

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS  
IN THE SEARCH FOR SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE  
IN VIEQUES, PUERTO RICO

By

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## **Abstract**

*This paper assesses the continued community participation mechanisms, especially the Restoration Advisory Board, and the role of these mechanisms in the environmental cleanup of post U.S. military training operations in the current colonial situation of the Puerto Rican island municipality of Vieques. Today the community has many informal and formal mechanisms of organization meant to address the social, economic, health and environmental problems resulting from the Navy's presence on the island. These mechanisms are the cornerstone of the community's search for social and environmental justice. This paper provides a brief history of the Navy's presence on Vieques, the evolution of community participation mechanisms and an analysis of how these mechanisms allow the community to interact with public, private and government institutions involved in the cleanup. The research is centered around interviews with community members to discern whether they feel these mechanisms are effective in properly addressing community concerns. The case study of Vieques could also have international implications for the future of foreign military bases and toxic waste disposal around the world. Analysis of the effectiveness of community participation mechanisms could help marginalized communities deal with developed countries on issues that may concern human health and environmental risks as a result of the developed countries' activities. The analysis of community participation mechanisms can be used as a guide for Vieques and other communities around the world trying to achieve social, economic and environmental justice.*

### **Key words:**

Social and environmental justice, community participation mechanisms, health, contamination, hazardous waste, military bases, colonialism, Vieques

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## Introduction

Vieques is a tiny island municipality of Puerto Rico, sitting seven miles off the east coast of the main island. “La Isla Nena,” or the little sister island as it is nicknamed, is a weekend destination for Puerto Ricans from the main island and the site of some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, many of which are still closed to residents and tourists due to the former presence of the United States Navy using the beaches for training exercises. In the 1940’s, the Navy appropriated 26,000 acres<sup>1</sup> on Vieques to use for bombing target practice and air, land and amphibious training exercises. The military’s appropriation of former sugar plantations where residents lived and worked displaced many families and sandwiched the remaining community between the military lands on the east and west sides of the island. Daily bombings and the general military presence on Vieques were controversial because they posed environmental, safety, health and economic hazards to Vieques. For decades, the Navy’s constant shelling disrupted the fishing industry, generally disrupted the peace by causing tense civilian-military relations, and caused environmental contamination that eventually would spread to affect the residents’ health.

Today, the cleanup is still in progress involving hundreds of abandoned magazines, rusting tanks, bullet casings, unexploded ordnance and other remnants of war, where the only battle ever fought was the one by the community for equal treatment and *Paz para Vieques*, or Peace for Vieques. This research addresses the question of whether or not, within the framework of modern colonialism, Vieques citizens who are simultaneously American citizens have the means necessary to demand their rights for social and environmental justice to be free from environmental contamination and health risks in their community. The community participation mechanisms have been in place for almost a decade with no real analysis outside of U.S. government entities addressing whether or not these mechanisms are effective or sufficient for addressing community concerns.

Almost a decade after the Navy ceased bombing on Vieques, this island paradise continues to be at the center of a struggle for social and environmental justice nested within a larger discussion about Puerto Rico’s colonial status with the United States. The residents of Vieques still struggle with social, economic, political, health and environmental issues from past

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<sup>1</sup> Barreto (pp. 23) explains in detail the prices and acreage purchased by the Navy in the 1940’s. After purchasing land from the Puerto Rican government and private land owners, the U.S. military became the largest landholder in

relations with the military and U.S. government. *Viequesnses* are also dealing with tensions between different factions of the community as well as tensions between these community groups and various private or government institutions involved in the cleanup of the bombing range.

The most persistent issues on Vieques, according to residents, are those of the allocation and ownership of the previously Navy-owned land, the emerging health crises, and the problem of the cleanup. The land previously owned by the Navy is now under stewardship of the Fish and Wildlife Service<sup>2</sup> with no intention of returning it to the residents, who argue that once it is clean should be returned to the community. Increased incidences of cancer and more birth defects on Vieques, as well as respiratory and other health problems, have led residents to believe that their air, soil, water and sea food supply was contaminated during the 60 years of Navy training operations on the island; they believe they should be compensated for health damages by the U.S. government. The cleanup itself is even an issue because the Navy and the community at large have very different ideas as to 1) the thoroughness and depth to which the Navy is responsible to clean<sup>3</sup> and 2) whether the current Navy cleanup methods are safe for residents. Many of these issues are the product of a military past, but residents are finding themselves confronted with new issues that are still unfolding.

In order to react to these dynamic changes the community uses formal and informal mechanisms to continue to adapt to tackle new problems. These participation mechanisms have evolved from informal protests to formal means of working through U.S. government organizations while still keeping their grassroots movements alive. The principle formal community participation mechanism is the Restoration Advisory Board<sup>4</sup> set up by the Navy and required to have a certain degree of community involvement. The RAB is a forum set up by the Navy per federal mandate for sites which have been deemed toxic enough to clean up and which requires a certain level of community participation involving members from the community and the Navy. There are advantages and disadvantages to the RAB and it is questionable whether

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Vieques.

<sup>2</sup> Fish and Wildlife Services (FWS) is an agency in the United States Department of the Interior. (See Appendix A for full explanation of FWS and other organizations).

<sup>3</sup> Rodriguez, Daniel. Personal Interview. Director of Environmental Protection Agency in Vieques explains that the thoroughness of the cleanup of previous Navy land is determined by the projected future use of the land, which is a decision of FWS, a US government agency.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A for full explanation and listing of all organizations.

this organization has the legitimate and sufficient means of addressing community concerns. The community uses myriad other formal and informal mechanisms to deal with problems of social and environmental justice, namely the American Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR), of which the efficiency and effectiveness is uncertain.<sup>5</sup>

Why is the case of Vieques important? The situation on Vieques is unique, especially for its position as a colony of the United States, but it is not an isolated case. There are many other communities around the world where the United States and other foreign militaries have bases. Military installations bring some economic advantages but, as seen with the case of Vieques, can also cause environmental and safety hazards as well as tense civil-military relations. Vieques can be a case study for other marginalized communities or communities in underdeveloped countries dealing with issues of social and environmental justice from developed countries: a process which requires a high degree of information sharing and an awareness of rights and local activism, especially in lobbying for the support of their national government.

In this information age, with such a high turnover rate for new technologies and increased potentially hazardous waste from such technologies, issues could arise with developed countries depositing waste in communities in underdeveloped countries which could pose safety and ecological concerns. In this case as well as in cases of international food security, and many other issues, communities need to organize themselves to deal with their national governments as well as the governments of developed countries through various mechanisms, both formal and informal. The framework of community participation mechanisms in Vieques can be used as a guide to other communities around the world trying to achieve social, economic and environmental justice.

This paper analyses the history of the Navy presence in Vieques and the evolution of community participation mechanisms employed by the residents. With evidence from interviews as well as historical and academic literature, it will present the main issues on the island according to the residents and the community participation mechanisms utilized by residents of Vieques, especially the Restoration Advisory Board. It will analyze the effectiveness and the

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<sup>5</sup> Chambers, Stefanie. *Minority Empowerment and Environmental Justice* (pp 29). Chambers' article defines the struggle as the community "seek[ing] to influence the policy process long-term and overcome their own marginalization in the political system." This paper defines "success" in the context of community organization strategies as the ability to achieve a desired response from public officials, government or private institutions and organization that are in the best interests of the community, as determined by themselves. The key to success is: ongoing organizational structure, diverse membership, technical training, building coalitions with existing orgs,

pros and cons of these mechanisms and draw conclusions about what can be learned from Vieques's unique position in the framework of modern colonialism. Also to be discussed are implications for the future of Vieques as well as the broader international implications for foreign military bases and communities struggling for social or environmental justice in the face of the new and evolving problems of toxic waste across borders and how the case of Vieques can be used as a model for community participation in these struggles.

### Research Process and Goals

I had the opportunity to travel to Vieques in the summer of 2009 to begin research on active community participation in the environmental cleanup through the Restoration Advisory Board. My initial research question was whether the RAB is an effective means of addressing the community's concerns and effective in involving the community in the process of cleaning up hazardous waste from the land previously owned by the Navy. In addition to interviewing representatives of community organizations, I conducted research in the historical archives, spoke informally with residents and observed life and the environment on the island. I had the opportunity to attend a RAB meeting and observe firsthand how the meetings are conducted. During my stay and in the research I have done since, I have come to realize that while the RAB serves an important purpose, other formal and informal mechanisms of community participation and organization in the search for social and environmental justice are more prevalent and often more effective than the RAB.

My answer to the initial research question, then, is more complicated than I had originally anticipated. As the principle formal mechanism, the RAB is not an effective means of involving the community because it has no real power as a decision making entity; it simply listens to community suggestions. Another challenge to the RAB's effectiveness is the bureaucracy that is inherent within the U.S. government, which holds the real power because it holds the strings to the Navy and the EPA and has the real power to make legislation and decide how to allocate the land - the RAB is a Navy organization. Faults notwithstanding, the RAB is important because it is one of the only formal means of appealing to the US government. Many informal mechanisms are more effective than the RAB because of the high level of bureaucracy inherent in the U.S. government. Because the RAB is established by a U.S. government agency the arbitration of the

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leadership skills, institutionalized forms of political participation.

meetings is not independent, therefore government interests are still guiding the final decisions of the board and U.S. interests carry over into the functioning of the RAB.

## **Background and Historical Context**

In order to understand the intricacies surrounding the cleanup of Vieques and the community's participation in the RAB, as well as the other formal and informal community participation mechanisms, it is important to understand the history of Vieques as an island and the history of the Navy's involvement on Vieques. This history is based in a tradition of colonialism and the international climate of the Cold War. This section will give a brief history of Vieques and the Navy's involvement on the island then analyze the community's initial protests and methods of organizing themselves against the Navy presence on Vieques and neighboring Culebra. The irony of these communities' situation is that, in a self proclaimed effort to increase freedom and security in the world, military installations have often succeeded in making the communities in which they build bases more unsafe and unstable. Many times, the negative consequences of military bases remain unintended, disregarded or unseen for years. In cases similar to the struggle on Vieques, the community has an uphill battle to secure rights to health, property and a clean environment.

### Colonial History

Put simply, throughout modern history Puerto Rico has always been a colony. For an "uninterrupted period of over five hundred years"<sup>6</sup> Puerto Rico has not been a sovereign nation, although the people have managed to keep a strong national identity alive. Puerto Rico came under Spanish rule during the same time as many of the other Caribbean islands when Columbus arrived. A visible post-Spanish colonial reminder stands atop the highest point on Vieques: the last Spanish fort built in the Caribbean, in 1882, before the Spanish left. The fort, El Fortin Conde de Mirasol, was renovated in 1991 and is now the Vieques Museum of Archeology, History and Art which exhibits local art and houses thousands of historical archives. In 1989 Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the United States at the end of the Spanish American War and the island has since been a Commonwealth territory of the United States.

The end of WWII and the beginnings of the Cold War in the 1940's for Latin America

and the Caribbean meant dealing with development and post-colonial dependence on either the U.S. or the Soviet Union. This international political environment, augmented by the security dilemma from tensions between the U.S. and the USSR, gave the United States cause to justify the national security need for a military base in the Caribbean. The U.S. justified building a base on the main island as well as on the municipal islands of Vieques and Culebra by labeling Puerto Rico as being of “immediate strategic importance” to the country’s “maritime defense needs.”<sup>7</sup> The large naval base completed in 1943 on the main island of Puerto Rico, Roosevelt Roads Naval Station, sits on 7,000 acres in the town of Ceiba which, combined with the 29,000 acres on Vieques and land on Culebra, makes it the world’s largest naval complex.<sup>8</sup>

Originally designed to house the entire British fleet if England had fallen to Hitler during WWII, the Navy continued to value its Puerto Rican base. During the Cold War the “need” for the base continued due to Puerto Rico’s strategic proximity to Cuba. By 1940, it was clear that the United States Navy was in Vieques to stay, asserting that “complete control of the Caribbean is fundamental to our national defense.”<sup>9</sup> Since Puerto Rico, and subsequently the municipalities of Vieques and Culebra, was technically a U.S. Territory there were very few transaction costs for the U.S. government in appropriating the land and relocating thousands of residents. Lack of accountability to international law or citizens who had a vote in Congress made it extremely easy for the military to ignore the protests of the local *Viequenses* and continue operations on the island. In the case of Vieques and the question of achieving social and environmental justice through community participation, it is important to look at where the directives and funding are coming from, the majority of the time from the U.S. government, and recognize that both the cleanup and formal community participation mechanisms are rooted in modern colonialism. A member of the Vieques community stated, “whoever is paying affects the results you’re going to get.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Malavet, Pedro A. “Puerto Rico: Cultural Nation, American Colony.” (pp. 2)

<sup>7</sup> Barreto, Amílcar Antonio. *Vieques, the Navy, and Puerto Rican Politics*. (pp 22). Detailed explanation of the Navy’s perceived need for a operations in Puerto Rico, Vieques and Culebra.

<sup>8</sup> *Roosevelt Roads Naval Station*. GlobalSecurity.org

<sup>9</sup> Fernandez, Ronald. *Prisoners of Colonialism: The Struggle for Justice in Puerto Rico*. (pp. 119); Barreto (pp. 25)

## Vieques: U.S. Commonwealth

Most Americans are aware of the fact that Puerto Rico is a colony, but often we do not consider what being a colony of the United States entails. The 9,106 residents of Vieques are United States citizens, as are the 3,808,610 residents on the main island of Puerto Rico.<sup>11</sup> Yet due to Puerto Rico's status as a Commonwealth of the United States, their territorial citizenship is more limited than the full citizenship that residents of the other 50 States enjoy.<sup>12</sup> Puerto Ricans, including *Viequenses*, are permitted to travel freely between their island and the mainland United States. They pay federal, import and export social security taxes as well as Puerto Rican taxes (the equivalent of State taxes). They vote in the presidential primary elections and can be drafted in the military in wartime. However, Puerto Ricans do not have a voting representative in Congress. They cannot vote for president or hold elected office, yet they have to abide by U.S. trade and tariff laws which impair trade in foreign markets. A clause in the U.S. Constitution makes the Navy's presence on Vieques completely legal, stating that any territory is subject to "exclusive Legislation in all cases whatsoever.. for the erection of forts, magazines, arsenals dock-yards, and other needful buildings."<sup>13</sup> This clause in the Constitution has been the source of controversy on the island, raising ethical questions of why the United States Navy would choose to drop live bombs, rounds of ammunitions and test chemical weapons on an island in an area where over 9,000 of its citizens live.

Another problem that has arisen from Puerto Rico's territorial status is economic dependency on the United States. The only industry that ever developed on Vieques was sugar, which established certain economic and social frameworks on the island that endured up to the Navy's purchase of two thirds of Vieques. The main societal structure left by the sugar industry was the plantation system, with a few wealthy land owners and the rest of the population working as agricultural hired labor and residing unofficially on the haciendas. When the sugar industry started to go downhill, plantation owners were happy to sell their devaluing land to the U.S. Navy. All of the families working on the plantations had no legal rights to the land and were displaced. The "Navy moved about 3,000 islanders to the Virgin Island of St. Croix. Another 4,000 were resettled in the center of Vieques, but, since the Navy paid no taxes" the

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<sup>10</sup> Interview 2. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

<sup>11</sup> United States Census Bureau

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Territories: Puerto Rico, Guam, America Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands and Washington D.C.

<sup>13</sup> Constitution of the United States of America

municipality and the people came out broke.<sup>14</sup> Without a sugar or any other industry the municipality had no income, which meant low quality or severe lack of public services, such as schools and sanitation. Without such social and economic infrastructure, the standard of living for residents was noticeably lower.<sup>15</sup>

Today, Puerto Rico's economy is the strongest in the Caribbean, but it is entirely dependent on the United States for trade, substantial federal transfers and tax advantages, as well as investment in manufacturing corporations. Since the sugar industry tanked in the 1940's, agriculture makes up only one percent of the island's industries and manufacturing has taken a major role in the economy producing pharmaceuticals, metals and machinery. Tourism in Puerto Rico also makes up a significant portion of the economy. This lack of industry affects Vieques because, as the colony of a colony, it is as dependent on Puerto Rico as Puerto Rico is on the United States. One resident explains, "*somos dependientes en esta isla. No siempre era así.*"<sup>16</sup> [We on the island are dependent. It wasn't always this way.] The Navy's role in this shift in the economy and industries on the islands is significant. As mentioned previously, the Navy owned most of the land available for agriculture and industries thinking about investing in Vieques had to work around the restrictions of the base.

### History of the Navy in Vieques

In the early 1940's, the U.S. Navy legally purchased two thirds of the municipality of Vieques from private land owners, the majority of which were haciendas from the failing sugar industry.<sup>17</sup> The Navy used this appropriated land on Vieques to build Camp Garcia, an extension of Roosevelt Roads Naval station on the main island. When the U.S. Navy opened their training base on Vieques, the island was no stranger to strategic military intrusions by their colonial power with disregard for the local residents. What is especially disturbing, however, is the fact that cries for equality and justice "were ignored in San Juan as often as they were disregarded in Madrid or Washington" causing residents to feel, and often refer to themselves, as the "*colonia*

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<sup>14</sup> Fernandez, Ronald. *Prisoners of Colonialism: The Struggle for Justice in Puerto Rico.* (pp. 120)

<sup>15</sup> Interview 3. Member of Women's Association of Vieques.

<sup>16</sup> Interview 6. Member of Fishermen's Association.

<sup>17</sup> Barreto explains prices, acres and families from which the Navy purchased land in the original Navy appropriation (pp. 23).



Originally after purchasing most of the land on Vieques, the Navy intended to relocate all of Vieques's 9,000 residents to the neighboring islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately however residents were allowed to remain on Vieques but they were displaced from their homes all around the island and relocated into two towns on the middle third of the island. Camp Garcia was opened at the border between the civilian part of the island and the military eastern third of Vieques. The eastern tip of Vieques was what the Navy designated as their primary air, land and sea based military training operations. The eastern and western sections of the island, which included to some extent the ocean around each end of the island, were fenced off and restricted to residents. Many residents today still remember families being forcefully removed from their homes<sup>21</sup>, bombs dropping daily, the general military presence in town disrupting daily lives and the beginning of the protests against the Navy as base operations began to interfere more and more with economic and cultural life on the island.

As McCaffrey describes, "Vieques would be converted into a training site, to be used for firing practice and amphibious landings by tens of thousands of sailors and marines."<sup>22</sup> The U.S. also rented out Vieques to other military allies, mainly NATO countries, to conduct trainings and perform mock battle operations. On the Navy website Vieques was touted as "One Stop Shopping"<sup>23</sup> for militaries to perform amphibious, air and land trainings. According to the Navy, the military must achieve a "high state of readiness and amphibious training and shore target exercises must be continued on an intensive and realistic basis" which required the "permanent use" of Vieques and neighboring Culebra. Vieques was the Navy's university of the sea for training amphibious maneuvers, target practice from the air and storming beaches and practicing other invasions on land in the supposed interest of national defense.<sup>24</sup>

Not only were Vieques and Culebra necessary, according to the Navy, for national security purposes, they were also ideal locations for year round training. The weather in Vieques rarely drops below 50 during the day which allowed the Navy to train year round. So what was the problem with the Navy base on Vieques? The problem was that the U.S. and NATO militaries were bombing a habited island. People living there were displaced from their homes

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<sup>20</sup> Barreto explains plans to relocate residents. (pp. 23)

<sup>21</sup> Interviews and photos from the Historical Archives. Museo Fuerte Conde Mirasol. Vieques, Puerto Rico.

<sup>22</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest* (pp. 35)

<sup>23</sup> Barreto (pp. 30)

<sup>24</sup> Guisti-Cordero, Juan. *One Stop Shopping for NavyFacts*. After the base closed, the Navy removed the website

and forced to migrate to other islands or live in the two small towns, Isabela Segunda and Esperanza, sandwiched between the live bombing range on the eastern tip of the island and munitions storage of the western end and endure the thundering of bombs being dropped daily on the Live Impact Area. There were even occasional misfires and bombs would land dangerously close to civilian populations.



Although there was no official occupation residents of the island were subject to the sailors' presence in their everyday lives. According to residents' reports and personal accounts this Navy presence was both a blessing and a curse. The military contributed to the economy providing some jobs to build a breakwater (which was never finished), bringing relief and aid during hurricanes, and ensuring continued benefits from ties with the United States. Severe economic drawbacks were also associated with the Navy presence, however. The United States was focused more on ensuring their interests abroad than maintaining the economy of Vieques, of which they had acquired much of the land potentially used for income from agriculture. They also thwarted fishing operations (intentionally or unintentionally), failed to ensure jobs on incomplete project, intentionally stunted the economy's growth by putting restrictions on airspace and waters around Vieques. The United States Secretary of the Navy maintained that

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advertising "One-Stop Shopping." Guisti's website is a response to the Navy's former site.

the economy of Vieques and the high unemployment was not the responsibility of the Navy, saying “we are not a social organization.”<sup>25</sup>

Social and safety issues also arose throughout the decades. On their days off many sailors would drink and loiter in the town, generally disrupting the peace, there were even rapes and deaths resulting from sailors and marine rowdy behavior.<sup>26</sup> Despite the theoretical security benefits to the world that the base on Vieques provided, the reality for island residents was that they were living with more insecurity. One woman in the Women’s Alliance of Vieques told me in an interview that when she was a girl, they would hear stories of abuse, rape and a general lack of respect from the young men in the US military, so they lived always in fear of running into a uniformed American in the street. She also told me that due to the lack of jobs, her family had no other choice but to set up laundry businesses. She recalls, “this was the only form of work that we had since our farmland had been taken over by the Navy, and we earned pennies for our work of washing the men’s uniforms.” She jokes that this is probably the reason she dislikes American men so much, “those were the filthiest clothes I had ever seen.”<sup>27</sup>

The sailors’ presence in town was far from the only disturbance of the peace in Vieques. During the sixty years of training on the island, an average of 1,464 tons of explosives and bombs were dropped on Vieques annually.<sup>28</sup> Every impact shook the ground, some bombs even going astray and braking windows of homes and schools.<sup>29</sup>

The situation was basically the same on Culebra. Residents’ protests eventually garnered enough support from the Puerto Rican government that the Navy was forced to abandon their plans to upscale operations on the small island. Success for Culebra, however, meant bad news for Vieques. Since the Navy was forced to discontinue operations on Culebra, it simply meant that to maintain the current level of training they would need to increase the intensity of operations on Vieques. This increased intensity disrupted the fishing industry, which without agriculture was the main industry on Vieques, by closing access to more and more of the waters around the island. The fishermen started up the majority of the protests in the 1970’s on the grounds that the Navy was hurting their industry and they were no longer able to support

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<sup>25</sup> Barreto (pp. 24)

<sup>26</sup> Barreto (pp. 29) describes rowdy behavior and deaths due to sailors interactions with locals during their time off base.

<sup>27</sup> Interview 3. Member of Women’s Association of Vieques.

<sup>28</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Fish, Wildlife, and Bombs. The Struggle to Clean Up Vieques.*

themselves and their families as long as Navy destroyers continued to tear up the reefs, cut nets and buoys and deny access to some of the best fishing waters. These protests gained solidarity among some community members and popular protest began to spring up as a result.

These protests were largely ignored by the Navy until they began to disrupt training operations too frequently. Arrests started to become the usual answer to any trespassing or protesting on the Navy's land, a title that the residents disputed. The general feelings of discontent dragged on for decades, with a tug-of-war being played between the Navy and much of the community. Relations reached a breaking point in 1999 when David Rodriguez Sanes, a *Viequense* civilian security guard working on the base, was killed in a training accident when a bomb missed its intended target.<sup>30</sup> This reignited the anti-Navy protests and prompted President George W. Bush to sign the Vieques Land Transfer Act, handing some of the land over to the municipality and some to Fish and Wildlife Services, part of the U.S. Department of the Interior.<sup>31</sup>

After operations ceased on the island, the Navy was ordered to clean up the remnants of sixty years of playing war; this included clearing away bomb casings and bullet shells as well as finding ways to dispose of live bombs, cluster munitions such as land mines and unexploded ordnance. After declassified Navy documents<sup>32</sup> revealed that the military had experimented with agent orange, napalm and other conventional weapons on Vieques, the community applied for Vieques to become a Superfund site.<sup>33</sup> Superfund sites are considered so toxic that the United States government is required to clean up with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulating the cleanup.

The people of Vieques had always been divided on the Navy presence in Vieques, but the majority of the residents were, and still are, opposed. The group in support of the Navy being allowed to continue operations on the island cited mostly the economic and relief benefits provided by the military presence. Today, the community is struggling with various government entities and institutions, as well as amongst the different sectors of the population itself, with

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<sup>29</sup> Interview 8. Member of the Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques.

<sup>30</sup> Historical Archives. Museo Fuerte Conde Mirasol. Declassified Navy debriefings and interviews with the pilots and the Navy personnel.

<sup>31</sup> *Vieques PR*. GlobalSecurity.org

<sup>32</sup> Interview 8. Member of the Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques.

<sup>33</sup> Superfund Site: the name given to the environmental program established by the U.S. government to address abandoned hazardous waste sites, many of which used to be military installations. The Environmental Protection

regards to the cleanup process after sixty years of bombing. This process involves toxic substance control, social justice in terms of health and environmental preservation and the future of the island which inevitably includes tourism and delicate issues such as gentrification and welfare dependence. The grassroots movements are still very much a driving force in terms of achieving results with regards to the cleanup.

### Roots of Popular Protest: The Fishermen's War

The history of the community grassroots movement that started in full force in the seventies is essential to the understanding of the development of the community participation methods in place today. These early grassroots movements have evolved into both the formal and the informal institutions that determine civilian-military interactions and outcomes in response to the changing dynamics on the island. The earliest community participation mechanisms were protests by the fishermen against the Navy's increased presence. Civil disobedience - the decisions of people to stand as human shields against the target practice or disrupt training exercises by driving their small fishing boats in the way of Navy battleships - was the main form of protest utilized during this time period. The surface issue with these struggles, which eventually gained solidarity from people on the main island of Puerto Rico as well as internationally, was the disruption to life on the islands that came with the presence of the U.S. Navy practicing war on their habited islands. Not far below the surface, however, was the issue of colonization. Means of protesting the same cause varied on these grounds and depended on whether the protesters were from the main island, Vieques, Culebra or other solidarity groups that had gathered in Vieques. The Navy aggressive response to the protests, and the ensuing backlash from some marginal citizen groups, highlighted the irony of the military's presence in Puerto Rico. While citing national and world security as the objective for the base the Navy succeeded in causing social and economic turmoil in communities of American citizens on Vieques and Culebra and in Puerto Rico.

*Puerto Rico:* By the time the fishermen on Vieques had taken up the cause of defending their waters it was hard to find any Puerto Rican, on the island or in the U.S. mainland, that did not support their cause. On the main island, Puerto Ricans disapproved of the situation which was seen widely and across political parties as the embodiment of the U.S. colonial power over

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Agency (EPA) is in charge of regulating the cleanup of these Superfund Sites (See Appendix B for a full definition).

Puerto Rico. They displayed their disapproval by way of student protests against U.S. owned strip mining and privatization of beaches, by refusing to sign up for the draft and by rioting.<sup>34</sup> Residents of Vieques were grateful for the widespread solidarity in Puerto Rico but also wary. *Viequenses* wanted to distance themselves from those solidarity groups looking to use the situation on Vieques as ammunition for the ideological fight against the neo-colonial power of the United States.<sup>35</sup> Rather than protest greater political implications of colonialism, the residents of Vieques simply wanted to be able to fish their waters and not feel the ground shake as bombs were dropped at all hours of every day.

*Culebra*: Taking place a few decades before the protests on Vieques, the protests on Culebra to oust the Navy were more directly framed in this anti-colonization argument. The struggle on the smaller island was a politically charged issue as well as a struggle for social justice. These protests had more leadership and participation from the Puerto Rican *independentistas*, or the political left that favored Puerto Rican independence. To the political left Culebra signified the “very essence of Puerto Rico’s colonial subjugation to the United States.”<sup>36</sup> The leftist Puerto Rican political party organized demonstrations to disrupt target practice on beaches where people positioned themselves as “human shields” to block training exercises. Protesters constructed a chapel on the bombing range as a symbol of their peaceful protest and struggle.

Protests, because they had such unanimous support from the Puerto Rican government and community, were successful in ousting the Navy. It was a mixed blessing when the bombings ceased on Culebra because it served to compound problems on Vieques. The Navy was forced to compensate for their loss of training space on Culebra, and with the Cold War causing high tension in the international political atmosphere there existed an especially perceived need for a U.S. Naval base in the Caribbean.<sup>37</sup> The Navy moved all displaced operations to Vieques, dramatically increasing the frequency of dropping bombs and restrictions of water and land to residents.

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<sup>34</sup> Barreto (Chapter 4: Clemency and Consensus) talks about politics in Puerto Rico and Vieques and general rallying support from Puerto Ricans on the main island and on the mainland United States behind the Vieques cause.

<sup>35</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest* (Chapter 3 The Fishermen’s War, pp. 86)

<sup>36</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest* (pp. 70)



*Vieques*: On Vieques the increased restriction of beaches and water surrounding the island, a direct result of Culebra's success, prompted the first major protests that flared up in the seventies. These protests were centered mostly around the fishermen of Vieques who tried hard to keep their economically grounded protests separate from the colonization issue.<sup>38</sup> At the time the fishermen operated within a fishing cooperative which was underdeveloped yet important. With increased Navy operations on the island fishing boats were prevented from entering waters, buoy lines were mysteriously severed and some of the most important fishing areas were closed as bombs were dropped. These concerns were legitimized when the National Resource Fisheries Project testified in court that yields were down and the environment was depleted. "Fishing was an organic expression of a community's effort to survive"<sup>39</sup> and as such, the Crusade to Rescue Vieques (La Cruzada pro Rescate de Vieques) was founded as a coalition movement to bring together many islanders in support of the fishermen. This organic, cultural method of protest contrasted with Culebra's anti-colonial, Puerto Rican government led opposition to the Navy. Fishermen were the perfect symbol of simple social and economic local issues caused directly by the Navy because if they couldn't fish their waters, they couldn't feed their families. Vieques residents used cultural and economic grievances to make sure their protests did not spiral into full out anti-US colonial protests but were based instead on rather simple issues.

#### Early Informal Community Participation Mechanisms

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<sup>37</sup> Barreto: WWII and the Cold War. (pp. 25)

<sup>38</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest* (pp. 67)

<sup>39</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest* (pp. 80)

- Peaceful civil disobedience and protests<sup>40</sup>
- Community social/economic/political organizations
- Committees to counterbalance pro-Navy propaganda

It proved difficult, however, to mobilize and sustain a grassroots community based protest movement on Vieques. Many residents theoretically were opposed to the Navy's presence, but they also favored ties with the United States and did not want to sever or endanger these connections. Among the informal mechanisms that residents initiated was a committee to address the Navy's participation in cultural *patronales*<sup>41</sup> as well as pro-Navy propaganda in schools; some felt that the Navy presence had become too invasive in civilian life.<sup>42</sup> The community also formed political alliances in response to Puerto Rican and United States government discussions about Vieques and held rallies at the gates of Camp Garcia. Political parties unified against the expropriation of Vieques land and solidarity groups were created, such as *Viequenses United (Viequenses Unidos)*. This unity, unfortunately, was short lived. Many residents were torn between wanting to challenge the Navy but not change the status quo. This inability to find unity was the reason the fishermen's protests were the cornerstone of the Vieques grassroots movement.<sup>43</sup>

The Navy's response to the grassroots protests that sprung up in Vieques was to develop a "community action plan" to divide and break the Vieques protest movement, a large part of which was initiating arrests for trespassing on U.S. government land. To the Navy, protests against the Navy actions were equal to a threat to national security. All lawsuits that were filed against the Navy by either the Puerto Rican government, residents or organizations during those years were tried by the same judge. In the American judicial system the judge is theoretically chosen at random, leaving only the conclusion that the outcome of the trials were questionable at

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<sup>40</sup> When discontent grew into confrontation, the fishermen went out into the waters and physically blocked the Navy by positioning themselves in the line of fire. This forced the Navy to stop all training exercises until all civilians were out of the bombing range. They staged "fish-ins," pickets, demonstrations and activities on land such as festivals and fundraisers. News cameras and media were brought in to film the fishermen directly questioning the Navy's jurisdiction over the waters. Solidarity beyond the island was crucial because it helped the local people organize themselves into effective informal community organizations. Fishermen and their supporters sat on beaches where the Navy was supposed to be bombing and waited in non aggressive civil disobedience. Twenty one people were arrested for trespassing.

<sup>41</sup> Cultural patron saint festivals.

<sup>42</sup> Barreto: explains pro-Navy and anti-Navy groups that started up. (pp. 35)

<sup>43</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest* (Chapter 3: The Fishermen's War).

best and unfair at the least.<sup>44</sup>

There was a backlash from Puerto Rican citizens in response to the Navy's arrests and aggression. Small radical groups began to attack the Navy, killing some sailors and injuring others. To answer at least some of the concerns that had spawned this backlash the Navy agreed to hire 100 civilian security guards to work on the base. The supposed goodwill of this act was almost negated, however, by the creation of the political group the Pro-Navy Vanguard (*Vanguardia promarina*)<sup>45</sup> and the social Navy support group, the Navy League. Back and forth passive aggression between the Navy and the general community coupled with the Navy renegeing on some of its promises to scale back or stop activities on Vieques<sup>46</sup> led to much discord and contributed to the lack of trust that still exists on the island today between the many groups.

Grassroots and popular protest movements continued in full force on Vieques until the Navy left in 2003. Informal methods of community organization and mobilization in dealing with the U.S. Navy were eventually effective in achieving the community's goals. On Culebra, political pressure ensured that the Navy ceased bombings, but by contrast the grassroots movement on Vieques was much more difficult to mobilize around social and economic issues without involving the passionate adrenaline of colonial politics. Eventually, the community's perseverance paid off and the Navy ceased operations and began to cleanup the waste from sixty years of bombing. In her book, Military Power and Popular Protest, Katherine McCaffrey uses the analogy of David triumphing over Goliath in a very romantic story of fishermen in wooden boats chasing the most powerful military in the world out of their waters and off their island. It is a victory that the residents are intensely proud of and they still carry this pride and their struggles with them today.



The informal participation of the community has been forced to evolve, however, from a

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<sup>44</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest* (Chapter 3) Explains in detail the fishermen's war on the Navy.

<sup>45</sup> This political group was comprised of mainly the North American population on the island and those Vieques residents with ties to the Navy either through marriage or family.

<sup>46</sup> Barreto talks about lies and irresponsibility on the part of the Navy, telling residents they were going to scale back operations then appropriating more land to increase training operations instead. (pp. 27)

grassroots organic movement into more formal channels in order to deal with the U.S. government. The struggle has two parts: the first part was getting the Navy to agree to leave Vieques, the second part is achieving social and environmental justice in terms of the cleanup, reparations for health damages and future mending of U.S.-Vieques relations. As Sherrie Baver states in her article concerning environmental justice on Vieques, “while environmental justice strategies may have been part of the reframing in the first stage of the struggle to oust the Navy, they have become central for stage two as the movement regroupes to fight for new goals: decontamination, devolution, health care, and sustainable development.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, the first stage of the struggle involving protests and peaceful civil disobedience - with slogans like *Paz para Vieques*, Peace for Vieques, and *Ni Una Bomba Mas*, Not One More Bomb - was easy to rally behind; everyone wants to fight for a cause.<sup>48</sup> After this victory, however, comes the real battle - the battle for social and environmental justice.

## **The Moral Dilemma of Military Installations**

“Creo que no existe la intención limpiar, porque todo cuesta dinero es demasiado caro y no quieren gastar dinero.”<sup>49</sup>  
[I don't think there exists the intention to cleanup, because everything costs money, it's too expensive and they don't want to spend money.]

Vieques is not an isolated case of contamination from the presence of U.S. military bases on island territories or in communities around the world. Nor is the United States the only country with foreign bases. Foreign military installations around the world have moved into communities to be met with varying degrees of involvement and dispute. This section will explore what complaints the communities have and what, if any, is the level of community participation in the decision making process concerning military actions in and around the communities. Also covered will be the positive and negative aspects of military involvement as well as the moral dilemma developing countries are confronted with when opening and operating a military installation in a community, domestic or abroad.

### Foreign Military Bases Draw Parallels to Vieques

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<sup>47</sup> Baver, Sherrie L. “Environmental Justice and the Cleanup of Vieques.” (pp. 92)

<sup>48</sup> Interview 2. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

<sup>49</sup> Interview 6. Member of the Fishermen's Association.

There are other military bases and Superfund sites around the country and the world that have formal and mandatory community participation mechanisms. Many cultural, economic and social factors determine how effective these mechanisms are at achieving social and environmental justice for local communities. Moreover, opinions among community members are usually split concerning the presence of a foreign military, with some factions of the community welcoming the military and other factions against any military presence. These similar cases are important in the study of Vieques because all of these cases have set and continue to set precedents for the minimum acceptable level of community involvement, the effectiveness of any environmental cleanup or health risk assessments and how these causative institutions deal with civil-military relations. A RAB member in Vieques explains, "...we are setting a precedent because this is the first time the Navy has had to cleanup a site, so we are creating a relationship that never existed. I'm sure that if the Navy had been nicer to the people they would still be bombing here."<sup>50</sup>

The most widely known case of the Navy being ousted from operations in the United States was the base in Kaho'olawe, Hawai'i. In 1990, the Navy was forced to abandon the base due to popular protest and obligated to clean up from their military operations. In the state of Hawai'i, voting citizens were able to mobilize political pressure in order to force the Navy out of business. In Vieques, the previous success of the community in Hawai'i boosted the confidence of residents to organize themselves for peaceful protests with hope for a positive outcome. Although both Hawai'i and Puerto Rico "still endure the attempted eradication of indigenous perspectives and local resistance" the argument can be made that cultural sensitivity is necessary to "confront these social and political injustices" that have occurred on both islands and are still being dealt with today on Vieques.<sup>51</sup>

Other U.S. military bases around the world are in the Philippines, Madrid, Greece and South Korea and Micronesia. In Micronesia, another U.S. Territory in the Pacific, the U.S. Navy was assigned as an interim post-war government from the 1940's to the 80's and initiated a series of economic development and stimulus projects on the islands. The development projects turned out to be more an Americanization of Micronesia and not culturally or socially sensitive to the indigenous population. The result of these projects was an economic dependence on U.S. aid

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<sup>50</sup> Interview 1. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

<sup>51</sup> Garrison, Rebekah S. "Illegal Island Annexations: Silenced Truths from 1898." explains the parallels between the

and relief.<sup>52</sup> These Pacific islands are another case of U.S. economic interests overriding the rights and needs of the citizens, taking place around the same time as Vieques was struggling with the Navy. This post-Navy dependence and complete Americanization of Micronesia highlights the difficulty and delicacy in negotiating with developed countries' governments for projects that benefit the local people. The example of the Pacific islands also reaffirms the need for community participation and activism, which was absent in Micronesia, in order to hold governments of developed countries accountable to the communities.

In May of 2010, the local community in Okinawa, Japan protested the presence of the U.S. Navy and Marine base and demanded that the Japanese government call for the Americans to leave. According to a news article in Washington Post<sup>53</sup>, the community has always been upset about excessive aircraft noise and crimes perpetrated against citizens. Amid increasing incidents of rape and generally disruptive behavior by sailors and marines in the town, the Navy was forced to put tighter restrictions on sailors' and marines' off-base activities. The community in Okinawa is forced to appeal to the Japanese government, relying on rallying, solidarity and international pressure in an attempt to move the base from the island. 90,000 people from across Japan gathered in the town to protest the presence of the Navy.<sup>54</sup> The Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques put out a statement and emails of solidarity.<sup>55</sup> Okinawa is another example of the importance of informal mechanisms as a driving force for social justice against a U.S. military installation.

### Benefits and Drawbacks of Military Installations in Communities

Universal popular support for a foreign military is rare in a local community. Yet, as the presence of military installations has benefits as well as drawbacks, it is also unusual to find universal unpopularity. A member of the RAB in Vieques explained to me the division that the Navy presence and the cleanup had on the community: "La marina viola muchas reglas. RAB es inefectivo, no tiene el apoyo de la comunidad que necesita. Está dividido entre ellos."<sup>56</sup> [The Navy violates many rules. The RAB is ineffective and doesn't have the community support that it

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military bases on Hawai'i and Vieques through the lens of the colonized, indigenous people. (pp. 125)

<sup>52</sup> Hanlon, David. *Remaking Micronesia*

<sup>53</sup> Yamaguchi, Mari. *Okinawans Rally for US Base to be Moved off Island.*

<sup>54</sup> Yamaguchi, Mari. *Okinawans Rally for US Base to be Moved off Island.*

<sup>55</sup> Rabin, Robert. *[CPRDV] Vieques en conferencia ONU en Okinawa Vieques at UN conference in Okinawa.*

needs. It is divided between the community.]

Benefits associated with military presence in a community are that many bases bring jobs and new industries as well as spur construction of new homes and openings of businesses, in a sense acting as an economic engine for the host community. The military is also often the institution that is most prepared to mobilize in case of an emergency. For example, the United States military is normally the fastest to respond with disaster relief in the case of hurricanes in the Caribbean. The aspect of emergency relief is advantageous to Vieques and Puerto Rico during hurricane season.<sup>57</sup> Militaries also generally improve infrastructure in their host communities. Most of the infrastructure improvements are very specific to military needs, but some projects spill over as positive externalities that benefit the community.

Just as military bases bring economic growth and emergency support, they can also cause significant problems with community relations and environmental degradation depending on the type of military actions. In Vieques, sixty years worth of bombs being dropped and experimentation with depleted uranium, agent orange and other weapons left a significant amount of damage to the ecosystem from both physical and chemical pollution.<sup>58</sup> Fragile ecosystems on Vieques were damaged due to Navy activities, not only on land but also the delicate coral and reefs surrounding the island. Some of these problems are less material and more associated with the superior attitudes of military personnel and troops toward the civilian populations they are supposed to be protecting and serving.<sup>59</sup> A military presence can also divide communities ideologically and create trust issues between the community and the military which may cause violence or rioting due to the disruptive behavior of soldiers or activities on the base. Foreign militaries may also blatantly disregard the needs and concerns of the community in order to protect their economic or security interests.<sup>60</sup> The same member of the RAB gave her honest opinion of the Navy activities in Vieques over the years, saying, “Es patético. Es criminal que estan haciendo, que han hecho. Estan matando gente aquí.”<sup>61</sup> [It’s pathetic. It’s criminal what they are doing, what they have done. They are killing people here.]

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<sup>56</sup> Interview 2. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

<sup>57</sup> Sattler, David N. et al. *Hurricane Georges: A Cross-National Study Examining Preparedness, Resource Loss, and Psychological Distress in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and the United States.*

<sup>58</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest.* (Chapter 3).

<sup>59</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest.* (Chapter 3).

<sup>60</sup> Interview 1. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

<sup>61</sup> Interview 2. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

Vieques residents found themselves incurring all of the negative externalities that accompanied the Navy presence yet reaping none of the presumed benefits. The reason that many residents, such as the members of the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques, rejected the pro-Navy argument is that Roosevelt Roads on the main island and not Vieques was receiving all of the economic benefits of the military presence in Puerto Rico. The soldiers lived and spent money on the main island, contributing little to the economy on Vieques. Vieques was only a shell of a base where the majority of the bombing and training exercises were held. Due to the fact that the Navy did not provide jobs in the community and payed no “rent” to Vieques for the use of the land, the military presence was actually stunting the growth of the island.<sup>62</sup> Besides the economic downfalls, the Navy’s simultaneous air, sea and amphibious training using live munitions is now showing signs of being harmful to human health and having severe environmental consequences.

These sites with distinct military and community interactions are useful because they have all set precedents concerning military and community interactions, thoroughness of cleanup, and civil-military relations.<sup>63</sup> Often times these interactions involve the intervention of local governments, as with the case of Okinawa and Vieques.<sup>64</sup> These communities and bases are also important because they continue to fuel recognition of the need for community participation and input in cases of military involvement.

### Why is Vieques Central to this Issue?

Vieques is central to the issue of foreign military responsibilities in communities because in the literature and in the interviews with residents it is apparent the level of carelessness employed by the military when it is not accountable to the residents. McCaffrey cites in her book the loss of civilian control over the military and a complete lack of consideration for the rights and demands of American citizens in regard to the military. It is astounding that the military would specifically target a population of its own citizens that has no voting rights and subject them to daily bombings and testing of unconventional weapons.<sup>65</sup> Vieques is a special

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<sup>62</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest*. (Chapter 3).

<sup>63</sup> Interview 2. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

<sup>64</sup> Delorme, Evelyn. *Vieques Puerto Rico: Letter From the Vieques’ Mayor to the Environmental Quality Board*. Mayor of Vieques writes to the Puerto Rican government, Navy and US government to ask to stop open burns etc.

<sup>65</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest* (pp. 13)

case because, unlike Hawai'i, where popular protest was able to turn into local political pressure that in turn put pressure on the U.S. government, Vieques has to rely on the Puerto Rican and U.S. governments' word that they will follow the suggestions and address the concerns laid out by the community through formal mechanisms such as the RAB. The problem lies therein, that there is a lack of accountability within the U.S. government with concern to Vieques, versus Hawai'i and other Superfund sites around the country - Vieques has no voting members in Congress that will face political repercussions if they do not lobby for the community.

This failure in accountability of the U.S. government is why the island's informal organizations and perseverance are so important to the struggle for social and environmental justice. The methods that the people of Vieques have developed may be useful in the future for communities struggling to find formal and informal mechanisms to deal with institutions and governments concerning issues of social or environmental justice are unique for dealing within the framework of modern colonialism. In Vieques, the president of the Fishermen's Association says that the Navy has a responsibility to clean up Vieques and that a clean Vieques is a right, not a privilege.<sup>66</sup> In agreement with this statement is a member of the RAB who asserts that in civil-military relationships there is an abuser and a victim, and the Navy has a responsibility [to us], not the other way around. She says, "en todos casos impidieron el verdadero poder de la comunidad. Ellos tienen que ganar la confianza de nosotros, no vice versa."<sup>67</sup> [In all cases, the Navy impeded the real power of the community. They have to gain our trust, not vice versa.] Ideally, the foreign military base would act responsibly toward the economic, social and cultural issues that may arise from their presence in a community, however it has more often than not been the case that citizens must demand rights to health and security that have been encroached upon by the military.

The irony of the *Viequenses*' plight, both then and now, is that in the name of freedom, democracy or national and global security the military has effectively ensured that a community of its own citizens in Vieques would be denied the rights to their land and ignore serious risks to their health. The base in Puerto Rico and other foreign military installations have often times succeeded in making the communities in which they operate more unsafe and divided. To mitigate this irony, it is important that the military recognize its obligations - both material and

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<sup>66</sup> Interview 6. Member of Fishermen's Association.

<sup>67</sup> Interview 2. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

non-tangible<sup>68</sup> - and respect the rights and the culture of the people in the community to avoid serious negative, often unintended, consequences.

## **Vieques Today**

Today the residents of Vieques are in a constant struggle with Puerto Rican and U.S. government organizations, especially the Navy, to remedy various social, economic, health and environmental issues. Most of the issues, according to many community groups that I interviewed, arise from the previous Navy operations on the island and the risk of further contamination from the cleanup process, a process which the community feels has questionable methods and insufficient monitoring to prevent further health risks to the island and its residents. Many of the economic and social issues such as civil-military relations are carried over from the past, but many of them, such as the higher rates of cancer and the questionable cleanup process, are new developments in the lives of the *Viequenses*. Various factions of the community, the Navy and multiple U.S. government institutions are involved in and affected by these problems differently. All of the organizations and institutions involved with these issues have distinct methods and goals when dealing with these issues and the reality of the problems are different for everyone which complicates the solution to the multiple and interdependent issues.

Originally, my research was aimed to address only the Restoration Advisory Board and its effectiveness and legitimacy as a formal mechanism for dealing with the community's concerns. Through interviews, observation and literature there begin to give some insight into whether the RAB and other community participation mechanisms are effective methods of addressing community concerns on these issues and painting a picture of the reality of the people living on the island today. While the RAB has its advantages, the community makes it clear that they think the RAB is not sufficient as the principle formal mechanism for addressing community participation and concerns in the cleanup process, or that the Navy is taking doing enough. In the search for social and environmental justice, the residents cite a discrepancy in the scientific evidence that exists between independent studies that have been done on levels of contamination in Vieques and the ATSDR health assessments and contamination studies done by the Navy. The community has difficulty dealing with the RAB in search for social and

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<sup>68</sup> Some material reparations could be compensation for health or economic damages. Non-tangible reparations could be restricting off base activities to cause less disruption in the community or mend civil-military relations by

environmental justice.

This section gives an overview of the main issues Vieques is facing today, the major and minor organizations that participate in any aspect of these issues, which issues affect which actors and how these actors deal with those problems through formal and informal mechanisms, but especially through the RAB to determine whether the RAB is a legitimate way to address community concerns and fulfill the commitment to community participation in the cleanup process. The role of the ATSDR will also be addressed, specifically focusing on how the community is dealing with the issue of social and environmental justice in the face of scientific discrepancies on levels of contamination and reiterate why grassroots participation is so important to holding the government accountable.

### Principle Issues and Actors

I had the opportunity to meet many of the community members from various social organizations and the RAB<sup>69</sup> who had participated in the grassroots protests against the Navy presence in the 80's, many of whom had gone to federal prison for peaceful civil disobedience. I interviewed members of the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques who were actively involved in the protests and many people who today hold integral positions in community organizations involved in the cleanup and the issues dealing with the uncertain future of Vieques. Interviewing so many individuals about their post-U.S. Navy experiences, I came to discover that every organization and individual has a different story and that even different facets within the community have different perspectives on the cleanup process and different goals for the direction the island should be headed. Vieques is a microcosm of issues charged with politics, environment, social issues, public health, education and the economy and every interest group have distinct motives and a distinct reality in terms of these problems.

The reality of life on the island for the scientists at FWS in charge of restoring and protecting the damaged and fragile ecosystems that exist on Vieques is different from the reality of long time residents and ex-marines living in the towns that are now starting to experience health problems. My research focused on the opinions and facts gathered in interviews by people on all sides of these issues. There is a plethora of actors involved with these issues and

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acts of goodwill.

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix A for full explanation and list of organizations.

every interest group, organization or institution has its own agenda. I was able to talk to at least one member of most of the groups, including the Women's Alliance, the Fishermen's Association, the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques, the Restoration Advisory Board and the Navy. Per those interviews, this section will expound the most pressing issues on the island today, list and explain the organizations (community or government) that are dealing with these issues,<sup>70</sup> as well as discern whether or not the organizations feel they are accomplishing their goals and how these different organizations relate to each other.

According to interviews from many different community and government groups, the most persistent problems that Vieques is dealing with today surround the environmental cleanup, ownership and plans for development of the land, reparations for any health and environmental damages and the lack of trust between different interest groups.

*Land Development and Allocation of Land:* The biggest dispute over the future of the land previously owned by the Navy is between Fish and Wildlife Service and the community over the issue of ownership, future use and cleanup. Also, within the community itself different groups want different types of development for the land. After the protests ended and the Navy stopped training exercises on Vieques, the lands were not immediately partitioned back to the residents. The United States gave stewardship of the land to the FWS, a branch of the U.S. Department of the Interior, for the purpose of preserving it indefinitely as a conservation area. The Navy was required to clear the old bombing range of unexploded bombs, debris, shells and other military relics. The reason that this seemingly secondary issue of land allocation is central to the struggle on Vieques is because the depth and thoroughness of the cleanup, however, is dictated by the perceived future use of the land by the owner, in this case FWS.<sup>71</sup> FWS was named the official stewards of the previously Navy owned land and they were given the land by the U.S. government with the intent to keep it as a wildlife preserve. The standards for cleanup for future use as a refuge are much less thorough and stringent than for future use by people for development and construction of houses. Effectively, this allocation of land to FWS ensured that the land would not be cleaned up to the proper standards to ever be usable for industrial or residential development. Even if residents were to gain back rights to the land and want to develop industries or communities it would be unsafe due to the fact that the cleanup from the

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<sup>70</sup> See Figure 1 (pp. 32) for diagram of organizations according to affiliation.

<sup>71</sup> Rodriguez, Daniel. Personal Interview. Director of Environmental Protection Agency in Vieques.

original standards as a wildlife refuge might have left unexploded ordnance or other hazards buried ten feet underground.<sup>72</sup>

Much of the community, many long time residents and many social interest groups, such as the Women's Alliance and members of the RAB and the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques, have very different ideas about the land use. These residents remember their families being kicked off the land and they would eventually like to see the land returned to residents for construction of homes, possibly agriculture and the development of industries. Obviously, this would require a much more stringent cleanup, which is not on the EPA, the Navy or the FWS agenda.

*Differing Ideas on the Cleanup Process:* The two major issues with regards to the cleanup process itself are that the community wants to see results from the removal of ordnance as well as results from air, soil and water testing for contamination, whereas the Navy and the EPA want to wait until the cleanup is done (take years) to perform any contamination testing. The community is also protesting the process of cleaning ordnance by doing open burns and open detonations,<sup>73</sup> arguing that this process releases more contaminants into the air, soil and water. CH2MHill, the private company hired by the Navy to perform the cleanup of ordnance, and the Navy claim that there is no other means of clearing some sections of the land if not by open burning and open detonations. The EPA backs this statement, citing the safety of the EOD<sup>74</sup> technicians. As Daniel Rodriguez, the EPA director on Vieques, asserts, "we can't obligate the Navy to send people out there to die, this is not a war."<sup>75</sup>

Rodriguez also explains that, if we define cleanup as making sure that the air and the soil is free from contamination such that it does not pose a risk to human or environmental health (opinions on how the cleanup should be conducted notwithstanding), Rodriguez explains that as of today the Navy is not yet conducting a cleanup, per say, of the former bombing range. Rather, CH2MHill and the Navy are still in the process of removing ordnance and that once all the

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<sup>72</sup> Interview 1. Member of Restoration Advisory Board; Interview 6. Member of Fishermen's Association; Interview 8. Member of the Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques.

<sup>73</sup> Open Burns and Open Detonations are when the Navy disposes of live ordnance by blowing it up without covering the explosion. These are controversial because the community argues that Open Burns and Open Detonations put more pollution and contamination into the air and soil on the island.

<sup>74</sup> EOD, explosive ordnance disposal involves the detection and de-arming of unexploded explosive ordnance, whether this takes the form of old weapons, weapons that failed to detonate upon firing or weapons planted by enemy forces, such as land mines. Source: Rodriguez, Daniel. Personal Interview. Director of Environmental Protection Agency in Vieques.

ordnance, tanks and bomb shells have been cleared they can begin testing for contaminants. According to Rodriguez it doesn't make sense to start testing for contamination now because they might release something during clearing of ordnance that may cause contamination so the tests would have to be redone. Also, because each soil sample costs "thousands of dollars" it would be financially irresponsible for the EPA to require that the Navy do samples now and again after the removal and cleanup.

The community is contesting the use of Open Burns and Open Detonations, which is exploding unexploded ordnance in order to dispose of the ordnance. This practice is an issue with residents because, when citizens relocated to the middle of the island in the 1940's, they were directly downwind of the bombing. Strong trade winds blow dust from the Sahara Desert east to west all the way across the Atlantic Ocean where it reaches the Caribbean islands. It follows, then, that any whatever contamination and heavy metals are released into the air by test bombing or exploding ordnance on the east tip of the island would blow across the habited parts of the island.

*Health Risk and Contamination Levels:* There are three main parts to address the risk to human health on Vieques. One is to determine whether the air, land and water was contaminated and continues to be contaminated by past military actions and the cleanup, two is collecting reparations from the U.S. government if there is found to be contamination, and three is determining to what extent any contamination and risk posed to human health on the island was caused by the military operations on Vieques.

Among the most prevalent health issues are high rates of infant mortality, rising cancer rates, and other illnesses.<sup>76</sup> 7,000 Vieques residents filed a lawsuit suing the U.S. government for health damages in federal court. Before the case could go to federal court, it had to pass through a federal judge, Daniel Domínguez, in a district federal court in San Juan, Puerto Rico who denied the claims of the residents on the grounds that the court does not have jurisdiction over the case.<sup>77</sup>

Residents have begun conducting independent studies with the help of independent scientists, testing for high levels of heavy metals in hair, skin and blood samples of residents. The Department of Health in Puerto Rico, with the help of Dr. McKenzie, is beginning to

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<sup>75</sup> Rodriguez, Daniel. Personal Interview. Director of Environmental Protection Agency in Vieques.

<sup>76</sup> McCaffrey, Katherine T. *Military Power and Popular Protest* (pp. 13)

conduct a cancer study to determine the prevalence of certain types of cancer and if it is possible that the cancer could have been caused by the Navy.<sup>78</sup>

*Environmental Degradation and Contamination:* Environmental degradation and contamination of the natural environment on Vieques are huge sources of some of the other issues that residents deal with daily. Their land, air, water and marine sources have shown toxic levels of heavy metals and other contaminants. Discrepancies exist among these studies as well as the health assessments by ATSDR. Residents are struggling to have the Navy and the U.S. government agencies, such as ATSDR, accept studies done by independent scientists showing that there are unsafe levels of toxic chemicals, hazardous waste and heavy metals affecting the health of citizens. The EPA's final reports on contamination say that all levels are below the minimum background level to pose any threat to human health.<sup>79</sup>

The community, in the mean time, is demanding answers in the form of scientific data. While the Navy denies any contamination (citing ATSDR studies and their own scientific data), the community has begun hiring independent scientists to perform independent studies for contamination due to the higher rates of cancer, birth defects and other health problems that they believe are a result of contamination by the Navy. Rodriguez's own projection for the cleanup was well beyond the Navy's projected date of 2021<sup>80</sup> but residents have the right to know now whether they have been contaminated so that they can start to repair some of the damage that has been done their health and their livelihood. They also have a right to know whether their homes are safe to live in and that the air, water (fresh and sea) and soil pose no significant threat to their health and safety.

*Trust and Civil-Military Relations:* One of the most important non-tangible issues that confronts Vieques today is the lack of trust between the community and U.S. government entities (including the Navy, FWS, and at times the Puerto Rican government). As a result of being subject to more than sixty years of military presence and activities on the island, residents were

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<sup>77</sup> Rabin, Robert.

<sup>78</sup> Pagan, Myrna V. *Presentation to the United Nations Decolonization Committee.*

<sup>79</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Fiscal Year 2009 Performance and Accountability Report*

<sup>80</sup> Rodriguez, Daniel. Personal Interview. Director of Environmental Protection Agency in Vieques. "How long will the cleanup take do you think?" "Navy says until 2021... Ehhh beyond that, I think. In their final draft they said at the end of the fiscal year, so September of 2020 cleanup work, then still work depending on the decision if the area needs more attention (more action required etc). The underwater part (and we know they need cleanup under water because we have pictures, we have videos of bombs underwater and ordinance underwater), will take them the longest and that is projected until 2020, but I think it will take longer."

not very receptive to FWS taking over stewardship of the land. They find it difficult to work with FWS on conservation efforts because their trust in the U.S. government had been shaken and they were not sure that this new government institution had their best interests in mind. The people considered, and to some extent some factions within the community still consider, FWS to be the same as the Navy. They often use the adage “same uniform, different badge.” Residents do not trust the EPA and ATSDR to tell them that the current cleanup process is not contaminating them further. A member of the RAB affirms, “[the Navy] gives information to the RAB and wonders why the people don’t trust their [contamination level] readings, but if you have been bombing these people for 60 years, of course they are not going to trust you!”<sup>81</sup>

*Lack of Economic Opportunity:* The economy of Vieques is not in great shape, as a “labor supply and lack of infrastructure have been identified as key criteria in restraining Puerto Rico’s economic growth.”<sup>82</sup> Vieques is the poorest municipality in Puerto Rico with 73 percent of its residents living below the poverty line.<sup>83</sup> There are high rates of unemployment, the fishing industry is almost lost and, since the Navy took over about two thirds of the land on Vieques, they took away most of the productive potential for industries such as agriculture or cattle. Lack of economic opportunity ensures, unfortunately, that the residents do not have control over their fate or the future of their island. There are some organizations, like the *incubadora*, or small business incubator, working to develop small businesses and promote entrepreneurship on the island, but many people are still on welfare.<sup>84</sup>

*Social Protest Easier than Economic Development:* For decades, people were arrested for civil disobedience and trespassing onto the base during the grassroots protests and there was a high level of adrenaline with the movement because people became passionate about the cause. Rebellion is easy, romantic, actions with a clear goal in mind (driving the Navy out of Vieques) and strong ideological catharsis. The second stage of the struggle in Vieques is the search for social and environmental justice as well as sustainable development.<sup>85</sup> Development is hard work with no immediate results and not as easy to gain support for as an anti-Navy protest.

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<sup>81</sup> Interview 2. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

<sup>82</sup> (Joint).

<sup>83</sup> United States Census Bureau.

<sup>84</sup> Interview 8. Member of the Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques.

<sup>85</sup> Baver (pp. 92)

According to Marianne Pearl,<sup>86</sup> who writes about community activist Nilda Medina in her book The Global Diaries of Marianne Pearl, development is always harder than rescue and for Vieques the harder struggle is still to come. Gaining international support and solidarity to force the Navy to leave Vieques was fairly easy because the conflict often framed the people of Vieques against the greatest military power in the world. It was easy to want to be a part of the story where David overcomes Goliath. Today, the nature of the struggle is less romantic with less tangible and much less dramatic, but no less important, results.

*Reparations from U.S. government:* Tying into the issue of contamination and health risks, and the idea of reparations and who is to be held accountable for any contamination or social and environmental justice concerns on Vieques. The complicating factor in this project, as with any social research, is that every side to the argument has some legitimate reasons and certain justifications for their actions. Everyone has a point, but the legal processes involved are so convoluted it is difficult to point to a clear solution that satisfies all parties. Reparations to the community for health damages also ties into the responsibility of governments to citizens in communities with military bases as well as hinging on the results from scientific data on contamination levels and the ability of the community's formal and informal mechanisms to successfully negotiate with the U.S. government.

*Viequense Identity:* Depending on who you ask, *Viequenses* identify as Puerto Rican or they are a completely separate people from Puerto Ricans on the "Big Island," with a distinct culture, tumultuous history and unique experiences, "specifically identifiable on the basis of residence in Vieques."<sup>87</sup> The *Viequense* people are proud of their island, of its glistening beaches, the bioluminescent bay that glows at night, the history displayed in the restored Spanish fort and their isolated island paradise. There is a movement to revert back to the original Spanish names for the beaches, as opposed to the color coded names assigned to the beaches by the Navy for their operations.

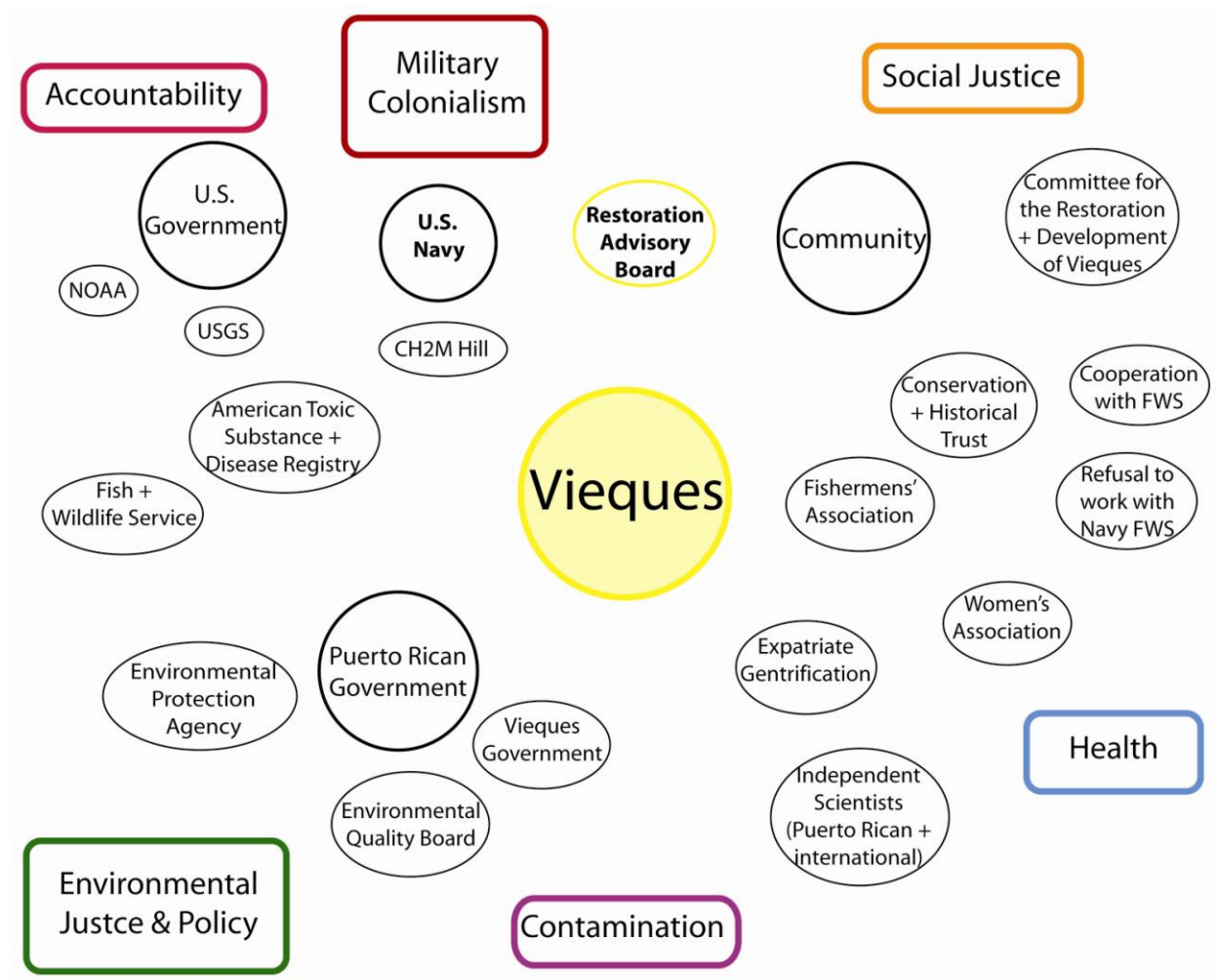
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<sup>86</sup> Pearl, Mariane. *In Search of Hope: The Global Diaries of Mariane Pearl*.

<sup>87</sup> Guisti (pp. 131)

**Figure 1**

Diagram of institutions and organizations involved in Vieques.



## Community Participation Mechanisms

The residents of Vieques today are working through various channels of formal and informal community participation mechanisms in an attempt to achieve their goal of making their concerns over health and the environment heard and dealt with effectively by government agencies. Both the formal and informal mechanisms have pros and cons as well as varying degrees of effectiveness and perceived success by the community and the Navy. The initial focus of this research was to concentrate on the Restoration Advisory Board. Yet, further investigation points to the presence of informal mechanisms employed by the community that may be more effective in addressing their concerns with the U.S. government institutions. This section will introduce the formal and informal community participation mechanisms, addressing the RAB specifically, and analyze how these organizations have evolved with the changing state of affairs on the island, the importance of community participation, and the fact that the composition of the community itself affects these interactions.

## Present Day Formal Community Participation Mechanisms

- Restoration Advisory Board
- Lawsuits against the U.S. government
- Lobbying Congress for support

Formal mechanisms are those means which allow the community to formally address the United States government, whether it be via Navy representatives, the EPA or other channels. Only three main formal mechanisms are available to the community to communicate concerns with the U.S. government and the Navy. First and most prevalent is the Restoration Advisory Board (RAB), second are lawsuits filed by residents against the U.S. government for health damages, and third is support garnered from U.S. Congressmen to lobby for the cause of Vieques in Washington D.C. This last mechanism is useful for actions such as requiring the American Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR)<sup>88</sup> to reevaluate their health assessments which claim that there is no potential threat to human health as a result of the former military activities

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<sup>88</sup> ATSDR is the principal federal public health agency charged with the responsibility of evaluating the human health effects of exposure to hazardous substances. The agency works in close collaboration with local, state, and other federal agencies, with tribal governments, and with communities and local health care providers. The goal of the agency is to help prevent or reduce harmful human health effects from exposure to hazardous substances.

on Vieques.

Along with these formal channels for dealing with community concerns, residents have also created independent, grassroots organizations to express needs and mobilize awareness and support.

#### Present Day Informal Community Participation Mechanisms

- Community social/economic organizations
- Speeches to United Nations, Congress, other international organizations
- Alliances with other civil rights and Latino groups
- Volunteer projects on Vieques
- Fundraising for social/economic causes
- Speakers, cultural events and memorials
- Independent scientists conducting studies of levels of hazardous waste

Informal mechanisms are independent social movements which allow the community to informally address the United States government, whether it be via Navy representatives, the EPA or other channels. Informal methods of participation are started and sustained by the residents on a grassroots level. The numerous social and economic movements that developed in Vieques have led to the formation of various community-led organizations, including the Vieques Women's Alliance, the Fishermen's Alliance and the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques. These organizations have staged ongoing protests and civil disobedience movements as well as helped the community forge strategic alliances with other Latino, African American and civil rights groups. Women in the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques such as Myrna Pagan and Carmen Valencia have given speeches concerning the plight of Vieques at such press conference from Congress in New York City<sup>89</sup> and the United Nations Committee on Decolonization.<sup>90</sup> Pagan is the Chairperson of the Health Commission for the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques. Her speech to the UN presented the plight of the people of Vieques, the contamination that was causing health

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Source: ATSDR Website.

<sup>89</sup> Interview 3. Member of Women's Association of Vieques.

<sup>90</sup> Pagan, Myrna V. Speech to the UN Committee on Decolonization. *Presentation to the United Nations Decolonization Committee.*

problems and the community's inability to deal with the U.S. government due to their colonial status. Environmental volunteer projects bring together residents, organizations like the Cultural and Historical Trust of Vieques and tourists to work on various ecological projects such as turtle protection. Residents put on fundraisers to support fishermen and the local industry and hold cultural events at the museum and in the town plaza. All of these community activities are effective in achieving many of the goals of the individual organizations, however because all of these informal organizations and events have members with different views on the cleanup and development, the grassroots movement on Vieques no longer has unity and a single vision.

The most recently adopted informal mechanism is the one with the most visible direct impact on the formal mechanisms and the government channels of participation. This last, and recently the most prevalent, informal mechanism is the continued studies of toxic waste levels and their health effects on residents by independent scientists and professionals. Scientists from Puerto Rico and the United States perform studies on the soil, air and water contamination, the increasing rates of cancer, levels of heavy metals in hair and blood samples of residents and higher than accepted background levels of hazardous waste and environmental contamination. All of these avenues of community participation and organization have been carried out with various rates of success and difficulty over the years, and many of the organizations have evolved with the dynamic issues on the island. How the evolution of much of the popular protest movements progress with the changing issues of the island are covered in the background and historical context section of the paper.

Also important to the functioning of the community participation mechanisms and the interactions among the community and between the community and the Navy is the composition of the community itself. Multiple groups have different ideas about the cleanup process, different histories with the Navy, and different ideas about the future use for the land. These differing factions of the community include long time residents, residents who moved to Vieques from the main island of Puerto Rico, a group of expatriates from the United States and some foreigners who have settled on Vieques permanently or have property they return to seasonally. The development goals of all the community groups are also distinct from the goals of the U.S. government agencies, namely the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Navy.

The United States government and some very vocal factions of the community are in a constant struggles concerning the thoroughness of the cleanup. The U.S. government wants to

clean up the land as cheaply and quickly as possible (which will still take a long time, according to the EPA<sup>91</sup>) and only clean up to the standards of land use set by the FWS, which is as a wildlife preserve. Certain groups in the community, mostly long time residents, are demanding that the land be cleaned and returned to its pre-navy condition. This tension among the different community factions and the Navy will unfortunately divide people and possibly degrade the effectiveness of these community participation mechanisms. On Vieques however this tension, rather than discouraging residents, has instead highlighted the importance of community participation in the cleanup process, because “action by the federal government is typically the result of intense pressure by the oppressed group. One need only to think of the civil rights movement and the enforcement of voting rights for an example.”<sup>92</sup>

Community participation is key in dealing with problems of social and environmental justice. It is imperative that institutions, in this case the Navy and the U.S. government, have a forum at which to hear the concerns and needs of the community - who are in this case United States citizens - and more importantly that the government address these concerns. All of the three formal mechanisms are costly, either in time, money or resources that the community may not be willing or able to access or provide. On the other hand, many of the informal mechanisms do not provide the community with legal support and documented dialogue with the government. There are pros and cons to both methods and the methods themselves have evolved over the years from squatting and more informal means of protest to more formal channels of working through the government.

Residents express in their sentiments clearly and in more detail in the interviews of how these mechanisms function, focusing specifically on the RAB. Also addressed are community opinions and sentiments on the effectiveness of these methods, the benefits and drawbacks of each mechanism, and lastly, what can we learn from the case of Vieques. Whether working through formal government channels or staging peaceful protests, one thing for certain is that the residents of Vieques have fought and will continue to fight for their cause until the U.S government and the Navy have responsibly cleaned the toxic waste left by sixty years of bombing.

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<sup>91</sup> Rodriguez, Daniel. Personal Interview. Director of Environmental Protection Agency in Vieques.

<sup>92</sup> Chambers, Stefanie. *Minority Empowerment and Environmental Justice*. (pp. 32)

### RAB Addresses Community Concerns: Effective?

The interviews with members of the community, conducted in the summer of 2009, began with the intention of focusing on the RAB, but as I talked with residents representing different social and economic interest groups, it became clear that many groups were forced to work outside of the RAB to achieve the goals of their organization. However, although many of these individuals pursued other means of dealing with their problems, most of them still attended meetings and kept up to date with the current information provided by the Navy at these meetings. The RAB seemed to still be the most useful out of the three formal mechanisms of community participation in that it is the only way to convey their concerns to the Navy and the US government on a formal basis, however it is wrought with frustrations for the community. With time, attendance at the RAB meetings by residents, even community members officially part of the RAB, started to decline due to frustrations. Many people still attend the meetings because they understand the importance of attendance and interest to hold the Navy, CH2MHill and the EPA accountable to the community for the efficiency and safety of the cleanup. Lamentably, this community pressure is the only reason that the Navy has had to reevaluate and make some concessions, otherwise the community is sure that the EPA, under pressure from the US government to keep the cleanup as cheap and quick as possible, would allow questionable regulations and methods for the cleanup proceed without contest.<sup>93</sup>

This section describes how the RAB functions specifically in Vieques, the community participation element, advantages and disadvantages evident at the meetings, frustrations with the RAB expressed by some of its community members and finally my experience at the August 2009 RAB meeting on Vieques.

The creation of a Restoration Advisory Board, called by its acronym RAB, is required by the United States government of all Superfund sites, of which Vieques is one. The RAB is a “stakeholder group that meets on a regular basis to discuss environmental restoration at a specific property that is either currently or was formerly owned by DoD [Department of Defense], but where DoD oversees the environmental restoration process.”<sup>94</sup> In the case of Vieques, the RAB is comprised of Navy representatives who are usually civilian employees and representatives

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<sup>93</sup> Interview 2. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

<sup>94</sup> Interview 1. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

from CH2MHill<sup>95</sup> as well as community members. The RAB is a forum for information exchange between the installation, institutions and the community, it is not a decision making body. The Navy installation assigned to perform the cleanup of the Superfund site is not required to follow the recommendations put forward by the RAB. The civilian Navy regulators, however, stress that “decision makers will listen closely to and consider the input RAB members provide regarding environmental and restoration activities”<sup>96</sup> in an effort to identify the most efficient and productive means of tackling issues.

In addition to these official institutional representatives the board has a community participation requirement. The creation and continued participation in a RAB fulfills a statutory requirement to establish “a committee to review and comment on DoD actions and proposed actions regarding environmental restoration.”<sup>97</sup> A forum set up by the Navy per federal mandate for Superfund sites and requires a certain level of community participation and is required to meet once every three months. In Vieques, the RAB involves members from the community, the Navy and CH2MHill. The latter of these two have the responsibility to field questions about the cleanup from the community and make sure that everyone is informed, while the community is allowed to raise questions and concerns. As a previous member of the RAB disclosed, however, “the meetings give the impression of community participation but it is all a façade. For a while the Navy was getting the *Viequenses* that work in the live impact zones to come to the meetings and attack the community members who would speak. It was a really horrible, hostile environment, all political bullshit.” According to the same RAB member, it will be difficult to remedy civil-military relations because “the community has been lied to by the Navy, they have been subject to 60 years of bombing.”<sup>98</sup>

There are advantages and disadvantages to the RAB. The advantages of having a RAB are that the community has an official and documented forum at which to express their concerns and have questions answered on the record, which holds the Navy, CH2MHill and the U.S. government accountable for the concerns of the community. The Navy representatives that are in charge of facilitating the meetings every three months make sure to have headsets available

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<sup>95</sup> CH2MHill is the privately contracted company in charge of cleaning up and removal of unexploded ordinance on the island. See Appendix A for full description of organization.

<sup>96</sup> Interview 1. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

<sup>97</sup> Interview 1. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

<sup>98</sup> Interview 1. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

and live translators from English to Spanish and Spanish to English and invite CH2MHill and other cleanup employees to explain the process and technicalities of the cleanup and field questions from the community.

Some challenges to this mechanism are that the RAB is not a decision making entity and the community can only make suggestions in the hopes that the Navy and CH2MHill will take these concerns into consideration, meaning that the community has no real power to make decisions at these meetings. Another inefficiency to the RAB meetings is that CH2MHill employees, normally just technicians who disable bombs, are asked to attend meetings and perform community relations work to explain their work to the community who have questions about the technical and specific information provided. The process is frustrating for both sides, as there exist language, cultural and trust barriers to the dialogue. The focus of the August 2009 meeting was the continued progress of the cleanup and environmental contamination. The difference between the community's and the Navy's perception of the cleanup progress, including Open Burns and Open Detonations, creates sentiments of unease and the community feels that because these burns are still taking place after voicing opposition that their concerns are not being addressed.<sup>99</sup>

Many of the frustrations that were expressed in interviews by members of the RAB were manifested through a lack of trust with the Navy. One RAB member describes her experience with the RAB and the Navy:

“The RAB meetings were ineffective because they were only in English. And [the Navy] gave workshops so that everyone could understand the technical terms, but they were only in English and the reality is that the majority of *Viequenses* don't speak English. Some of the documents had been translated but the problem was that most of us didn't know the technical jargon in Spanish or English. Also, the Navy told us that there were no experts in the area that spoke Spanish... One time they gave a presentation and they promised a Latina lady who knew the subject and an Indian woman ended up giving the presentation who obviously did not speak Spanish. We asked her where the presentation was from... and she said that they always use this presentation - it is standard. This was always happening. Not just one time, but many.

By law the RAB is supposed to meet at least one every three months, or better yet every month. And the meetings should be in a well known location, at a time known by everyone, but they were always changing the date and the time if they knew that [a certain activist or community

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<sup>99</sup> Interview 1. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

member] was going to be gone from the island. And do you know where they published the meeting dates and times? In Vieques events [implying that this is not a good source to get the word out about the meetings.] Nothing on the radio and nothing in the other newspapers.”<sup>100</sup>

[Translated from Spanish]

My last day on Vieques I had the opportunity to attend the August 2009 meeting of the Restoration Advisory Board. The meeting was held at the restored lighthouse on a hill overlooking the town of Isabel Segunda. Those in attendance were Navy representatives, CH2MHill workers and about 35 interested community members. Talks and questions were directed toward addressing any issues the community might have had at the previous meeting, the progress on the cleanup (including slides, pictures and maps), potential problems and ways to deal with snags in the cleanup process. The Navy officials running the meeting were very concerned with procedures in order to ensure community participation, presumably so that the community could not come back later and claim that the Navy did not do everything possible to make information surrounding the cleanup available. A microphone was passed around the presenters and the audience for presentations and questions and headphones were available with simultaneous translations into English and Spanish to make sure that everyone was able to understand. Yet, despite all the steps taken to ensure accuracy, the tension and frustration was apparent.

Right away, I could feel the tension between some factions of the community and the Navy representatives, sentiments that have been carried over from when the island was still being used as a practice bombing range by the Navy. It was apparent that this general lack of trust and respect were the cause of frustration, a certain degree of inefficiency and misunderstanding, evidenced by raised voices, repeated questions about details on the cleanup and murmurings of discontent at some explanations provided by CH2MHill and the Navy. As an outside observer, I was interested to see how different groups perceived the same goal. The collective goal is a clean Vieques, free of toxic and hazardous waste and safe for future use of the natural assets of the land. Problems arise, however, because of differing ideas on the degree to which cleanup should be conducted, what methods should be employed and what exactly the future use of the land should be. A RAB member confirms, “[the Navy is] only cleaning up to make [the land] a nature preserve because FWS owns the land, they are not anticipating use by

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<sup>100</sup> Interview 2. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

people so they will not clean up to those standards.”<sup>101</sup> Residents want to land to be returned to them so that they can build houses and develop the land for agriculture or other uses while at the same time realizing that this may take many generations,<sup>102</sup> but the Fish and Wildlife Service, who is the official steward of the land, have plans to keep the land as a wildlife refuge indefinitely, which is what the U.S. government intended when they handed over ownership (a title which residents dispute, saying that FWS does not own the land).

### Social and Environmental Justice: The Role of ATSDR

The struggle for social and environmental justice on Vieques involves more patience, more negotiating, and a different kind of perseverance. The history of the protests, the slogans and the informal mechanisms are still very important for the momentum of the community, but to function effectively within the formal mechanisms used today would ideally require more flexibility from both the Navy and the community. A lack of trust between the Navy and the community has contributed to today’s dilemma of the RAB’s ineffectiveness and so other formal community participation mechanisms have come into play as a result. The community is accustomed to having to demand their rights, so when the Navy and FWS suggest collaborating and compromising on cleanup and conservation, naturally the community, having been slighted before by the Navy, is going to be distrustful. That the community would have to struggle so much for basic health and safety rights is a problem of military bases and institutions all over the world.

These tense relations affect the success of the formal mechanisms such as the RAB and required the use of other formal mechanisms in the search for social and environmental justice. This section will cover the discrepancies in scientific data concerning contamination, how the American Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR) functions, the failure of the first ATSDR study to address the health risk on Vieques, the two formal mechanisms outside of the RAB utilized by the community, and lastly the importance of the community’s informal mechanisms to ensure government accountability within the formal mechanisms in the search for social and environmental justice.

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<sup>101</sup> Interview 1. Member of Restoration Advisory Board.

<sup>102</sup> Interview 3. Member of Women’s Association of Vieques.

Many of the principle stumbling blocks for the community come from the differences in evaluation of the impact from the Navy's operations on Vieques. These differences in scientific data on contamination and health conditions among the residents come from the Navy and other U.S. governmental organizations as well as the community in Vieques, which has garnered support from various independent academic and professional individuals. There is conflicting evidence as to whether Navy activities on the island did and still continues to "pose any significant risk to human health."<sup>103</sup>

Over the years, the Navy and the U.S. government have contracted various private organizations and assigned some government agencies<sup>104</sup> to the task of assessing the health and environmental risk of the previous Navy training exercises. These agencies are also in charge of evaluating the health and environmental effects of the continuing cleanup process, methods and possible ramifications of lingering toxic waste. The American Toxic Substance and Disease Registry, ATSDR, is the main sector of the U.S. Department of Health and Safety responsible for assessing when there are conditions in the environment whether naturally occurring or from man-made activities that pose a significant risk to human health. Scientific data is collected from tests done at the site of possible contamination and an analysis, called a Health Assessment, is provided to the government and the community.<sup>105</sup> The Health Assessments are published with variations of one of two conclusions: either 1) there IS NO significant or apparent risk to human health, or 2) there IS a significant or apparent risk to human health [emphasis added].

The procedure to request an ATSDR health assessment is an online or written petition by a resident of a site in question. ATSDR conducted their first studies in Vieques due to a petition by residents and with a known lack of sufficient data to evaluate current exposure to harmful or toxic waste. In a series of four studies that were finalized in 2003 the agency performed analyses of multiple sites on Vieques on the quality of the air, soil, groundwater, shellfish, fish, sea water and vegetation. The studies checked for levels of heavy metals including arsenic, mercury, lead, cadmium and zinc, as well as explosive compounds, above the accepted background levels that might pose a human health risk.<sup>106</sup>

The results from the studies found traces of explosives and many heavy metals in almost

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<sup>103</sup> ATSDR. *Exposure Investigation: Isla de Vieques*.

<sup>104</sup> See Appendix A for a full list and description of the agencies and organizations.

<sup>105</sup> ATSDR. *Exposure Investigation: Isla de Vieques*.

<sup>106</sup> ATSDR. Website.

all of the samples, but ATSDR concluded that these cases were neither unique to Vieques nor that levels were above the safe baseline level. As such, all ATSDR reports to date on Vieques state that “there is no apparent health hazard posed by metals or explosives” and no recommendations were made to improve the quality or health of the residents. The ATSDR final report on Vieques that was published in 2003 was claimed to address community concerns surrounding the previous studies, but community members in Vieques remain skeptical because people are still incurring cancer and other diseases at higher rates than the rest of Puerto Rico. They want answers.

Independent scientists were recruited by the community to assess the ATSDR reports. Flaws within the ATSDR methodology began to surface and these independent scientists began to perform their own studies of the levels of heavy metals and other toxic waste. In many cases the ATSDR agency has been known to use previously documented data or not conduct up-to-date studies. In the case of Vieques it appeared that ATSDR had used data already collected by the Navy or in some cases data previously collected by institutions such as NOAA to report on the study. Some ATSDR studies, as with the air quality analyses from when the Navy was using the east end of the island as a live bombing range as well as the present practice of open burning and open detonation, were based solely on air quality models and therefore contain a high degree of uncertainty.<sup>107</sup> These evident differences in quantitative data were cause for concern within the community and they confronted the agency.

The *Viequesenses*' concerns with the ATSDR studies were well founded. The agency was responsible for another failed health assessment in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 2007. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, ATSDR was called in to decide whether or not the temporary living conditions set up in Baton Rouge posed any risk to human health or safety. The agency gave the trailers the green light. In 2007, however, there was a lawsuit filed to reevaluate the situation after people started to fall ill from the presence of high levels of formaldehyde in the temporary housing trailers. ATSDR replaced the study with an updated version, citing unclear language, failure to take daily temperature into account, and insufficient discussion over health concerns as the reason for the incorrect first analysis.<sup>108</sup> The Vieques community immediately jumped at the opportunity to have ATSDR revisit the situation on Vieques as well.

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<sup>107</sup> ATSDR. *Exposure Investigation: Isla de Vieques*.

<sup>108</sup> ATSDR. Website.

The approach necessary for Vieques, however, differed from the situation of Baton Rouge residents because of their colonial status. Puerto Rican lawyers in New York, at the time affiliated with the Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques (Committee for the Restoration and Development of Vieques), garnered support from Congressman Stephen Rothman from New Jersey and another Congressman from Florida (both with strong Puerto Rican constituents) to lobby for the Vieques community, since the community did not have a representative themselves. They asked that ATSDR be required to reevaluate the conclusions of their health assessments in Vieques as they had in Louisiana.<sup>109</sup>

The lobbying efforts were successful and in August of 2009 the then president of ATSDR, Howard Frumpkin,<sup>110</sup> visited Vieques to meet with some of the local government and community leaders. Frumpkin is quoted in a press release statement three months later: “Much has been learned since we first went to Vieques a decade ago, and we have identified gaps in environmental data that could be important in determining health effects. We are committed to using the best technology and scientific expertise to help find answers for the people of Vieques... The gaps we found indicate that we cannot state unequivocally that no health hazards exist in Vieques. We have found reason to pose further questions.”<sup>111</sup> The former president of the agency also stated that the agency aims to “coordinate an inclusive, accountable process featuring participation of Puerto Rican community members and professionals in moving forward. Flavio Cumpiano, a lawyer and Congressman instrumental in negotiating that ATSDR revisit Vieques, says, “a week after the ATSDR withdrawal of its report... ATSDR Director Frumpkin responded to Congressman Rothman's letter... The letter was made public just last week [and I think it] provides some hope although we still have to be vigilant.”<sup>112</sup> Even while working through formal, legal channels to claim their rights as citizens to be free of contamination, the community still realizes that importance of the informal mechanisms that drive the movement and fill the gaps where the formal mechanisms are insufficient to address community concerns.

As a result of the meeting in Vieques ATSDR scientists will prepare a summary report of

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<sup>109</sup> Cumpiano, Flavio. *Vieques Research Question*.

<sup>110</sup> Rabin, Robert. Frumpkin resigned in January of 2010 due to “scathing criticism from Congress and the media for the poor handling of public health problems [in Louisiana] and understating the health risks of several other, less-publicized cases” Vieques included.

<sup>111</sup> *Federal Agency to Change its Early Conclusions on Environmental Assessment in Vieques*. ATSDR Press Release.

<sup>112</sup> Cumpiano, Flavio. *Vieques Research Question*.

the previous environmental health work done for Vieques including recommendations developed from the scientific consultation. As part of the scientific process this report will be peer reviewed by independent experts. Once peer review is completed ATSDR will provide detailed recommendations about future activities. “ATSDR greatly appreciates the scientists taking time to travel to Atlanta and share their findings and perspectives. We salute the independent scientists and community leaders for their dedication to the health of the people of Vieques, and we look forward to working with them as we move forward with our fresh look at Vieques,” said Frumpkin.<sup>113</sup> It was clear that had the community not sought out the resources to pursue the ATSDR on its own the U.S. government would have done nothing to provide resources to deal with the discrepancies.

In terms of the U.S. government institutions addressing the concerns of the community, the community expressed frustrations that their questions were not being properly taken into consideration and that, in some cases, their concerns were being blatantly ignored. In response to these concerns among the goals of the ATSDR reopening the study is that the agency will “work with community members and Puerto Rican health officials to issue science-based, precautionary recommendations to protect public health.”<sup>114</sup> The role of community was instrumental in having ATSDR reevaluate their studies but, as Cumpiano knows, community activism must continue to be persistent.

Community sentiments in general surrounding the Navy and the cleanup are varied, but generally distrustful. Some view it with resignation, some with anger, and others as a hopeful and necessary process. Apathetic is not among the words I would use to describe the residents of Vieques; they could talk about their views over social, environmental and economic issues (whether related to the Navy, the FWS or the EPA) for hours to anyone who is willing to listen. Many people have personal grievances against any or many of the institutions and organizations and often attach social issues that may not be directly related to the contamination, political and reparation issues that the Navy are legally responsible for rendering. But in the search for social and environmental justice and in light of the laborious and tedious process of working through the formal community participation mechanisms, it is clear that every ounce of community activism is vitally important to the overall cause of the residents of Vieques.

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<sup>113</sup> *Federal ... ATSDR Press Release.*

<sup>114</sup> *Federal ... ATSDR Press Release.*

## **International and Future Significance**

The case of Vieques extends beyond the small island itself. There are militaries all over the world that produce waste, companies that pollute that need somewhere to dispose of this waste, as well as new technologies such as nuclear power creating different types of hazardous waste being produced at a higher rate than ever. With an increase in the rate of turnover for technologies like computers and the prevalence of nuclear weapons, nuclear power plants and chemical weapons the question arises for the future: where is all of this potential toxic or hazardous waste going to be disposed? Most of the waste is coming from the developed world because developed countries are able to consume more new technologies, therefore any increase in the flow of waste will most likely be from developed countries to underdeveloped countries.

Per examples like Vieques, in the future the developed world, including the United States, will likely increase its attempts to dispose of toxic or hazardous waste, often produced by the military, in less developed countries where environmental, safety and human rights laws are less stringent. Often times in these developing countries, land tenure and property rights are not well defined and governments or private land owners may accept money to allow developed nations to dump their toxic waste and technology waste that decomposes unhealthily and may cause adverse effects on nearby communities.

In this case where local or national governments are permitting dumping of waste or activities that could be potentially hazardous to human health by developed countries, communities with objections to these actions - such as is the case with Vieques - would have to utilize both informal and formal mechanisms or community participation and organization strategies to fight for social and environmental justice. The rules would be slightly different in every game because the communities would have to work within their own governments' legal constraints as well as the social and cultural limitations, but the framework for the community participation mechanisms could definitely draw from the successes and obstacles that the Vieques community is still experiencing.

It is unclear where the biggest obstacles for the future lie, both for Vieques and for the world, but Vieques can be a case study for other marginalized communities or communities in underdeveloped countries dealing with issues of social and environmental justice from developed countries, a process which requires a high degree of information sharing, awareness of rights and local activism, especially in lobbying for the support of their national government.

## **Conclusion**

This research addressed the question of whether or not, within the framework of modern colonialism, Vieques citizens who are simultaneously American citizens have the means necessary to access their rights to social and environmental justice in order to be free from environmental contamination and health risks on their island. The community participation mechanisms utilized by residents have been in place for almost a decade yet have never undergone formal scrutiny as to whether or not these mechanisms are effective or sufficient for addressing community concerns. The people of Vieques continue to pressure the U.S. government, the Navy, and various other institutions that they consider to be responsible for health, environmental and social problems resulting from contamination by previous military training operations carried out on Vieques. The community has organized itself through formal and informal community participation mechanisms to deal with the economic, safety and social ramifications from previous military operations. Given the colonial history of Puerto Rico, the history of the Navy in Vieques, the evolution of community participation mechanisms from organic to formal while still understanding the importance of informal mechanisms as well as the parallels between Vieques and other military bases around the world, the search for social and environmental justice on Vieques has just begun.

The most persistent issues on Vieques, according to residents, are those of the allocation and ownership of the previously Navy-owned land, the emerging health crises, the problem of the questionable environmental cleanup methods as well as issues of trust between the community and the Navy. Many of these issues are the product of a military past, but residents are finding themselves confronted with new issues that are still unfolding. In order to react to these dynamic changes, the community utilizes formal and informal mechanisms to continually adapt and tackle new problems. These participation mechanisms have evolved from informal protests to formal means of working through U.S. government organizations while still keeping their grassroots movements alive. The Restoration Advisory Board is the most prominent of the formal mechanisms, yet there are disadvantages to this institution as it is set up and monitored by the Navy, which raises the question whether the RAB is sufficient to satisfy an acceptable level of community participation in the cleanup. The community also works through other formal mechanisms like ATSDR for actions such as filing lawsuits against the U.S. government. Informal mechanisms play a significant role working in tangent with these formal mechanisms.

The significance of this project spans local, national and international issues of land and cultural ethics, as well as the environment. The issue today, 70 years after the Navy began bombing Vieques, is how the people of Vieques and the U.S. institutions find a way to be effective in achieving the same goal - a clean and contamination free Vieques - with such different backgrounds, limited trust and motives and two opposite ways of solving the same problem.

The reality for the community is that the Navy is not willing to spend the money necessary to ensure the safety of Vieques residents, and also that the U.S. government does not seem willing to grant reparations to residents suffering from health problems due to Navy activities. As is the case in many communities around the world, it is important for Vieques to determine who funds community participation forums and environmental cleanups, who decides land tenure and reparations and who has “real” power (money, resources, direct legislative power to make laws) versus who has “indirect” power (voting, lobbying, protesting). It is imperative that citizens and community members know their rights and are aware of the avenues available to them to formally address concerns in order to achieve social and environmental justice. In addition to community activism, however, foreign militaries and developed countries must choose to operate conscientiously and responsibly in communities and transparency is vital within all levels of community participation mechanisms to ensure these mechanisms’ effectiveness in the search for social and environmental justice.

## Appendix A

List of all relevant institutions, associations and organizations with explanations of their affiliations, current role in Vieques and how they are relevant to the cleanup.

### U.S. Government Institutions

#### **Restoration Advisory Board**

According to the organization's website, a "stakeholder group that meets on a regular basis to discuss environmental restoration at a specific property that is either currently or was formerly owned by DoD, but where DoD oversees the environmental restoration process." A forum set up by the Navy per federal mandate for Superfund sites which requires a certain level of community participation involving members from the community, the Navy and CH2MHill. The latter of these two organizations have the responsibility of fielding questions about the cleanup from the community and making sure that the community is informed of the latest cleanup updates.

August 2009 Meeting: Those in attendance were Navy representatives, CH2MHill workers and approximately 35 community members. Talks and questions were directed toward addressing any issues the community might have had at the previous meeting, the progress on the cleanup (including slides, pictures and maps), potential problems and ways to deal with obstacles in the cleanup process. The NAVFAC officials running the meeting were very concerned with proper execution of all procedures in order to ensure community participation. The community is worried, however, that this preoccupation with technicalities is simply so that the community could not come back later and claim that the Navy did not do everything possible to make information surrounding the cleanup available, and not actually concerned with addressing the community's questions. A microphone was passed around the presenters and the audience for presentations and questions and headphones were available with simultaneous translations into English and Spanish to ensure that everyone was able to understand the dialogue.

#### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

Agency under the umbrella of the United States Department of the Interior. Official land stewards (owners) of the large portions of former Navy land that were not returned to the municipality. Primarily concerned with the environmental issues and conservation on Vieques. Managing wildlife refuge, using educational and volunteer programs to keep locals informed, hopefully involved and also out of restricted areas.

#### **U.S. Navy**

Branch of the United States military. From the 1940's to 2003 used Vieques as a test bombing range and rented the island to NATO allies for training troops and testing weapons. Today the Navy is responsible for the ongoing cleanup of unexploded ordnance and pollution caused by previous military actions.

#### **American Toxic Substance and Disease Registry**

Under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Part of the U. S. Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA). Controversial agency in that it is under "scathing criticism from Congress and the media for the "poor handling of public health problems [in Louisiana] and understating the health risks of several other, less-publicized cases" including Vieques, according to its own website.

Also per its own website, "the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is the principal federal public health agency charged with the responsibility of evaluating the human health effects of exposure to hazardous substances. The agency works in close collaboration with local, state, and other federal agencies, with tribal governments, and with

communities and local health care providers. The goal of the agency is to help prevent or reduce harmful human health effects from exposure to hazardous substances.”

First health assessment on Vieques (plus another failed health assessment in Baton Rouge, Louisiana) done by this organization stated that there was no threat posed by any former military actions to human health on Vieques. Since that study, the agency has been forced to revisit Vieques to determine with proper methodology whether there is a significant risk to human health. This decision would affect any possible reparations paid by the Navy and the U.S. government to the community.

### **NAVFAC**

Navy representatives and community liaisons for the cleanup on Vieques. Distribute flyers with information regarding the cleanup and run the RAB meetings. U.S. Navy entity. Emails and phone numbers available on cleanup flyers to call for more information and ways to get involved in the cleanup.

I called the office a total of twelve times during my stay on Vieques and the receptionist would always tell me that no one was available to answer questions. Finally she informed me that Madeline Rivera, the community liaison and representative, was off the island and would not return until the RAB meeting. So I emailed Madeline (in Spanish) and she responded (in English) that she was “not authorized to discuss the project for any research studies without the approval of the Navy Public affairs office.” The information I was requesting is available to the public via other channels.

### **Environmental Protection Agency**

A U.S. government agency whose mission, according to the website, is to “protect human health and the environment. To achieve a cleaner, healthier environment for the American people, the Agency: 1) Develops regulations to implement environmental laws enacted by Congress and, where appropriate, delegates authority to states and tribes for implementing programs and ensuring that standards are met. 2) Enforces environmental laws, regulations, and standards by taking legal action.” The EPA has five long term goals, the last two (Number 4: Healthy Communities and Ecosystems. Number 5: Compliance and Environmental Stewardship) relate directly to the case of Vieques. The EPA’s job in Vieques is to regulate the process and results of the cleanup by the Navy to make sure they are up to standards for future use of the land. However, the EPA is also under pressure from the U.S. government to be cost and time effective. The director of the Vieques project, Daniel Rodriguez, is Puerto Rican.

### **U.S. Government**

All branches of the U.S. government have been involved in Vieques at some point - Congressmen, Presidents, the judicial system and especially the military. The U.S. government also includes agencies such as the EPA and ATSDR, which are government organizations. It is important to recognize that agencies such as the EPA and ATSDR are funded and staffed by the U.S. government.

The U.S. government exercised sovereign immunity in a case where 7,100 *Viequenses* filed for health damages due to past military actions and contamination.

### Puerto Rican Institutions

#### **Environmental Quality Board**

The Puerto Rican equivalent of the EPA. Has essentially the same goals as the EPA but less resources, budget and influence concerning the cleanup. Is able to submit recommendations to the Puerto Rican government and the EPA concerning the cleanup.

## **Puerto Rican Government**

Vieques is often referred to by many of the islanders as “a colony of a colony,” referring to the fact that Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States (subject to government decisions without much input) and Vieques is in much the same situation with the main government of Puerto Rico. There is a constant dialogue on the radio about the status of Puerto Rico as the Commonwealth. There are three main political parties on the island that roughly represent those in favor of independence, statehood, or keeping Puerto Rico a Commonwealth. The group calling for independence is arguably the smallest but also the most vocal group. The group in favor of statehood is important in the dealings with the U.S. Navy, because when they hold office, Puerto Rico (and consequently Vieques) politics favor more U.S. interests than those of the Puerto Ricans and *Viequenses*.

## Community Groups

### **Fishermen’s Association**

Fishermen were the first to begin heavily protesting the Navy’s actions in Vieques. Today, the organization is mostly concerned with environmental issues as they relate to fishing on and around the island as well as the future of the industry. Because the industry was decimated by the Navy’s presence, the new generation of fishermen did not grow up knowing how to manage natural resources of the sea. The association is also trying to make it easier to obtain a fishing license on Vieques, where as now they are required to travel to the main island of Puerto Rico and it is expensive.

### **Women’s Association**

The strongest voice for health and social concerns on Vieques, the organization is pro-active in sending speakers to conferences all over the world, tracking studies on the increasing cancer rates and higher rates of diabetes and birth defects in Vieques and staying active about some of the social concerns on Vieques (for example, the possibility of a bridge connecting Vieques to the main island).

## Organizations and Non-Profits

### **Conservation and Historical Trust of Vieques**

A privately owned non-profit organization that promotes environmental conservation and ecotourism through educational programs and exhibits that encourage the Vieques people to participate. Owned by two Americans, staffed by a Puerto Rican biologist and local Vieques residents.

### **Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques**

This organization has evolved since the protests with the needs of the community to tackle new social, health, environmental, developmental or political issues that may arise. The committee has a more holistic approach to the problems on Vieques. Members are very active in the RAB, in the lawsuits and in the media.

## Private Companies

### **CH2MHill**

Private company hired by the Navy to perform cleanup and EOD (Unexploded Ordinance Removal) of the eastern third of the island where the live impact area and the buffer zones were.

## Appendix B

### Definitions

Social Justice: distribution of advantages and disadvantages within a society; ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to have access to those factors which ensure quality of life.

Environmental Justice: ability to lobby for environmental legislation to ensure that there are no health or safety risks to the community or the ecosystems. “Have substantial and equal opportunities to participate directly in decisions that affect them” (Archon Fung 2004, 4). The theory behind environmental justice is that “poor people and people of color disproportionately suffer from the harmful impacts of environmental policy... For years, the Defense Department had argued it was exempt from environmental legislation, citing national security.”<sup>115</sup>

Superfund Site: name given to the environmental program established by the United States government to address abandoned hazardous waste sites. Part of the EPA’s program CERCLA.

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<sup>115</sup> Baver pp. 92

## Appendix C

### Acronyms

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| ATSDR  | American Toxic Substance and Disease Registry                          |
| DoD    | United States Department of Defense                                    |
| EPA    | Environmental Protection Agency  |
| EQB    | Environmental Quality Board (Puerto Rican EPA)                         |
| FWS    | Fish and Wildlife Service  |
| NAVFAC | Navy organization puts out information on the cleanup, coordinates RAB |
| NOAA   | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration                        |
| RAB    | Restoration Advisory Board   |
| USGS   | United States Geological Survey  |

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