

Despite Julia's reservations, she does acknowledge a major strength of the Committee: the fact that it has held together despite marked internal differences of group members. Furthermore, the group has succeeded in mobilizing both the local municipal government and the Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner in Washington, D.C., to take a stand on Vieques. While the Committee did not have a strong base or identification in the town, at the same time it had no real opponents or vocal critics. Most Viequenses seemed comfortable with the idea of lobbying and signature collecting, and the group's spokesperson, a retired doctor and son of a former Mayor lent a face of respectability and moderation to the Committee.

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In order to consider some of the limits and potentials of the Committee, I will turn now to a discussion and analysis of two very different events that occurred during my fieldwork. The two events point to the constraints activists face in organizing for social change. The first was a picket in front of Camp García in October 1993, organized by the Committee to protest the Navy's accidental bombing of the buffer zone, near a residential area. The second event was an excursion organized by the Vieques Cultural Center to the ruins of two sugar *centrales* located within the boundaries of the Naval Ammunition Facility. While the two events were formally quite distinct—one an overtly political rally organized by the Committee, the other a cultural tour promoted by the Cultural Center of Yaureibo, a local organization run under the auspices of the Institute for Puerto Rican Culture—there were important commonalities in the organization and function of the two events. First, a handful of the same anti-Navy activists organized both events. The Cultural Center board was dominated by a number of Committee members who were quite savvy about using the institutional structure and financing of the Center to promote a nationalist agenda. Second, both events were intended in one form or another to raise consciousness about the negative impact of the Navy on island life. Analysis of the two events suggests that the population of Vieques is potentially mobilized and radicalized, dependent upon the packaging and perception of the event.

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A Tale of Two Events

The Bombing of Vieques, October 1993

In the early evening of October 24, 1993, the neighborhood of Santa María on the eastern limits of Vieques' civilian zone was rocked by powerful explosions. Residents, well used to the routine sound of bombing, besieged the Mayor with panicked telephone calls, describing "a new kind of bomb" or perhaps a crashed bomber in their neighborhood. In reality, it turned out that a Navy fighter plane had accidentally dropped five 500-pound bombs six miles off target, near the so-called buffer zone between military and civilian zone, only one mile from a populated civilian area. Phone calls to the Navy from the Mayor's office went unanswered until late the next day when the Navy called to apologize for "excessive noise" emanating from Navy property (*Vieques Times*, November 1993, p. 7). Members of the Committee were outraged and pushed the group to organize its first picket. Several of the more radical Committee members drove through town in a car rigged with a loudspeaker, denouncing this "brutal assault" on the people of Vieques and announcing that the Committee would hold a picket in response to the bombing.

One week after the bombing, on Sunday, October 31 at noon, approximately 30 protestors, the majority members of the Committee, picketed in front of the gates of Camp García. Committee members developed a set of rhymed chants specifically for the protest and distributed colorful homemade placards to participants. While a

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megaphone was exchanged among different Committee members who led the group in protest chants, the main speaker of the rally was the group's spokesperson, a retired doctor and son of former six-term Mayor of Vieques. The doctor was a recognizable figure in town, driving a large red Chevy emblazoned with PPD bumper stickers. He was also widely respected, not only for his family connections, but for being a prominent public health official in San Juan. Protestors stopped chanting while the doctor delivered a prepared statement on behalf of the Committee. He denounced the bombing mishap, called for an end of all bombing and a withdrawal of the military from all of Vieques. He noted that this week the Mayor had signed a card as part of the Committee's postcard writing campaign to President Clinton, calling for the closure of the base, and that the Mayor had asked the Resident Commissioner to deliver 3,750 signed postcards from Viequenses to President Clinton. The doctor's delivery of the statement was calm and measured. When he finished reading his statement, the rally came to an official end, having lasted approximately one hour. Committee members, wearing new T-shirts, posed with big smiles for a group picture in front of Camp García's gates and then drove home.

Picketing in front of the base was a tactic used by the Crusade and the event clearly intended to draw on this legacy. Although, as Julia remarked earlier, there was discomfort within the Committee over the idea of a picket, the event might be described as a non-confrontational confrontation. Held before the gates of Camp

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García, an emblem of the Naval presence in Vieques, the picket in a symbolic sense took civilian grievances directly before the military. Yet in reality it was one or two Viequense security guards who stood witness to the event, while the operational and command center of the small Naval presence was located on the other side of the island. Meanwhile, the military officials responsible for the mishap in all likelihood were not even located on Vieques Island but rather in Ceiba, Puerto Rico, at Roosevelt Roads. The picket, furthermore, scheduled for Sunday at noon occurred at a time and place that ensured little public notice. The gates of Camp García lie away from town and beyond the major residential areas. Sunday afternoon is a sleepy time on the island, and few cars travel past the base. In contrast, a beach barbecue organized by the PNP on the other side of the island later that day attracted hundreds of Viequenses. The tone of the picket was moderated by the measured words of the respectable doctor and the group photo session at the end.

Though the location and timing of the event meant that it did not attract considerable attention, the picket did not go unnoticed. Several police officers and a reporter for the local newspaper were on hand, taking note of the event. One of the youngest Committee members was reluctant to attend the picket because of warnings he had received from friends that he would be labeled a communist and blackballed from the police academy he longed to attend. There may have been validity to this

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young man's fears. In an act of intimidation, a military official stood in a highly visible spot on the margins of the picket, videotaping protestors.

While the picket seemed intended to raise the public consciousness of the menace of the military presence, it was not clear how effective it was in realizing this goal. Although the Committee succeeded in publicizing the event in the Puerto Rican press, the local reaction to the picket was lukewarm at best. Beyond several passing cars, it seemed as if few people were aware of the protest. One veteran activist was upbeat after the protest, which he pointed out was the first picket in a year since a group of people protested napalm being dropped on Vieques during maneuvers. Yet a cynical observer of the event dismissed the protest as nothing but the same group of hacks, bent over, beating the same old drums, chanting "*que se vaya la marina.*" "What are they going to accomplish?" he asked. Yet if the picket did achieve anything, it was to reinforce a sense of solidarity among the Committee itself, a group of people with diverse political perspectives. The group photo at the end of the picket seemed to emphasize this fact.

Excursion to the Sugar *Centrales*' Ruins

One Saturday morning in January 1994 the Vieques Cultural Center organized an excursion to the ruins of the Playa Grande and Resolución sugar *centrales* on military baseland. The occasion of the tour was the 150th anniversary of the founding

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of the municipality of Vieques. Though the excursion received the sponsorship of the municipality and required the consent and cooperation of the Navy, the idea and initiative for the outing came from the Cultural Center and the several activists who dominated it. The community response to the excursion and the dynamics of the event provide a counterpoint to the picket organized by the Committee several months earlier.

Turnout for the excursion overwhelmed planners who had secured only two school buses to accommodate participants. Approximately 300 people gathered in the town plaza that morning. Emotion was high. In the crowd were a number of older Viequenses who had worked in the mills and were evicted by the Navy in the 1940's. Others had been born on sugar land and had never been allowed to return to the places of their birth. Families arrived carrying coolers. While there were many people wearing Vieques T-shirts and a handful of individuals carrying Puerto Rican flags, this was definitely not a hard-core *independentista* crowd. Some attendees sported camouflage and one wore an Operation Desert Storm T-shirt. There were a few North Americans in attendance, but on the whole, Navy League members were conspicuously absent. The main organizer for the event, Samuel Rivera, a high-profile anti-Navy activist who was both a member of the Committee and the Cultural Center, rallied the crowd with fiery words about the struggle to reclaim Vieques. The crowd cheered and clapped. There was a scramble to board the two buses and a much

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slower process of forming a caravan of *públicos* and private cars to carry the rest of the crowd to the base.

In order to arrive at the site of the old sugar *central*, the caravan had to pass through the main entrance of the base. There was considerable delay. The Navy was expecting only two school buses and was overwhelmed by the caravan that arrived. It was a busy day for the guards, who copied down license plate numbers and collected signatures. The base commander was on hand in her dress whites to act as an escort, but ended up supervising chaos. In the meantime, people aboard the idling buses started singing nationalist and folk songs. Two elderly North Americans aboard one of the buses looked decidedly uncomfortable.

Finally, the procession was underway. The trip was clearly emotional for many of the attendees. One woman sat clutching a tissue, looking out the window. Another woman shouted out as she recognized stopping points for the old locomotive that ran from the cane fields to the central. An elderly (and imaginative) anti-Navy activist lamented that land now overrun with vines and scrub brush once nurtured sugar cane that grew to 36-foot heights. When the group arrived at the site of Playa Grande, Samuel gave a brief speech. "This was the center of the social, political, and economic life of Vieques before the Navy expropriated it in the 1940's. This is where people lived, worked and died," he noted. Samuel gave a brief chronology of the owners, and encouraged people to share their experiences, and especially young kids

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to speak to their elders. The crowd started milling about the ruins. What little had been left of Playa Grande was largely destroyed by Hurricane Hugo in 1989. The site was mainly crumbling, vine entangled brick walls, overrun by mesquite and thick vegetation. People reminisced and poked among the debris, collecting rusted nails and pieces of broken pipe. Parents took photos of their children in front of ruined walls. The local television station conducted an interview among the ruins, talking to an older man who had worked and lived at Playa Grande. He explained that the Navy arrived and offered the people a choice between the base and the *central*. They all chose the base, he remembered. His family was paid $25 to leave. Yet the base never ended up providing the work they had all expected, he noted. People were videotaping the interview, taking photos and notes.

I spoke to a young man on the tour. I recognized him as one of a group of unemployed young men who pass most of their days on the roadside, drinking bottles of rum and beer from brown paper bags. He sported a cap emblazoned with the Puerto Rican flag, and seemed enthusiastic about the tour. I asked him what he thought of ruins. "It's nice," he answered in English, but switched to Spanish as a sailor passed by, "But we need this land. They have two-thirds of the island; we have only one third. With this land, Vieques could develop. What do they need all this land for? They're not even using it. The Navy should go. I'm not anti-American, only anti-Navy."

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The buses loaded up at noon to move on to the second destination, the ruins of Resolución. The caravan passed through magazines cut into the hills before arriving at a site quite similar to Playa Grande. Again Samuel gave a brief historical introduction to the *central* and encouraged people to share their experiences. There were a few brief testimonies. One woman grabbed a mike and said that even though she was born here, this was the first time she returned to this soil in 52 years. An elderly man and prominent artist in Vieques said a few words about his experience working at Resolución. Again the crowd milled about, collecting nails and taking pictures, exchanging stories and memories. People began to break out coolers and bags of food and drink—*arepas* (johnny cakes) and fried chicken, juice and water.

When it was time to move on, the caravan made a final stop at the beach in front of the base headquarters. By now the historical tour had transformed itself into a large town picnic. The atmosphere was festive and there was food and drink everywhere. Samuel said a few final words. He thanked the base commander, who sat to the side of the crowd, for her cooperation in planning for the day's activities. There was polite applause. "But," he continued, "We come here today on the behalf of no organization, because of no one's permission or approval. We come here today as our right as the people of Vieques, to our own land. This is not just a historic tour of our past, but a visit to our present and future!" The crowd erupted into loud applause and cheers. The festivities continued and by the time buses loaded to return to the Plaza,

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they were rocked with loud nationalist and folk songs. In the week following the excursion, poems of loss and longing were printed in the local newspaper, describing the bittersweet experience of visiting Vieques' glorious past, now in ruins.

Hegemony and Struggle

A major theme of this dissertation is the extent to which the power of the colonial state constrains political expression, organizing and protest in Vieques. The differing outcomes of the picket and the cultural tour reflect the barriers activists face in organizing for social change, as well as the potential for consciousness raising and agitating against the Naval presence outside the overtly political realm.

In the Introduction, I spoke of the concept of hegemony as a way of understanding struggle, the ways in which the process of domination shapes the way people accommodate and resist domination itself (Roseberry 1994: 360-361). What is of interest then, in examining political action and consciousness in Vieques, is less the way the state may act to manipulate beliefs, than how it acts to define "the boundaries of the possible." (Sayer 1994:375). As Sayer notes,

> Power enforces the terms on which things must be done at the most everyday of levels... it is profoundly coercive, whether or not it is experienced as such. Frequently it is, but people have no material choice but to 'accommodate' to what is, for the time being their social reality (p.375).

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The limited success of the picket points to a deep reluctance of Viequenses to involve themselves in overtly political acts of direct confrontation. While many people were deeply upset over bombs dropped on the outskirts of town, they were more troubled by the idea of picketing in front of the base. To picket in front of the base, to be photographed by military police, to chance association with radical causes, was too great a risk for most people. If we recall the history of police involvement in tracking independence activists, and the economic discrimination against *independentistas*, we see how in a tight community with few resources, people fear being identified and penalized as political radicals.

The picket represented a deviation from the Committee's measured moderation and non-confrontational approach to the conflict with the Navy. The picket cannot be considered a radical act, for even in directly confronting the Navy the Committee tried to limit the perception of extremism. We have noted the group's commitment to signature collecting and lobbying Congress. We have noted its efforts to draw together a non-partisan group of citizens to push for the base's closure and the attention the group has given to the doctor to lend a face of respectability to its activities. Stung by charges of anti-American, socialist extremism, the Committee organized in a way that was palatable to both the citizenry and the structures of power. This tension constrained the efficacy of protest. Yet the fact that the Committee organized in such a way does not imply the "mystification" of its

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members. We have noted that the Committee included a number of radical socialists who constrained their personal convictions and opinions to lobby before Congressional committees that had a history of inaction in the Vieques conflict. Their willingness to adopt such tactics speaks not to a "false consciousness" but rather reveals the workings of power. In the case of the Committee, this power shaped both the constitution (non-partisan) and tactics (lobbying) of the group. In their efforts to appear as good citizens, however, Committee activists legitimized the very structures of power that oppress them. Yet as we have seen by examining the poorly attended picket, the combined force of social opinion and state sanction allowed them few other choices.

The historic tour, on the other hand, allowed for freer expression of sentiment and commitment. While the picket evoked the specter of communism and anticolonialism, the tour was safely ensconced in the realm of culture; the excursion, after all, was a historical tour organized by the Cultural Center. While most North Americans stayed away from the event because they associated the excursion with a particular anti-Navy activist, Viequenses were more willing to accept the stamp of institutional legitimacy given to the tour by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (the backer of the Cultural Center), the municipality, which co-sponsored the event, and the Navy which authorized entry onto military lands. Strong nationalist feeling, assertions of historic links to the land and claims to its future came from a

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heterogeneous assemblage of townspeople. Like the fishermen who focused grievances in the realm of the cultural and economic, the excursion to the base offered a rallying place for nationalist sentiment within a circumscribed locale.

In Puerto Rico the rise of the cultural arena is an important area for defining and reinforcing a sense of identity and political consciousness (Dávila 1997, Quintero Rivera 1991). In Vieques, we see the way the state-sanctioned cultural tour becomes an important vehicle for reinforcing identity and political consciousness. The poignancy and power of the tour derived from its connection to the expropriations narrative that dominates popular discourse. The local newspaper described participants as pilgrims to a "living history classroom" of what had once been a thriving agricultural area and residential community (*Vieques Times*, Jan 1994, p. 8). The military escorted tour to historic ruins not only reminded people of what they had lost, and of the island's past, but made apparent the current social inequality of the military land holdings and the abandonment of the terrain. The excursion reinforced not only a historic link, but a sense of entitlement to land that is clearly not used. As such, it politicized the populace, again within a context that the Navy itself unwittingly authorized.

What potential does the cultural realm have for political action? What lessons might Committee activists extract from these two events? As Dávila has noted, many theorists have greeted the rise of cultural movements with skepticism, reading them

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as a retreat from the terrain of politics (1997:3). Yet we have seen from the example of the Crusade that culture can be mobilized in highly politicized ways that integrate issues of power and class. It is clear that the historical tour was much more effective in rallying nationalist sentiment and in reinforcing grievances against the Navy than the Committee's October picket. However, the picket, while poorly attended, was at least connected to a political program. The cultural tour rallied sentiment and then sent participants home. The success of the historical excursion can be measured in the enthusiasm and turnout of the crowd, rather than in the promotion of a concrete political agenda. Yet the Crusade demonstrates that the defense of culture can be drawn upon as a basis for organizing, if it is connected to a political structure. Strong emotions evoked by the image of the fishermen; a recently organized fishing co-op; a group of disenchanted local activists with links to the independence and ecumenical movements in Puerto Rico and the United States proved a potent combination, launching a sustained anti-base movement.

In sum, these two events point to the constraints activists face in overt political organizing, yet also the potential of radicalizing the population in a domain outside pure politics. In the success of the historical excursion, we see the resonance of the realm of culture to Viequenses. It seems important to note that the tour was particularly effective in rallying the populace because it connected to grievances held against the Navy. A visit to the remains of two sugar *centrales*, a tour the Navy

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approved as a seemingly harmless "historic excursion," proved a volatile reminder of the squelching of the economy, the loss of land, the idleness and destruction of terrain by the military.

Yet culture is not the only realm that demonstrates potential for political mobilization in Vieques. I turn now to a third event that unfolded during my stay in Vieques, a military plan to build a radar installation on the western part of the island. The ensuing battle over the radar installation suggests another arena—that of health and the environment--- as an effective area to develop political consciousness and mobilize the populace.

The Irradiation of Vieques

In the Spring of 1994 the Navy announced its intentions of erecting a $10 million "Relocatable-Over-The-Horizon-Radar Installation" (ROTHR) in Vieques with the cooperation of the Puerto Rican Police, the Puerto Rican National Guard, and the Puerto Rican Economic Development Administration (*Fomento Económico).* The stated purpose of the project was to help in inter-agency Caribbean drug interdiction, although analysis of the radar system suggested that its utility was really to be found much further away, detecting drug activity in South America. The installation would consist of three parts: a transmitter located in Vieques, a receiver in Lajas, Puerto Rico, and an Operation Control Center in Norfolk, Virginia. The

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Vieques transmitter would include 34 vertical towers ranging in height from 71 to 125 feet, which would require approximately 100 acres of leveled land. The Navy was considering three potential sites for the installation: one on the western part of the island, near the Playa Grande Lagoon on the site of the old sugar cane *central*, and two others near the Camp García airstrip on the eastern part of the island.

The significance of the timing of the project was not lost on members of the Committee. Though the project was described as part of the war on drugs, a popular and commonly accepted battle in Vieques and Puerto Rico, Committee members felt that such a claim was only a subterfuge for entrenching the military presence on the island. After all, it was shortly after Romero visited Vieques to describe his efforts to reclaim the Western part of the island, and in the midst of the Committee's work to close the Vieques base, that the Navy suddenly found new use for lands that had lain idle for decades. Committee members were furious and found a new focus for their energies: alerting the public to potential dangers of the radar installation and resisting what they perceived as new efforts by the Navy to maintain its presence on Vieques Island.

Public hearings on the project were held in Lajas and Vieques at the beginning of June. In the weeks preceding the hearings the Vieques television station ran a number of programs describing the potential health risks of the radar installation. In Vieques, a growing concern for the health effects of the Naval presence dated back at

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least five years when an article was published in a Puerto Rican engineering journal about dynamite residues in the local drinking water (Cruz Pérez 1988). Residents were increasingly concerned about contamination from military explosives and reports of high levels of certain types of cancers in the community. The secretive nature of military activity and the community's lack of access to information intensified fear and suspicion. So while the announcement of the radar installation received little attention in Lajas, in Vieques it raised activists' fears that the military plotted a new way to ensure its presence on the island and that electro-magnetic radiation could expose the population to new risks of cancer. The hearings in Lajas passed without notice. In Vieques, the public response to the hearings and the radar project was explosive.

On Saturday morning, June 11, the Committee organized a boycott of the public hearings on the radar and a picket on the Plaza in front of City Hall where the hearings were taking place. Approximately 150 people joined in the demonstration, blocking traffic for hours and drawing considerable attention as they chanted and marched in the hot sun. A member of the Puerto Rico-based leftist environmental group, the Misión Industrial, distributed leaflets, describing the dangers of electromagnetic radiation. Inside City Hall, a handful of concerned residents posed critical questions about the impact of the proposed radar installation. They inquired about the energy requirements of the station, the aesthetic appearance of the facility

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on land locals hoped to conserve for ecotourism, and the health effects of electromagnetic radiation. The hearing, the public concerns, and the protest all received extensive coverage in the local paper and attention in the Puerto Rican press. The local newspaper described the demonstration as composed of "sympathizers from all parties, various religious groups, municipal assemblypersons and even government employees, many not considered anti-Navy types." (*Vieques Times* June 1994, p. 1). What was clear was that the Committee had successfully surmounted fears of communism and anti-Americanism to organize a high-profile picket joined by a diversity of people from the community.

In the weeks after the picket, there was a growing schism in the Committee as to how to continue the momentum that had been established that Saturday morning. One Committee member had been quoted in a San Juan paper expressing his opposition to the radar project as nothing more than a military plot to ensure military control of the island. He represented a faction of the Committee that felt strongly about emphasizing the military conspiracy part of the equation, rallying popular sentiment against the radar station as a thinly veiled attempt to derail efforts to reclaim the land. Several other Committee members, however, wished to avoid statements of direct confrontation with the Navy and focus attention on the health dangers of the radar station. The threat of cancer, they felt, would be much more effective in building popular opposition to the Navy and its project. They wished to

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de-emphasize the military objectives of the Navy, a focus which they felt alienated people, and concentrate more on the environmental repercussions of the project as a way of attracting as many people as possible. Ultimately the faction that wanted to emphasize the health risks and environmental consequences of the facility dominated and the struggle over the radar developed with a focus on those concerns.

In a startling development, in July 1994 the Board of Directors of the Vieques Conservation and Historic Trust (VCHT) announced its unanimous opposition to the Navy's ROTHR station. The VCHT, as mentioned earlier, is the pet project of a number of wealthy, North American seasonal residents, and there is heavy overlap of membership between the VCHT and the Navy League. While the organization claims to concern itself with the preservation of Vieques' environment, particularly its unique bioluminescent bay, over the years it has alienated itself from sympathetic Viequenses because of its refusal to take a stand in opposition to the Navy's bombing of the island. The Trust has maintained that speaking out against the bombing would be an exercise in politics and that it wishes to engage in environmental preservation, not political controversy. In reality most VCHT members are strongly supportive of the military presence on Vieques and were not willing to compromise their loyalties, even in the face of this apparent conflict of interest. Thus it was quite surprising when the VCHT issued a strongly worded statement, declaring its unequivocal opposition to the radar station, which aside from representing a visual blight on "one of the

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loveliest unspoiled islands in the Caribbean" and a potential health threat to island residents, would almost certainly adversely effect the island's environment, in particular, the bioluminescent bay (*The Vieques Times*, August 1994, p. 3). The position represented the first time that the interests of anti-Navy activists and those of any locally based North American organization had converged.

The struggle over ROTHR was to continue over the next several years with the Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques at the forefront of the battle. In May 1995, the Committee organized a candlelight march in opposition to the radar that was attended by over a hundred Viequenses. A victory seemed on the horizon when the Navy announced that it would abandon plans to install the radar. Then in a reversal, in 1996, the Navy announced its intentions to go forward with the ROTHR project. Focusing on the health and environmental ramifications of the radar system, the Committee rallied opposition. With the help of a strong, left-leaning environmental movement in Puerto Rico, a parallel movement sprung up in Lajas, Puerto Rico, resisting the establishment of a ROTHR receiver in that community. In January 1997, the Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques organized what it declared to be the largest anti-military demonstration in Vieques in 20 years. Over 500 people gathered in front of the gates of the Western Ammunition Facility, the proposed site for the ROTHR, to express opposition to the facility. Leaders of the local political parties and churches delivered messages of opposition to the radar. The

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demonstration was coordinated with the movement in Lajas, which held its own protest simultaneously in front of the gates of Fort Allen. In February, 1997, the Committee organized yet another well attended protest, this time a "Walk for the Health of Vieques." The purpose of the walk was to dramatize the community's concern with high cancer rates and other illnesses stemming from environmental contamination, and residents' fears that electromagnetic radiation from the proposed radar installation could exacerbate rates of illness. As in January, over 500 people attended this walk.

In focusing on the health and environmental consequences of the proposed radar installation, the Committee succeeded in rallying opposition to the Navy on the island. Opposition, however, was carefully framed around the threat of cancer. The Committee de-emphasized its belief that the radar project was a military subterfuge designed to derail land reclamation. It organized residents not to protest the Navy, but to "walk for the health of Vieques." Fears of association with an anti-American cause dissolved in the face of what was understood to be a real threat of cancer.

The Committee's emphasis on moderation and respectability turned out to be an important asset in organizing around the radar issue. The doctor, an epidemiologist and prominent public health official, whose presence the Committee had sought to highlight as a voice of reason, gave legitimacy to health concerns about the radar installation. When the doctor talked about cancer rates and the risks of

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electromagnetic radiation, people listened. Even the North Americans, who had never displayed any sympathy for anti-military causes, were swayed by the concerns the Committee raised about the installation, even if those concerns (predominantly the bioluminescent bay) differed from those of Viequenses. In short, the Committee succeeded in building tentative bridges between the Viequense and North American populations.

Again, in the radar struggle, we see the way in which the issues that mobilize Viequenses have symbolic resonance that connect to deep-seated grievances against the Navy. The historic excursion, for example, actively revived romantic memories of the sugar era and the more painful story of the expropriations, reinforcing claims to the land. The struggle against the radar station and perceived cancer threat connected to pervasive fears of military conspiracy and "genocide." While the Committee felt that the public would shy away from a focus on the calculated political motives behind the proposed ROTHR station, activists recognized that the public was generally sympathetic to the notion of military conspiracy. The idea that the military secretly plots to depeople the island remains strong, as is a belief that its maneuvers and bombing have created a toxic legacy. By focusing on the theme of cancer-causing radiation towers, the Committee was able to tap into these fears and rally the community against the military.

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Conclusion

In June, 1994 I was sent by an informant to the doorstep of María Rivera, a 72 year-old woman whose daughter had married a Marine. It was the type of interview I tried to avoid. Most of my interviews were developed over time, gained through the process of networking and cultivating friendships. This process was important to me because the topic of the Navy in Vieques is sensitive. In this case, however, a friend of a friend insisted that I must talk to María about what she thought about the Navy since her daughter had married a Marine. The friend called María, told her she didn't have to answer any questions she didn't want to, and that I was on my way over. I was then shuttled over to an interview I wasn't sure I ever wanted, at least under these circumstances.

When I arrived at the house, doña María was extremely reticent, bordering on hostile. I tried to describe my project, telling her that I was interested in knowing how relations were between the Navy and the town over time, and how Vieques had changed. She told me that she didn't know much about these things, that they didn't interest her at all, and that she didn't want to get involved in them. What exactly did I want to know? I asked her if she knew if there were any dances or social events between the Navy and the town in the past. "There was a dance hall in town," she answered curtly. Now there are no more dances. What about marriages between soldiers and Viequense women? Her daughter and cousin. That's all she knew. Both

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left the island. I asked her some questions about the 1950's. She said she wasn't here. She left for New York, where she lived for 25 years.

I was prepared to leave when doña María started to warm up. She told me that most people in Vieques were in favor of the Navy. There are only a few who are against them and they are communists. Well, it is said that they are communists, but she doesn't know for sure. But it's a small group and they are opposed to everything. They like to start fights. For example, take the radar. They are against the radar. It's always the same people against everything."Are you in favor of the radar?" I asked. "Of course," she responded. "It's to fight drugs. Just the other day they dropped $60 million worth of drugs on Vieques." [2]

She started to talk a little more about the Navy. She said they had some clubs on base that they allowed "Hispanics" to attend. They gave them passes. Of course they don't give passes to communists. They're not even allowed on base. There's only a few of them. One of them they say is a Jew, she noted, as if to highlight the activist's alien nature. He's against everything and he's not even from here. So it's none of his business anyway. He's married to a woman who is a teacher in the school, and she's not from here either. There are two or three of them from here that they won't let on the base either.

[2] In fact, in a widely publicized incident, authorities discovered that empty base land was being used as a new cache for drug smugglers.

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"So do you think that most people here are in favor of the Navy?" I asked. "Oh yes, definitely," she assured me. "Most people feel that way. If it went to a vote we would win."

"Why are people in favor of the Navy?" I asked. "They bought this land," she responded. "This island is poor. Before there was sugar cane and the Navy gave people land. That's what they say," she qualified herself.

I was interested then when doña María turned the conversation back to discuss the proposed radar installation. "Why don't the communists want the radar?" she asked me. "Does it cause cancer? They wouldn't put something in that caused cancer, would they?" She was completely sincere and appeared genuinely worried.

I discovered later that doña María had been a member of the Pro-Navy Vanguard, the militant pro-Navy group that organized in opposition to the Crusade to Recover Vieques in the late 1970's. Despite doña María's strong support for the Navy and her hostility towards anti-Navy activists, the potential health threat of the radar installation troubled her. The fear of cancer penetrated an ideological curtain of sorts. Doña María had absorbed some of the Navy's major representations of the anti-Navy protestors---that they were a communist minority, dominated by outside agitators; that local claims to the land were unfounded, because the Navy bought its holdings and gave parcels of land to the poor. Yet her fear of cancer was genuine and raised questions for her, where so much else seemed to be black and white.

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My encounter with doña María suggested to me the significance of the new angle the Committee has adopted to fight the Navy. Simply put, if the fear of cancer could win over someone like doña María, its potential for mobilizing the population at large seemed great. The Committee's success in rallying Viequenses around issues of health and the environment dovetails with the growth of the environmental movement in Puerto Rico as a whole. It is a movement that has been able to rally popular support for class-based concerns like differential access to resources like water, U.S. colonial control and destruction of natural resources. In 1997, the environmental movement entered center stage when it used the courts to block popular PNP Governor Pedro Rosselló's celebrated "Super Aqueduct" project, demonstrating itself to be a formidable political force on the island. At least several prominent individuals in the Puerto Rican environmental movement are long-term left-wing activists, who were in Vieques support groups in the 70's, and have now offered their assistance in the radar mobilization. In Vieques we see the way that this focus on health and the environment provides a space for resistance where other expressions of protest are quashed.

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Conclusion

On May 13, 1997, Iván Meléndez led a group of fishermen to confront warships off the southern coast of the Vieques. It was Mother's Day. Vieques families were picnicking at the beach while Belgian and Dutch fleets were bombarding the island. Myrna Pagán, a new member of the Committee to Recover and Develop Vieques described the confrontation in a letter to the editor of the San Juan Star:

> With all the coastline available in the "war zone," the six battleships anchored in the community's face and involved the zone where our fishermen's nets lay being destroyed. Revival time fast became survival and the fishermen reacted. They approached the ships within calling distance and shouted to the sailors on board:
>
> "You are in our fishing grounds, our traps are being destroyed, you must leave immediately.
>
> "Say again!"
>
> "You are destroying our fishing grounds. Move out, move out."
>
> They got the universal finger in reply. All hell broke loose: watermelons and pineapples rained on the tiny fishing boats from the three story vessels above them, but were boomeranged by the fishermen. Then they were forced away by high power water hoses to regroup on the beach. More fishermen joined in now armed with paint-filled projectiles and slingshots. Outboard motors were revved up and the local fleet went to face the enemy. A few people on both sides got hit by projectiles and paint splashed on the gray battleship walls. David meets Goliath. Finally they pulled anchor and a cheering community witnessed the giants' retreat. (*San Juan Star* 5/21/97 p 68).

The altercation grabbed the headlines of the Puerto Rican press. A Dutch sailor lost an eye. This confrontation did not trigger a wider response or precipitate the birth of a new movement. Yet it signaled the tenacity of those who resist the military presence and the continuity of conflict nearly twenty years after Vieques'

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organized anti-military movement erupted. What sense can we make of the Vieques case?

While European-based literature emphasizes the rise and significance of so-called "new social movements" of the middle classes (Touraine 1988; Melucci 1989; Laclau and Mouffe 1985b; Habermas 1981), research in Latin America in the past decade highlights the continued importance of "popular" forms of mobilizations (Nash 1992; Stephen 1997; Radcliffe and Westwood 1993) erupting from the "intersection of economic exploitation, political oppression and poverty" (Vilas 1997:6). Social movement theorists have noted an explosion of small, localized movements in Latin America despite oppressive political and economic conditions. Increasingly, theorists have invested hope in these small-scale movements to transform society (Hellman 1997:14). These movements, which were once regarded as building blocks in broader liberation struggles, are now being celebrated as "transforming the nature of political practice," establishing "spheres of autonomy in a fragmented social and political space" by a multiplicity of actors (Escobar & Alvarez 1992: 2-3). We are called on to celebrate the way in which small movements empower their participants, win concrete concessions from the state, and bring about a radical new democracy (Hellman 1995, Escobar & Alvarez 1992, Mainwaring & Viola 1984, Slater 1985). Yet Hellman (1995, 1997) argues that we need to look hard at the alleged victories of these small movements. The Vieques case provides an opportunity to consider the life history of a locally based social movement: to

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measure its impact, to consider its lessons. What, we may ask, have been Vieques' achievements?

Viequense anti-military activists have not yet achieved their most significant goal: the eviction of the Navy from the island and the recuperation of land. Nonetheless, activists have been able to shake the political power structure. Anti-military protest in 1978 triggered a Congressional inquiry into the state of military activities on the island. It pressured Puerto Rican Governor Carlos Romero Barceló to file a lawsuit against the Navy. Continued agitation brought the Navy to the bargaining table with the governor in 1983 to sign an agreement to improve conditions on the island. In 1993-1994, new efforts to remove the military led Romero to submit legislation to Congress to turn over land now occupied by the ammunition facility. Yet it does not appear that these events constituted real victories. The Congressional inquiry, while concluding that the Navy should relocate to another island, did not compel the military to do so. The 1983 accord superseded Romero's lawsuit and diffused protest while offering little in the way of substantial change. Romero's 1994 legislation, activists charged, was but another effort to derail organized protest in Vieques, and win the Puerto Rican government bargaining power in discussions about military contracts with the Navy. Thus the Vieques case raises questions about whether localized movements are able to win real concessions from the state.

To what extent have Viequenses been empowered by anti-military political activity? The notion of empowerment, Hellman (1995) notes, is frequently celebrated

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in small movements, but hard to quantify. "Although the literature on new movements is replete with references to empowerment," she argues, "virtually no one has paused to define the concept, nor is there agreement on exactly how an empowered person differs from someone who has not undergone this transformative process" (1995:175). How does the experience of political participation and collective action affect those who emerge from struggle without a decisive victory in hand?

"Our grandparents were more submissive," noted Juan Jiménez, "We are fighting back now." The political climate in Vieques has clearly changed from the 1940's. By looking at the history of Vieques' relationship with the Navy, we see a growing radicalization of the population. When we consider the most recent confrontation between fishermen and the Navy, we see a change in consciousness from the time of the expropriations. We see a population with an ingrained sense of injustice, with a willingness to confront and challenge structures of power.

At same time, we must also take note of disillusionment formed in the aftermath of the Crusade. While Pedro Vales was proud to show me photos of himself in a small boat, waving his fist at Navy warships, he was largely pessimistic about the possibility of evicting the Navy. Don Pedro was more affected by the Crusade's failure to remove the Navy than by the positive experience of acting collectively with fellow fishermen. Whatever experience he gained in leadership, whatever sense of personal power he developed, he has turned inward towards his evangelical ministry. With the failure of the 1983 accord that formally ended the Crusade we see the growth of cynicism and vigilantism, the starkest expression of which is landgrabbing.

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While the Crusade may have transformed complacency into fiery resistance, without a formal organization to channel sentiment, anger remains diffuse and undirected.

It seems overly romantic, then, to celebrate Vieques' movement as uniformly empowering the population when victory has remained so elusive. But the resilience of protestors against all odds, the continuity of protest from generation to generation, demonstrates the way in which collective action has kept alive the hope for a better future.

Has the movement in Vieques contributed to the building of a radical new democracy? Viequense protestors have consistently drawn attention to the lack of substantive justice within the colonial system. Like civil rights protestors of the 1950's and 1960's, anti-military activists in Vieques have drawn attention to the contradiction between equal justice under the law and the denial of equal opportunity to American citizens. In their struggle with the Navy, Viequenses protesters advanced a notion of second-class citizenship, and called upon the government to deliver Puerto Ricans full rights as members of the American nation. Does this call for equal rights, however, constitute the construction of a radical new democracy? Vieques' anti-military activists appear to be demanding not a reconstitution of current political systems, but a modification of the existing political order. As Hale (1997) notes, the contradiction between the universal principle of equality and the continued marginalization of certain types of citizens creates an opportunity for oppressed groups to make claims in the name of bourgeois law—"albeit at the risk of reproducing the very cultural logic that oppressed them" (p 574). In Vieques we see

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that the focus on the courts, on accords, on lobbying the power structure has derailed potentially more potent forms of political expression.

Many social movement theorists remain optimistic about the potential of small movements like the one in Vieques to transform society. Escobar and Alvarez (1992:7) argue that we should not dismiss some forms of collective action simply because their goals are circumscribed. Calderón, Piscitelli and Reyna (1992) argue that these small movements exhibit a "marked political propensity":

> It is not impossible to imagine that these numerous small actors might communicate with each other and thereby connect their spaces, not in a simple aggregate manner, but organically. And this might provide one of the necessary conditions for reconstituting the institutional fabric of a type of democracy that is yet to come (p 26).

The case of Vieques, however, raises questions about whether locally based movements naturally connect to similar mobilizations. Activists in Culebra and Vieques did not perceive a commonality of interests; rather they competed with each other for the same goal: the eviction of the military from their shores. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Crusade, activists' goals have been more limited and less concerned with linking struggle to a broader movement. Current activity in Vieques fits within a stream of movements that focuses on the small, that has tempered revolutionary enthusiasm for concrete, winnable goals. Recall the words of Mario Martínez: "More than anything..you have to work with concrete issues. We can't be very idealistic." Hellman (1997) notes that these movements often demonstrate the heroic efforts of powerless people to resist oppression and gain more control over their lives and immediate circumstances. However she notes: "As long as they limit

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their efforts to the struggle for relatively narrow, concrete goals, they are easier to get off the ground and easier to sustain. As such however, they risk political insignificance" (p 18). Hellman argues that these small movements must develop linkages in order to develop into more "radically transformative forces."

Viequenses have long had ambivalent relations with people and groups from "*afuera.*" This tension stems not from some irrational parochialism but from an understanding of Vieques' structural weakness in relationship to Puerto Rico, and the facility with which local goals can be hijacked to advance other interests. Nonetheless, the history of anti-military struggle has demonstrated Viequense activists' ability to reach beyond the local and make the linkages necessary to propel their grievances onto the world's stage. The two most noteworthy instances of collective action with transformative potential were most obviously the Crusade, but more recently, the budding movement against the radar, with its links to the Puerto Rican environmental movement. In both instances it was the framework of collective action that both grounded the local movement and made possible broader linkages. In the case of the Crusade, the realm of culture, expressed in the symbolism of the fisherman was a key framework, because it offered Viequenses a safe space outside fiercely polarized partisan politics while easily translating into other contexts. Iván Meléndez's recent altercation with the Navy shows efforts to revive that particular framework. The success of organizing around health and environmental concerns with the radar, however, demonstrates that culture is not the only viable framework for collective action. The focus on health and the environment might also provide a

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vehicle for expressing grievances and a bridge to similar struggles. In the end, it will be the framework of struggle that is the key to transforming a charged local struggle in Vieques to a movement with true transformative potential.

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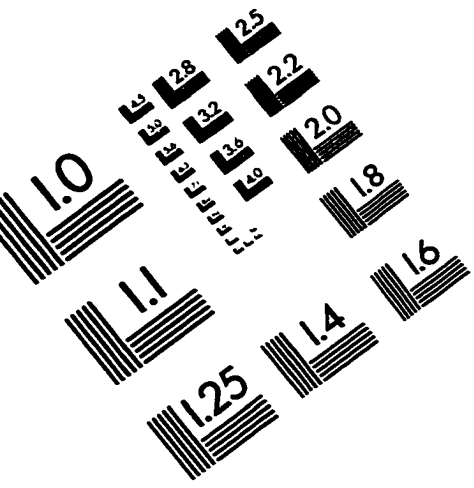

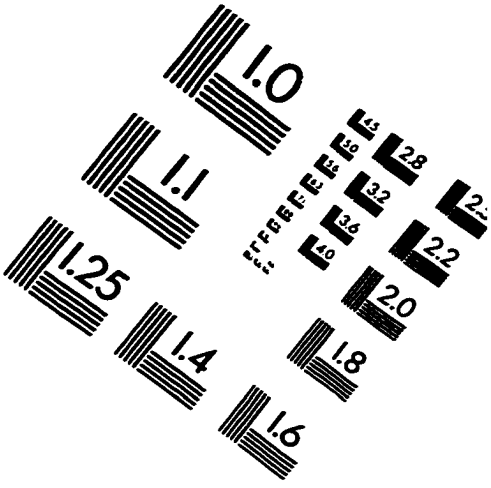

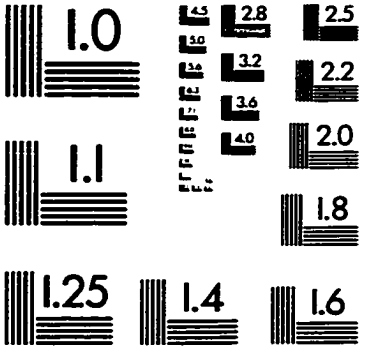

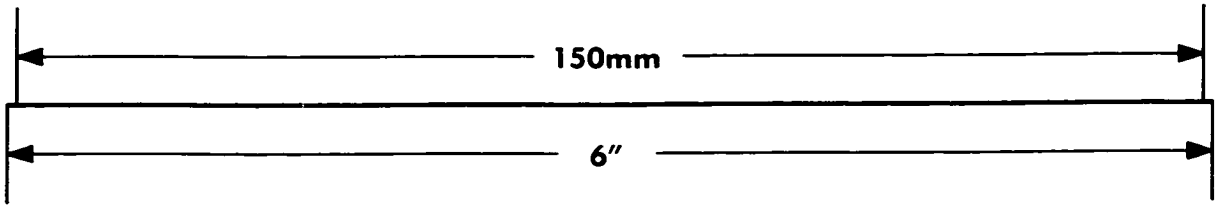

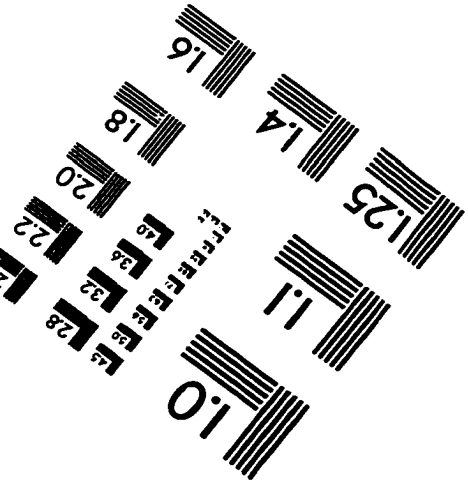

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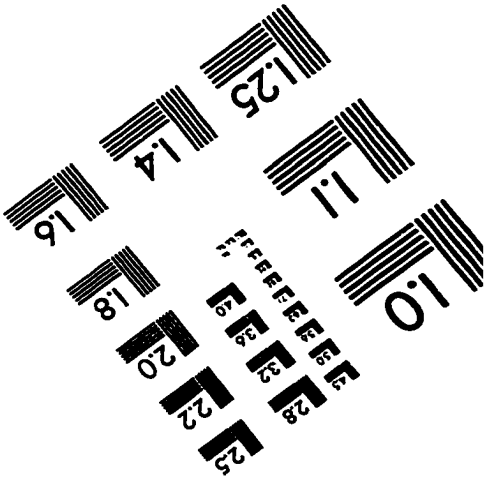

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