
Original Article

Sixty years before the homicide: The Vieques movement and trauma resolution

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Abstract This article focuses on the intersection of cultural trauma and social movements research to bridge the two in an effort to expand the application of trauma theory and to enrich the social movements research field. Focusing on the case of the antimilitary movement in Vieques, Puerto Rico (1943–2004), I examine the way trauma narratives informed the mobilization process, and how the movement engaged in a meaning-making process that contributed to its success. The article addresses the concept of trauma resolution through social movement research as a way for social actors to change their social conditions and re-establish control over the means of self-representation.

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Introduction

On 25 June 1999, the Special Commission on Vieques (CEV) produced a report to the governor of Puerto Rico, Pedro Rosselló, that categorized the impact of the US Navy's presence in Vieques, a municipal island of Puerto Rico, as one of 'collective transcendence'. This 'special category', as the commission called it, sought to cover 'the extent and intensity' of the damages experienced by the people of Vieques from 60 years of military presence. 'These refer to damages that transcend the [Vieques] population and current circumstances. These are damages that affect their affirmation as a people and

The title is inspired by the novel *Twenty Centuries after the Homicide*, by Carmelo Rodríguez Torres.

their [national] identity, their collective self-esteem and their expectations for the future' (Comisión Especial de Vieques, 1999, p. 34).

The CEV's assessment describes the impact of the military presence beyond objective features such as public health, the environment and economic development. The evidence cited by the CEV came from testimonials as well as site visits and reports that spoke of land expropriations, the displacement of civilians from public spaces, sexual harassment, environmental devastation and economic deprivation. All of these stories captured the attention of members of the commission as they were introduced, many for the very first time, to the reality of the US military presence in Vieques. In most instances, commission members were shocked by the testimonials, many of which went beyond the initial assumed issues of bombing and military exercises. The testimonials conducted by the commission took place at the same time as, and in response to, massive protests calling for the end of military training and the removal of the US Navy from Vieques after a civilian was killed in military-related accident. At the center of this public mobilization, the Vieques Movement pointed to the traumatic effects of the military presence caused by the disruption of social life and uprooting of collective identity.

The movement's description of the impact of the military presence resembled the construct of *cultural trauma* (Alexander, 2004, p. 1); that is, social actors defined the military presence as a 'fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they come from, and where they want to go' (Alexander, 2004, p. 10). I argue that the Vieques Movement engaged in a meaning-making process to cast the military presence as the reason for their current condition, of trauma, while setting the grounds for the pursuit of change in the social conditions in Vieques. It is my argument that social movements, more than establishing blame for their grievances by identifying perpetrators, also seek resolution by re-establishing control over the means of self-representation (Eyerman, 2001; Alexander, 2004). By seeking to remove the elements that they associate with trauma and outlining a path toward restoring lost collective identity, social movements seek to overcome their cultural displacement and resolve their trauma. The resolution of trauma would consist of establishing a vision for the future that excludes the agents or elements previously associated with a traumatic effect. In the context of the Vieques Movement, ending the bombings and the proposed plan for sustainable social development post-demilitarization – known as the 4 Ds – represented a blueprint for a new reality without the US military.

In the following pages, I demonstrate that the Vieques Movement engaged in a process of meaning making by appropriating a trauma narrative at work in the local community to strengthen its agenda for social change. I will establish the presence of a symbolic repertoire that provided the means by which to associate transformations of fundamental aspects of the local social fabric with the arrival and establishment of the US Navy in Vieques. This symbolic repertoire would subsequently help produce a trauma narrative. I then highlight how activists

conducted performances that depicted the military presence as a traumatic experience. Finally, I briefly situate the latest efforts of the movement toward a comprehensive program of development as part of a trauma-resolution process. I will use trauma theory to show how meaning is constructed in social movements and to show the role that carrier groups play in the performance of trauma resolution.

Social Movements, Culture and Trauma Construction

The literature on social movements has struggled for several decades with the place that culture occupies in the analytics of collective action. In the past 15 years, carried by the cultural turn that has influenced diverse areas of sociology, social movement scholars have scrutinized the dominant models of resource mobilization and political process in order to identify the neglect of culture in their calculations of opportunities, constraints and choices (McAdam *et al*, 2001). As a result of this critique, scholars delved into ways to integrate culture in their examination of collective action. The most promising models for the operationalization of culture have either (a) conceived of movements as social actors wielding meanings, symbols and worldviews as tool kits (Swidler, 1986, 2001); (b) assumed that movements are embedded in webs of signification or scripts that define, enable, and constrain their strategies and opportunities (Polletta, 2002; Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani, 2009); (c) illustrated how movement actors framed their grievances, prognosis and proposed solutions in pursuit of adherents (Snow *et al*, 1986); or (d) highlighted the ways that social-movement actors engage in cultural work such as identities, narratives or art (Melucci, 1996; Polletta, 2006; Jasper, 2011). Though this scholarship certainly moved culture from the margins to the center, scholars still struggle with the dilemmas of a utilitarian view of culture (for example, resources), culture as opposed to structure (institutions), and culture as a mere interpretive lens or frame. The aforementioned models fall short in their analysis of culture in social movements, missing the opportunity for stronger theorizing around meaning making instead of strategic uses and positioning of culture in collective action. As Jasper (2012, p. 31) suggests, scholars' analytics must move from focusing on how culture allows actors to 'move across different social scenarios' to how actors 'create scenarios with their own projects they have in mind'.¹

The emphasis on meaning making situates culture at the center of the analysis, filling the gaps identified by culturalists such as Touraine and Melucci, but free from the constraints that current paradigms face about culture's relation to strategy, structure and power. Through meaning construction we may examine

¹ Author's translation of original Spanish.

how social actors articulate ‘shared understandings’, ‘the building blocks for alliances and solidarity in mobilization’ (Kane, 1997, p. 252). Instead of approaching mobilization as a function of framing or symbolic resonance, stronger cultural theorizing looks into the semiotic nature of mobilization, ‘a multipath process between movement leaders and participants’, to produce meaning (ibid, p. 255). By following how actors establish the significance of particular phenomena, as well as the performances, adaptations and projections of such meaning, we can arrive at a deeper understanding of mobilization as a cultural process. Roy (2010) suggests examining the social relations within which social movements’ performances are conducted to understand the embeddedness of mobilization in culture. An analysis of the impact of folk singers on the civil rights movements decisively shows that because culture is embedded in particular types of social relations, these very relations can simultaneously be reproduced or challenged through their cultural practices (Roy, 2010, p. 91). In the context of Vieques, the social relations within which mobilization against the military presence is embedded are represented by the sudden transformation and threat to a community caused by the imposition of a foreign element and its prerogatives. This suggests that in dissecting mobilization in Vieques as a cultural process we must trace the webs of signification that were created, adapted and mobilized, as well as identify the actors who carried out performances that defined this event as traumatic.

Certainly we can assume that 60 years of US Navy presence on the island of Vieques left deep impressions on the collective memory of local residents (Mannheim, 1952; Conway, 1997; Pennebaker, 1997). However, this trauma, instead of being attributed solely to the events themselves, must be interpreted as the ‘representation of these events’ as a ‘fundamental threat’ to the foundations of collective identity (Alexander, 2004, p. 10). Although Caruth (1996) and Edkins (2007) both link trauma to direct exposure to an event, they also argue that trauma is retrospective, that it is not self-evident, and that it requires an interlocutor or audience to share and re-experience the trauma through communication (Van der Kolt and van der Hart, 1995, p. 177, cf. Edkins, 2007, p. 40). Thus, trauma is a mediated artifice rather than solely a direct product of an event. It is a social process, a construction carried out by social agents.

Trauma theory identifies *carrier groups* as social agents who produce and perform the narratives that establish an event as traumatic (Alexander *et al*, 2004; DeGloma, 2009; Walker, 2012). Just as Weber (1968, p. 468) coined this term in reference to agents with ideal and material interests, in trauma theory carrier groups are conceptualized by their capacity to articulate particular discourses, thereby defining and situating their social reality for publics (Alexander, 2004, p. 11). Carrier groups are not conceptualized as nor reduced to victims of trauma, although they have experienced events associated with traumatic effect. Instead, the work of carrier groups involves the expansion of both the groups of individuals who may identify with a traumatic event (social

transmission) and the set of events that may be categorized as traumatic (social affiliation). As DeGloma writes, carrier groups ‘work to expand the relevance of trauma through time and space’ (2009, pp. 106–107).

The process of trauma construction must be placed in the context of mediating the past and memory on the basis of two premises: first, that trauma represents an interpretation of the past, thus being a reconstruction of the collective memory of a given community; and second, that at the center of both memory and trauma lies the construction and affirmation of collective identities (Zerubavel, 1996; Olick and Levy, 1997; Falasca Zamponi, 2003). According to Alexander (2004, p. 1), ‘cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways’. In analyzing trauma as a mechanism used by groups to mediate their past, Alexander and others have emphasized that meaning making translates particular events into sources of trauma (see Wagner-Pacifci, 1996; Eyerman, 2001). Further, the event or experience is not considered traumatic because of its direct and objective effects; rather, events are recoded as sources of trauma by particular agents in society (Zerubavel, 1995; Alexander, 2004, pp. 10–11). Through the attribution of traumatic effects to past events, social agents can problematize the origination of collective identity traits or the occurrence of social processes, and they can allocate responsibility to other actors or demand symbolic retribution or reparations for damages (Eyerman, 2001; Alexander, 2004).

Earlier work on cultural trauma has alluded to the role of social-movement leaders as carrier groups (Smelser, 2004, p. 38) as well as social movements as a space to nurture collective memories and identities (Eyerman, 2004, p. 69). However, with the exception of Eyerman’s work (2001), social movements are absent from the analysis of cultural trauma. By analyzing anti-military social-movement activists as a carrier group articulating a trauma narrative around the 60 years of military presence on the island of Vieques, we can better appreciate the process of meaning construction and the bridge that links the agency of carrier groups and social structure. As discussed above, the formulation of a comprehensive and robust theorizing about culture in social movement is an ongoing project. In a similar way, the element of carrier groups in cultural trauma has not received the attention it deserves. The following examination of carrier groups’ performance, adaptation and projection of trauma narratives goes beyond rhetorical strategies (DeGloma, 2009) and situates them at the center of meaning construction.

The Vieques Movement: 50 Years of Resistance

The social movement process called the ‘Vieques Movement’ is a 50-year grassroots movement aiming to eject the US Navy from Vieques. The general

agenda of this movement included ending all military exercises, closing the naval training grounds and revoking the military land tenure. The resistance movement in Vieques can be traced to the 1940s, with points of effervescence in the mid-1960s, at the end of the 1970s and after 1999 (Ruiz, 1947; Meléndez, 1989; Barreto, 2002; McCaffrey, 2002).

The resistance to the military presence can be divided into three periods with different actors, objectives and strategies. The first period (1943–1959) was marked by discontent with the economic situation and constraint among the islanders. The island's historical archives record the first 'peaceful' public manifestation against the military establishment in 1943. Ruiz (1947, p. 205) notes, 'In the summer of 1943 there was a manifestation with black flags'. This period also saw the emergence of the first organization, Hijos de Vieques (Sons of Vieques), a lobbying group that focused on pressuring the state to address the unemployment situation in Vieques.

The second period (1960–1979) was characterized by a more combative stand and direct action methods. Rumors of more land expropriations by the US Navy in the mid-1960s would galvanize a community effort when business owners, university students and local officials conjured a popular march against any further expansions (Meléndez, 1989; McCaffrey, 2002). This period also saw a series of fishermen-led counter-maneuvers to disrupt exercises and some of the first civil disobedience acts carried out by local residents as new spearheads of the resistance. The formation of the Crusade for the Rescue of Vieques (La Cruzada pro Rescate de Vieques) and the Fishermen's Association (Asociación de Pescadores de Vieques, APV) marked the beginning of a long-lasting organized resistance effort that would continue beyond this period. This period also provided the articulations of two mobilization narratives: anti-colonialist and socioeconomic.

The last period (1993–2004) presents a movement that was renewed after a decade of latency, integrating a language of inclusiveness, broadening points of concern in the mobilization discourse to include peace, the environment, and health, and marking a dramatic change in collective action. The footwork was carried out by three key organizations: the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques (CPRDV, a reconfiguration of the Cruzada of the 1970s), the APV, and the Vieques Women's Alliance (Alianza de Mujeres Viequesenses). On 19 April 1999, a 500-pound bomb missed its intended target and hit an observation point (OP1), killing a civilian security guard, David Sanes, and wounding two other individuals (Colombani, 1999). Although community support had been building as a result of organization efforts, the suddenness of this event triggered a massive mobilization of support at local, national and extra-national levels. Demonstrations were spontaneously held in front of the city hall, while other activists initiated protests at the main gates of Camp Garcia, in Vieques (Estrada *et al.*, 1999). For the next 5 years, a protest movement grounded in direct action tactics, broad-based coalition building,

and mass mobilization carried out an impressive and expressive resistance to militarization.

Most examinations of the Vieques Movement have focused their attention on one of two features that framed the mobilization: political cleavage (Meléndez, 1989; García Muñiz and Rodríguez Beruff, 1999; Barreto, 2002) or the movement's internal dynamics (McCaffrey, 2002; Vélez-Vélez, 2010; Torres-Vélez *et al*, 2013). Some have understood the mobilization and resistance in Vieques within the framework of US-Puerto Rican colonial politics (Murillo, 2001), while others have situated the struggle within a national field of activism (Vélez-Vélez, 2014). Little attention has been placed on the mechanisms that sustained the mobilization in Vieques and carried it to success. McCaffrey (2002) has drawn some conclusions about the symbolic significance that certain identities, in particular that of fishermen, had in framing the struggle. However, these identities, though they sheltered the struggle from being undermined by exogenous interests, had limited resonance among the island residents (Vélez-Vélez, 2010). The question persists: What allowed the last wave of action by the anti-military movement to mobilize such massive support when others did not?

While intellectuals observing the events unfolding assessed that this mobilization was 'like no event in anyone's memory' (Mullenneaux, 2000, p. 46), it is precisely because of memories, remembrance and retelling of past events that the mobilization swelled to such a scale. As Barreto (2002) stated well, 'for a traumatized community, this incident represented a tragic episode of *déjà vu*'. The latest wave of resistance in Vieques revisited the experiences of 50 years of military presence to give meaning to the opposition movement and to project a future without the US Navy.

The last wave of resistance appropriated these experiences, opening to open a wound that could only be healed through the removal of its source, the US military and the development of a new social reality for the island.

Methods and Data

The data used in this analysis were drawn from 27 semi-structured and in-depth interviews collected in Vieques between 2002 and 2006. All interviewees were, at some point, local activists from one or more of the active organizations working on the island. Four of the interviews were collected in the middle of the mobilization process (2002–2003) in the context of participant observation and exploratory fieldwork and 23 were collected in 2006, after the US Navy had retreated from the island. The selection of participants followed a snowball sampling technique to both reach into the tight organizational structure in the middle of the mobilization in 2002 and circumvent the effects of the

demobilization after 2005. The initial contacts included known activists and adherents of the movement.

The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Spanish by the author and have been selectively translated into English. The interviews focused on three general issues: (a) the lives of residents and their experiences growing up on the island, (b) their experience living with the military presence, and (c) their understanding of the mobilization process on the island. The interviews presented a picture of how actors perceived the military presence shaping their lives and how the movement sought to resolve the issues they attributed to the military presence. Though different participants had different roles in the movement, the interviews reveal a consistent storyline that was unaltered by the participant's positionality in the mobilization process. In addition to the interviews, public documents and newspaper clippings have been incorporated to further corroborate information and capture the public discourse.

Toward a Trauma Narrative

The articulation of opposition during the last wave of mobilization in Vieques took place in the context of reorganization efforts by activists who sought to problematize the public discussion of the military presence. Two preceding efforts had framed the antimilitary movement: the 1960s anti-colonialist narrative and the 1970s fishermen's narrative. These two phases, while related to and influential on the larger movement, must be interpreted as distinctive and competing discourses for mobilization against the military presence. Both failed to provide meaning to the experience of the military presence in ways that propelled mass participation.

The establishment of a political left or anticolonial narrative in the movement meant the interpretation of the military presence as a consequence of the colonial status of Puerto Rico, the central issue of national politics since 1898 (Murillo, 2001). Although the link between colonialism and the military presence is self-evident, the mobilization narrative around this connection was very limiting. As one of my interviewees, Edwin, stated,

There were times here that our protests were very closed, to the point that what you saw was another [leftist] political act, with slogans such as 'Yankees Go Home! Down with the American Imperialism!' These were traditional slogans that closed doors. Here the *independentistas*² ... we presented a very political outlook, in favor of independence. And a political

² *Independentistas* refers to sympathizers of the secession of Puerto Rico from the United States and full independence of the island nation.

argument only, that didn't appeal to everyone. On the contrary, it was very limiting.

While the movement in the 1960s succeeded in gathering some support for certain aspects of the military presence issue – such as land deeds for families relocated in the 1940s – its dependence on external ideological loyalties made a weak foundation for local mass mobilization.

In the 1970s, mobilization based in the fishermen's community evolved from lessons of the anti-colonialist model, but most strongly from the success of the fishermen's association against the naval base in Culebra.³ In the 1970s, with the formation of the Culebra Fishermen's Association, the fishermen acquired a more symbolic importance in Vieques, becoming the vanguard of the anti-military movement on the island (Mullenneaux, 2000, p. 31; McCaffrey, 2002, p. 75). The Vieques Fishermen Association provided Viequenses with another story in the debate, one untainted by any ideological sway as the fishermen were associated with neutrality.⁴ As one of the presidents of the APV explained, 'The situation in Vieques is that the [fishermen] have families to support If you have a boat you can go fishing, and no one will ask you if you are pro-navy, anti-navy, what political party you are. No one will ask you that' (McCaffrey, 2002, p. 76).

The APV represented an alternative to the leftist articulation, one grounded in the local concerns of the islanders, an indigenous approach to mobilization.

The fishermen's identity helped to overcome the handicap of national politics and exogenous interests; however, narrowing the issue to the concerns of a particular segment of the population made it difficult to incorporate the experiences of other groups in the community into the movement. As expressed by Clara, 'When you talk about the struggle in 78–79, I see it as an economic struggle. I mean, the fishermen were a group of workers who saw their labor being affected by the military practices, so they decided to fight back for their right to fish and work'. Although the narrative articulated by the fishermen reflected local subjectivities, their story was not shared by all islanders and thus had a limited triggering effect.

These two narratives – of the anti-colonialist/political left and the fishermen/economic strain – represented initial forms of meaning articulation for the movement in Vieques. While both narratives featured the military presence as an element to be defined in the context of their discourse, as the epitome of colonialism or as a barrier to economic self-sufficiency, respectively, no group produced a narrative that placed the military presence as the source of meaning

³ Culebra is a neighboring municipal island northeast of Vieques that served as a target range for the Roosevelt Roads Naval Station from 1941 to 1975. After a massive mobilization, led by the local fishermen's association in 1975, the base was closed and all exercises were relocated to Vieques.

⁴ For more on the fishermen's collective identity formation see McCaffrey (2002).

for their reality. Placing the military presence as a subject requiring definition may have been a weak effort at meaning making by the movement. A subaltern narrative focused on qualifying the military as source of intangible damages started to emerge in ways similar to the previous anti-colonialist and fishermen's discourses. This new narrative situated people's experience of the military presence as a defining force of who they were in the present and the social reality that they intended to create in the future. The death of civilian guard David Sanes would trigger dormant memories, stories and fears that situated the military as a source of trauma. This remembrance provided the support required for the meaning construction process to emerge.

Sixty Years Before the Homicide

The death of David Sanes served as a turning point in the association of features of the military presence (actual events) with views of collective suffering (interpretations of those events) on the island. In the collective mind of Viequenses, this event was tied to a set of images, implications and responses related to 60 years of military occupation, an existing mnemonic repertoire of traumatic experiences. As people revisited the shared memories and experiences of the past, these mnemonic triggers opened a vein of signification, allowing emplotment and interpretative intervention from movement actors as the events unfolded (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1; Davis, 2002, p. 12). In an appropriation of the trauma images, the movement situated the accidental death of David Sanes as the last episode in a dramatic sequence that had started 60 years earlier, contextualizing both the present within their past and their mobilization process.

The articulation of a trauma narrative about the abrupt and irreversible disruption of normalcy is supported by symbolic references from oral, chronicled and fictional mediums of storytelling accumulated over the past five decades. Some people referred to the arrival of the navy as a turning point, a rift in the temporal mental landscape of the life of the local people (Sarat *et al*, 2007, p. 7). In his memoir, *The Route: The Forgotten Side of Vieques*, Pragmacio (2004) uses the phrase 'on the route to our destiny' to speak of the new path that he and others embarked on after 1941. This memoir illustrates the way his family and the island learned 'to resist pain either physically or mentally, with patience and perseverance until it vanishes' (p. 37) while facing the challenges of a changing reality, including the expropriation of land, the bombing and violence against civilians. 'Many residents couldn't believe that strangers from other places treated us as strangers in our own land', he comments (p. 56).

Some of these features will become pivotal elements in the narratives of the military presence experience. For instance, in the life stories collected by Fabián Maldonado (2003) from elder residents in Vieques we find similar evocations of

the expropriations and the changes that were associated with it. In one testimonial, César López remembers, ‘how his life and that of the majority of the citizens in Vieques was impacted’ by the expropriations (p. 49). Returning to his high school years, César paints a picture of how the island was before the arrival of the navy, how the Central Playa Grande, the ‘only way of life’, was ‘taken away’ and ‘demolished’, and his witnessing of the encampments for relocated families in areas where sugar cane used to be planted. ‘It was a very drastic change in Vieques’, he says (pp. 49–50). Although such reference to the past can create nostalgia (Davis, 2002), reference to this split further attributes meanings to the disruption. These images provide an initial symbolic language for referencing the military presence as source of change, potentially traumatogenic change (Sztompka, 2004).

Historians have provided other images that supplement and complement this narrative of transformation, highlighting the divide between past and present. In his description of Vieques pre-1941, Pastor Ruiz (1947) draws an image of a peasantry with few ambitions, high self-reliance and independence, but low expectations of prosperity. The historical narrative of pre-military Vieques tied these conditions to social stability, predictability and complacency – normative factors of their cosmology. These precepts were linked with social assumptions about the dominance of sugar mills as employers, access to land through a sharecropper system, and physical distance from the main island and its institutions. In the context of post-1941 Vieques, the experiences of displacement and relocation, an increase in unemployment and migration, and the introduction of military exercises to the island were associated with new precepts such as instability, uncertainty and deprivation. The historization of this event as a transformation of the very cultural complex that sustained the current social order as normal further accentuates the qualification of the military arrival as disruption (Sztompka, 2004).

Although memoirs and chronicles embodied the event as an experience bound by the forces of the tangible and material world, fiction writers created intangible meaning for these experiences in the imagined collective identity. Among their works *Usmaíl* (1959) by Pedro Juan Soto and *Twenty Centuries after the Homicide* (1970) by Carmelo Rodríguez Torres were two of the earliest representations of the military presence as trauma. In both novels the military arrival and presence are associated with themes of social deterioration and disruption. *Usmaíl* narrates the clash between two cultural forces – civilian and military – and the crisis that envelops the island as it is transformed into a civilian-inhabited militarized space (Rodríguez, 2009). The embodiment of shame and trauma resides in the main character, whose name, Usmaíl, can also be read as ‘US Mail’, reflecting the duality of a bicultural origin and conflict and the burden of its meaning. *Twenty Centuries after the Homicide*, the novel of Viequense trauma par excellence (Santiago Diaz, 2005, p. 485), describes the struggles of the author and his characters to come to terms with the personal and

collective memories of a society that with the arrival of the ‘Nephilims’⁵ entered into a spiral of suffering, despair, and social and moral decay. Like *Usmail*, the trauma is inscribed by evasive memories, disrupted recollections and disorganized chronologies as well as erased histories, all of which serve as mechanisms to cope with the realities of a society that has been raped, physically and metaphorically. Furthermore, Rodríguez Torres intertwined both narratives into a single symbolic repertoire by using the common character of Usmail, a child who was literally castrated (by rats) and figuratively emasculated by his turbulent childhood (Rodríguez Torres, 1970, p. 67). These novels manifest a visceral portrait of how an exogenous force such as the military can extirpate and displace the roots of a people and the subtle ripples that emerge in the sense of self and future as a consequence.

These images represent existing meaning structures embedded in the island’s cultural repertoire, associating the military presence with affective and symbolic predicates of impact and change. Because trauma is retrospective, these associations between effects and the military presence emerged in how certain events were recast after the death of David Sanes as activists of the Vieques Movement galvanized these associations to give form to the actual traumatic narrative.

Narrating and Performing Trauma

It is important to remember that these events are not traumatic in themselves beyond the individual; they must be interpreted, defined and framed as traumatic for the collective (Hughson and Spaaij, 2011, p. 285). While the death of David Sanes was interpreted by the media as an isolated accident, one that took place within the workplace, the assessment by the Vieques Movement was very different. Toño, a state employee and activist of the CPRDV, contextualized the event as an impetus for mobilization: ‘When this happened the [CPRDV] was already active, so this helped a lot. With David’s death, I think it awakened the struggle in Vieques’. The event stirred memories of past accidents, deaths and threats that the community had lived with for 60 years, which started to emerge from the confines of private lives into the public sphere.

As the activists were mobilizing, they also engaged in a process of retelling the past, confirming six decades of experiences that were buried in their memories and silences, yet unforgotten. In speaking about their interpretation of the death of David Sanes, they reflected on those memories and knowledge of past events.

⁵ Nephilims were giants who populated the earth according to the Old Testament and threaten the peoples of Canaan (see Numbers, 13:33). Rodríguez Torres uses the Nephilims to represent the military, highlighting the awe and fear they produced in the local people.

There have been many deaths. It's important to make clear that David's death was not the only one. Hopefully the last one, but never the only one.
Saul

People were clear that this was not the first time an accident happened due to error. Previously, in 1992, they dropped five bombs a mile away from the civilian population. It missed the civilian population by just a second. There have been other accidents and the people understand that the maneuvers are a threat to their safety.

Mariano

The death of David Sanes became the embodiment of other deaths linked to the military presence, like a eulogy to others lost in the past and not entirely forgotten by the community.

In the process of articulating the trauma narrative, stories and characters that had been woven into the collective memory narratives of the island were translated (Wagner-Pacifici, 1996) into nuances of the traumatic experience. Cruz Soto (2006, p. 9) speaks of a post-memory in reference to how the 1950s killing of Julián Felipe Francis, also called Mapepe, re-entered the Viequense popular mythology decades later as a narrative of tragedy and martyrdom. This narrative would be revisited and situated as another stone in the pathway of the traumatic experience in a post-David Sanes Vieques. For instance, Clara mentions Mapepe's story when speaking about the impacts of the military presence: 'Mapepe's death occurred because of [the clash between civilians and the military]. He was beaten by a group of drunken marines'. In a similar way the accidental death of Don Anastacio and his son, included in the testimonies collected by Fabián-Maldonado (2003), was relived by activists as part of an overdue recognition. Saul, a retired math teacher and activist, recounts this incident as part of the long record of deaths associated to the military: 'March 25, 1940, a Monday, Don Anastacio Acosta and his son Domingo died. He was a foreman in the Punta del Este lands where the target area is now. They were on horseback and one of the horses stepped on an incendiary bomb and both burned to death'. This retelling and remembering of an endless chain of negative events that always go back to the military presence turned the accident of April 1999 into a case of *deja vú* (Barreto, 2002). As Caruth (1996) so appropriately stated, trauma involves reliving the experience, re-experiencing it through telling the stories that situate and embody the memories with traumatic meaning. The revival of the death stories allowed people to tie their experience to the military presence, and their memories to the trauma narrative.

In the process of revisiting the experience of the past, the activists of the Vieques Movement engaged in performances at different forums that would galvanize their attribution of trauma to the military presence. The activists, as agents of the Vieques Movement, in their broadcasting of interpretations of the

military as trauma partook in meaning construction: ‘In doing so, the carrier group makes use of the symbolic resources at hand, and the constraints and opportunities provided by institutional structures If there is illocutionary success, the members of this originating collectivity become convinced that they have been traumatized by a singular event. Only with this success can the audience for the traumatic claim be broadened to include other publics within the “the society at large” (Alexander, 2004, p. 12). These performances would take place at diverse discursive levels, from public interactions and media forums to national institutional structures and extra-national spaces. The activists of the Vieques Movement projected the trauma narrative to internal and external publics in search of publicity and legitimacy, making meaning for this experience and making the trauma real.

Among the first performances in this stage of the struggle in Vieques took place right after the incident that killed David Sanes. As mentioned above, for most Viequesenses, this was only the latest in the chain of events tied to the establishment of the US Navy on the island. In an act of both defiance and mourning, a mixed group of relatives, activists and residents walked onto the base carrying a large white cross on their shoulders, to be placed at the site where Sanes was struck by the projectile. The cross bore the words ‘They Must Leave Now!’ along with Sanes’s name and the date of his death, an indictment to end what for some was a repeated nightmare. The cross was placed at the top of a hill that was renamed Monte David, where the first disobedience camp was erected that night. The placement of the cross served as a memorial not only for Sanes but also for the nameless others whose lives were lost in connection with the military presence. At the same time, placement of the cross at the heart of the firing range established a direct tie between the bombing and the deaths and threats attributed to the military presence.

The symbol of the cross resurfaced in the struggle of Vieques as a mnemonic device representing loss, death and mourning in other performances. For instance, following the Holy Week rituals, a procession of crosses made its way from the main town of Isabel Segunda to the Destino ward where the main gate into Camp Garcia is located. Under a soft rain, the marching cross-bearers reached the gates and, being unable to enter, improvised a cemetery in the green area along the fence. A few dozen crosses with the names of Mapepe, Anastacio, Miliby and others bore witness to the suffering and threat attributed to the military, reiterating the trauma narrative.

The placement of these crosses at the Camp Garcia gate, along with the establishment of the movement headquarters at the same location, turned this space into a stage where denouncement and challenge to the military presence would take place routinely. The emergence of this location as a space of performance and meaning making – a sort of *mise-en-scène* – allowed further enactments of trauma attribution. One of the best illustrations of this was the ‘white ribbons’ campaign. What started as a passive form of showing solidarity in

the community was slowly transformed into an icon of the struggle at large. Laura, one of the organizers, explains how this campaign was engendered and how it moved from a space-bound performance to an act of quiet resistance:

We started asking ourselves, what could we do that would reduce those reactions [of fear] and infuse confidence [in the women working with us]? Well, let's transform the gate – that sign of repression, that represents the military presence. Let's convert it into something that we want; let's turn it into a shield that protects us from what is inside. How? Let's tie little white ribbons to the gate, so many that whenever we look at that gate we won't notice the cyclone fence that made us afraid – that fear that we don't dare to talk about. We started tying ribbons, and people started daring to follow us. Later, everyone who came to Vieques [as supporters] went to the gate and tied a white ribbon on it.

The white ribbon campaign engaged the trauma narrative through the acknowledgement of those attributes of repression and fears commonly cloaked by silence – 'that we don't dare to talk about'. The exercise of transforming the gate into a 'shield' also alludes to those elements from the present and past that are seen as a threat to people's lives.

The white ribbon performance would eventually evolve into an endorsement of the Vieques cause by appearing unobtrusively in different places. Laura concludes, 'Those little ribbons started to appear in the most intimate places, on car antennas, on bicycles, in very personal places, almost invisible'. The ribbons changed from a statement challenging the fear associated with the military to one of solidarity with the struggle as the trauma narrative slowly reached a critical mass.

The actions taking place in Vieques, whether at the gate or the disobedience camps, operated as public displays of discontent aimed at a local audience. However, one of the activists' most important goals was to challenge emerging national discourses that reduced the problem in Vieques to the threat and physical impact of the bombing. The debate carried on by public figures – politicians, observers and pundits – focused on the bombing, the type of exercises and their objective impact as the source of grievances with the military. This discourse was embodied by the CEV, an *ad hoc* body constituted by Puerto Rico's Office of the Governor after the David Sanes incident to study the activities of the US Navy in Vieques and make recommendations for resolving the situation. Through public hearings and evidence examination, such as site visits, environmental impact reports and testimony of what were termed 'experts', the CEV centered on the effects of the bombing across the island (Comisión Especial de Vieques, 1999). Activists sought to shift attention away from material outcomes to focus on the more intangible effects of the military presence that were being overlooked. On 15 June 1999, in a final testimony to the commission, Carmen,

a citizen witness affiliated with the Vieques Women's Alliance, at the insistence of one commissioner for more descriptions of the bombing, revealed a subaltern narrative to everyone's surprise:

Then, I was like, 'Yes, sure, the bombings were terrifying; you felt that everything was going to fall on top of you. That the house was about to crumble, the noise, the tremor. But that was just part of it. It was the harassment, the fact that you grew up fearing [the soldiers] going around knocking on doors looking for women. That was the horror! Seeing my mother locking the doors and windows with a machete in her hand in case they tried to enter. So, sure the bombing was bad, but there was more than bombs here ... [The Commission members] were in shock'.

This testimony challenged what the commission had defined as the problem with the military presence – the bombing – and brought intangible and affective features such as fear and threat into the discussion. This performance by the activists publically identified the military as a source of trauma, restoring to Vieques Movement actors authority over the meanings and interpretations of events. The testimony and the following CEV report situated the bombing as only one feature of the trauma under a new cultural complex that represented people's experiences of the military presence (Sztompka, 2004, pp. 169, 189). Because the CEV was an institutional stage, the performance operated on a different level from the crosses and ribbons, further reinforcing the trauma narrative.

The series of performances about the deaths, threats and fear portrayed the military presence as a living trauma; the US Navy was not something of the past but a conditioning force in the present. The Vieques Movement activists, in their performances as a carrier group, provided publicity to the association between the military presence and the transformations they experienced, and made it possible, at different levels, for other audiences to see and recognize the traumatic effects (Alexander, 2004, p. 11).

From Trauma to Resolution

In establishing a shared ground for mobilization, the Vieques Movement revised its outlook on the struggle and focused on a discourse of the future. At the center of this effort a discourse that shifted from 'what happened' to 'how to go [about it]' (Almog, 2007, p. 291), projecting a vision of a Vieques without the military. This script of the future sought to galvanize a long-term agenda for Vieques, one that instead of focusing solely on immediate issues – economic opportunities, reparations to fishermen for damage to their equipment and financial losses, or land ownership titles – argued for fundamental changes in the military presence

and built upon these. In 1993, under the leadership of the CPRDV, a public assembly ratified a set of goals termed the '4 Ds', meaning *demilitarization*, *decontamination*, *devolution* and *development*. The Vieques Movement sought to articulate a script for the resolution of their current state of affairs, along with a series of other desirable and necessary changes (Davis, 2002, p. 11).

The structure of this script of resolution provided a beginning point, demilitarization, that entailed the removal of the military from the island, but it did not specify how this was to be accomplished. This lack of specificity about how the four goals were to be achieved provided leeway for readers and listeners to imagine solutions (Davis, 2002, p. 19) and experiment, to activate their creativity (Polletta, 2002, p. 37). This encouraged engagement among island residents and potential adherents in this point of departure toward historical change, the demilitarization of the island.

However, the articulation of the 4 Ds as a resolution to the military presence would only gain strength after the emergence of the trauma narrative. The David Sanes incident triggered mnemonic repertoires, retrieving earlier associations of the military with feelings of disruption, fear and threat. The publicity of the trauma narrative set the interpretative ground for residents of Vieques to understand their past, present and future.

Through the lens of trauma the 4 Ds provide a vision of the future, an endpoint toward which people can project their current reality and imagine a new one (Benford, 2002). As Ernesto explained, 'The truth is that you cannot see a future for this island and its inhabitants, fishermen or not, with the military presence. If we really want a better Vieques for us or for our children and grandchildren, we have to start a struggle and stay committed to this struggle, so that at some point in the history of our people we can remove the navy. That is the only way we will have a future'. Considering that the ultimate goal of the Vieques Movement was a demilitarized, decontaminated and self-sustaining island, the 4 Ds embodied the trauma resolution envisioned by the activists.

In interpreting the 4 Ds as trauma resolution, the movement rejected other resolutions, zeroing in on the removal of the military as the only acceptable outcome. This became evident in early 2000 when President Clinton announced an agreement with Governor Rosselló 'that meets our training needs and addresses fairly the concerns of the people' (Clinton, 2000). This 'agreement' established a directive for a local referendum that presented the people of Vieques with two options: (1) a mandate to 'cease all training no later than May 1, 2003' or (2) 'continued training' that would include a stimulus package of \$40 million for development. Both options also included resuming the military exercises with 'dummy bombs' instead of live ammunition until the referendum had taken place and a transfer of land titles of the 'western quarter of the island to Puerto Rico'. The televised announcement of the agreement was received with great disappointment by activists who expected a better outcome after a year of occupying the target range and mass mobilization. Many expressed a sense of 'betrayal' by

Governor Rosselló and interpreted his acceptance as a disheartening ‘compromise’. A CPRDV organizer told a newspaper reporter, ‘to believe that the Navy will hold this agreement is to negate history’ (Roldón Soto, 2000).

The rejection of any compromise that did not include the termination of all military presence intensified recruitment and mobilization of civil disobedience activists. McCaffrey (2002, p. 172) writes, ‘The resilience of protestors and their refusal to accept the terms of the Rosselló-Clinton agreement shifted the political terrain in Vieques, Puerto Rico and the United States as a whole’. Even after a mass arrest operation closed all disobedience camps at the target range, activists continued to defy the federal directive and assert their desire for a military-free future for the next 4 years. The eventual end of exercises in 2003 and transfer of terrains to the Department of the Interior in 2005 was an inconclusive end to the 60 years of military presence. In the eyes of most activists their celebration was a short-lived one; their victory was the first step in a longer route to their imagined island.

Conclusion

I have argued that the last wave of protest in Vieques rested on the appropriation of the military presence as a cultural trauma, one that transformed people’s sense of self, interpretation of their past and present, and expectations of the future. Following the trauma theory approach I have illustrated the trauma narrative present in the community and how the movement emerging after 1999 engaged in a process of meaning making by retrieving stories archived in the collective memory to highlight the traumatic effect of experiences accumulated from 60 years of military presence. The appropriation of the trauma narrative, though triggered by unforeseen events, provided the movement with symbolic material to articulate their proposal for a resolution. The retrieval of memories and stories and their associated emotions accumulated over 60 years of military presence made the community relive the experiences and situated the movement as a necessary driving force for resolving the situation of trauma. While the 4 Ds were created outside of the narrative of trauma, it was in the context of the appropriated narrative and emotional and mnemonic performance that they acquired a character of trauma resolution. By projecting a vision of the future, the construction of an alternative reality beyond the military presence, the proposal of the Vieques Movement transcended its instrumental significance and provided a new cultural context. Social movements seek to alter the conditions associated with the predicaments that afflict their communities. The concept of trauma resolution is an important addition to social-movement research that shows how trauma theory can be operationalized to expand our previous understanding of how social movements approach problem solving. At the core of this article

has been the idea of bridging research on trauma and social movements. Trauma theory can enrich social-movement research by offering a strong cultural approach to comprehend the role of meaning-making practices in carrying the mobilization of communities beyond pragmatic values. The formulation of a comprehensive and robust theorizing of culture in social movements is an on-going project. Here, the attribution of trauma effects to the military presence in Vieques situated meaning making (culture) at the center of the mobilization process, allowing us to analyze mobilization through the deconstruction of the meaning-making process. With respect to the contribution of social-movement research to trauma theory, my focus is on the potentiality of expanding our understanding of the role of carrier groups. By examining carrier groups' performances, adaptations and projections of trauma narratives we situate them as agents of social change. This opens a direction for future research to investigate questions such as the instrumentality of the trauma narrative in mobilization, the conclusiveness of trauma resolution in social movements, and the authority of other actors over memories of trauma in social-movement processes and to assess the value and explanatory capacity of this alternative approach.

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