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Evicting A Neighbor: Health, Power and Discourse in Vieques, Puerto Rico

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EVICTING A NEIGHBOR: HEALTH, POWER AND DISCOURSE
IN VIEQUES, PUERTO RICO

by

Nelson Class-Meléndez

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
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Department of Anthropology

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EVICTING A NEIGHBOR: HEALTH, POWER, AND DISCOURSE IN VIEQUES, PUERTO RICO

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Western Michigan University, 2003

This thesis examines the two years that followed the death of a civilian, David Sanes on April 1999, when a Marine Corps F-18 pilot accidentally dropped two 500-pound bombs on an observation post on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques. Following the death of Sanes and for the first time in contemporary history, all competing political parties, the Viequenses, and religious leaders apparently reached an initial consensus that resulted in a series of efforts to evict the Navy from Vieques.

Importantly, this coalition adopted an environmental discourse that is essentially anti-Navy. This thesis draws upon this anti-Navy discourse to examine many of the socio-political aspects as they impact the health concerns among the Vieques residents. Drawing upon both new environmental anthropology and critical medical anthropology's conception of the body, these health and ecological concerns are mediated by cultural perceptions about the environment and its relationship to the body in health and illness. This approach has been framed to highlight and understand the reemergence of the anti-Navy movement of the 1970s and 80s and its widespread support by a broad spectrum of political and social sectors, which materialized into nationwide demonstrations.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Death shakes and traumatizes” claims the Archbishop of San Juan, Monseñor Roberto González, reflecting upon the effects of an accident that took away the life of a Vieques civilian, David Sanes when two 500 pound bombs were accidentally dropped by a Marine Corps F-18 pilot on an observation post on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques (El Nuevo Día April 19, 2001). Monseñor González adds that this lamentable accident “created the sensation that someone who is loved by many became a victim of war terror” (El Nuevo Día April 19, 2001). Without question, this incident has re-ignited a controversy that has remained outside of most Puerto Ricans’ attention for the past sixty years. This date then marks a moment in which Puerto Ricans started to pay attention to the grievances that Viequenses attribute to the U.S. Navy presence for the last sixty years.

This thesis arose out of my desire to address the fact that, following the death of Sanes and for the first time in contemporary history, all competing political parties, the Viequenses, and religious leaders apparently reached what seemed to be an initial consensus that resulted in a series of efforts to evict the Navy from Vieques. Because this objective was adopted by the full Puerto Rican political and social spectrum, Vieques became a flash point in the increasingly unstable relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. Importantly, this coalition adopted an environmental

discourse that is essentially anti-Navy. As both a Puerto Rican and an anthropology graduate student, my interest in studying the Vieques' situation is rooted in my desire to understand this discourse, without neglecting the role of the existing power relations between Puerto Rico and the United States as well as the aspects that are bound to the experience of living in this Puerto Rican island –in contrast to living on the main island.

This project was conceived in February 2001, but its genesis lies much further back in the past. The same day David Sanes died, in the spring of 1999, I remember coming back from a camping trip in the nearby island-municipality of Culebra, where the Navy also conducted military practices until the 1970's. Since both Vieques and Culebra's ferry boats come in and out of the same port at Fajardo, during my long wait for Culebra's ferry, I was able to observe and experience all the trouble that both Vieques' and Culebra's residents go through every time they visit the main island of Puerto Rico, which is quite often. At the same time, I also remember asking myself, why I have never visited Vieques? Nonetheless, I was able to go to Vieques on May 8, 1999, when the Puerto Rican Independence Party or PIP (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño) began its civil disobedience campaign which lasted almost a year.

Indeed, at that point in my life, I had very little knowledge about Vieques, aside from the fact that it is physically separated from the main island and that therefore a boat or airplane is needed to get there. I did, however, have some knowledge about the U.S military presence in Vieques. Consequently, these concerns and lack of knowledge led me to address the current situation in Vieques from an

anthropological perspective. This perspective is based on the assertion that the health and environmental issues that are at stake bear upon how the Viequenses interpret the experience of living in this island, with an emphasis on what they believed to be harmful to their health and the environment.

Ever since I decided to conduct my research on Vieques, I kept repeating two conversations in my mind that I had with two old friends. One of them told me that I should go to Vieques one day and try to enter the military restricted areas because the Navy has the most beautiful and pristine beaches in the world. My other conversation was with a friend who was about to become a Navy Seal who said that during his training he had been able to see lobsters fly dozens of feet in the air because of the bombs they dropped as part of their training in Vieques. While the former emphasizes the beauty of the island, he implicitly suggests that Viequenses do not have free-access to some of the island's beaches. My other friend, in contrast, openly expressed, with a sense of pride, that he takes part in the constant destruction of the same island's natural beauty that my other friend alluded to. How could two Puerto Ricans of the same age have such contrasting views regarding the Navy's land ownership and military practices? Indeed, this type of contradiction will be addressed in greater detail in what follows.

To me, having the image of pristine beaches at the mercy of bombs, led me to think that the now famous slogan Peace for Vieques made more than sense. In addition, the errant bomb that killed Sanes has also awakened my desire to know more about the discontents of this island's community and the poor conditions under

which they live. I would argue, however, that this slogan represents more than just an appeal to get the Navy out of Vieques, but also that it is not universally shared in the same manner by all residents of Vieques. Therefore, since I contend that scholarship and political awareness should not be separated, what follows represents my attempt to combine a critical understanding of Vieques' complexities and sociocultural phenomena with a particular focus on how discourses are employed to represent these complexities and how they should be changed.

Furthermore, I would like to stress that to focus narrowly on the environmental health problems that are believed to be caused by the military maneuvers is to neglect the economic instability in Vieques and the health disparities compared to the rest of Puerto Rico. This alone makes it a worthwhile subject for any social scientist. As many Vieques residents argue, they not only suffer from exposure to toxic contamination. One only needs to visit the island to realize the aspects that affect them the most. They suffer the consequences of having a poor economy, high unemployment rates, and poor medical services, among other things. As a result of these circumstances, they depend on visiting the main island for jobs, medical care, goods, and even college education. Their ability to take advantage of local resources, for instance, is limited because they are sandwiched or imprisoned by two military boundaries. This situation has been further complicated by Puerto Rico's economic instability and the inattention to the Viequesens' concerns by Puerto Rican administrations for many years prior to the accident that took away Sanes' life.

Since the death of Sanes, coverage and discussions about the whole controversy have been mainly addressed by the mass media. In addition, inspired by health and ecological concerns, many state and privately-sponsored epidemiological and environmental surveys have been pieced together as attempts to reveal the environmental destruction due to the military practices as well as the possible harmful influence of naval contaminants on the local population. Without dismissing the importance of this type of information, my research adds to this literature by taking a different approach. It is not my intention to assess how many Viequenses support the Navy's withdrawal from Vieques. Nor do I intend to provide a scientific explanation of the aspects that connect the presence of naval contaminants with high cancer rates. Rather, my task is an interpretative one. It draws upon anti-Navy utterances to examine many of the socio-political aspects as they impact the health concerns among the Vieques residents. Drawing upon both new environmental anthropology and critical medical anthropology's conception of the body, these health and ecological concerns are mediated by cultural perceptions about the environment and its relationship to the body in health and illness. In a related fashion, I also address some of the cultural aspects that are being employed in the anti-Navy discourses. Ultimately, it is also my intention to provide a window into the context from which these protests emerged, the current state of the grievances, and the direction in which the dispute is heading.

Theoretical Approach

As stated above, the approach employed in this thesis relies heavily on both new environmental anthropology and critical medical anthropology's conception of the body for what they offer to come to grips with the global, local, and individual processes that mediate health and environmental concerns. Despite the fact that a quick survey of anthropological literature reflects a lack of emphasis on the impact of military facilities on host societies, both bodies of literature help build a theoretical framework to understand how people articulate and perceive their health and environmental concerns, as well as how they call for action and organization around their demands.

Up until the 1960s, cultural anthropology's traditional approach to culture was characterized by concerns for structure, norm, and symbols, but now the state of affairs within the discipline lacks such a shared set of terms (Ortner 1984). This, in effect, led the field into a "creative crisis of reorientation and renewal" (Rosaldo 1989: 28). This is not to say, however, that there are no trends or schools of thought that guide current research and concerns. For instance, this thesis is based on and intends to contribute to a growing literature that focuses on understanding environmentalism and conceptions of body, self, emotion, resistance, and the environment (Shepard-Hughes 1994 & Singer 1989).

The overall approach in this thesis is particularly informed by the poststructuralist's influence on anthropological theory and practice. Influenced by the works of French scholar Michel Foucault, this intellectual movement is well known

for its contribution to the study discourses while examining how they are related to different power structures (politics, economics, cultural, and social) and the assumption behind social practices and institutions. Thus here I offer a discursive analysis that "stems from the recognition of the importance of the dynamics of discourse and power" (Escobar 1995:vii) as they impact the health and ecological concerns of the Viequenses and how they are perceived by those who identify with the struggle against the Navy.

The term 'discourse' bears implications of both process and substance and it is in this dual sense that it becomes an object of analysis. According to Milton, in the sense of process, it "denotes social reality is constituted by the organization of knowledge," while as a substance it is a "field of communication defined by its subject matter or the type of language used" (1993:8). Following Rappaport (1994) and Milton (1993), I would argue that the anti-Navy discourse it is not just a form of communication about their health and environmental concerns, but also the processes whereby our understanding of their grievances and where the realms of the "might have been," the "should be," and the "may always be" are constituted. Discourses also reveal how we give meaning to an entire field of memories and experiences that can be contain political significance. My contention is that the experiences that become part of the main anti-Navy discourse are those that support the idea that the struggle is defined in terms of human rights while avoiding the status issue.

Furthermore, like this view of the term 'discourse', culture also has the dual sense of substance and power. Milton writes, "in a substantive sense, culture refers to

the complex of ideas (norms, values, representations and so on) through which people understand the world and which form a basis for action” (1993:8). In its processual sense, however, culture differs from discourse because it has been linked to notions of what Gupta and Ferguson call “a culture” –that is, “the idea that a world of human difference is to be conceptualized as a diversity of separate societies each with its own culture” (1997:1). With this in mind, it is my contention that the Vieques’ situation allows the anti-military movement to articulate a discourse that combines the local fishermen as the main “culturally authentic” representation of a locally established resistance with human rights.

Puerto Rico’s colonial status reflects what Wolf calls the structural mode of power, which “shapes the social field of action so as to render some kinds of behavior possible, while making others less possible or impossible” (1994:219). Similarly, I will also utilize the concept of ‘social suffering’ in order to grasp “the results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to the people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems” (Das, Kleinman & Lock 1997: ix).

This approach has been framed to highlight and understand the reemergence of the anti-Navy movement of the 1970s and 80s and its widespread support by a broad spectrum of political and social sectors, which materialized into nationwide demonstrations. Hundreds of Puerto Ricans camped inside the firing-range for a year until federal marshals removed them on May 1, 2000. Of particular importance is to analyze how these protests have raised health related issues, such as high cancer rates

and cardiac problems among Viequenses, environmental damages, and fear of physical and emotional distress. Following Milton (1993), I would argue that the Vieques' struggle serves as a good example to test the assumption that the tools of discourse are used to generate social change. These protests must also be understood as the ways in which the Viequenses articulate their understanding of their grievances and about the political contexts that legitimize the US Navy's presence and to what extent it should be changed in order to guarantee Vieques' well being.

It is worth noting that the process of articulating a discourse is mediated by power, in that it is important to address who gets to define the grievances and responsibilities. Certainly, an attempt should be made to analyze the context in which the protests have taken place, as well as its political, social, and economic implications of the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. On the other hand, and bearing in mind that the Viequenses should not be seen as passive political agents, an effort is made to study the extent to which their concerns, feelings, and protests have been influenced by political leaders, reports about environmental damages, epidemiological investigations, and ongoing debates regarding Vieques future development.

Field Research

In this project I employed a variety of methods to examine how Puerto Rican political and community leaders and Vieques residents articulate their feelings toward the US Navy presence and its association with health related issues in the island. It

combines participant-observation, interviews, and archival analysis. Over the past two years (Spring 1999 to Spring 2001), I closely followed the development of the controversy through the examination of documentaries, local newspapers, newsletters, pamphlets and other social movement publications. In this examination, I focused on the expressions made by a variety of protest leaders with regard to their perception of Vieques health problems. In doing so, I intend to answer the question of why health concerns have the ability to spark people to a nationwide protest and express an anti-military discontent, especially when, in the past, this sentiment has been almost exclusively associated with the pro-independence followers in Puerto Rico.

Over the course of a month-long study, I acquired data through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and by attending public meetings. In order to conduct the interviews and acquire first hand information regarding daily life in Vieques, I spent the majority of February 2001 living on the island. I initiated my research with day-to-day casual socialization while visiting the principal communities of the island. This allowed me to meet and develop informal relationships with community members and possible informants.

Because of the short-term nature of this project, it did not benefit from developing long-term relationships with many informants (i.e. establish rapport), which is one of the aspects that have historically characterized the ethnographic enterprise. Nonetheless, my personal characteristics, or what Kondo (1990) calls the "salient features of identity" helped me bridge the gap with my informants. As a

Puerto Rican who was born and raised on the main island, my physical characteristics and my language fluency (Spanish) were qualities that gave me the ‘cultural competence’ to project myself as a ‘native anthropologist’ studying his ‘own culture’. It did not take me long, however, to experience feelings of strangeness, especially during the early stages of my research. These feelings became more evident in public places or activities, such as waiting for the ferry on the port, or taking a ride in the público (jitney with more or less fixed routes system of privately own vehicles). They taught me that in Vieques, as many residents claim, “everybody knows each other.” While residents were chatting with each other and saying enthusiastic “hellos” to everyone they knew, they were all aware of who is a visitor and who is not. Consequently, embarking in my inquiries involved overcoming early fears about a Puerto Rican from the main island speaking for them. Unlike me, Viequenses are direct actors and agents in a continuing story that is loaded with implications for the island’s future.

I interviewed fifteen members of the several Vieques communities who are currently residing on the island. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. They were contacted mainly through day-to-day encounters in public places and meetings. With the exception of well-known public figures and government officials, I offered anonymity to all participants. I fully explained my project to all interested parties and conducted most of the interviews when the informants were not working. The majority of the interviews were done in Spanish and all of the translations are my own.

In most cases participants seemed to enjoy the chance to explain their concerns as well as to explore aspects of their unequal relationship between the main land and Vieques. They were asked to respond to a set of general open-ended questions, which lasted between 25 minutes to 1 hour. These questions intended to address their general impressions to several key issues regarding the experience of living in Vieques and how both the Navy presence and Puerto Rico's government neglect on the municipality have impacted this experience.

With regard to their general impressions and experiences about life in Vieques, we discussed how they felt about the transportation problems, their perception of the efficiency of the health services in the island, and the neglect of the Puerto Rican government toward them. After conversing about these general impressions I moved on to discuss how they feel about the US Navy presence and asked them to what extent they think health related issues of the Viequeses are due to the US Navy military maneuvers. During many interviews other subjects were brought in for discussion. Some of these included their dependence on the Fajardo municipality's public health care system, historic encounters between Vieques residents and soldiers, alternatives for promoting Vieques' future development, and to what extent Vieques' well-being represents a challenge to the colonial status of Puerto Rico as a whole, among others.

Bearing in mind that opportunity and serendipity usually characterize the ethnographic process, I was able to attend demonstrations, political meetings, and cultural activities in order to understand who participates in such activities and the

points where political divisions have emerged. Although my research focuses on a discursive analysis, I attempted throughout my stay to employ the strategy of participant observation to supplement these interviews with first-hand observations of health care facilities, schools, and several public buildings in the two main towns of Isabel II and Esperanza, where I stayed. I also shopped in local stores, ate in restaurants, and traveled to and from the island by ferry, which gave me an idea of the Viequenses' and Culebrenses' (who also live off the east coast of the main island) transportation problems. For the most part, I was also able to observe and converse casually with many Vieques residents. Formal interviews were not possible with these individuals, but I was able to engage in many informative discussions about many aspects, such as the health care system. While it is hard to quantify informal conversations, they are indeed a valuable source of information because informants are less self-conscious of their remarks when the tape-recorder is off and when I was not taking notes.

Perhaps due to the civil disobedience campaign, numerous protests and lawsuits, during my stay there was a halt on the military maneuvers, so I did not experience the sounds and fears of the thundering assaults nor the dusty clouds that the residents constantly mention. The political atmosphere was relatively calm yet charged in light of the Navy's announcement of its plans to soon resume the military training. This made me realize, or at least be aware of, the politics of this type of research. As McCafrey (1999) also stresses, in Vieques, where activists expended so much effort on building a consensus at a local, national and international level, I

quickly discovered that there was no such thing as “objective research.” From the beginning of my fieldwork people inquired about my position on the Navy conflict, which gets complicated by the fact that in Vieques everybody knows each other. In absence of any definitive ethnographic guidelines, I went with my conscience and joined the picket line in front of Camp Garcia’s main gates in Vieques, despite being aware that I may have jeopardized interviewing many Viequenses who were ambivalent or in favor of the Navy.

As the topic of my project is sensitive and politically charged, I also found myself trying to rephrase some questions. For instance, in some cases, instead of referring to the Navy bombs and contaminants right away, I decided to start by asking about the Navy as a neighbor. This also leads me to stress that I was careful to indicate that I was not working for any organization or government agency but as an independent student affiliated with Western Michigan University.

Overview of Chapters

The following discussion is organized on the basis of three main themes. While it is aimed at understanding the anti-Navy discourse, this thesis attempts to address: (a) the controversy within the colonial context (b) anthropology’s relevance to the anti-Navy environmental discourse, and (c) how this discourse seems to be intended to provoke certain types of political communication and actions. By tracing the development of the grievances regarding the military presence on Vieques, the opening chapter provides a background to the controversy that has been brewing for

decades. While providing a brief socio-political analysis, this overview presents the opposing views that have arisen about the use of the land and military maneuvers as well as their effects upon the Vieques population's health, environment, and the community in general. Since the US Navy La Marina is more than a symbol of United States power upon Puerto Rico, I also attempt to situate this whole controversy within the existing colonial status of PR.

The theoretical approach constitutes the main subject of the second chapter. It examines the new environmental anthropology's theoretical relevance to addressing the type of discourse that has been articulated by the anti-Navy front. I present the idea of Vieques as an environmental hotspot in order to challenge anthropology's contribution to address the anti-Navy environmental discourse, and the place of health issues discourses within this anti-Navy rhetoric. Regarding the health issues, critical medical anthropology's conception of "body" is also discussed. This represents an effort to present the "body" as a site or arena of the social suffering and power relations that take place in Vieques.

Finally, chapter III deals with mass media representations and images about the Vieques' situation that attempt to sidestep the political nature of the conflict. The act of recognizing and/or denouncing the political implications of the controversy is an attempt to exclude the most problematic issue in Puerto Rican culture –the relationship with the US. Here, a historical perspective about the anti-Navy movement is also provided. In doing so, I attempt to draw some conclusions about how the movement's perception or concerns have changed, from rallying around the

cultural icon of fishermen to transforming the struggle into a human rights issue after the death of Sanes.

CHAPTER II

THE CONTROVERSY

For the past two years, the abrupt appearance of bumper stickers, posters, and small flags proclaiming Peace for Vieques and Navy Out, among others, have been seen everywhere across Puerto Rico. These expressions are obvious symbols of the broad support and general consensus among thousands of Puerto Ricans who have rallied in support of the idea that the US Navy should immediately cease military training in the island-municipality of Vieques. Though short-lived, this consensus is the result of once seemingly impossible alliances between sectors of the Puerto Rican society that have been traditionally in dispute regarding virtually every aspect of its relationship with the United States. All of these sectors agree upon the fact that La Marina (the U.S. Navy) can no longer conduct its military practices in Vieques because they have adversely created serious health and environmental problems.

The most important aspect of this coalition is that it united the three competing political parties. These parties have historically represented different status ideologies (commonwealth, statehood, and independence), dividing the political support across its islands¹ into what Carr (1984) calls the “three discrete spheres of discourse.” In what follows, I would argue that the “success” of such rare consensus lies in the assertion that leaders of all status ideologies, along with religious and union leaders, gathered on a common anti-Navy front by momentarily

putting their differences aside and defining the conflict between the U.S. Navy and Vieques residents as a human rights issue, while avoiding addressing the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico.

Furthermore, even though Vieques' problems "are political in nature" (McCafrey 1999:9), it is argued here that the status issue is sidestepped because it is largely contested by all sectors, the current commonwealth status quo benefits from not questioning it, and thus it is disruptive for achieving high levels of national and international support. Reflecting upon the political nature of the Vieques issue, a resident points out that "it really demands a status resolution between statehood and independence." But he sarcastically reflects, "it seems that we need one hundred more years to decide. In the meantime the government has kept us (Viequenses) secret and looking in the opposite direction."

For decades, Viequenses (especially the fishermen), a few political leaders, and scholars have voiced their dislike of the Navy's unregulated military maneuvers, the usurpation of two thirds of the total land, and the liquidation of Vieques' economic base (McCafrey 1999). However, these concerns ran short of generating the attention and consensus that has been seen in the past two years. Health concerns, on the other hand, have generated such widespread support for the Vieques' struggle and are now placed at the center of a dispute between the U.S. Navy and anti-Navy activists. Few would disagree with the assertion that this situation was triggered by the death of a civilian, David Sanes, and the injuries of four others in Vieques on

¹ It is my contention that if there is something to be learned from undertaking the task of studying and

April 1999, when a Mark-82 bomb was accidentally dropped in the military observation area. But equally important, I would argue, is the fact that for the first time in Puerto Rican history the whole political spectrum is convinced that the naval operations that take place ten miles away from the civilian area have exposed the Vieques population to the effects of open burning and denotation of military ordnance. Thus it is believed by most anti-Navy advocates that the Viequesenses' health is at the mercy of the burning and denotation of chemicals that are used during warfare. In short, concerns over health have managed to unite a diverse political spectrum. But why this is the case? This is a question that thus far seems to elude our understanding of the situation.

Under "Friendly" Fire

The island municipality of Vieques, located seven (7) miles off the east coast of the main island of Puerto Rico, represents an interesting and unique scenario to be studied from an anthropological perspective. This long and narrow island has a total land area of approximately 51 square miles (137km²) and a population of 9,300 inhabitants. Here the U.S. Navy has controlled two-thirds of the land since the early 1940s, "forcing the population [of mainly U.S citizens] to live in a 7,000 acre strip of land sandwiched between a huge munitions depot and a bombing range" (Fernández-Porto and Marquez 2000: 7). Because this population of US citizens lives between two military facilities that belong to the U.S. Navy, this research has broader

writing about Vieques, I must refer to Puerto Rico as a group of islands instead of the "island."

implications for our understanding of the sociopolitical impacts of military training facilities that neighbor local communities around the globe.

Before the U.S. Navy's troops and ships attack a foreign country they practice their military maneuvers at bombing ranges, such as the one in Vieques. But Vieques' firing-range is unique because, for the past sixty years, it is the only place in the Atlantic where the Navy can simultaneously practice their bombardment from air, sea, and land using live ammunition. In fact, when asked about the military usefulness of this small island off the east coast of Puerto Rico, Rear Admiral Eugene Carroll (Deputy Director of the Center for Defense Information) replied:

It is useful because it is part of the largest naval complex in the world. The focus of this naval complex is Roosevelt Roads, on the main island of Puerto Rico, convenient to Vieques. At Roosevelt Roads you have large water areas and air space where you can exercise every element of the naval warfare time. You can use your airplanes, your ships, your submarines, you can fight practice battles, wars and then you proceed to reach the point where you attack or are attacking the enemy. And Vieques is where we land the troops, and we shoot guns, and we drop more bombs to protect the troops that we put at shore. It's part of a total complex that makes Vieques almost unique. It's a total warfare concept there.²

This statement clearly implies that the small Caribbean island of Vieques endures the attacks of the world's greatest Navy, even during times of peace. Ironically, these "attacks" are considered as "friendly" because Puerto Rico is a United States' commonwealth and no one is supposed to get hurt. Puerto Ricans themselves, as U.S. citizens since 1917, are part of the U.S. military personnel, though they "lack the political power to vote for the president that sends them to war" (McCafrey 1999:5).

² Interviewed by National Public Radio (May 2, 2000). Therefore, throughout the following pages, it must be understood that the name Puerto Rico stands for an archipelago and not a single island.

In sharp contrast with the Admiral's statement, consider what Hector, a 50-year-old Vieques resident, has to say about the Navy presence in Vieques. He claims:

I don't like the situation we have with La marina [the US Navy] because of the things they have been exposing our civil population to. We are a society under constant threat and danger. In the United States people are constantly talking about endangered animals and species. Well, Vieques is an endangered society. We have the highest cancer rate, contamination with different sorts of metals. Vieques society has been exposed to a major crisis due to environmental contamination [...] Let me tell you something... in Europe, it is prohibited to conduct military maneuvers with a certain type of bomb. So when Germany, France, and whoever wants to see how a cruiser bomb, for example, can be effectively fired from a ship they come to Vieques. And the Viequenses are part of these maneuvers.

Both statements inform my approach to this issue and must be perceived as contrasting views regarding the military use of this island. While the Navy sometimes refers to Vieques as the "crown jewel" of the Caribbean and vital for national defense, the military practices that are conducted by the Navy are considered threatening to the health of the Island's civilian population. Like Hector, Vieques residents are aware of the attempts that have been made to make public the presence of contaminants due to military live-bombing practices and the possible health related problems caused by an environment that possesses a high concentration of munitions-related toxic contaminants, including heavy metals such as arsenic, barium, cadmium, cobalt, copper, chromium, lead, nickel, vanadium, and zinc (Fernandez-Porto and Márquez 2000).

Politically Vieques is one of the 78 municipios (municipalities) that constitute Puerto Rico. Thus its residents suffer the consequences of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. However, as many Islanders claim, these

consequences affect them the most because of their geographical isolation. The main island is territorially larger and more populous than Vieques, which is why, according to many residents, “they get what is leftover of all federal aid.” This means that financial support to improve infrastructure, for example, is always absorbed by the main island first. This then brings to the fore the question: what aspects of locality mediate this dispute?

Vieques’ geography, its residents, and their lived experiences serve as a clear indication that the struggle to evict the Navy is already rooted in their history and daily life. Many anti-Navy activists speak with pride of their grassroots movements, and fishermen have fought a David versus Goliath kind of war against the Navy. In 1983, for example, the anti-Navy demonstrations and protests reached their highest point when the government of Puerto Rico and the Navy signed an agreement. But it is only in the past two years that Puerto Ricans and the rest of the world have expressed an unprecedented support for their struggle.

Aftermath: the Two Years that Followed the Tragic Death of David Sanes

An overview of the controversy that followed the errant bomb that killed Sanes is of extreme relevance to understanding the issues and concerns that are being addressed throughout this thesis. Two months after the death of Sanes, the former governor of Puerto Rico, Pedro Rosselló, accepted 13 recommendations made by a special commission composed of members chosen by the Governor himself. These recommendations can be summarized by the decision to make the plight of “not one more bomb” (i.e. that every effort will be made to immediately and

permanently stop all military activities) in Vieques and a transfer of all the land that is under Navy control to the Vieques population as the official public policy of the Government of Puerto Rico (Informe al Secretario de Defensa 1999).

Furthermore, the special commission found that the Island's population lives below the poverty level, with 26.3 percent unemployed. Consequently, the Commission realized that the promise of economic development that was part of an agreement in 1983 between the Government of Puerto Rico and the US Navy was unfulfilled. As Falcón points out, “every day there are new revelations about the Navy’s violation of [this] agreement regarding the environment and its promises to provide jobs to Vieques’ residents” (1995:5).

In terms of health, in 1993 the government of P.R. estimated that the cancer rate among Vieques’ citizens is 27% higher than the Puerto Rican average (Puerto Rican Central Cancer Registry 1997). The Navy also admits, despite an earlier denial, that it has tested napalm and fired 263 rounds of depleted uranium-tipped bullets on the island. Since these two anthropogenetic chemicals are believed to be carcinogenic these confessions serve to strengthen cancer narratives on the island. In addition, Viequenses also have an infant mortality rate higher than the average in Puerto Rico. Therefore, I would argue that, just as important as Sanes’ death has been to generating a unified-front to evict the U.S. Navy from Vieques, the claims that the past six decades of live-bombing exercises on Vieques have adversely created serious health and environmental problems have also contributed to generating a consensus.

In his attempt to find a permanent solution to the dispute, former US President Bill Clinton reached an agreement with Governor of Puerto Rico, Pedro Rosselló, on December 1999. For many this so-called agreement was an act of treason by Rosselló and “the President’s unilateral exercise of power over the future of Puerto Rico” (Schmidt-Nieto 2000:36). Under this agreement, the Navy is allowed to practice with inert bombs until the Vieques residents vote on a referendum that was to be held in November 2001. In exchange, Vieques should also receive \$40 million, presumably for infrastructure improvements, as well as the return of one of the two thirds of land that is currently under Navy control. Through this proposed referendum the Viequesenses are to decide whether to permit the Navy to stay indefinitely or force its withdrawal from Vieques soil by May 2003. It is worth noting that should the Viequesenses vote for the Navy’s continuation of its presence, they are offered in exchange \$50 million in federal aid (Harrell and Backiel 2000).

According to Harrel and Baeriel, this agreement reversed what was arguably “the first public policy in [P.R.’s] history to reflect a consensus among political parties and religious and social sectors” (2000:2). Thus, instead of resolving the controversy, it broke a historical yet fragile consensus. Indeed, the recently elected Governor of Puerto Rico, Sila M. Calderón³, who arguably won the election thanks in part to her opposition to the bombing, challenged the agreement, mainly because, as she has clearly stated, the Islander’s health cannot wait three more years. She promised a quick end to any further live-fire training on Vieques. Consequently, both

³ First woman to be elected for this post in Puerto Rican history on November 7, 2000.

the Clinton- Rosselló agreement and the referendum have and will continue to be the focus of growing debate and controversy. Calderón's stance, moreover, calls attention to the fact that she acknowledges that her future actions with regard to Vieques are constantly under scrutiny "now that the whole world is watching," as many protesters declare.

In addition, the results of many privately and state sponsored epidemiological surveys are likely to continue affecting the Viequenses' perception of their health problems. Currently, two years after that deadly bomb killed Sanes and one year after the removal of demonstrators from the range, the Navy announced its plan to conduct training on the island, despite continued protests. This, of course, will generate more political demonstrations, protests, and more civil disobedience and thus arrests on Navy land. Indeed, as of today, many influential public figures have been arrested and imprisoned for participating in the massive civil disobedience campaign, such as Robert Kennedy Jr., Edward James Olmos, Jessie Jackson and Al Sharpton, as well as several Puerto Rican members of Congress, legislators, majors, artists, and religious leaders.

At Vieques

"Now, more than ever, the Viequenses must have their eyes really opened," comments a 60 year-old Vieques resident during her early morning ferry trip to the main island of Puerto Rico. Perhaps, to the majority of the passengers, this statement was simply part of a casual conversation between two Vieques residents. On the

other hand, this may have been an obvious observation with regard to the controversy that has been surrounding the U.S. Navy presence and the remarkable, and at times overwhelming, attention it has generated from many social, political and religious sectors, and the international and national media. To me, this was a simple way to summarize all the information I was able to gather from my field experience on Vieques. Hence the following pages are an attempt to examine why the Viequeses must have their eyes opened regarding their current situation.

Certainly the metaphor of having “their eyes opened” acquires a whole new meaning in light of the turn of events that followed the accident that caused the death of David Sanes. Thus this metaphor implies that this rural community is in the midst of a dispute that is full of political implications that will likely cause significant changes for them and the Puerto Rican society as a whole. It refers, in other words, to the complex and simultaneous issues that have been brewing for nearly sixty years. One of these aspects is that they are aware that there is a referendum coming by the end of the year. The other aspect is that they are enthusiastic, yet overwhelmed by all the protesters from the main island and international celebrities or figures who are constantly visiting the island to participate in many demonstration and civil disobedience campaigns.

Moreover, the word choice of this metaphor emphasizes that it is, first of all, a Vieques’ struggle rather than a Puerto Rican one. As the ferry trip lasted approximately an hour and forty minutes, I was able to listen to what this Vieques resident meant by this metaphor. Let me suggest at the outset that the use of the word

Viequenses, instead of Puerto Ricans “must have their eyes really opened,” serves the purpose of emphasizing that the Vieques residents should be careful about how the anti-Navy discontent translates into projecting a pro-independence image, which is still constantly associated with anti-American and pro-communist sentiments. Thus, according to this resident, the Viequenses must also be careful not to convey a message to Congress and the White House of being anti-American, communist-inspired and/or supporters of a separatist/pro-independence ideology.

Carr argues, rightly I believe, that “it is the status issue that divides the claustrophobic political world of Puerto Rico” (1984:3). This statement bears upon the Vieques resident’s concerns. This Vieques resident is clearly aware that the independentistas (pro-independence followers) from the main island are actively involved in the attempts to evict the Navy because they see in Vieques a symbol of American imperialism. Yet, only a slim minority of Puerto Ricans share this pro-independence stance. The commonwealth and pro-statehood ideologies, on the other hand, have the most followers, making the idea of maintaining permanent relationship with the US as one that is shared by most Puerto Ricans.

Foreseeing that they must decide in favor of either the politics of the status quo or their health, it is significant for the Viequenses not to permit independentistas to lead the anti-Navy movement. Rather those Viequenses who are more worried of their health and environment should take the lead. This is the case because the relationship with the US arguably appears “to govern [Puerto Ricans'] prospects of employment, their income levels, and their living standards” (Carr 1984:3). For

instance, Cabán acknowledges that “in 1988 transfers to Puerto Rico reached almost \$ 6 billion, which accounted for 21 percent of the island’s personal income and 31 percent of the government’s annual receipts” (1993:30). As for Vieques, Langhorne notes that while two small manufacturing plants are the sources of livelihood, “the main reliance has been on various forms of federal welfare, principally food stamps” (1987:65). Not surprisingly, Viequenses and Puerto Ricans as a whole fear substantial reduction of federal transfers, on which Puerto Rico is increasingly dependent to “sustain consumption and the operation of government” (Cabán 1993:30).

Vieques is not the exception to the paradox that has characterized Puerto Rican history. As many scholars have recognized and analyzed, while Puerto Ricans articulate a strong sense of cultural identity and, in this case, dissatisfaction with the military presence on Vieques, they continue to support their political and economic ties with the United States. This indeed supports Kottak’s assertion that “people usually want to change just enough to keep what they have” (1999:34). Consequently, it is unlikely that the issues surrounding the military presence on this island will serve as a catalyst to resolve the status issue or at least redefine Puerto Rico’s relationship to the United States, especially now since it has been framed as a human rights issue –not a colonial one. With this in mind, in what follows I will address how the colonial status becomes what Wolf calls the structural mode of power, which “shapes the social field of action so as to render some kinds of behavior possible, while making others less possible or impossible” (1994:219).

Vieques Within a Colonial Context

Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States is certainly a complex topic that has been addressed by scholars and politicians from many different perspectives. Nonetheless, many scholars agree upon the fact that over the past century colonialism and U.S. Citizenship have been directly exposing Puerto Ricans to the political, economic, and social influence of the United States. Although Puerto Rico occupies a particular place within U.S. politics, as of today the U.S. has not made any efforts toward defining the nature of Puerto Rico's status. Bearing this in mind, the following is a brief summary of this complex and often conflicted relationship.

After 400 years of Spanish colonialism, Puerto Rico (along with the islands of Vieques, Culebra, and Mona) was acquired by the United States in 1898 as war booty in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. During the following half century, it was treated as a formal colony in which the Department of War exercised direct jurisdiction (McCaffrey 1999). Over the course of 35 years it was governed by mainly retired military officers who were appointed by U.S. Presidents to rule as they saw fit. Importantly, during this period (in 1917) and despite opposition of Puerto Rico's House of Delegates, Congress declared Puerto Ricans as United States citizens (Meléndez and Meléndez 1993). As Morris points out, "citizenship was a way to bring Puerto Rico, with its strategic Caribbean location and potential recruits for the armed forces, more tightly into the U.S. fold on the eve of World War I" (1993:33). As US citizens, Puerto Ricans are thus subject to federal laws, though "they are not

permitted to vote in US elections or influence the political decisions that effect most aspects of their lives” (Dávila 1997:2). In contrast to the millions of Puerto Ricans who migrated to continental U.S. However, US citizenship is currently cherished and highly valued by the majority of the Puerto Ricans, according to the Governor of Puerto Rico, Sila M. Calderón.⁴

In 1952 Puerto Rico was transformed into the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Later on the U.S. government announced to the United Nations that Puerto Rico was no longer a colony. The notion of commonwealth is an agreement with the United States that defines Puerto Rico, under Public Law 600 (PL 600), as a self-governing authority, not to be mistaken with being an independent political entity. Under this commonwealth Puerto Ricans are allowed to run local affairs but still be under federal jurisdiction. This is the case because “the U.S. grant of self-governance was provisional,” writes Cabán (1993:21). Congress can still unilaterally annul the Puerto Rican Constitution, revoke Public Law 600 “and veto any insular legislation which deems unwise or improper” (Cabán 1993:21).

The idea of commonwealth status was devised by Luis Muñoz Marín, who was a follower of former President Roosevelt and became the Puerto Rico’s first elected governor in 1948. As Carr points out, “commonwealth” is an unhappy translation of *Estado Libre Asociado* (Free Associated State), which means:

Puerto Rico is a “state” that, on the basic principle of the consent of governed, freely chose to be associated with, but not form part of, the United States –a territory with powers of local self-government

⁴ Ibid.

resembling, but constitutionally quite distinct from, those of a state of the Union [1984:4].

As a result of these ambiguities, it has remained a non-incorporated territory (i.e. it belongs to, but is not part of the US). P.R. has only one representative with a non-deciding vote in Congress.

According to Cabán, “U.S. colonial policy toward Puerto Rico has historically been propelled by two considerations: utilizing Puerto Rico’s strategic location in a region of critical geopolitical significance, and securing a favorable investment climate for U.S. business”(1993:20). A century later U.S. military presence in Puerto Rico has expanded significantly as part of a “regional network of installations of varied sizes and purposes reinforcing U.S. dominance” over the Caribbean and in the governance of Puerto Rico (García Muñiz 1993:53). For instance, “with numerous military complexes throughout the island, the military directly controls a significant portion of Puerto Rican arable land” (García in McCafrey 1999). In Vieques, for example, the Navy has not relinquished control over the large portions of the productive land that they acquired with the expropriations of the 1940s. Fernández notes that “the Navy, after all, not only took the land, it confiscated the best of the sugar lands...[and] effectively destroyed the economy of the community” (1994:249).

Roosevelt’s New Deal helped set in motion a form of local economic development that was combined with massive migration to the U.S. and the buildup of military facilities. During the 1950s and 1960s the Commonwealth status achieved high levels of support while Puerto Rico enjoyed the PPD’s [Partido Popular Democrático] economic development program, based on rapid industrialization and

U.S. investment in manufacturing, known as Operation Bootstrap (Meléndez and Meléndez 1993:1). Currently, Puerto Rico's economy is an appendage of the U.S. economy, given the fact that it is not allowed to have commercial treaties with other countries without U.S. flagged ships. In addition, government incentives that attracted many companies to establish in Puerto Rico, such as tax exemptions, loans, common currency and free access to the U.S. market, are being phased out over a ten year period and, more importantly, no longer serve as comparative advantages in relation to neighboring countries (see Dietz and Pantojas-García 1993).

Following McCafrey (1999), I would argue that the Navy presence on Vieques is legitimized by the incongruence, struggles, and ambivalence that surround Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States. In fact, Carr argues that "it is hard to resist the conclusion that [the] Commonwealth [status] suits the Navy admirably" (1984:311). As Victor, a Vieques resident, claims "Vieques is a colonial island...Puerto Rico is a colony and Vieques belongs to Puerto Rico." Yet, until recently, U.S. politicians have largely overlooked Vieques and its residents' concerns and Puerto Ricans from the main island in general. Therefore, the hierarchical relations between Puerto Rico and the United States, as well as the PR-Vieques' unequal relation must be understood. Moreover, it is on Vieques, locals point out, where both the US Navy and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces rehearsed before intervening at Kuwait, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Somalia to protect the weak from the strong. In other words, issues concerning the U.S. military presence in

Vieques bear upon broad topics, such as globalization, current affairs, international relations, and world politics.

Drawing upon the colonialist historical context, this chapter has attempted to summarize the Vieques controversy. It is intended to apply Wolf's (1994) notion of structural mode of power to Puerto Rico's colonial status. Both the Puerto Rican colonial status and the unequal relationship between Vieques and the rest of Puerto Rico are factors that shape the social field of action. I contend that because of the colonial context, the anti-Navy movement depends upon building informal sources of national and international support. Under the current constitutional agreement Puerto Rico lacks formal participation (legislative or diplomatic) in the shaping of defense policies that obviously have direct consequences for Vieques (García 1993). Thus, despite enjoying such a broad consensus supporting the Vieques' struggle, having a second-class American citizenship, one representative with a non-deciding vote, and economic dependence on the U.S., both the anti-Navy movement and the Puerto Rican government lack the ability to permanently end the military practices in Vieques by means of public policies, vote, and congressmen, etc.

One would have predicted that the type of discourse to emerge from Vieques would directly address the "colonial" situation. But, knowing that Puerto Rico's status discussions divide the island into at least three ideological camps, the anti-Navy movement chose to construct a discourse that emphasizes the resident's social suffering not their political status. This is why the metaphor of having their "eyes opened" illustrates the position on such a politically charged situation. In short, it is

not the colonial status what the Viequense want to change but their situation with the Navy as well as the economy and health care. Thus, it is against this backdrop of contradictory development outcomes that the current Vieques situation and the need for national and international consensus have to be understood.

CHAPTER III

VIEQUES: AN ENVIRONMENTAL HOTSPOT

The island of Vieques represents the disorder of the world's arms race, where after the Cold War, in the globalization we face, the armies of different nations and especially the armed forces of the U.S. which is the most powerful in the world serving the armament industry wants to continue selling and testing weapons; and Vieques is where 10,000 American citizens are used as guinea pigs to see how these weapons are used and how they function (Monseñor Alvaro Corrada Del Río, in Bermúdez Ruiz 2000).

The most important thing that we must remember is that the environmental aspect is intimately connected to the health of the Viequenses... the environmental impacts that are caused by the Navy in Vieques are not isolated from the people. Thus lets consider this element –the relationship between environment and health- and add it to the reasons to fight toward evicting the Navy from Vieques [Fernández-Porto in Vieques ante los ojos del pueblo 2000:28].

Both statements were made by positioned actors who attempt to make an immediate and lasting impression. Their position is simple to understand; both contend that we must not lose sight of the fact that Vieques is lived in by bodies that are directly or indirectly affected by the damaging ecological and health consequences of the military maneuvers. On the one hand, by demanding immediate political action, Fernandez Porto's statement goes far beyond a simple warning about the effects of these maneuvers. Monseñor Corrada Del Río, on the other hand, points out that seemingly unrelated geopolitical and international relations bear directly on the issue of the Navy presence on Vieques and suggest answers to why the Navy does not want to leave, despite constant protests. Together these assertions lead me to

contend that Vieques is indeed a clear example of how health and the environment, as well as their relationship, are affected by sociopolitical and economic conditions. This issue calls for an understanding of Vieques' environmentalism, while taking into account the global and local economic, political, and cultural aspects as they impact the health and environmental concerns of its residents.

This chapter is an exploration of the relationship between anthropology and Vieques' environmentalism. This is done with the intention of leading the discussion toward the next chapter, which focuses on the discourse that is being created around the Navy presence in Vieques and its relationship with health and environmental problems. Of course, when addressing this relationship we must take into account the local conceptions of both the environment and risk perceptions. Vieques is indeed an environmental hotspot (area of deforestation or pollution) that is loaded with controversies, as pointed out in the previous chapter. As Monseñor Corrada Del Río's statement reflects, the global forces or the need to test arms while exposing civilians to their effects as "guinea pigs" seem to have been increasingly influencing the impossibility of living a peaceful life in Vieques. Then we must ask: how can anthropology contribute to the understanding of these issues?

The environmentalism that takes place in Vieques is unique in many ways, particularly because it is anti-Navy. In Vieques, the death of Sanes, the alarming high cancer rates and the eminent presence of contaminants in the water and air have mobilized Puerto Ricans from different sociopolitical backgrounds to articulate an environmental discourse that stresses that the military training that takes place in the

island is detrimental to the environment and represents health risks for the residents. Thus emphasizing that illness, as Scheper-Hughes would argue, “is more than just an unfortunate brush with nature” (1990:232). In other word, Vieques’ health problems indicate that by living in this island residents are constantly exposed to an environment that hosts potentially harmful pollutants.

New Environmental Anthropology

If one accepts the anthropological cliché that culture is the mechanism through which human beings interact with (or, more controversially, adapt to) their environment, then the whole field of cultural anthropology can be characterized as human ecology [Milton 1993:4].

What follows supports the assumption that human interaction with the environment is a prominent area of inquiry for many anthropologists. For the past few decades anthropological research has slowly embraced the challenge of addressing both environmental issues and environmentalism mainly as a reaction to the rapid proliferation of environmental activism as well as a sharp rupture between the “old” ecological anthropology of the 1960s and 1970s and what is now known as the “new” or contemporary environmental anthropology. This rupture is both theoretical and practical and paved the way for an anthropological engagement with environmentalism (Little 1999, Brosius 1999). This rather recent research agenda has taken a fundamental role within the discipline under the rubric of new ecological anthropology, or political and human ecology.

In March of 1999 the American Anthropologist published a series of articles under the title “Ecologies for Tomorrow” as part of the “Contemporary Issues

Forum.” Interestingly, the majority of the articles that were published under this heading dealt explicitly with the legacy of Roy Rappaport’s work, portraying Rappaport (1927-1997) as the leading figure in the debates that resulted in the transformation of the old-to-new ecological anthropology. On the one hand, the “old” ecological anthropology of the 1960s has been recently criticized for being functionalist, apolitical, and for relying on systems theory, an adaptive view of culture, and a focus on negative feedback. The new ecological or environmental anthropology, on the other hand, “blends theory with political awareness and policy concerns” in ecological processes (Kottak 1999: 23). In short, whereas in the former the study of adaptation to specific ecosystems was said to provide explanations of customs and institutions, the latter draws its insight from analyzing issues of power and inequality, and discourse. Thus this forum provides a series of articles in the new ecologies (symbolic, historical, and political ecology) prepared by those who collaborated with, or learned from Rappaport, and understand that there is a relationship between his legacy and emerging terrains of inquiry. But to what extent it can aid us to better understand anti-Navy utterance?

Biersack (1999) offers what I consider an accurate introductory background to what she calls the three new ecologies: symbolic, historical, and political. However, following Wolf (1999), Gezon (1999), Kottak (1999), and Escobar (1996), I would argue that symbolic ecology’s usefulness should be seen in light of its contribution to historical and, more importantly, political ecology. Thus, as I will discuss, in the historical and political ecology the symbolic nature of the ecological processes is

incorporated into the political domain, so that they should not be analyzed outside of power relations. In general terms, historical ecology focuses on the way in which “the environment is historically and culturally produced through human-nature interactions” (Biersack 1999:9). Keeping this in mind, it would be misleading to ignore Marx and Engels’ contribution concerning their understanding of the human-nature interactions. Marx and Engels were among the first in Western philosophy to argue that while humans act upon nature through labor, they not only transform it, but also themselves, in the process. In Marx’s words, “it is as clear as noon-day that man, by his industry, changes the materials furnished to him by Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him” (in Lansing 1971 & Biersack 1999:9). This clearly challenges the nature-culture dualism, as “the relationship between humans and the environment is actually dialectical for, in the course of reshaping nature, society gradually reshapes itself” (Biersack 1999:9). Within the Marxist tradition, moreover, nature is no longer perceived as the stock of raw materials, instead it becomes a space (i.e. environment) that is culturally and historically produced, in other words, a historical product of social relations. Bearing this in mind we must then perceive environmentalism as the demands to control human activity that is in some way adversely affecting the environment. Environmentalism brings to the fore the fact that our interaction with the environment can be perceived “both as the source of environmental problems and as the key to their solution” (Milton 1993:5).

This approach also mirrors the rupture that crystallized between medical ecology and critical medical anthropology. Posing both a challenge and a critique of

the former approach, critical medical anthropology emphasizes the “importance of political and economic forces, including the exercise of power, in shaping health, disease, illness experience, and health care” (Singer and Baer 1995:5). Based on the idea that “restructuring of social relationships can have a radical impact on the health status and health care systems of a society,” many advocates of this critical approach in medical anthropology agree upon the assertion that “understanding the nature and determinants of social transformation should be issues of central concern to medical anthropology” (Singer 1989:230). Simply put, they contend that health and illness are mediated by both social and natural factors. But in their analysis they place an emphasis on the social issues that are usually linked to power and play into health and illness since these are the ones that can be more effectively changed and controlled.

While some scholars might be primarily concerned with the physical processes involved in environmental degradation, new environmental anthropology has a particular interest on the cultural and sociopolitical aspects that give rise to specific environmental problems. According to Singer, development and the expansion of capitalism have become “the most significant transcending social processes in the contemporary historic epoch” (1990: 21). Thus they can be perceived as some of the main forces that motivate human interaction with the environment. It has been argued, moreover, that new ecological anthropologists cannot be neutral observers of the ways that these external agents increasingly endanger local communities and ecosystems.

Regarding development Kottak (1999) asserts that environmentalism (as a social concern) “has arisen with and in opposition to the expansion” of development’s cultural model (i.e. developmentalism). It comes as no surprise that we often hear environmental activism or environmentalism linked to activities related to multinational corporations, pesticides, waste dumping and nuclear testing, while it is rare to hear about US military bases creating ecological damage and putting the lives of neighboring communities in danger. Little (1999), for instance, points out that many scholars have identified the unequal “ecological distribution of conflicts,” which involves the actions of multinational oil, mining, and agrobusiness companies that internationalize their toxic waste and environmental destruction. It is rare, however, to find reference to a military facility as an agent that is causing ecological problems. Indeed such an “ecological distribution of conflicts” does not take into account the possibility of military target practices creating environmental problems. But, if there is something that clearly stands out of the Vieques issue is that when the military forces of a given country decide to use a portion of land for military maneuvers, it is likely to transform both the physical and social landscape. I would argue that its transformative nature could be seen as similar to that of development.

It is worth noting that the effects of external forces, such as military training, upon a host community are not always straightforward and universal. This then generates diverse environmental movements and discourses. This is the case because the degree of ecological impact on a given location is different as well as both the historical and social contexts that allow the presence of such external forces (Kottak

1999). According to Milton, “culture is both the object of anthropological analysis and the enterprise in which anthropologists, along with everyone else, subjectively engage” (1993:1). With this in mind, I contend that anthropology can significantly contribute to understanding the environmental and health discourse mainly because it takes into consideration the historical and cultural aspects that play a crucial role in how people articulate their concerns and call for political action.

This is a rather complicated subject that deserves a considerable degree of overlap between two otherwise different theoretical trends within the discipline. More specifically, it is my contention that both new environmental anthropology and medical anthropology’s conception of the body can contribute to our understanding of the Vieques environmental activism. In briefly discussing and integrating both trends, my intention is to address how they have not only advocated for critical understanding of human impact on the physical environment but also in illustrating how this relationship is constructed, narrated, represented, and contested (Little 1999; Milton 1993; Brosius 1999). This arises because these two lines of anthropological inquiry, I would argue, have converged on challenging the idea that health can be perceived as a measure of environmental adaptation, mainly because “human interaction with the environment is widely perceived both as the source of environmental problems and as the key to their solution” (Milton 1993:5). In addition, they are both ultimately concerned with how human action affects the environment and the impact that this might have on society.

New ecological anthropology's approach to developmentalism reflects how the political economy school of thought is influencing it. For it shifts from focusing supposedly isolated communities, to recognizing the pervasive linkages and impacts on the flows of people, technology, images, and information. In this sense, political ecology and political economy are linked to "explore the role of power relations in determining human uses of the environment" (Biersack 1999:10). However, Kottak observes that we "must be careful not to remove humans and their specific social and cultural forms from the analytic framework" (1999:23).

Regarding critical medical anthropology it would be impossible to make reference to its critical gaze without recognizing the influence of the political economy school of thought. As Morsy (1990) points out, one influence of political economy in medical anthropology is to bring into focus how global power relations pertain to local health systems and concerns. In addition, if political economy teaches us anything, it is that the global nature of policies and economies are inseparable. For example, in their article N. and N. Kanji, and Manji (1990), argue that the economic crisis and health problems in sub-Saharan Africa need to be understood in the context of the class formation that came with the colonial legacy and then exacerbated by structural adjustment programs. In their analysis they stress the assertion that the structural adjustments and the preconditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for their loans produced economic changes (i.e.; privatization, and export oriented economies), in which social inequalities were exacerbated. Consequently, the very poor of these societies were the ones who

suffered these changes the most. For example, the privatization of hospitals affected them the most because they found themselves in need of the one thing they lack the most (money) to receive health care.

In Vieques these changes took the form of regionalization of the health care system. With only one medical facility (Susana Centero Center for Family Health), medical services are seriously limited. Although the center has a laboratory and x-rays installations, they lack qualified and certified technicians to operate them. By regionalizing medical services, Viequenses have to go to the main medical facilities in the region. These medical facilities are located in Fajardo, a municipality located at the northeastern side of the main island. Since 1985, though residents stress it occurred earlier, many services that used to be provided by the local hospital are now provided only in the main island, forcing sick and elderly residents to travel to Fajardo, with all the challenges and inconveniences this poses. To make matters worse, the only boat that can transport Viequenses to this municipality comes only three to four times a day. In short, the lack of government support plays an important role in the health problems in Vieques. Thus the government of Puerto Rico did not improve services on the island.

Almost of all of my interviewees were frustrated and dissatisfied with the local medical services. In fact, only emergency cases are attended at this local facility, moving to Puerto Rico those cases that cannot be treated properly in Vieques. John, a continental American who lives in Vieques, remembers a situation that clearly

represents how difficult it is to get health services for Vieques residents after this so-called reform:

You better stop that tape recorder for a minute if you want to hear it. A friend of mine works as a doctor at the hospital [in Vieques], and he tells me “man... they can’t even get aspirin”. He has his practice here. The man is great. He makes, believe it or not, house calls, if you can’t get out, but he also is unhappy with the hospital. And he is there mainly for emergencies. My wife fractured her arm and went to the hospital here. They told us “my god...we can’t do anything for you. You need an X-ray. We have an X-ray machine, but we don’t have an X-ray technician.” I don’t know about the finances of that hospital, but I think they are in bad shape. Maybe some money went where it shouldn’t have gone, or whatever. But we had then to get on a ferry. You have to get in at 5 in the morning and get on a ferry at 7 a clock, but [disgusted] it was a holiday that day, so we had to do this again to get on the 7 a clock ferry on another day to go get an X-ray and then come back here, then go back there and get it set. Then finally go back to have the cast taken off. All of this, waking up at 5 in the morning, the 7 a clock ferry, and hour and a half ride (I don’t care what the politicians tell you). One said it is 45 minutes...yeah, uhuu! It is an hour and 20 minutes by the time you get to the port, by the time get off it is about an hour and forty minutes, unless you don’t kill somebody to get off.

In addition to these difficulties expressed by this resident, this hospital also lacks personnel to offer prenatal care and run a delivery room, which might explain why Vieques has the highest infant mortality rate in all of Puerto Rico.

Many residents also believe the Navy had a hand in the poor public health services. For example, I constantly heard that the U.S. Navy apparently wants the population to remain below 10,000 “and do not care if they die of cancer or anything else,” explains María, who constantly travels to the Big Island seeking treatment for her kidney condition. In fact, Fernández-Porto (2000) showed a group of residents a graphic that compares Vieques with other Caribbean islands in terms of size and population, revealing that Vieques could easily have 25,000 inhabitants. But more than a sense of discomfort with La Marina, they all share resentment with what seems

a “colonial” and unequal relationship with P.R. They say the Puerto Rican government has failed to take into consideration that, due to the physical separation from the main island, Vieques deserves a more self-sufficient medical center. In short, while some of them believe that the cancer rates are a major concern among the Vieques population, they know for certain that the Puerto Rico government has contributed to their extremely poor health care system. Perceiving Vieques’ health problems only as an outcome of the military maneuvers is indeed misleading. For overemphasizing the effects of the Navy’s practices would obscure or legitimize the neglect that has characterized the relationship between Government of Puerto Rico and Vieques. In other words, although La Marina can be held accountable for some of the health problems that the Viequenses are facing, the Government of Puerto Rico is also responsible for the neglect of this population, thus complicating their health problems.

Similarly, in other developing countries structural adjustments and other types of foreign aid privileged the urban areas over the rural and increased the social inequalities between urban and rural populations. This promoted rural to urban migration and competition for jobs and social services. With this in mind, poverty becomes the “major risk factor for the ill health and death” as result of social inequalities that encompasses the world politics⁵ and local or particular social

⁵ Although I would argue that the United States geopolitics and military expansion (in this case of the Navy) could be analyzed through the political economy approach, these aspects are beyond the scope of this essay. For this reason, I have chose to use the concept of world politics instead of political economy.

relations of domination (Das, Kleinman & Lock 1997: ix). In short, poverty needs to be seen as both an outcome of social relations of inequality and as a cause of illness.

In Vieques, for instance, the fact that 73.3 percent of people live below the poverty level can be interpreted as a clear indicator that they are indeed a community at high risk of illness. Furthermore, on June 19, 1999 the newspaper *El Nuevo Día* published an article titled *Se puede morir en Vieques, pero no nacer* (It is possible to die in Vieques, but not to be born). This statement shows how it is possible to die in Vieques, but because of the lack of resources allocated for health care, especially prenatal care, babies are being born off-island.

A Quick Note on Globalization, the Body, and Discourse

The concept of globalization is employed to describe a world that currently features a degree of political and economic interconnectedness of unparalleled proportions. For example, Kottak writes:

The world has grown more complex and probably less comprehensible to most natives. Social scientists need new methods to study this complexity and the myriad forces, flows, and exchanges that now affect “local” people in their various immediate milieus [emphasis removed] [1999:30].

Globalization is now one of the most frequently used concepts that are employed to address this complexity which includes the transnational rapid flow of information, images, people, commerce, and organizations as they impact people’s lives (Harvey 2000; Kottak 1999). Indeed the increasing interconnection of the world has forced anthropologists to perceive a community or “culture” as less isolated and thus focus more on its possible linkages with external agents (Kottak:1999).

It could be argued, moreover, that Vieques' environmental degradation is arguably interrelated to the current political and economic landscape (see Márquez and Fernández Porto 2000). As Nieves (1999) points out, the buildup of military bases (Roosevelt Roads and Vieques) in eastern Puerto Rico represents a wide range of complex geopolitical and geoeconomic strategies. Perhaps nothing is more representative of U.S. militarism and defense policies than the Relocatable Over The Horizon Radar (ROTHR), located to the west of the civilian population. Márquez and Fernández Porto rightly, I believe, describe how this radar represents these geopolitical and geoeconomic strategies, or so-called defense policies, and the use of their military facilities on Puerto Rican soil:

This relic of the cold war era, built as an early warning military tool to detect Russian bombers as they took off from their landing fields, was brought from Alaska and installed in Vieques. The purposed reason for the ROTH is to detect drug-carrying airplanes, as they fly north towards the Caribbean from the Northern part of Bolivia and Brazil, and from Perú, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela [2000:6].

This description clearly implies that the US Navy is redefining its defense policies towards Puerto Rico and, especially, its use of Vieques. This radar was first used for national defense during the Cold War era and it is now being used in the war against drugs in the region.

As the protests of the 1990's have demonstrated, this radar is also a source of concern for the Viequesenses because it is believed to be emitting cancer-causing radiation into the civilian population. But, in short, one thing must bear in mind when discussing issues like the radar. While the Navy does change its use of the facilities and purposes on the island, this reflects that the Vieques current situation

is interrelated to the US political and economic intentions toward this region of the Globe. “Keeping an eye” on the drug trafficking activities of countries like Colombia, Venezuela, and Perú has direct and indirect consequences on the community of Vieques. Consequently, the social suffering of Vieques is connected to the world politics arena and international relations.

Moreover, the interconnectedness between Vieques and US policies toward the region should not be seen only in terms of the way it impacts the community. Rather, it should also be seen in light of its political possibilities. Brysk (2000) argues that national human rights campaigns have been successful at transforming their situations when they are able to make global appeals through transnational networks. Perhaps in the struggle for human rights, localized movements may have found a common ground outside national borders (Brosius 1999: 281). Milton contends, moreover, that “those who most influence the definition of environmental responsibilities are those who can make effective use of the tools of discourse” (1993:9).

In Vieques, anti-Navy activists are well aware of the “political possibilities” of recognizing and denouncing how their suffering is connected to the realm of international relations. By employing what Little (1999) calls an “environmental advocacy network” anti-Navy activists have proven that they depend on their ability to generate and use information strategically. In fact, Estela, a Vieques resident, is convinced that “there are many countries waiting for us to get the Navy out to do the same thing in their own country... why do you think that one of our leaders was

invited to India to give a lecture on civil disobedience.” She is certain that the news about the development of this controversial issue is traveling the world and having a great impact. Much remains to be seen, but the success of the civil disobedience campaign has depended heavily on constantly creating public awareness, media coverage, and political demonstrations.

One of the main purposes of the anti-Navy environmentalism is, of course, to make a lasting impression on the whole international community and thus define the controversy as a struggle for human rights. The issue is not Puerto Ricans against the US but rather a community fighting for its right to live a peaceful and healthy life. All of this has taken place in a current historical context where the state of the environment and/or environmental issues are high on the global political and popular agenda (de Steiguer 1997; Mannion & Bowdly 1992); thus creating a more sensitive and open international community to listen to the demands of the Viequenses.

What Kind of Social Change?

As a result of all these indicators of exposure to naval contaminates, environmentalists in Vieques started paying attention not only to the vast newly accessed devastated land, but also to issues that bear directly on areas of environmental justice. “Why here [in Vieques] and not in the States?” asked an activist during a political demonstration. This assertion brings to the fore the fact that while they are affected by the military practices, they are excluded from making decisions that have far reaching social and political consequences. “It’s not the same

to fire bomb near a Estate than where thousands of Viequenses live, and who lack the political power to influence their politics. Thus, by bombarding our precious little island they [the Navy] can pretty much stay out of trouble” he concludes. “We are well aware of the fact that wastelands can result by accident or the intent to pollute” another resident claims. “But when it comes to Vieques you really start to wonder if the Navy really cares, especially when they accumulate old tanks and military vehicles for target practice,” he acknowledges.

According to this resident, the burden of naval contaminants has fallen on them because they simply do not live in the continental United States. “But they won’t anymore...because with our civil disobedience we will still tell them to find another place for target practice while letting the world know the injustices we are suffering” he also claims after pulling back the microphone. In short, these quotes clearly reflect that there is a perception of social and political discrimination. While they are denied their rights to influence political decisions, they are differentially harmed. For this reason, I contend that the anti-Navy movement has eclipsed environmental rights issues and brought to the fore health concerns. Social change would not just lead to environmental conservation but improvements in human health.

As Escobar (1999) has noted, the study of the relationships between society and nature and how they are mediated by power relations must go beyond political economy to consider the discourses and practices through which nature is historically produced and known. In other words, political ecology goes beyond studying social inequality in and of itself to consider the manner by which the environment is

transformed and how this transformation can adversely affect local communities. To better grasp this assertion a post-structuralist definition of discourse should be considered. In Escobar's words, discourse "is the articulation of knowledge and power, of statements and visibilities, of the visible and the expressible" (1996:326). But more importantly, he claims that a discourse "is the process through which social reality inevitably comes into being" (Escobar 1996:327). Similarly, Brosius (1999) argues that when studying environmentalism, discourse matters because it is manifestly constitutive of reality. Regarding environmentalism, Brosius also argues that we must "avoid thinking about it merely within the limited purview of social movements" (1999:278). Instead, he adds, it refers to a broad field of discourse constructions of nature and historical and contemporary forms of domination that influence various forms of human agency, the politics of representation, and prescribe various forms of intervention. In this context, any analysis of environmentalism is incomplete if it fails to consider how it creates discourses that allow institutions to distribute individuals and populations, allocate resources, and influence political processes at the regional, national, and local levels, in ways that are challenging or consistent with the existing power relations.

The environmental movement in Vieques is made up of several groups which seemingly sprung up spontaneously and whose power resides in the ability to generate and use information strategically. In fact during the past few years this issue has moved from relative obscurity to become a major social concern; thus becoming an issue that every Puerto Rican or politician is forced to address. In Vieques this case

becomes even more crucial because this movement arises under colonial conditions, adding an element of dependency on the local government that at the same time also lacks power to influence Federal policies. Thus the discourse becomes a vital tool for social change, mainly by influencing public consciousness in many ways.

Moreover, Brosius adds “when anthropologists (or others) turn their attention toward the examination of a particular environmental movement, often one of the first things that catches their attention is the images they see being deployed” (1999:280). Indeed, upon my arrival and even before I decided to embark on this research, I was profoundly attracted to study the images that have been employed and rapidly being purveyed to express the anti-Navy sentiment that characterizes Vieques’ environmentalism, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Much of the rhetoric of this campaign asserts that there is a connection between high cancer rates and the environmental destruction that takes place in the island. Yet Brosius suggests that we as researchers of environmental processes must “be alert to the ways in which such concerns are encoded, deployed, and contested and perhaps transformed” (1999:284). Drawing from Kottak’s contributions to new environmental anthropology, I would argue that many of these concerns might come in the form of risk perception either implicitly or explicitly.

In summary, this chapter has set out to discuss the main themes of New Environmental Anthropology’s approach to discourse with its particular relevance to the Vieques anti-Navy movement. There are many ways to go about studying the Vieques issue. I chose to focus on the Vieques’ environmentalism from an

anthropological approach. Anthropologists working under the rubric of New Environmental Anthropology have contributed in many ways to our understanding of environmental movements and their environmentalist discourse. But the question remains: how can anthropology contribute to the understanding of these issues? Perceiving Vieques as an environmental hotspot is my way of addressing this issue. While in many regions of the world, corporations have ignited the presence of environmentalist groups; in Vieques is the presence of a US military body what has caused the presence of an anti-Navy environmental movement.

In light of the above discussion, we must then answer this question by pointing out that anthropology's contribution lies in the fact that the environment, health, and culture should be perceived as socially contested arenas. For it possess numerous challenges to any theoretical framework dealing with health and environmental problems at the same time.

The multiple discourses that are employed by environmental movements are intended to empower historically disempowered communities (Brosius 1999). In this sense, we as researchers attempt to describe this process by mapping their terrains of resistance (Brosius 1999). In Vieques any attempt to map these terrains must take into consideration two major factors. First, that local and international power relations mediate ecological processes. It is for this reason, for example, that Vieques strategic geographical location and the ambiguities of political relations with the US play a significant role in the articulation of a discourse that denounces the interconnectedness of the island's situation and the existing power structures. And

secondly, an environmental discourse does indeed communicate many assertions about the controversy as well as causes of risk and concern to the environment and health. Yet this would be incomplete if it fails to grasp the assertion that this environmental discourse also leads us to address how the environment is historically and culturally produced. In short, it is with this in mind that we proceed into the next chapter, where I attempt to focus on how the anti-Navy discourse has employed representations of the environment, cultural icons and the body as attempts to empower the Vieques' struggle.

CHAPTER IV

CONSTRUCTING IMAGES

In the previous chapter I attempted to provide a theoretical background to understanding anti-Navy discourse. I argue, in short, that the unpacking of this discourse is an appropriate starting point for our analysis of the controversy. In this chapter, I develop this further by focusing on the discourse that has mainly characterized the anti-Navy environmental activism. In doing so, Kottak's assertion that "change always proceeds in the face of prior structures (a given sociocultural heritage)" (1999: 34) comes to mind with regard to the use of social suffering discourses against the Navy presence. To better grasp this assertion, we should look closely at how the grievances of the conflict were expressed both before and after Sanes' death.

The process of constructing such discourse includes the use of images and dramatic accounts and a persistent interest in putting these images out for the world to see. While these images may fall under the category of essentialist, Brosius argues that "historically marginalized communities have begun to recognize the political potency of strategically deployed essentialism" (1999:281). In fact, these images are employed to generate media coverage, which is a key factor that could determine the momentum of an environmental campaign (Brosius 1999). In the words of an anti-Navy activist: "the media is very important for the struggle because through it the

public will know the injustices that are being committed against us.” Both the media and the Vieques environmental movement portray these images because, though for different purposes, they are intended to capture and maintain the general public’s or viewers’ attention; the former for ratings and the other in order to generate more political support. Thus, instead of perceiving these images as mere acts of essentialism, we must make an effort to view them as strategically used and not as mere romantic representations.

After a few days on the island I was already facing the experience of living in a peaceful place that, at the same time, has a history of political confrontations with the Navy. For instance, while looking at my fieldnotes, I suddenly realize that the ruins of the Vieques Fisherman Association’s structure provides a powerful image that illustrates Kottak’s (1999) contention that change comes in the face of prior structures. Even though the strong winds of hurricane Hugo destroyed the fishermen association’s former building, today the concrete walls that are left still represent decades of resistance by the local fishermen and are graffitied with anti-Navy slogans. These ruins still represent the meeting place of those fishermen who entered the political arena to challenge the Navy in the late 70’s. At the same time, they also represent how health and environmental concerns are blended with “culturally authentic” representations of daily resistance. As you look across the street from the bar/restaurant/guesthouse “Bananas” and you see the graffitied wall of this old structure that has a drawing of Vieques’ map that says “Vieques the highest cancer rate.”

Conceptualizing the Struggle

To many Viequenses, it is well known that while the death of Sanes is the first one to be directly associated with an errant bomb, this is not the first bomb to be accidentally dropped off-target. In fact, other bombs have landed near the civilian area, “putting our lives in obvious danger,” emphasizes José, a Vieques fisherman. Many residents, for example, remember another accident in 1993, when a fighter jet dropped five 500 pound bombs approximately one mile from a residential area (see McCaffrey 1999 & The Vieques Times 1999). How did Sanes’ death become so galvanizing, when, as many anti-Navy activists argue, Sanes’ death is not the first to be attributed to the Navy?

“Finally the people from the main island listened to our concerns and discomfort with La Marina,” asserts Ismael Guadalupe, a long-time anti-Navy activist in Vieques. Regarding the decades of unpublicized pacific protest, The Vieques Times stresses:

Civil disobedience is nothing new in Vieques. For years fishermen have been subject to sanctions for entering restricted zones. But since the invasion of the impact area following the death of David Sanes, college students, environmentalists, lawyers, journalists, and politicians have flocked in proclaiming the right of “peaceful civil disobedience.”⁶

Thus the struggle against the Navy presence is not new in Vieques. This then brings to the fore the many years of neglect from Puerto Rico’s central government toward these grievances; thus aggravating their social suffering for decades. In addition, these expressions are a mere reflection of the extent to which the death of Sanes

ignited an interest of Puerto Ricans from the main island, along with those who live in United States mainland and international figures, to finally pay attention to the grievances that have been voiced for many years by grass roots organizations.

Without questioning the catalytic nature of this accident, it is worth understanding the historical context or structural dynamics that serve as fertile ground to promote the existence of a sudden yet short-lived unified-front of various and at times rival sectors against the Navy presence in Vieques.

The Fishermen

As I approached people in Vieques and discussed my interests, I was repeatedly pointed in the direction of the fishermen “because they are the ones who really know about the whole controversy and historical encounters with La Marina,” suggests the Vice-Major of Vieques. “We are founders of this struggle,” asserts Angel a long-time fisherman and anti-Navy activist. A social history of the anti-Navy movement reveals that it is the fishermen who started the political action against the Navy, mainly on the basis of access and control for the island’s natural resources. Rallied around the figure of fishermen as authentic, historical and cultural icons (McCafrey 1999), Vieques grass roots organizations have been voicing their grievances, such as lack of land and sea access, which has arguably truncated their economic development for more than thirty years.

⁶ The Vieques Times p.5 Vol. 126 April, 1999.

As Gupta and Fergusson have noted, “representations of resistance play a crucial part in the legitimation struggles that take place around the authentication of identities” (1997:20). As an attempt to maintain this sense of authenticity or cultural distinctiveness in Puerto Rico, Dávila points out the following:

Such attempts are vividly displayed in Puerto Rico, where the island’s cultural identity remains the most important basis for defining the national entity, and where the idiom of culture has historically served as a site for contesting power over the colonial state [1997:14].

In Vieques this process of authentication has been represented by the figure of the fishermen as key cultural icons in the struggle to evict the Navy “because they are important and meaningful expressions of the island’s working class culture and rural past” (McCaffrey 1999: 12)⁷.

A woman who works at the museum El Fortín del Conde de Mirasol said “here a lot of visitors complain about the display of pictures that show the political struggles against the Navy.” “And what do you usually reply to them?” I asked. “Well... I always tell them that the struggle against the Navy is part of our history too because for decades the Navy hasn’t allowed our fishermen to fish freely and our tourism to prosper like it would have otherwise.” Confrontations with Navy vessels have been well documented over the years. For instance, at this museum it would be impossible to ignore pictures and images of small fishing boats in front of Navy warships and helicopters, as well as demonstrators being arrested by U.S. Marshals.

⁷ Here I mainly relay on McCaffrey’s (1999) contribution, not only because it is the only ethnography that has been written about Vieques but because it also offers a critical analysis of the anti-Navy movement and its discourse practices. Interestingly, this dissertation was roughly finished the same year that Vieques became an issue of major proportions in Puerto Rican history. Because of the fact that it was written before Sanes’ tragic death and allegations of high cancer rates, along with other

According to Valdés-Pizzini, when fishermen organize to “demand more environmental justice they are not just doing it for their right to fish whenever they want, but they are also defending their traditional access to their fishing grounds” (1990:164). Similarly, McCafrey argues that (1999) fishermen draw attention to the material basis of local grievances. “We [the fishermen] simply got tired of seeing our women being abused by soldiers and our land and water being restricted and destroyed,” expands Angel regarding the fishermen initial involvement in the struggle.

Furthermore, most long-time residents, for instance, remember the expropriation by the Navy of thousands of acres during the 1940’s as the source of dissatisfaction with the military presence. In Vieques the word “expropriation” is loaded with both vivid and personal experiences of the usurpation of the island’s land and perhaps the destruction the island’s economic base (see Amémée 1977 and McCaffrey 1999). “When the Navy arrived, people were expropriated and whole communities were moved to different barrios with the promise of high paying jobs and land of our own,” narrates Maria. María currently lives in a humble house located in Montesanto, one of the resettlement tracks where many Viequenses were relocated when the Navy evicted them in 1943. Since that day, Maria and many other Viequenses do not have a title to the land where their houses are located, which explains why they have to frequently visit the post office to get their mail.

illnesses possibly related to naval contaminants, it allows us to closely explore the discourses against the military presence in Vieques that have been articulated before and after these events.

Finally, McCafrey argues that the fishermen's campaign gained some degree of support "because it crystallized grievances in a culturally resonant form that avoided the larger issue of Puerto Rico's sovereignty" (1999:10). In doing so, I would argue that the anti-Navy activists portray the controversy more as a local issue rather than national; thus stripping the issue from becoming a matter of addressing PR's relationship with the US. The only "success" of this campaign rests in the signing of the agreement on 1980, although its promise was never fulfilled and, as time goes by, many residents claim that Vieques is growing in its indignation with la Marina. In short, it comes as no surprise that the culturally authentic figure of the fishermen is successfully combined with health and environmental concerns because they simply represent their social suffering while not challenging the current political relations with the US.

The Role of Health Concerns and Human Rights

Many efforts have been made to explain the context in which the Vieques controversy erupted, and more importantly how it has been embraced by the Puerto Rican society. Schmidt-Nieto (2000), for instance, explains how in the aftermath of Sanes' death the phrase "national consensus" has been frequently used to describe the struggle for Vieques. Although Schmidt-Nieto (2000) and many others acknowledge that the rapid union of forces into a national consensus escapes any clear explanation, he highlights the end of the Cold War, the years of protests against the obsessive pro-statehood policies of former governor Roselló, and the entrance of thousands of

demonstrators to the military restricted areas, allowing them to “see with their own eyes” the environmental destruction of Vieques’ natural beauty, as the aspects that set the stage for this national and historic consensus. However, he fails to take into account the impact of Vieques’ health statistics and concerns, particularly the high cancer rates, as aspects that spark people to protest. At the same time, it is also my contention that regarding Vieques’ anti-Navy movement it would be misleading to ignore the role of representations of both culture and the body as aspects that would generate both international and national support.

Moreover, in her ethnography about the anti-Navy movement in Vieques, McCafrey (1999) acknowledges that those involved in the earlier struggle to evict the Navy fear accusations of being communist, perhaps because Puerto Ricans are aware of the U.S.’s “fight” against communism and socialism. “I remember when we [the fishermen] were accused of being communist,” reflects Carlos Zenón, a long-time Vieques fisherman and anti-Navy activist. But now, Schmidt-Nieto argues “issues of human rights, like Vieques, could be presented to the public eye without accusing any activist group of communism or socialism,” which in P.R. sometimes is seen as synonymous to being separatist or anti-American (2000:39). There are still, however, the remnants of these accusations by those who are reluctant to support the anti-Navy movement. When I asked an activist about these remnants he replied: “Many people in Puerto Rico think that this is struggle that is being fought by independentistas (independence advocates) and comunistas (communists), but no, no and no... we are simple people fighting for our right, our human right, to live in peace.” He then went

on to point out that the weakness of such accusations lies in the fact that “many people characterize the US with its numerous struggles for people’s right. Then why do we have to explain that we are not pro-independence or anything else.”

Shuffling through his historical documents, Zenón showed me the picture of a dead man and then claimed, “the first real martyr of the Vieques’ conflict is this man, Angel Rodríguez Cristobal, who was arrested for trespassing into Navy land and then murdered in the Tallahassee Federal Correctional Institution.” According to Zenón, “while Sanes was a good man and a real Viequense, Rodríguez was an extraordinary man who fought against the Navy... but he never got the recognition that Sanes got.” Why? I asked. “Simply because he was not a Viequense and we [the Viequenses] are very regionalist... we are Viequenses first and then Puerto Ricans,” he explained.

Five days later, Zenón made similar remarks in an activity that was dedicated to commemorate Rodríguez’s sacrifice and love for Vieques. But while listening to these remarks for the second time, I reflected upon the fact that while Sanes’ political position was irrelevant to the events that determined his fate, Rodríguez was a nationalist leader who lost his life as a result of participating in a demonstration against the U.S. military presence in Vieques. Then why did Sanes’ death trigger much more political mobilization than Rodríguez’s death? “Times have changed,” a reflective Zenón answered to a similar question. It can be argued that in light of the end of the Cold War, issues and demonstrations of anti-Navy sentiment can escape accusations of being socialists or communists and thus be acknowledged by conservative sectors of the Puerto Rican society.

To make sure that her administration's involvement in the Vieques' controversy should not be interpreted as a message of being anti-American or even anti-military, the governor of Puerto Rico, Sila M. Calderón, recently expressed "I want to take the opportunity to say that it is not an anti-US or anti-military protest, it is a human rights issue."⁸ I argue that we should look critically at these attempts to define the protest in terms of human rights. For I would argue that defining the struggle in these terms serves as a persuasive appeal to people around the world to support the cause, while at the same time it strips the struggle from coming to grips with the specific political issues of the Vieques' situation.

"Until you've seen all the garbage they (The Navy) have thrown here, you never seem to understand why we want them to get the hell out of here," claims a continental American and protester in a public demonstration. As a direct result of the civil disobedience campaign, the opening of Navy land also allowed researchers to conduct ecological surveys and make public Vieques' harsh reality (Schmidt-Nieto 2000). Thus those who trespassed onto Navy land were exposed to the environmental destruction caused by the Navy's years of bombardment. Speeches, letters, newspapers, internet sites, list serves and radio talk shows have all become vehicles for communicating that such a beautiful Puerto Rican island can not be the host to so much environmental destruction that is, at the same time, believed to be the source of the island's health problems. This consequently plays into the idea that the controversy is a human rights issue.

⁸ Interviewed by National Public Radio on April 30,2001.

As stated above, it is my contention that Schmidt-Nieto (2000) and others fail to acknowledge the impact that the allegations of high cancer had on generating this consensus. In a succinct examination of the Vieques situation prior to the widespread support for the Navy's withdrawal, García stressed, "opposition to the navy in Vieques will be steadfast in years to come, not necessarily for political reasons but for reasons of survival" (1993:63). While he did not expand on what he meant by survival, García may have predicted the role of health and environmental issues as human rights within the struggle. Similarly, in 1999, perhaps predicting what was about to happen in the aftermath of Sanes' death, McCaffrey noted that a focus on health and environmental concerns could lead to a "movement of true transformative potential" and that "culture is not the only viable framework for the collective action." (1999:262-263). The end result is a struggle defined mainly by health and environmental concerns, which is a human rights issue, in combination with cultural representations of their local grievances.

Risk Perception Enhancement and Discourse Making

When environmentalists employ a discourse they heavily rely on general notions about the multiple environmental hazards and, more importantly, on effectively spreading the word about these notions. In Vieques, for instance, the explicit notion and message is that when "we" talk about contaminants in the environment we are simultaneously talking about health risk. However, Kottak (1999) contends that risk perception per se does not guarantee the presence of environmental

activism. Nonetheless, few will disagree with the assertion that the death of Sanes, the fact that the Navy admitted the use of napalm and uranium, the alleged high cancer and mortality rates simply confirmed public suspicions that the trainings have had adverse effects on the health and thus gave a sense of urgency to the struggle.

Cancer

Allegations of cancer rates that are higher than the Puerto Rican average are based on a Department of Health's report that was published in 1993 with data that was collected in 1991. There is certainly a need for more updated epidemiological studies in Vieques toward the ambitious task of determining whether the Viequeses' cancer and other health issues are connected to the presence of naval contaminants in the island. Nonetheless there is a strong belief that the last sixty years of live bombing in the eastern part of the island has a lot to do with such health statistics.

Based on his experience with cancer patients, Kleinman (1980) argues that in western cultures, cancer figures as a disorder that is loaded with powerful symbolism or metaphors (see Susan Sontag 1977). Cancer is "freighted with meanings of the risks of invisible pollutants, such as ionizing radiation and even the chemical constituents of the very foods we eat. These menacing meanings meld ancient fears of contamination with the great modern threat of man-made catastrophes that poison the environment with toxic wastes" (Kleinman 1980:21). For example, Angel, a long time Vieques resident claims that "you don't have to be an expert on the health sciences or an epidemiologist to realize that the people around you are dying mainly

of cancer more frequently than on the main island.” Here Angel perceives a direct relation between the pollutants that are constantly poisoning the environment and the high cancer rates on the island.

But critics of the movement say that both activists and the government have jumped to conclusions with fragmented and unscientific data. My informant responds that, “it is a matter of time before we all realize that our bodies are more contaminated than our other Puerto Rican brothers”. In short, similar to cultural representations of daily resistance, cancer serves the purpose of illustrating the extent to which the anti-Navy campaign is not politically motivated but framed as one of survival.

Risk Perception and the Three Bodies

This risk perceptions can best be explained by employing Lock and Scheper-Hughes’ conception of the body as an arena for social suffering and struggle. In their analysis Lock and Scheper-Hughes (1996) go a step beyond studying how political and economic forces shape the human body in health and illness. They argue that the symbols and metaphors themselves also shape how they are experienced, and more importantly, how they are interpreted. In other words, our task is to “describe the variety of metaphorical conceptions (conscious and unconscious) about and the associated narratives and then to show the social, political, and individual uses to which these conceptions are applied in practice” (1996:50). To accomplish such a task, they propose the analytical tool of the three bodies (individual, social, and political) and the relationships amongst them.

As an attempt to illustrate the relationship among these three bodies Scheper-Hughes writes, “the medical anthropology gaze grazes the body’s surface and then moves outward to catch the play of metaphors, figures of speech (tropes), and symbolic meanings within the web of exchanges among the ‘three bodies’...the representational body social; the controlling, bio-power forces of the body politics; and the not unrelated but self-conscious, more or less alienated, attribution of meanings to the individual and existential body personal” (1994:230-31). It is equally important to conceptualize these three bodies as overlapping levels of analysis that would provide us with an understanding of the relationship among the personal, the social, and the political while utilizing the body as the main focus.

Drawing from the theoretical framework of structural and symbolic anthropology, the social body refers to “the representational uses of the body as a natural symbol with which to think about nature, society, and culture” (Lock & Scheper-Hughes 1996: 50). Through the social body the “cultural constructions of and about the body” are seen as aspects that bring light to “particular views of society and social relations” (1999:61). “Since the Navy first set foot on this Island it has transformed into a concentration camp,” believes a 60-year-old resident. Similar metaphors are being employed to illustrate the consequences of the expropriation processes that took place during the 1940, having not only a direct effect on the social makeup of the community but also limiting their access and control of land.

“La Isla Nena” (The Little Girl Island), for example, was one of the many names by which Puerto Ricans made reference to Vieques before the protests.

Yet, this name is now strategically used by anti-Navy activist as a linguistic and political device. I would argue that referring to Vieques as the little girl island or perhaps the baby island is not only a reference to size. The use of this term metaphorically implies that Vieques is a like a little girl who needs to be taken care of because it is under the mercy of bombs and from which ecological beauty has been taken away, ironically, by the military forces who are known to “protect the weak from the strong” (Torres in *The Vieques Times* 1999:7). Gender, I would argue, is also a key symbol here because women are the ones that most likely need to be protected from outside dangers. Thus this little island’s environment has been badly damaged, while the health of its residents is also suffering the adverse consequences of exposure to naval contaminants. Further, this assertion clearly implies that Vieques’ state of affairs is highly associated in terms of a patronizing relationship with the United States’ military, its interventions and policies, made in name of the so-called national security.

In the case of Vieques, the July 30th issue of *El Nuevo Día* printed an article entitled “Se convierte el cáncer en el testigo adverso al cuerpo militar,” (Cancer has become the adverse witness against the military body) clearly stating that the high cancer rates on Vieques are evidence that the Viequenses are dying and suffering as a result of the live bombing training at the island. During the following months the same newspaper started reporting the results of tests conducted by different environmentalists in the open burning and denotation sites, which document the high concentrations of toxic metals and chemicals that are believed to be

carcinogenic. Evidently, the assertions made by the environmentalists through *El Nuevo Día* fit Kleinman's interpretation of some narratives concerning cancer in westernized society. The association of toxic waste with the high cancer rates in Vieques is based on a biomedical viewpoint, in which a number of chemicals (such as military explosives) are believed to be carcinogenic. In addition, government officials and environmentalists from the Puerto Rican Independence Party found that the navy used napalm and uranium during their training (*The Economist* 1999). Since these two contaminants are believed to be carcinogens these findings serve to strengthen cancer narratives on the island.

I would argue that the lamentable death of David Sanes is not separated from this discourse that links high cancer rates with the high concentration of naval contaminants. According to Kleinman and Kleinman, "images of [social] suffering are appropriated to appeal emotionally and morally both to global audience and to local populations" (Das, Kleinman and Lock 1997: 1). In Vieques the images of fear and death by a bomb accidentally dropped in the civilian area and the linkages constantly made between cancer and naval contaminants serve as the basis for the perceptions of social suffering and consequently the nationally driven consensus to get the Navy out. In this sense, "the existential processes of pain, death, and mourning are metamorphosed" (Das, Kleinman and Lock 1997:x) by the cultural responses to the traumatic effects of political violence.

El Nuevo Día (November 23, 1999) also interviewed children from Vieques and found that most of them reflect some kind of fear of a bomb and that they might

die of cancer if La Marina stays in Vieques. One of the children even expressed that his grandfather is possibly suffering from cancer because of the bombings. In short, according to this newspaper, even children are making the claim that they are at the mercy of bombs and cancer.

In relation to this discourse that hold the Navy as responsible for the high cancer and infant mortality rates, as well as for truncating their economy, members of Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques, formally known as the Crusade for the Rescue of Vieques, have been visiting several barrios (small towns) of Vieques to offer small lectures on the vast environmental destruction of Navy land and, equally important, the risk of exposure of the civil population to the contaminants through wind and drinking water. During my visit I was able to attend two of these meetings. There is an emphasis on the educational aspect of this campaign because, as the environmentalists Fernandez-Porto expressed, “the vast majority of the people in Vieques still don’t know what really happens at the shooting range and its possible damages to their health.” Thus it serves the purpose of spreading the word about the vast environmental destruction at its possible connections to the current health problems.

At both presentations the audience of about 35 seemed to be mostly neighborhood people, along with some of the members of the committee. Fernández Porto’s main idea was to show that with such little research there is reason to believe that the munitions-related toxic substances that are being leached into the environment will find their way into people’s bodies, putting them in obvious risk of

cancer, low birth rates, Lupus, Scleroderma, skin conditions, and respiratory disease. Aided by pictures and slides he showed images of lagoons that have been dried up, the results of his field research, and highlighted the findings from other researchers, proving that “what happens in that ecosystem matters to us, because we are part of it.” By bringing Fernandez-Porto to offer informed statements such as these, the Committee wanted to generate not just awareness around the different barrios, but also support for civil disobedience. This civil disobedience has become a key element for the struggle.

Furthermore, the relationship between civil disobedience and the individual body in the anti-Navy discourse is also represented in a unique way. Here the body is perceived as the source of resistance, as something that is both symbolically and realistically used to stop the bombing at the inner range. When it comes to discussing aspects of resistance, Scott’s “Weapons of the Weak” (1985) is often cited as a valuable contribution to understand how powerless societies, such as Vieques, rely on a variety of resistance strategies to accomplish what they want. In Vieques the assortment of resistance strategies has been dominated by civil disobedience. Through acts of civil disobedience “they [the Navy] know they cannot shoot bombs unless there is nobody” claims an anti-Navy activist. He continues, “Our bodies are like a giant shield with which we block the maneuvers.” Thus the end result is a dual perception of the body: as the source of resistance (blocking military maneuvers) and as a source of suffering. These images have indeed have had an important role in the formation such a unified front against La Marina.

Peaceful Vieques or Peace for Vieques

While it would appear that these images and allegations are unchallenged among the Vieques residents, they are in fact challenged. Although news broadcasters are keen to display the images that have been discussed above, there is a small contingent of residents who challenge these images because they have misrepresented the struggle, imposed forms of political action, and jeopardized their relationship with the US. Vieques' environmental movement fits, to a certain extent, Brosius' assumption that these type of movements "are concerned with efforts to valorize natural and cultural communities that have historically been disregarded, subjugated and in other ways denied standing" (1999:280). What this fails to grasp, however, is the fact that at the same time these organizations might also be subjugating the local population, working as activism gatekeepers, impose their forms of political action while neglecting other critical areas of main concern to local residents.

Bearing in mind that the ethnographer should make every effort to incorporate multiple voices and perspectives (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995), it would be misleading to ignore complaints from a quiet contingent of Viequenses who supports the Navy and/or resents the presence of anti-Navy protesters. Among these residents there are those who point out that the high cancer rates have not been properly assessed or scientifically proven yet; thus challenging the alleged connection

between naval exercises and this chronic illness. Short of real scientific evidence, it seems that the residents are polarized between those who believe that there is connection (that is, between high cancer rates and naval exercises) and those who challenge it.

Among the groups that challenge this connection is a recently formed organization called Pro-Navy. This small group of Vieques residents defends the Navy from virtually all negative allegations and wants to influence political decisions towards the goal of guaranteeing the Navy's permanence on Vieques soil, even with live-bombing. Analyzing their discourse is beyond the scope of this thesis, but their presence, brings to the fore an interesting paradox. This is the case simply because one of their main concerns is that the anti-Navy protesters have disrupted the island's peacefulness. Thus the paradox: while the anti-Navy protesters are constantly advocating for peace in the form of better health, environmental justice and economic improvements, they have disrupted the peacefulness that characterizes the civilian area mainly by igniting struggles for power within the movement and between residents.

Such is the case in Vieques where "everybody who comes from outside is treated like a god" disgustedly expressed a resident. She adds, "here the movement is losing sight of its true meaning." Why, I asked? "Well...I say this because I think the people here [in Vieques] are starting to get mad because the only thing you see in the news is a few leading figures of the so-called "movement" talking about the cancer this and the cancer that. We, the normal and ordinary residents are the ones who can

tell you that there is more to it than cancer. Our health here is in grave danger also because if we get sick, and God forbid one of our sons, we would have to literally move both sea and land to at least get some health care.”

Although on the surface all the Viequenses seem to be creating a discourse that calls for immediate mass movement and political action, this discourse has ultimately served to reinforce local power relations. This not only reinforces local power relations but also changes daily life in such a way that has lead Eugenio, a Vieques merchant and guesthouse owner, to suggest:

“Please don’t get me wrong... but sometimes I even want the protesters to leave the island for awhile. I do support the struggle, but here things are getting worst. When I see the TV I say to myself ‘people might think that we are at war.’ And that is affecting my business badly because, instead of coming here, tourists will want to go to a peaceful place. And this is a peaceful place (I mean it was). Like many places, we have our problems that we want to change, but the bottom line is the fact that I don’t like what I see or hear on the TV every time the words Vieques or Navy are mentioned”

Such thorny issues clearly demand a rethinking of the current political strategies, although the movement seems to be heading in the opposite direction. Meanwhile, news broadcasters will remain keen to display these images, while neglecting the fact that social change would not only mean the Navy’s exit.

Despite this criticism, the images that have been discussed in this chapter have prevailed within the anti-Navy front. But why these images have been embraced by the anti-Navy front? It is my contention that by addressing this question we can better grasps how the Viequenses perceive themselves within the whole gamut of issues that have erupted since Sanes’ death.

Combining these representations of their social suffering with images of the local resistance of the fishermen has proven to be an effective way of challenging the military presence on the island without having to address the colonial relationship with the US. This discourse has appeared in many forms -all emphasizing that the health problems of the Viequenses are a sample of their social suffering. Without question, these health problems and concerns rapidly spark people to protest and take political action. This action is geared toward generating a social change that would improve their likelihood of living a long and healthy life; thus turning the controversy into a human rights issue. In the case of Vieques stopping the military maneuvers signifies putting and end to the environmental destruction that is believed to be source of many illnesses in Vieques.

The incidence of cancer is used to illustrate why people are more likely to suffer from this chronic illness in Vieques than on the main island, while the fishermen bring to the fore images of how their social landscape has been adversely transformed. Here is where local meaning is incorporated into the discourse, as an attempt to emphasize how they have embarked in the struggle.

I would argue that defining the struggle in terms of human rights works in tandem with the cultural representations of local resistance and social suffering. In doing so, the movement has recognized the political potency of strategically deployed images that Brosius (1999) refers to. These images, in short, serve the purpose of stressing how the survival of the Viequenses is in danger for multiple reasons. At the same time, the image of the fishermen is employed to emphasize that the Viequenses

have been fighting locally for their peace and justice long before Sanes' death and that they have an active participation in the struggle. Together both the idea of Vieques as a human rights issue and the fishermen as the local resistance provide a sense of urgency to the struggle that negates the need to resolve the status issue of Puerto Rico.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Many areas of inquiry and complex questions have remained well beyond the scope of this thesis. The Vieques controversy, moreover, is without question more complicated and profound than what the above discussion reflects. However, in light of this discussion it should be clear by now that the problem is very serious and demands an immediate solution. It is serious because, as we have seen, is loaded with images and allegations that people in Vieques are dying as a consequence of a military presence that is legitimized by a colonial power structure.

What Did you Uncover?

This is a question that I was frequently asked upon my arrival to the main island of Puerto Rico. It, of course, bears directly on the main focus of my investigation. Yet as researchers we must keep in mind that our answers to such question might have an impact on their judgments and thus their political actions and support toward the struggle, especially when it comes from Puerto Ricans from the main island whose support is critical for the anti-Navy movement's objectives. What follows then is a refined version of my subjective answers to this question.

In Vieques, an accidentally dropped bomb has opened a "pandora's box" of controversies that are loaded with political implications, environmental destruction,

conspiracy theories and numerous health concerns. Following the death of Sanes and for the first time in contemporary history, all competing political parties, the Viequenses, and religious leaders have reached what seemed as an initial consensus that resulted in a series of efforts to evict the Navy from Vieques. This coalition adopted an environmental discourse that is essentially anti-Navy. With images of pristine beaches at the mercy of errant bombs and cancer patients, fishermen fighting for their right to fishing waters, the discontents of this island's community and the poor conditions under which they lived have come to be known by almost all Puerto Ricans. Viequenses are well aware of these grievances, complexities and ambiguities. And according to my informants and my own perceptions, all of these issues require social and political solutions in the near future.

This controversy has been brewing since, according to many anti-Navy activists, the Navy is responsible for many decades of economic stagnation and serious health problems that they are facing, such as high cancer rates and infant mortality. These demands and claims deserve attention and action. In fact, to a certain extent, this thesis is written with the intended purpose of transmitting such demands. However, here I also offer a critical analysis of these claims.

This thesis draws upon anti-Navy utterances to examine many of the sociopolitical aspects as they impact the environmental health concerns among the Vieques residents. Here I emphasized the fact that many aspects have been sidestepped while others represent the core of an anti-Navy front. Due to this critical analysis I contend that Vieques is an environmental hotspot that is in the middle of

complex power structures that need to be changed in order to improve their living conditions, not just for the Viequenses but for the rest of the Puerto Ricans as well.

In light of the lack of a theoretical framework that would deal with environmental health problems as a result of naval exercises, with an emphasis on discourse, this thesis has argued for a new environmental anthropology in tandem with critical medical anthropology's conception of the body. Following these two approaches I argue that since health and environmental problems have a social root, they must be dealt with in social and political terms. Thus favorable improvements in Viequenses life in general come about not because of arguments or persuasions, but because of vast social transformation, namely by changing the colonial status and providing better health services and environmental monitoring. The anti-Navy discourse is not just a communication about the health and environmental concerns, but also reveals many of the aspects that mediate the process whereby anti-Navy activist portray their understanding of their grievances and where the realms of the "might have been," the "should be," and the "may always be" are constituted through such communication.

According to my observations and interviews, for decades (since the 1940s) the collective memory of the Viequenses has been marked by the presence of a neighbor (US Navy). Clearly representing federal authority in all of Puerto Rico, this neighbor expropriated them in order to occupy two thirds of the island they inhabited. On one side the Navy stores ammunitions, while on the other side it practices with the same arms and bombs that are used during war. While the Viequenses lack of formal

political methods at the federal government to influence any decision that would affect them the most, the presence of this neighbor has influenced the social landscape in such a way that the unemployment rate is growing and the economic activity is disappearing. In addition, the Navy has admittedly tested napalm and depleted uranium, while the available cancer statistics reflect that Viequenses are more likely to suffer from this chronic disease than the rest of Puerto Ricans living on the main island.

As a consequence of the Vieques controversy, Puerto Rico is at one of its most important historical moments, given the fact that it is forced to face the issue of its relationship with the US. Of all the problems that are being faced by the Puerto Rican society, the Vieques controversy has occupied such a leading role because the root of the problem has to do with human rights, which is one of the most important factors. The US military presence is another factor that has been increasing for the past six decades. Vieques is part of a broader US military presence in Puerto Rico, which has a direct relationship with the colonial relations that govern the island.

While for many Puerto Ricans the relationship with the US is the source of economic prosperity, security and even a privilege, Vieques represents the fact that this relationship is based upon an unequal distribution of power. This power is represented in Vieques because while they lack of real representation in Congress nor vote for the President of the US, they have to endure the “friendly” fire of military maneuvers and, as individuals, become part of the US armed forces. It is because of this that many have argued like Carr (1984) that “it is hard to resist the conclusion

that the Navy has benefited from all political incongruence and ambiguities that have been existing since the creation of the Commonwealth status.

Yet it would be misleading to ignore the fact that most Viequenses argue that Puerto Rico's central government has failed to address their situation with the Navy by simply neglecting them; thus complicating their numerous problems. Many problems that could have been solved by allocating the necessary resources for better health care in the island and economic stimulus are now starting to be attended, though there is much to be done. Consequently there is a sense of frustration with the government, although it is now involved in the movement. This involvement has been present since the death of Sanes. For the two years that followed Sanes' death the central government has been trying to evict the Navy mainly through lobbying in Washington. However, much of the campaigns' success lies in the civil disobedience, since it began the Navy has been forced to temporarily stop any maneuvers.

Since its foundation the anti-Navy movement has been faced with the overwhelming task of choosing between not challenging the current political relationship with the U.S. and confronting the military presence in the island. However, both the government of Puerto Rico and the anti-Navy movement have given very little attention to this issue or procrastinate by defining the struggle, almost exclusively, in terms of human rights. As a result, the most desirable alternative has been to fight for the Navy's eviction without changing their relationship with the US

nor to upset it because this represent putting in jeopardy the “benefits” that the US has brought to PR since its invasion in 1898.

This demonstrates how this way of thinking is so ingrained in Puerto Rican culture in general, where any allegations of authenticity and attempts to be recognized within the system are made without an explicit attempt to change the existing power structures and its membership in the American nation. In Vieques, for example, the anti-Navy discourse places the figure of the fisherman as a true cultural representation of their struggle. This figure not just represents the injustices that they as a community have suffered due the Navy but how they have courageously fought for decades.

Therefore, the anti-Navy movement and its environmental claims are in essence not new to Vieques’ social landscape. What is new, however, is the fact that support for the struggle has come from very diverse sectors of Puerto Rican and international politics. In addition, now the image of the fishermen has emerged as a cultural icon that gives pride to many Viequeses because it brings a “true” Vieques element to a struggle that has been so popularized as a result of such a broad consensus. Its main accomplishments have come in the form of this support, in their ability to halt military maneuvers with civil disobedience, and by being able to improve their ability to reach beyond the local forms of political support. I contend that they have reached beyond the local forms of political support because they have also portrayed the body as the site of power relations, which is frequently addressed by critical medical anthropology. As a result the most recurring themes since Sanes’

death are numerous risk perceptions attempts to portray the Viequenses problems as a site of power relations that make the struggle a human rights issue.

Protesters argue that the health and environmental cost for the military presence in Vieques is too high. As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the phrase “Death shakes and traumatizes” represents an attempt by Monseñor González to illustrate that there is a strong connection between social suffering and the Navy presence in Vieques. Knowing that a neighbor and perhaps a friend like David Sanes died because of a tragic accident during a naval exercise may have given the impression that the Viequenses are living an undeclared war. Despite such vivid representation of bodies struggling for survival, the Viequenses have had their eyes really opened due to allegations that many people around the world are seeing the struggle as a fight for independence. With this in mind, it would seem overly romantic, simplistic, and misleading to argue that all Viequenses agree upon these images and how their sentiment has been channeled. In fact, many anti-Navy activists are constantly attempting to avoid accusations of being pro-independence because this jeopardizes support from opposing political sectors.

For decades Puerto Rican pro-independence groups have voiced an intense rejection of the oppressive power structures and the prevailing status quo in Puerto Rico and recently in Vieques. Foreseeing that they must decide in favor of either politics of status or their health, Viequenses are growing reluctant to the independentistas leading role in the movement. Their prominence within the movement has portrayed both Viequenses and Puerto Ricans as American citizens

that would like to end their particular economic and political ties with the US has already generated allegations of becoming activism gatekeepers and of disturbing the peace that used to reign within the community. Thus while for many La Marina is a non desirable consequence of a colonial relationship with the US, for many it is something that they are going to have deal with if they still want to be part of the US.

Although a recuperation of part of the land is being processed, the movement has not yet achieved its main goal: eviction of the Navy from the island. Victory has indeed remained elusive (McCaffrey 1999). Due to the fact that Puerto Ricans are divided among three discursive regimes with regard to the colonial status, it is clear that there are many barriers for achieving this goal. It is my contention that the movement lacks of a coherent program of action in light of the fact that it demands a new way of thinking among Puerto Ricans. In addition, they have even being accused of disturbing the peace that has characterized the civilian area. This way of thinking demands, simply put, to think that it is OK to protest against something that is so representative of the US' power on Puerto Rico. It will take more than bumper stickers and civil disobedience to get to the root of the ultimate solution. Consequently the consensus is already facing its shortcomings, especially because it remains unprepared to adopt a position regarding the colonial status.

Appendix

Protocol Clearance From the Human Subjects
Institutional Review Board



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: 21 June 2000

To: Ann Miles, Principal Investigator
Nelson Class-Meléndez, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Sylvia Culp, Chair *Sylvia Culp*

Re: HSIRB Project Number 00-04-27

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "A Qualitative Approach to Public Opinion in Vieques, Puerto Rico" has been **approved** under the **exempt** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 21 June 2001

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