

Artistic Activism in Vieques: An Exploration of Puerto Rican Resistance through the Lens of
Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla's Performance Art Series

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Introduction:

Partners in visual art creation, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla have exhibited their work all over the world, but their home base is San Juan, Puerto Rico. Allora was born in Philadelphia and received her education in the US, while Calzadilla was born in Cuba but was raised and received his education in Puerto Rico. They explain that their work together is grounded in the idea that because of their different backgrounds, their communication is perpetually limited. While each can speak their native language to each other, meaning that Calzadilla can speak to Allora in English and Allora to Calzadilla in Spanish, they acknowledge that their understanding of those languages will never be absolute. For this reason, their work focuses on how meaning is ascribed, which is central to learning and understanding another language (Allora and Calzadilla, Newfields).

Allora and Calzadilla are most well-known for their work that they presented on behalf of the US at the 2011 Venice Biennale, the world's most distinguished art event where countries are represented by artists on a global stage. Allora and Calzadilla presented "Gloria" which consists of three pieces that focus on the US military. While the pieces raise questions about US militarism, Calzadilla explains, "there's a difference between a critique and being critical" and their work constitutes the latter (Calzadilla quoted in Davis 67). He also states that the art pieces which compose "Gloria":

don't have a specific meaning, they don't have a specific agenda. They're not trying to convince anyone of anything. It's art. We are artists, we are not politicians. The objects can have many readings (Calzadilla quoted in Davis 67-68).

In the art series I will analyze (which includes one of the pieces included in "Gloria"), Allora and Calzadilla addressed the salient issue of US naval occupation on the island of Vieques which lasted six decades. Their first piece involved direct coordination with activists and resistance

groups to demand that the Navy evacuate. Their subsequent pieces grappled with the complexity of naval departure, framing the ongoing social and political issues.

Puerto Rico itself has had a long history of protest art centered on issues related to its lack of political sovereignty. Its indeterminate status as neither country nor state which has been labeled as “other” by both the US and Latin America leaves the small island of Vieques particularly relegated to the margins. It has even been referred to as “the colony of the colony” (Barreto 2). From 1941 to 2003, the US Navy controlled a majority of land in Vieques, basically “sandwiching” local residents in between an ammunition storage area and a maneuver and live weapons testing zone. Thousands of Viequenses were displaced, unemployment skyrocketed, public health consequences were felt, and ecological life destroyed (McCaffrey; Bayer; Lugo Lugo). Large-scale social movements coalesced in the streets and on the site of the Navy’s facilities as a response to the man-made disaster it created in Vieques. To accompany the social movement, artists Allora and Calzadilla created a four-piece series which used a combination of installation and performance to highlight the lasting problems created by the naval occupation.

This thesis analyzes for the first time the four pieces that make up Allora and Calzadilla’s full set: “[Land Mark](#)” (2001), “[Returning a Sound](#)” (2004), “[Under Discussion](#)” (2005), and “[Half Mast/ Full Mast](#)” (2010). In their first piece, “Land Mark,” Allora and Calzadilla collaborated with activist groups on the island in order to create shoe soles engraved with protestors’ grievances and demands that were transferred onto the bombing site’s sand via footprint (Sheren 129). The second piece “Returning a Sound,” features Homar, a former activist driving around Vieques on a moped with its muffler replaced by a trumpet, commemorating the US naval departure in 2003 and the Viequenses victory but also grappling with the complexity of that victory (Arbino 280). In the third piece, “Under Discussion,” a descendant of a Viequense

fisherman is sailing on an upside down conference table from mainland Puerto Rico to Vieques, specifically steering it through the site of the initial struggle in the first movement against the Navy in the 1970s to comment on how Viequenses should be driving the debate over the island's future (Arbino 281). The fourth piece is called "Half Mast/ Full Mast," created in 2010 which features two static images of Viequense territory connected by a pole, one that depicts victory in the struggle against the US and the other a site that represents defeat or persisting challenges. However, the only way to distinguish which site is which is by where the Viequense gymnast positions themselves, thereby highlighting the central role of local residents' experiences in the memory of the struggle (Lisson Gallery; Arbino).

The two scholars who examined three of the four pieces in the series, Ila Sheren and Daniel Arbino, classified Allora and Calzadilla as "agents of change" and their work as "artistic activism" (Sheren 122; Arbino 272). I partially agree with scholars that these pieces function as a critique of US actions and politicize the situation in Vieques, but I also partially agree with the artists' suggestions that they are apolitical because they are not necessarily advocating for political change to be made to Puerto Rico's status. I argue that there is a tension between the art and the artists with respect to what the pieces do and what the artists claim as their intent. Interestingly, this tension is a demonstration of the in-between or liminal space that characterizes Puerto Rico as it is rejected both by the US despite being a part of it and by Latin America because it is technically part of the US. This paper will begin with a literature review discussing the minimal research done on this series. I then provide a brief overview of relevant work on social movements and performance art.¹ After that, I describe key historical events that highlight

¹ Another area that is relevant to this research is border theory. To examine this from a Latin American and Caribbean perspective, one might explore the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Marisel Moreno as well as Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña (Anzaldúa; Moreno; Taylor).

the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the US and as well as Puerto Rico's association with Latin America more broadly before considering the particular history of Vieques as it pertains to the idea of liminal space. I integrate the discussion of the art pieces into the history section when relevant and then I discuss all of the findings in conjunction with one another. I conclude by making suggestions for future research to illuminate the connections between performance art and social movements. It is important to note that this project explores a single case, and for that reason cannot be the basis for more general claims about the relationship between art and the subject of the art. Additionally, it is limited by the fact that it could not address the public reception of these pieces in Vieques, mainland Puerto Rico or the US. I made every attempt to get in contact with the artists, but there was no direct way to contact them, and the galleries reached out to them on my behalf but the artists never responded.

Literature Review:

Previous research analyzing Allora and Calzadilla's full set of performance art pieces together has been minimal. Allora and Calzadilla themselves are represented by the Lisson Gallery and Barbara Gladstone, and while both galleries acknowledge the pieces they created, the PDF press packets they put together only include brief mentions of the pieces. For example, Lisson's press packet excludes "Land Mark" and Gladstone's press site only covers 2007 so the later three pieces were excluded.

There is a similar lack of scholarly attention to Allora and Calzadilla's full set and its implications. There have been several scholars who only examined a single piece in their work. For example, Allora and Calzadilla's "Land Mark" was a chosen subject for several scholars but not in connection to other pieces in the Vieques set (Bobrow-Strain; Cheetham; Knight and

Senie). Allora and Calzadilla's second piece, "Under Discussion" made a brief appearance in John Ingledew's *How to Have Great Ideas: A Guide to Creative Thinking*, but it was used out of context and direct engagement with the actual piece was lacking (Ingledew 117). I have only found two scholars who analyze the "full" set: Daniel Arbino and Ila Sheren.² However, in Arbino's article "Half-Mast: Shifting Landscapes of Protest and Demilitarization in Vieques," he only explored the latter three pieces and in Sheren's book *Portable Borders: Performance Art and Politics on the U.S. Frontera Since 1984*, she only explored the first three. Both authors asserted that Allora and Calzadilla's performance art series serves as activism. Arbino wrote about the role of media in protest including performance art in Viequense activism and Sheren wrote about their series as a form of border art with a focus on the portability of borders during globalization. Unlike Arbino with "Land Mark," Sheren acknowledged that Allora and Calzadilla later completed their fourth piece "Half Mast/ Full Mast" but chose to focus on the first three because they were the most related to the protests and the eventual naval decommissioning (Sheren 158). I take a different approach from Sheren and Arbino in two ways. First, although Sheren's argument is more in line with mine in examining the pieces as border art, I see the tension between the artists' claims about their intent and how the pieces have been interpreted as an important consideration. I also ground the discussion of these pieces in social movement and performance art theory, unlike either Sheren or Arbino.

Not only does this thesis explore for the first time all four pieces together in one paper and take a previously unexplored angle to do so, it also delves into topics that have not received much scholarly attention. Regarding the present situation in Vieques, there are only a handful of articles and book chapters that examine the island's contemporary condition. The vast majority

² Yates McKee is another scholar and activist who discusses Allora and Calzadilla's series in an article that focuses primarily on "Land Mark" and briefly addresses "Returning a Sound" and "Under Discussion (McKee).

of the work written about Vieques was done in the first decade of the 21st century and shortly after, mostly detailing the battle with the Navy but not going into much depth about the aftermath and its implications for today. Additionally, little scholarship exists that explores performance art in Puerto Rico that is not related to the diaspora, and by extension Vieques.

Theory on Social Movements and Performance Art:

Because Allora and Calzadilla's series draws on tactics used by both social movement activists and performance artists, I will now situate their series into a theoretical framework by providing an overview of social movement and performance art theory. In Vieques, social movements played a vital role in driving the Navy out of the island. Understanding what exactly social movements are, how they sustain themselves, and why individuals choose to participate is integral in understanding how the movements in Vieques coalesced and ultimately achieved their central objective in 2003.

Definitions of social movements have evolved as the field has, but I find David Snow and Sarah Soule's definition in the first chapter of their book, *A Primer on Social Movements*, to be the most comprehensive. They identify and explain five elements that they believed are necessary to conceptualize social movements in order to arrive at this definition:

“Social movements are collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity, partly outside institutional or organizational channels, for the purpose of challenging extant systems of authority, or resisting change in such systems, in the organization, society, culture, or world system in which they are embedded” (Snow and Soule 6-7).

While I believe this is the prevailing definition, social movements were not always considered in this light. Collective behavior approaches dominated the study of protests through the 1960s, suggesting that the defining feature of activists who engage in collective action is irrationality.

However, these approaches were challenged in the early 1960s, as the then prevailing emphasis on irrationality shifted to rationality and self-interest, specifically that rational individuals could choose to engage in collective action (Morris and Herring 22-26).

These ideas eventually led to questions about what encourages people to participate and how movements are able to advance their agendas. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald's book, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, responded by highlighting three interconnected factors they believe are necessary for individuals to participate in a movement and for a movement to sustain itself. Beyond grievances, these factors include a window in the political context, access to formal or informal networks or organizations, and a strong articulation of the movement identity that resonates with the public (McCarthy, McAdam, and Zald). In the case of Vieques, Katherine McCaffrey used certain social movements terminology regarding the different movement waves on the island. She discussed that the latest wave's victory can be attributed to the "political possibilities" in the post-Cold War world, far-reaching activist and labor networks, and the different impact each movement's frame yielded (McCaffrey 84-97).

It also tends to be the case that movements dissolve after achieving their central goal or make visible steps toward that goal. A common outcome of social movements in the long-term is the transformation into a more institutional entity such as political parties. The mere possibility of that also lends itself to disagreements and fractures within movements and can result in dissolution. This is relevant for the social movement in Vieques because after it achieved its goal of full naval evacuation in 2003, the movement confronted new challenges staying united in the face of competing ideas about the future. Carmen Lugo-Lugo, author, professor, and director of the School of Languages, Cultures, & Race, emphasized that one lesson activists around the

world can learn from what unfolded in Vieques is to not completely abandon long-term goals in pursuit of short-term ones (Lugo-Lugo 228). Scholars in the field of social movements are certainly aware of these trade-offs, although there is no sure way to combat them (Piven and Cloward). This is especially true in Vieques, as progress has essentially remained at a stand-still since the movement's initial victory in 2003.

Performance Art:

An understanding of the evolution of performance art as a discipline is useful to better understand how Allora and Calzadilla performance art series works. There have been several waves of performance art over the course of the 20th century in the Americas and Europe, with each wave shaped largely by its cultural moment. Since the field of performance art's origins in 1909, there has not been consensus on the definition of performance art. For example, Robyn Brentano in her 1994 book, *Outside the Frame, Performance and the Object*, discussed how performance as it is thought of today can be described as "time-based, process-oriented work created by representatives of conceptual or 'body' art infused with the new philosophical theories emerging at that time" (Byrne and Larkin 492). However, Goldberg argues that performance art is and has not necessarily been a definable term. She stated "by its very nature, performance defies precise or easy definition beyond the simple declaration that it is live art by artists," and that "any stricter definition would immediately negate the possibility of performance itself" (Goldberg 9). Even if it lacks a fixed definition, performance art has been a form of artistic rebellion which aims to create art that "does not produce objects to be valued and sold" (Byrne and Larkin 492). Dorothea Kraus explains that the elements required to create performance art, "time, space, the performer's body, and performer-audience relationship," have

remained consistent over time (Kraus 384). Using these elements, the goal of performance has also consistently been attracting large audiences and jolting them into rethinking their perceptions of reality (Goldberg 8). While it is not clear what if any audience viewed Allora and Calzadilla's performances taking place in real-time, the artists used time, space and the body as central elements of the pieces.

Performance art, including Allora and Calzadilla's series, can largely be traced back to two artistic movements that are considered to be the origins of the field: Futurism and Dadaism. The Futurist movement, which dates back to 1909, has been defined as an Italian movement which "aimed to capture in art the dynamism and energy of the modern world" by rejecting the historic "cult of tradition and commercialization of art" (Tate n.p). Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti spearheaded the movement during a period of heightened Austro-Italian tensions. Marinetti combined the national fervor about intervening in Austria as Italian artists were illustrating themes of "nationalism and colonialism" with the desire to reform the art world (Goldberg 13). The movement became symbolized by Futurist Evenings, or performances focusing on complex political issues which had the purpose of "disrupting a complacent public," despite the consequences the performers often faced (Goldberg 11-14). These performances led to the creation of the Variety Theatre Manifesto which was special in that it encouraged performer-audience collaboration to free the audience "from their passive roles as 'stupid voyeurs'" (Goldberg 17).

Inspired by Marinetti's ideas, the Dadaism movement emerged formally around 1916 in Zurich as a way to respond to the devastation of the first World War (Tate n.p). Cabaret Voltaire was created out of this movement, which was a center for nightly theatrical events founded by Emmy Hennings and Hugo Ball. Those running the performances were "under pressure to

entertain a varied audience,” and for that reason had to “be incessantly lively and new,” because “live reading and performance was the key to rediscovering pleasure in art” (Goldberg 58).

However, a series of internal disagreements about the movement’s future trajectory. Questions about whether the movement could be transformed into an international organization and the newly created Dada gallery which was criticized for becoming a space for “tea-drinking old ladies” resulted in the movement dying out in the 1920s (Goldberg 62-22).

Several other moments emerged such as Surrealism, Bauhaus, and what was referred to as the “living arts” but it was not until 1968 and beyond that performance became a conventionally accepted discipline, which artists developed a continued focus in. The idea of performance as non-commodity that encourages an audience to reconsider how they view a particular situation is at the heart of performance art today, and at the heart of Allora and Calzadilla’s series in Vieques. In fact, Goldberg argues that in the first decade of the 2000s, when Allora and Calzadilla created their series, performance was the ideal medium globally because it does not require translation, it eludes government watchdogs, it is portable, and it raises fundamental questions about art’s meaning and how it might “generate empathy” for “disparate ways of living” around the world (Goldberg 227). Goldberg’s arguments about performance functioning as a universal language that raises awareness for frequently overlooked communities certainly rings true in this case. Karen Schmelzkopf even goes so far as to say that the Navy “effectively erased Vieques as a place” (Schmelzkopf 133). By creating their series, Allora and Calzadilla sought to rectify this erasure by calling attention to the Viequense struggle against the US Navy and introducing provocative new language to make sense of it.

As we can ascertain from the series in Vieques, performance also has strong historical roots in Latin America, especially in relation to resistance and social movements. Diana Taylor

argues that performance driven by trauma has had a twofold purpose in Latin America: to offer catharsis to everyday people and condemn governments committing human rights violations against their citizens (Taylor 1674). Taylor gave examples of *las Madres (y Abuelas) del Plaza del Mayo* and *los Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* in Argentina using live performances as part of their repertoire, as well as Rosario Ibarra who led *la Frente Nacional Contra la Represión* joined with artist Jesusa Rodriguez to co-create a performance in Mexico City denouncing then Mexican leader Luis Echevarria Alvarez. Las Madres engaged in theatrical tactics such as “walking ritualistically around the central square” in Argentina to demand information about their disappeared children at the hands of the Argentine government (Taylor 1674-75). Taylor explains this to be simultaneously relieving for participants and disrupting to a complacent public suffering from denial (Taylor 1676).

One school of performance art which spread throughout Latin America, the Theatre of the Oppressed, has implications for understanding Allora and Calzadilla’s series in Vieques. Augusto Boal, its founder, previously a theater director and playwright in Brazil, turned the *Teatro Arena* where he worked into a forum for productions expressing the reality of political and labor conditions in the country. These productions began to be presented beyond the theater, free of cost so anybody could attend. It became known as “popular theater,” which Boal declared was meant to be performed “*for* the people, and *by* the people,” in order to give the oppressed a platform instead of the “professional actors” directed by state institutions (Boal xxii). While performances which were collaborative by nature were not revolutionary themselves, Boal referred to them as a “rehearsal of revolution,” because they encouraged audiences to take a more active role in thinking about the complex social and political issues of the time (Boal 119).

A common theme throughout Allora and Calzadilla's series is the use of Viequense bodies as an instrument to translate and produce their own counternarratives when it is evident that the public lacked an understanding of their struggles. Boal, too, realized the value of the body in narration and communication. He wrote a series of books explaining ways to transform audiences into spectators into "spect-actors," or members of the audience who were previously only spectators but who have become actors with agency in actively developing the performance (Boal xxi). Boal taught techniques in which everyone, using their body, can become a performer and actively shape reality as it unfolds (in performance and in politics). Beyond theater (though using it as the solution), Boal promoted literacy through body language in Peru as various languages and dialects divided the public, and about 3-4 million out of 14 million at the time were not fully able to read (Boal 96). He essentially wrote a manual on how to use the body as "a means of theatrical production," listing the steps as "knowing the body, making the body expressive, the theatre as language, and the theatre as discourse" (Boal 102).

In the cases I have mentioned, it is evident that performance has served as an avenue for those engaging in resistance against oppressive regimes. Scholars such as TV Reed and Dorothea Kraus have articulated this claim. Using Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* as one example, Reed explains that artists and art critics have acknowledged that art is "fundamentally political" and social movement activists have stated that within protest lies an aesthetic dimension. Yet the topic of art's influence on social movements, and vice versa, remain "undertheorized and underinvestigated" (Reed 77-84). Kraus, too, argues that research has not yet sufficiently explored the connections between performance and social movement (Kraus 386-387). My case study of Allora and Calzadilla's series sheds light on some of the connections between the two

fields, but does not pretend to fill this gap. Rather, it joins the work of scholars suggesting directions for further research on how the two fields often merge.

Puerto Rico, US, and Latin America:

There has been a long history of protest, art and protest art in Puerto Rico. In addition to situating Allora and Calzadilla's performance art series into a theoretical framework, an understanding of Puerto Rican history and relations with the US as it pertains to its liminal space is necessary to be able to situate it into a historical framework as well.

Puerto Rico was originally home to the Taino, an indigenous group with ties to the Arawak in South America. When Spain took over the land in 1493, it marked the end of Taino civilization and the beginning of Spanish colonial rule which endured for the next four centuries (Sheren 123-124). Spain began experimenting giving Puerto Rico limited autonomy in 1897, but this has been described as a "short-lived self-government experiment," as opposed to a permanent policy. Shortly after this so-called experiment began, Spain soon entered the War of 1898 in which the U.S. acted upon ambitions of acquiring Puerto Rico for its economic and military value (Brás n.p). The Spanish empire was already deteriorating, but they lost their remaining colonies after this defeat. Specifically, Spain relinquished control and transferred Puerto Rico and its 120,000 former acres of Spanish-controlled land and military posts across the islands (along with the Philippines and Guam as "spoils") to the US through the Treaty of Paris in 1898 (Atilas-Osoria 223).

Following the peace treaty, the US immediately began planting colonial roots. For the subsequent two years, the U.S. military controlled Puerto Rico until the Foraker Law was ratified in 1900 which established a civilian government led by the US federal government (Library of

Congress). Implicit in the Foraker Law and explicit in other Insular Cases (Supreme Court cases about the new US territories acquired from the war) was the idea that Puerto Rico was merely a US possession that would never become a US state and would not enjoy the protections of the US Constitution (Maldonado-Denis 90; Morales). In 1917, the Jones-Shafroth Act was signed into law and since has been commonly described as the “imposition” of US citizenship on Puerto Ricans. Notably, even with this citizenship, Puerto Ricans living in Puerto Rico were still unable to vote (Atilas-Osoria 223; Denis 139; Dod and Thomas 75). Granting citizenship also subjected Puerto Ricans to the US draft and around this time, there was a war brewing. One month after the Jones Act was passed, US President Woodrow Wilson requested a formal declaration of war against Germany and two months after that, mandated conscription for men between ages 21-31 in Puerto Rico (Denis 139).

Puerto Rico’s contemporary tradition of political resistance against the US has its roots in the Puerto Rican Nationalist movement. The Puerto Rican Nationalist Party was founded in 1921 and in the 1930s, Pedro Albizu Campos, a figure central to Puerto Rican history who is often portrayed as a villain or erased from US history, became the leader of the party. René Francisco Poitevin argues that Albizu Campos fundamentally altered the course of Puerto Rican nationalism by uniting Puerto Ricans across different sectors of society, associating the struggle for independence with economic justice, and encouraging the use of violence (although many protests were peaceful) (Poitevin 91-92).

Puerto Rican and federal US authorities responded to Nationalist organizing with heavy repression. The peak of brutality occurred with the Ponce Massacre of 1937, in which 19 people were murdered and 200 more were wounded simply because they participated in a peaceful march (Poitevin 92). In the following decade, Puerto Ricans who refused to enter the US military

were imprisoned. In 1948, several students were wounded by the police at a rally at the University in Puerto Rico where Albizu Campos was prohibited from speaking (Poitevin 92). La Ley de la Mordaza, or Gag Law was passed later that year, making it illegal to display a Puerto Rican flag or show any sign of approval of Puerto Rican nationalism, whether that be applauding a speech or visiting a tombstone of someone who had passed (Poitevin 92; Morales). Ironically, during that time in the late 1940s of intense resistance and repression, Puerto Rican Governor Luis Muñoz, enacted Operation Bootstrap to address the issue of poverty through attracting US foreign investment. The operation was metaphorically intended to “lift Puerto Rico up by the bootstraps,” by shifting from an economy grounded by agricultural labor to manufacturing in order to create a modernized and industrialized one (Denis 257-259).

Puerto Rico’s colonial status was addressed legislatively in the early 1950s in part due to the ongoing protests. In 1952, US Congress approved Puerto Rico’s new Constitution and the *Estado Libre Asociado* (Free Associated State or Commonwealth) was established (Bonilla and Lebron 6-8; Northrop). The commonwealth was essentially a new legal category that granted Puerto Rico limited autonomy in the form of economic, political and legal rights. For this reason, it was regarded as a “solution” to the colonial question of Puerto Rico. However, Puerto Rico remained a US colonial possession that was not in any sense sovereign. The islands remained subject to US control and the creation of the “Commonwealth” was essentially only a change in language (Atilas-Osoria 224; Bonilla and Lebron 6-8).

Despite the ongoing violence and censorship and attempts to legally reconcile Puerto Rico’s colonial status, many Puerto Ricans continued to engage in resistance throughout the subsequent decades of the 1950s-60s. Prominent activist groups were the Socialist Workers Party in the 1950s and the various student pro-independence movements in the 1960s (Movement

Pro-Independence and University Federation Pro-Independence). The Puerto Rican public eventually discovered that since the founding of the Puerto Rican Nationalist party, the Puerto Rican government (led by the US) was conducting a massive surveillance campaign known as *las carpetas* (or the files) which identified any person who supported the pro-independence cause. It was also referred to as *las listas de subversivos* (lists of subversives) and was weaponized against Puerto Ricans (Denis 99-107). Those identified on the lists were subjected to harassment and imprisonment. In addition, it was difficult for them to find housing and job opportunities and they were even given unfavorable settlements in custody cases (Poitevin 91). Overall, understanding Puerto Rico's history in relation to the US provides insight into the long-held grievances by Puerto Ricans which have and continue to spark protest against their oppressor.

While it is clear that Puerto Rico, although technically a part of the US, has been ostracized from American society, it is also the case that it is not considered part of Latin America either. Sheren goes so far as to say that Puerto Rico “functions as an ‘other’” within Latin America for being “too Americanized” when compared to other Caribbean islands (Sheren 124). Similarly, in the introduction to Juan Flores's *Divided Borders*, Jean Franco presents an anecdote about looking at a map of Latin America and the Caribbean at a museum in Brazil and realizing that Puerto Rico was missing. Franco states, “both in Latin America and the United States, Puerto Rico stands for something which cannot be assimilated” (Franco quoted in Flores 9). Essentially, Puerto Rico is rejected by Latin America as it does not fit the cultural and historical criteria to be included among those nation-states (Fahey n.p). Not fully accepted by either the US or Latin America, Puerto Rico remains in a liminal space.

Vieques background:

After an overview of how Puerto Rico came to occupy the in-between space of US territory, one can situate the particular history of Vieques which has often been referred to by scholars as “the colony of a colony” due to US military occupation (Barreto 2). Vieques is a 51-square mile island situated about eight miles southeast of the Puerto Rico mainland. It was once inhabited by about 10,000 people and as of 2022, it is inhabited by about 8,000 (McCaffrey 83; US Census). In 1941, as a response to the perceived German threat and the onset of World War II, the US expropriated 21,020 acres - or $\frac{2}{3}$ of the total land in Vieques as well as over 6,000 acres of land in eastern Puerto Rico to help construct the Roosevelt Roads Naval Station (McCaffrey 86). Roosevelt Roads then went on to become one of the largest naval facilities in the world (Lugo-Lugo 211). For Vieques, an island already consumed by inequality largely due to the sugar oligarchy,³ the naval base’s construction and the possible employment opportunities it could provide offered hope for financially struggling residents.

However, construction on Roosevelt Roads stalled after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941. Pearl Harbor was the facility that Roosevelt Roads was “supposed to rival,” so its now recognized vulnerability challenged US conventional military strategy of positioning a whole fleet at one installation (McCaffrey 87). It led to construction in Vieques and by extension its promise of economic opportunity to stop completely (Paravisini-Gebert 130). The Navy’s

³ Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert characterizes Viequenses’ history as “a sustained struggle against the local sugar oligarchy” and in doing so rejects a myth that Vieques historically consisted of a population whose main occupation was subsistence farming (Paravisini-Gebert 130). The oligarchic struggle was against two sugar corporations, one which was US owned and the other owned by Puerto Rico which dominated the economy and controlled 71% of the lands while a few wealthy families owned the rest (McCaffrey 87). According to McCaffrey, this meant that 95% of the rural population, or $\frac{2}{3}$ of the total population in Vieques did not own their land. Because the majority of the land was already privately controlled, it made the ultimate transfer from the private sector to the US military smoother, as those who constituted the majority had little authority to fight back and were ultimately removed from their homes (McCaffrey 87).

plans had a calamitous effect on Vieques' economy, in part because construction ended sugar cultivation so Viequenses could not even return to harvesting (McCaffrey and Baver 112). In 1947, however, construction restarted though the US military announced that the role of Roosevelt Roads shifted to a "training installation and fuel depot" (McCaffrey and Baver 112). This would require turning Vieques into a new "training site, to be used for firing and amphibious landing practices," which also justified expropriation of 4,000 more acres of land in Eastern Vieques so now $\frac{3}{4}$ of Vieques belonged to the US military (McCaffrey and Baver 112). At this point, the Viequenses who did not leave the island now lived between an ammunition storage area in the west and the maneuver space where they conducted military exercises and a bombing range in the east (McCaffrey 83). The navy's execution of their plans during the late 1940s generated immediate consequences for Viequenses: thousands were displaced, the economy was crippled, poverty became exacerbated, and health declined. Viequenses were already expressing their concerns that the live bombing was hazardous to the civilians, specifically because the prevailing winds were blowing contaminants into their homes. The situation in Vieques became a "rallying point" for Puerto Rican nationalists and pro-independence supporters. Albizu Campos even condemned the US endeavors in Vieques as "the vivisection of the Puerto Rican nation" (McCaffrey 88).

The Navy looked to legitimize their occupation of Vieques in any way they could and sought to continue expanding their control of the island. Between 1947-1961 and despite various pleas for land return, the Cold War and US grand strategy of containing communism provided new justification for the US to maintain a perceived military superiority using Vieques to do so. Military personnel often stayed on the island and were known amongst Viequenses for their "spending, drinking, and sexual harassment" (Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 168). There were

isolated incidents reported in which Marines committed violence against Viequense residents with impunity (Arbino 271). Notably, McCaffrey points out that “although the navy maintained no formal jurisdiction over the civilian sector, in reality it controlled the fate of the entire island,” significantly the majority of Vieques land, water, and air (McCaffrey 88). She states that in order to expand without limits, the navy prevented the creation of a resort on the island, “held title to the resettlement tracts in the civilian sector,” and “in 1961, it drafted secret plans to remove the entire civilian population of 8,000 from the island; even the dead were to be dug up and removed from their graves” (McCaffrey 88). However, Puerto Rican Governor Luis Munoz Marin and John F. Kennedy’s presidential order stopped these plans from realization. In any case, tensions between civilians and the military were high before they exploded during the movement in the 1970s.

While there was clear discontent and isolated displays of grievances in the years prior, a full protest movement did not break out until the late 1970s. After an anti-colonial movement that turned militant forced the Navy out of neighboring Culebra in 1975 (which the US Navy had occupied since 1902), the Navy enhanced their exercises in Vieques (McCaffrey 89). Fishermen, who were in a sense on the frontlines of the standoff between civilians and the Navy because of increasing disruption to their livelihoods, began to confront the Navy. They often did so by interrupting naval exercises in their 10-18 feet long wooden fishing boats. Their efforts became culturally symbolic and “drew on evocative cultural imagery of Puerto Rican rural traditions in conflict with modern warships and weaponry” (McCaffrey and Baver 114). Street protests ensued, marking the first wave of large-scale social movement that lasted about five years.

However, leading Vieques scholars, Katherine T. McCaffrey and Sherrie L. Baver, explain that this first movement achieved a “symbolic” victory at most (McCaffrey and Baver

115). They attribute this to the movement's narrow framing of issues, specifically emphasizing local economic grievances experienced by fishermen, instead of the broader human rights concern about testing bombs on a populated island. Local fishermen framed the movement as an economic struggle against the Navy that was threatening their source of income, by contaminating marine life, destroying their fishing equipment and implementing strict limits preventing them from using important fishing grounds (McCaffrey and Baver 115). McCaffrey and Baver also attribute the movement's failure to its exclusive leadership structure. As the movement emphasized local Viequense men at the top, movement supporters across Puerto Rico and the US engaged in a struggle with Viequenses about how to move forward. For example, when Puerto Ricans who supported the Vieques cause burned an American flag at a protest outside Roosevelt Roads in Ceiba, members worried that "outside forces were attempting to hijack the struggle as a platform for the independence movement" (McCaffrey 91).

Additionally, McCaffrey and Baver indicate that the broader political context of the Cold War, specifically US concern about the spread of Communism in the Caribbean, denied the movement any possibility of achieving success (McCaffrey and Baver 113-115). When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in the late 1970s and revolutionary movements erupted in Central America and the Caribbean Basin (with particular anxiety that Cuba would impact other Caribbean islands), the US's main concern was containing communism (McCaffrey and Baver 115). McCaffrey explains that for this reason, the Navy scrambled to disrupt the movement by attempting to enhance the divide between local Viequense activists and those on the Puerto Rican left. It did so by characterizing the movement as a "communist insurgency run by outside agitators" (McCaffrey 91). They also hired about 100 Viequenses to serve as civilian security guards and created a militant pro-navy campaign that would hold "counter demonstrations"

condemning the movement for being unpatriotic. McCaffrey identifies the “turning point” of the tension to be the death of a Puerto Rican activist who was arrested for trespassing on the base and died in prison (McCaffrey 91-92). The Puerto Rican Independence movement responded by staging an ambush in 1979 in which they killed two and injured ten other naval officials.

However, McCaffrey notes that several radical groups at the time claimed that they orchestrated this as revenge so what really happened was unclear (McCaffrey 92). In any case, violent chaos erupting between activists and navy personnel provoked Governor Romero’s 1983

“good-neighbor” agreement, in which the Navy agreed to create employment opportunities on the island and work to reduce the negative environmental effects. McCaffrey and Baver highlight that this agreement was “symbolic” because even though the Navy took accountability for misrepresenting the movement as communist insurgency and verbally committed themselves to prioritizing civilian health, no real change was made. The movement dissolved as a result of the agreement, but tensions between Viequenses and the Navy continued (McCaffrey and Baver 115).

After the first movement wave failed to effect real change, a second wave of protest movement broke out and spanned most of the 1990s. This movement was based largely in Vieques and Lajas, a municipality located on Puerto Rico’s southern coast. After the Soviet Union collapse in 1991 and the end of the Cold War, the US was looking to adjust its military disposition by closing bases around the world. Rejuvenated by this initiative, activists formed the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques (CRDV) to argue that the bases in Vieques be included in the base closure agenda. It also adopted a set of demands known as the “four Ds: demilitarization, decontamination, devolution, and (community-based, sustainable) development,” that would be central to the movement’s long-term agenda (McCaffrey and Baver

122). However, around this time, the US's justification for military occupation shifted to surveilling the War on Drugs, which it claimed required the Navy to build a radar system in Puerto Rico. Because of its possible negative health effects, specifically the electromagnetic radiation emissions, and the formation of another grassroots organization, another social movement emerged (McCaffrey 93; 2006; McCaffrey and Baver 117).

Activists in Vieques and Lajas framed their protest more broadly against US military interference so as to avoid the leadership issues that the previous movement faced (McCaffrey 94; 2006). However, in Vieques, protestors emphasized grievances about the Naval radar's negative impacts on public health and environmental destruction, while in Lajas, activists condemned the expropriation of land previously used for agriculture (McCaffrey 93-94; 2006). Even though they highlighted different specific grievances, the broader frame of protesting military imposition which encompassed both, helped to unite different sectors of society, demonstrated by the Vieques Conservation and Historic Trust joining the movement (McCaffrey and Baver 117). It also led to a changing political context in Puerto Rico which would allow for mass protests, which was especially made clear in 1999, when Puerto Ricans shifted attention from Vieques and mobilized against Governor Rosello's plans to privatize the "state-owned" telephone company to a US corporation. (McCaffrey 94; 2006).

Drawing on the work of the last two waves of movements, the movement that continued the fight in the late 1990s- early 2000s effectively reinvented itself to ultimately prevail against the Navy. The catalyst took place in 1999, when security guard David Sanes Rodriguez was accidentally killed by an on-site bomb that missed its target, sparking mass outrage (Baver; McCaffrey; McCaffrey and Baver). The movement that coalesced as a response to his death framed its struggle as a battle for peace, with activists choosing to exclude any politically

charged discourse about US colonialism. This framing appealed to all sectors of society, unifying people of different class, age, political affiliation, etc. It also remarkably brought together a number of religious denominations, which McCaffrey notes became a powerful unified actor in helping the movement ultimately achieve success (McCaffrey 96-97; 2006). Puerto Rican icons such as Ricky Martin as well as US politicians like New York Governor George Pataki, Congressman Luis Gutiérrez, and environmental lawyer Robert Kennedy Jr., expressed their support for the movement in Vieques - the latter two being arrested for entering the Naval facility (McCaffrey and Baver 121). Notably, in 2000, the movement organized the *Marcha Para La Paz de Vieques*, a silent march in San Juan attended by 150,000 in protest of Governor Rossello's pact with President Bill Clinton which would allow the bombing to continue (McCaffrey 97; 2006). McCaffrey even states that at the time this was the largest protest in Puerto Rican history and it demonstrated the strength of Puerto Ricans that would ultimately prevail over the US military (McCaffrey 97; 2006).

“Land Mark” (2001-2002):

The death of David Sanes Rodriguez led to an outpouring of grievances in the streets and the emergence of the final wave of protest movement, ultimately resulting in the production of Allora and Calzadilla's first piece, “Land Mark” (see fig. 1). This piece was created in 2001 at the height of intense negotiations with President Clinton. To create this piece, Allora and Calzadilla collaborated with several resistance groups in order to engrave shoe soles with protestors' grievances and demands related to the harms of continued naval occupation. Protestors wore these shoes when they illegally walked on the sand of the naval facility, resulting in the engravings being temporarily transferred onto the land via footprint.

The significance of “entering” this space served as Allora and Calzadilla’s entry point for this piece because it was known that before the Navy launched a bomb, it would issue a public announcement and military personnel would be dispatched to ensure no civilians trespassed. If they were not successful in creating a perimeter, they were required to stop (Obrist 205). In this way, the sole act of entering the bombing range, let alone leaving explicit messages on the sand, was considered civil disobedience.

This piece had two artistic components: an installation, or what could be considered more traditional, static art, and a performance (Sheren 129-130). The engraved footprints on the sand were considered the installation, and the act of making those footprints, the performance. The act of making the footprints can be seen as a direct form of resisting U.S. influence on the island as it involves explicit expressions of Puerto Rican grievances. Significantly, the footprints were also made illegally as access to the naval facility was restricted by law. Scholar and activist Aaron Bobrow-Strain connected this piece to the first wave of protest in the 1970s in that protestors participating in both movements utilized “emergency designs” (Bobrow-Strain 128). Fishermen engaged in civil disobedience decades ago used available tools such as their boats and buoys in order to “weld great sea monsters out of scrap metal pieces” and disrupt naval exercises (McCaffrey 90; Bobrow-Strain 128). In this piece, Allora and Calzadilla built upon this tradition through “Land Mark” which combined civil disobedience, the illegal act of entering, and printmaking as the emergency design. As fishermen used buoys and propellers, the artists and activists weaponized their voices through printmaking and shoe soles.

Unlike any of the protests from the 1970s-early 2000s, the actual protestors were absent in this piece. Sheren argues that absence appears in two ways: the absence of the actual protestors whose only trace is their footprints, and the temporality of the footprints which would

soon be erased by the water and wind (Sheren 130). However, she only described absence as playing a central role in this piece to symbolize the “desolation” of the island and highlight how the U.S. had denied generations of Puerto Ricans the right to occupy their own land (Sheren 130). Sheren never analyzed the second sense of absence, in the sense of the footprints eventually disappearing due to external forces such as nature which she mentioned, or notably other protestors. Impermanence in this sense may be evocative of the past silencing of Viequenses. Every time they had spoken up, they may have been heard and seen for a moment in time, but were ultimately forgotten about or intentionally ignored. Just as these footprints were soon to be stepped on or washed away, ideas for the islands’ future, especially from Viequenses, were also subject to this fate by the overarching federal power. This was especially true at this point in time as the movements in Vieques had not achieved success, but the protests over Sanes’s death in the early 2000s made it impossible for the world to ignore them.

The latest wave of protest movement in Vieques involved people of many different backgrounds uniting around a common enemy which was made evident in the various engravings in “Land Mark.” In this sense, the audience for this piece was not only the US Navy, but also other protestors. According to Bobrow-Strain, the different physical locations and positions of the footprints represent the various ideologies of protestors and in particular, their views on the contested future of Vieques (Bobrow-Strain 129). This reflects the different ideas Viequenses had about how to develop the land as some were in favor of building hotels and others were staunchly opposed to any privatization efforts. One shoe design that exemplified this idea of uncertainty about Vieques future featured a “cartographic outline” with two bombing ranges on both sides of Vieques (the formerly occupied sides) marked with an “X”. McKee explains that an “X” is a symbol typically used in land art “indicating and canceling human

presence in ‘remote’ landscapes.” However, McKee argues that in this case, it is used to emphasize the island’s uncertainty as it is the “target” of competing interests (McKee 36).

Bobrow-Strain echoes this as he explains how “Land Mark” is a direct manifestation of “radical social movements,” and specifically how movements are not the result of uniform ideologies, but rather “tentative and fragile assemblages of different positions worked out in practice”

(Bobrow-Strain 128). Even though the movement in Vieques had a successful frame which united protestors (changing from local economic grievances to military interference to peace), “Land Mark” and its analyses serve to emphasize that that does not necessarily mean there is the same level of consensus about Vieques’ future.

Participation in “Land Mark” sheds light on possibilities for resistance. My social movement theory section focused on large-scale social movements, but scholars also argue that there are smaller ways people engage in resistance that are not as visible to the public (Scott 29; Paschel). For example, in James Scott’s book, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, he argues that marginalized communities frequently fight back through “everyday acts of resistance” (Scott 29). Scott described these “everyday acts” as an ongoing struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor that involves little organization or coordination and avoids any direct encounters with the oppressor (Scott 29). While this act required some degree of organization and a potential confrontation as it was on the site of the Naval facility, the art in itself cannot be considered a social movement. Instead, it lies in the space in-between social movements and subtle acts of resistance.

The few scholars who have written extensively about “Land Mark” have mentioned the pieces’ connections to Neil Armstrong’s dramatic footprint on the moon. However, they have focused on the differences rather than similarities (McKee 32-44; Bobrow-Strain 129). For

example, Bobrow-Strain emphasized that in Vieques, these footprints were temporary and did not suggest any kind of reconquest or “monumental step” (Bobrow-Strain 129). During the time this piece was created, Viequenses were still engaged in a fight over their land as the Navy’s operations were ongoing. In fact, Yates McKee made the analogy of applying bodily weight to make a footprint to applying pressure against the Navy for the injustices they were committing against the local community (McKee 30). That same comparison could not be made for the moon as Armstrong was not engaged in a protest and was working for the US government.

Additionally, Armstrong’s footprints on the moon highlighted unity in the sense of “mankind.” However, while “Land Mark” emphasized unity in that those participating in this piece wanted the Navy to leave the island, the actual footprints themselves highlight the disjunction in protestors’ ideas about the future (Bobrow-Strain 129). As mentioned before, the different physical locations and messages emphasized competing ideas about the island’s future trajectory.

Comparing the moon to Vieques in terms of craters also provides insight into the ongoing disaster in Vieques. Specifically, Neftali Carreira explains that there are more craters per square meter on the bombing range in Vieques than there are on the moon (Carreira quoted in McKee 43). However, the craters on the moon are considered to be part of a natural process caused by objects colliding with the moon in space. The craters on Vieques are the result of the Navy forcefully choosing to collide with an island inhabited by human beings. In fact, the land used as the live impact zone is now “an area so polluted it will most likely never be able to be used for civil purposes” (Carreira quoted in McKee 43). Essentially, while the first process is natural, the second is man-made and the craters are physical evidence of this man-made disaster that the Navy created and now is reluctant to clean up.

Aftermath:

The US Navy fully decommissioned their bases in Vieques, or their hemispheric “crown jewel” of military operations in 2003, largely due to the civil disobedience campaign (although Clinton began agreeing to return western land in January 2000) (McCaffrey 126; Baver 106). Their evacuation, however, may not have been fully motivated by good will. Scholars Bobrow-Strain and McKee explain that the US no longer needed Vieques due to new technology (Bobrow-Strain 130; McKee 36). McKee states that in addition to the protest movement and its “expensive” interruptions, the “new Geographical Information Systems (GIS) had to some extent rendered the physical terrain of Vieques obsolete: war games could now be conducted in the open ocean using a precise spectrometric simulation of the island's topography” (McKee 36). Basically, when the Navy left, Vieques was of no further use because they had taken everything they needed. Whatever motivated their decision, the demilitarization of Vieques, according to the CRDV, also needed to be accompanied by other efforts listed as part of the “four d’s” - devolution, decontamination and development. Baver refers to the struggle to achieve these objectives as the “second stage” of the struggle, because Viequenses had to advocate for the Navy to essentially clean the mess they made (Baver 107).

The demilitarization of Vieques resulted in questions over how the land would be returned and who would determine what would be done with it. By May of 2001, the Navy returned about 8,000 acres in the West to “local and federal entities,” 4,300 acres to the Vieques Municipality, 3,000 acres to the US Department of the Interior and specifically the US Fish and Wildlife Service and 800 acres to the Puerto Rican Conservation Trust nonprofit (Baver 106). The western side was the ammunition depot, which consisted of lagoons, wetlands, and beaches that did not sustain the same amount of damage as the live impact area on the East did. However,

the military still used it as a dumping site for hazardous waste. (McCaffrey 130). The rest of the land transfer began to slow after 9/11 but by May 2003, Bush followed through on Clinton's land return agreement, giving about 14,500 acres of eastern Vieques (the maneuver area and bombing range) to the US Fish and Wildlife Service as a wildlife refuge. The 980-acre bombing range was to be declared a "wilderness area" which legally prohibits human access (McCaffrey remediation article 83). Significantly, $\frac{3}{4}$ of Vieques land still belongs to the US federal government and Fish and Wildlife Service has control over 17,000 acres of Viequense territory. In 2005, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) put the Vieques bombing range on its National Priority List of the most hazardous waste sites in the US, also known as a "Superfund" site (McCaffrey battle 130).

It is important to note that this type of land transfer from the Department of Defense or the Department of Energy to the Fish and Wildlife Service is not uncommon. Several scholars theorized about why military sites turn into wildlife refuges, often concluding that it provides the state an off-ramp from the "financial burden" of extensive decontamination efforts necessary to make the land habitable for humans (Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 169). Other skeptics of the specific case of the Vieques conversion believe that Congress initiated it to punish Viequenses for stopping the Navy's operations (Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 169). Shiloh Krupar wrote a chapter in *Critical Landscapes* in which she explains the "military to wildlife conversion," or "M2W" which states that the US military decommissions and transfers formerly occupied land to refuges, as modeled after the Rocky Mountain Arsenal (National Wildlife Refuge). Around the same time the FWS was setting up a refuge in Vieques, the Army turned the former chemical weapon manufacturing site into an "urban sanctuary" after legal battles over contamination, (Krupar 131-132). The story has since been used to create other stories about other M2W

conversions, as Krupar states that M2Ws require “pedagogical investments,” usually highlighting “animals as signs of purity and the native and in the moral landscape of nature preservation” (Krupar 132). This strategy certainly informed the Viequense conversion as the refuge places a similar emphasis on its priority to preserve native plant and animal species.

Advertisements from the US Fish and Wildlife Service certainly have assisted in perpetuating these false narratives about the purity of Vieques land and how to maintain its condition. In a 2008 brochure, there are two sentences vaguely acknowledging that there was a “US Navy Period” and after that thousands of acres on western and eastern Vieques were transferred from the US Navy to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS 2008). The subsequent six pages detail the diverse flora and fauna and conclude with strict tips for visitors. The current US Fish and Wildlife website’s Vieques page is not much different. In its history section, it acknowledges the Navy’s purchase of land in Vieques and the accidental death of David Sanes Rodriguez, leading to Puerto Rican demands that it leave. As in the 2008 brochure, the focus of the 2023 web page remains that Vieques holds “the most ecologically diverse wildlife refuge as well as the one with the largest land mass in the Caribbean” (FWS 2023). It does however, include one phrase of caution, stating “currently, a major portion of the eastern wildlife refuge is closed to the public due to the danger of unexploded ordnance and the associated clean-up process” (FWS 2023). Most ironically in both of these is the stated mission of the refuge to protect and preserve the plants, fish and wildlife and its endangered species (FWS 2008; 2023). Allora and Calzadilla’s series encourages viewers to reconsider who and what classifies as “endangered” in Vieques (Allora and Calzadilla quoted in McKee 25-26). Designating land as a wildlife refuge is considered to relieve the financial burden that cleanup requires because much lower levels of decontamination efforts are necessary, as opposed to the levels required for

residential spaces. If one has a fuller historical understanding of this struggle in Vieques against US institutions, one can understand how the FWS's stated mission of preserving wildlife is at odds with protecting human residents who live there, who should also be considered an endangered population.

This false narrative that highlights the "purity" of Vieques also drives and is actively promoted by the tourist industry. Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones explain that because military occupation prevented construction of buildings and other signifiers of modernity, outsiders view the land as "natural" and "undeveloped" (Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 169). Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones include an article from the *Miami Herald* in 2003 which stated, "Thank the US. Navy for keeping Vieques Island largely off-limits to tourists and developers for 60 years" (Wooldridge quoted in Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 169). In the *New York Times* in 2005, a journalist stated "Bombs have paradoxically preserved much of the island's natural beauty and delicate tropical ecosystems by preventing the unchecked land speculation and slowing the pace of modernization" (Laughinghouse quoted in Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 170). So not only did the media push the view that the land is "undeveloped," they also perpetuated the idea that the Navy did a service by forcefully occupying the territory, effectively displacing thousands, and leaving behind lasting toxic damage. Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones explain that the people who buy into the narrative that Vieques is "untouched" and "natural" lack historical knowledge and tend to focus on the side of the land with objectively picturesque beaches as opposed to the side that shows evidence of destruction. But the scholars also argue that Viequenses and outsiders view the same sights, such as forests and horses, differently. Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones state that while tourists view these as signs of undeveloped and "pristine" nature, local residents view them as "land degradation" (Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and

Jones 171). Most importantly, Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones explain that while many Viequenses they interviewed view their land as degraded and contaminated, many tourists do not because the chemical contamination is largely invisible.

The increase in tourism due to these false narratives about land purity have had implications for local Viequenses. Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones interviewed several people from the US who discussed buying a house in Vieques to eventually move to. It appeared that their main concern was making a profitable investment and finding a relaxing place to settle down, with no concern about how this would affect the local community. The authors argue that this kind of gentrification has pushed Viequenses out of the housing market because they cannot afford the inflated prices. One local Viequense they interviewed discussed how tourists, like the Navy, only view Vieques as an opportunity, whether it be for vacation or for military purposes and that they have no interest in immersing themselves in Viequense culture and history. Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones point out that this apathy from tourists resulted and continues to result in steep cultural, linguistic, racial and class barriers dividing the populations (Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 172). Additionally, the privatization of beaches, specifically resorts' interference with fishing, is also evocative of decades of struggle against the Navy and at the heart of the protests in the 1970s.

A majority of local Viequenses have outwardly criticized the military to wildlife conversion for its effects on the island in terms of limiting development. Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones interviewed several residents who believed that the US Fish and Wildlife Service is essentially the Department of Defense except their officials do not wear military uniforms (Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 169). They express that the whole point of naval evacuation was the restoration of their land, but the conversion to a refuge has limited access to their land

even more. When the Navy was present, Viequenses would be able to enter spaces when they finished bombing, but the wilderness area effectively prohibits any human access on the questionable pretenses of “preserving nature.” The FWS’s strict rules about protecting wildlife have been viewed as hypocritical by Viequenses because these laws did not exist when the Navy was present. The Navy “destroyed the coral, killed the turtles, the fish, the crabs, contaminated the land” and the FWS allowed it, but now when Viequenses want to develop the land themselves, they are restricted (McCaffrey 138; 2006).

There has also been a struggle over recognizing long-term public health effects of naval occupation, which has limited efforts to effectively address the consequences. Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones state that in addition to the regularity of conventional weapons being dropped on Vieques, the Navy eventually admitted to using weapons such as “Napalm, Agent Orange, and depleted uranium” (Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 173). As a result, Viequenses have suffered from higher cancer and asthma rates, skin issues, kidney failure and heart conditions disproportionately compared to other Puerto Rican municipalities (Baver 108). The American Public Health Association explains that the Cancer Registry of the Puerto Rico Health Department Report shows:

the cancer rates for Vieques subsequently increased, generating standardized incidence ratios for the periods 1985–1989 and 1990–1994 that exceed the alert levels adopted by the surveillance system as defined by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry of the US Department of Health and Human Services (APHA excerpted in Wilcox 697).

Additionally in 1995, Vieques had “the highest mortality rate among Puerto Rico’s 78 municipalities” with a chance 65% more likely that a woman will give birth to an underweight baby than anywhere else in Puerto Rico (APHA excerpted in Wilcox 697). There has been a struggle over combatting these health effects because of the charged disagreements over the accuracy of certain studies. For example, Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones explain that the US

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) produced a report (supported by the Navy) in which they argued that “contaminant levels” from the Navy’s practices were too low and thus there is “no apparent public health hazard” (ATSDR 2003 excerpted in Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 173). This prompted several researchers to independently produce reports rejecting that assertion. However, the mere debate exemplifies the complex layers of the decontamination efforts.

The latest US Government Accountability Office’s Report to Congressional Committees in 2021 shows that progress is still slow. The wildlife refuge still consists of all 17,771 acres of Vieques land that it did in 2003. The US Fish and Wildlife Service website recognizes the US Navy as the “Principal Responsible Party (PRP)” for its cleanup (FWS 2023). The Accountability Office’s Report states that cleanup efforts are “expected to continue through 2032.” The report explains that “substantial work remains for the Navy and the Corps on both islands at sites with munitions, especially underwater sites where unexploded munitions are buried in the sea floor.” It provides the costs of cleanup added to the expected estimate of future cleanup (for Culebra and Vieques) as \$800 million (Government Accountability Office 2021). It goes on to explain the various challenges the US Department of Defense is experiencing with the island’s topography and the dangers of unexploded ordnance. The most striking line reads, “the Navy also faces challenges on Vieques with community distrust of the military handling cleanup efforts” (Government Accountability Office 2021). First, acknowledging the challenges in the island’s cleanup seems to be a justification for its slow-moving progress, which might not ever be completed as there is not even an established end-date. Second, the particular emphasis on the community’s distrust of the military seems to be a case of victim-blaming so that the Navy, who was the source of the distrust, is not required to take full accountability. At the first sign of this

continued struggle for Viequenses against US institutions, whether that be the DoD or DoI, Allora and Calzadilla produced more pieces in their series which served to continue advocating for Vieques when the social movement had dissolved.

“Returning a Sound” (2004-2005):

After the Navy conducted a full evacuation and decommissioning of Vieques in 2003, Allora and Calzadilla produced “Returning a Sound” in 2004 to highlight the complex aftermath of commemoration and reclamation (see fig. 2). As explained previously, in 2003, the movement in Vieques succeeded in driving the Navy out, but a majority of the land they relinquished was immediately transferred to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Many Viequenses viewed the transfer as a “stalemate” for organizations on the island fighting for decontamination and land restoration such as the CRDV mainly, Grupo de Apoyo Técnico, and Profesional para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques. The piece itself is a video, featuring a Viequense activist named Homar driving around the formerly occupied areas of the island on a moped which had its muffler replaced by a trumpet.

The physical vehicle and its transformed components are central to the message the artists sought to convey. First, the moped itself is significant because it represents a vehicle primarily used by those of lower class status in Vieques and is representative of the population disproportionately suffering from the Navy’s presence on the island. Sheren points out that members of the upper class in Puerto Rico preferred vehicles enclosed by doors and windows which had installed air-conditioning (Sheren 133). In this video, the noise that the trumpet emits is central, as any time Homar (turns the handles) or goes over a bump or makes a turn, sound changes. Replacing the muffler, which is used to silence noise, with an instrument used to

produce noise indicates a “call to attention and to action,” according to Allora and Calzadilla (A&C in Smith 34). Specifically a trumpet, which has typically been used to produce “loud resounding sounds” highlights how this piece can be seen as an anthem celebrating the movement’s achievement (Allora & Calzadilla quoted in Smith 34). Additionally, the emphasis on the trumpet’s loud tone and pitch demonstrate Homar’s attempt to draw attention, or make visible Vieques’ new situation.

However, Allora and Calzadilla also intentionally used a trumpet to trigger flashbacks to trumpets being used by the Navy in their exercises, thereby using the same instrument to announce the shift in power. It is also significant that a trumpet, an instrument meant to be played by humans, is being played by a machine, or a vehicle, leading the emitted sounds to be more machine-like. According to Allora and Calzadilla, the trumpet was intended to evoke mechanic sounds of “an ambulance, an alarm, or Morse code-even experimental salsa to represent the trumpet returning a sound,” which was “a complement to the cacophonous bomb drops that had once dominated the island” (Allora & Calzadilla quoted in Smith 34; Arbino 280). In that sense it is not fully a celebratory anthem, as it emphasizes that even though the Navy has left, the memories remain present. In this sense, this series occupies the space in-between “destruction and recovery,” and celebrating a victory against the US while acknowledging that this victory is not complete (Allora & Calzadilla quoted in Smith 34).

That question of absolute victory in terms of reclamation is what “Returning a Sound” intends to grapple with. There are obvious biblical connections that can be made from this piece, but only partially. According to Sheren, the use of the trumpet and the “iconography” of the piece can be seen as an allusion to the story of Jericho, specifically when the Israelite army surrounded Jericho seven times and played their trumpets. The sound of the trumpet led the

people to elicit loud screams which ultimately resulted in the wall falling down at which point the Israelites claimed the city. Sheren drew this parallel, arguing that Viequenses' battle against the US is similar to the Israelites who also confronted a "seemingly undefeatable" force, again signifying the kind of David and Goliath narrative (Sheren 132-133). However, I believe Sheren's connection to Jericho is perhaps too strong. This may be the surface-level parallel one can draw, but "Returning a Sound" emphasizes that Viequenses are still engaged in a battle to fully reclaim their land. Over half of the territory remains restricted to the public and as for places Homar drove by such as the wasteland and gated-off facilities, I am not quite sure he was satisfied to have reclaimed it in that state. While Sheren believes the trumpet calls were celebratory, I see them more as a call to action announcing that the struggle against the US is ongoing, and that Viequenses have only reached an in-between phase in their fight.

Absence is emphasized again in "Returning a Sound" to highlight a different kind of struggle to fully reclaim Viequense territory. Homar drove through visibly unpopulated streets, only passing by two people in the entire video. The streets' apparent desolation may be reminiscent of naval occupation when Viequenses were not permitted to enter their own land, which caused many Viequenses to flee to neighboring places. However, this remains to be the case as many Viequenses argue that human access has been limited even more with the Fish and Wildlife presence (Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 169). Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones explain that in wildlife refuges there are rarely indications of human presence. For example, they explain that there are typically "no large dwellings, no crowds of people, no houses, and no agricultural activity on either side of the simple dirt road that heads east towards some of the most popular beaches on the island" (Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 165). As the tone of this video is at least in part celebratory, one would expect more people out on the street celebrating,

as was previously the case when thousands were on the streets protesting only months prior. The visibility and presence exemplified by the blaring trumpet contrasted with the absence of Viequenses celebrating or continuing the social movement in the street raises the question of whether the Naval departure and subsequent land transfer was a victory after all. Instead, it marks the dawn of a new stage in Vieques' struggle.

Even as the movement celebrated their goal of naval evacuation, local Viequenses continued to be reminded of naval presence which in a sense is indirectly continuing through territorial restrictions and insufficient decontamination efforts. The slogan that used to be "*Fuera la Marina*" (Get out Navy), was displayed on the pavement but was changed to "*Vieques para los Viequenses, Fuera Fish and Wildlife*" (Vieques for Viequenses. Get out Fish and Wild) (Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones 169). This subtle change might imply that not much has been fixed and Viequenses are simply engaged in another stage of the struggle fighting for Viequense autonomy against the DoI instead of the DoD. However, Allora and Calzadilla may be acknowledging this second phase of struggle and placed Homar in the driver seat intentionally to assert his agency in driving the new fight for Vieques' rights.

Allora and Calzadilla employ juxtaposition of appealing and unappealing images to highlight different versions of reality in Vieques. For example, scenes highlighting the turquoise water and Vieques' beauty are soon contrasted with the image of a wasteland, which is likely a place where the Navy randomly dumped a heap of hazardous contaminants. Similarly, the sign that reads "no trespassing, danger explosives, authorized personnel only," exemplifies the reality of contamination and environmental degradation, while the media and the tourist industry continue to produce a very different narrative. "Returning a Sound" essentially draws attention to the fact that there are two sides to this. While the media and the tourist industry promote the

beauty, the juxtaposition in this video may serve to reject these external notions of “paradise” that Puerto Rico and the Caribbean grapple with. Those notions certainly attract the wrong kinds of attention in terms of the media and tourists, which ultimately contribute to perpetuating stereotypes of Puerto Rico solely as a vacation destination and limit efforts to achieve sovereignty.

“Under Discussion” (2005):

Allora and Calzadilla produced “Under Discussion” in 2005 during this transition period in Vieques, at a point when discussions were especially “stuck” (Interview Art 21) (see fig. 3). Diego de la Cruz, activist and son of a Viequense fisherman who helped spearhead the resistance movement in the 1970s, sails the island’s waters on a makeshift boat - a conference table flipped upside-down with a motor attached to it. In this piece, Diego sailed along the historic fishing routes in eastern Vieques, highlighting the site of the initial mobilization. He served as what Boal would characterize as a “spect-actor,” or a bystander observing the unfolding of Vieques’ precarious situation as well as an agent in its future development (Boal xxi; Smith 32).

The table plays a central role in emphasizing the issues inherent in any discussion about the fate of Vieques without Viequenses at the forefront. Arbino and McKee explain how the table could be viewed as a “materialization” of the negotiating table, or a proper setting for conflict resolution after the naval evacuation and land transfer to the FWS (McKee; 2005). As this was unpopular to many Viequenses, the upside-down table represents how the decisions being made were not “productive or inclusive” (Arbino 281). Allora and Calzadilla chose to transform the table into a vehicle, or a mode of transportation, as a way of driving the discussion to its source or intended outcome. By attaching a motor to a negotiating table that had previously not

represented Viequenses interests, the artists and Diego are “mobilizing” the conversation to serve the interests of those who have a stake in its future. (Arbino 281). This is certainly necessary as an exclusion of local Viequenses has implications for the island’s reconstruction because US officials do not possess the same kind of local knowledge that is crucial for sustainable development. In McKee’s unpublished manuscript “Allora and Calzadilla’s Recent Videos: *Returning a Sound* and *Under Discussion*,” he explains how this type of conversation “fails to account for the inequalities that underwrite the space of the table to begin with, such as the hierarchical division between scientific expertise and local ecological knowledge” (McKee unpublished quoted in Smith 32). This divide has been central to discussions about tourist development, and also about addressing the Navy’s impact on public health. The report I discussed earlier conducted by the ATSDR and its outside researchers supported by the US government but rejected by Viequenses and independent researchers exemplifies this disconnect.

Allora and Calzadilla employ juxtaposition again in “Under Discussion” to show the complexity of claiming victory in Vieques when a majority of the land remains restricted and contaminated. In the video, viewers observe picturesque beaches before being flashed with images of craters, tanks, and military bunkers. One featured sign reads “*Bienvenidos: Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre de Vieques*,” and proceeds to lay out rules consistent with the FWS guidelines today. The refuge prohibits camping and littering, but permits observing nature, taking photographs and hiking, only during the day. Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones explain that this sign is the first sign one sees upon entering eastern Vieques. There is irony in this because it was an important site of resistance just years prior. As in the emphasis on absence of people celebrating in “Returning a Sound,” the absence of police and the civil disobedience campaigns and the presence of this sign welcoming people to the wildlife refuge is ominous and may

portray a defeat more than a victory in their struggle against US institutions. However, in my mind, it appears to be a stage in-between victory and defeat, and one that could be perpetual unless Puerto Rico is granted more autonomy.

Similarly, this idea of Viequenses now existing in the in-between space can also be reflected in the contrasting camera angles. The video switched from an angle featuring Diego's point of view from the boat to an aerial view peering down on the island. According to McKee, this angle “evokes the gaze of a surveyor or military strategist” (McKee 22). In a very general sense, it also represents a higher authority looking down upon Viequenses and in this way raises questions about US power and authority that have not been fully resolved (Arbino 281). Even though this piece suggests that Viequenses should be the ones in charge of their future as they are the only stakeholders, the aerial camera angle contributes to the idea that Viequenses will always be subject to US federal power, as long as Puerto Rico’s political status remains. Thus, the perpetual in-betweenness of Vieques in relation to the US is emphasized as long as they retain control of Puerto Rico.

In both “Returning a Sound” and “Under Discussion,” the mundane actions of driving a vehicle and sailing a table as if it were a boat is reminiscent of Augusto Boal’s ideas. After the coup in Brazil in 1964 resulted in increased censorship and repression, Boal developed more inconspicuous forms of theater production such as “invisible theater” after a period of imprisonment in 1971 and his exile to Argentina. The idea of invisible theater was to perform normal, everyday activities in order to hide its theatrical nature, but really the actions the performer is engaging in are intended to shed light on complex cultural and political issues. In these videos, both protagonists Homar and Diego are connected to the struggle through their own activism or a relative’s (or both), and this strikes at the very core of the Theater of the Oppressed

logic of performances “for” and “by” the people. Even though the act of driving is monotonous, the videos are meant to be projected on a screen which according to Allora and Calzadilla, “underscores the monumentality and weight of the situation the protagonists find themselves in,” and it “foregrounds the land as the arena in which these antagonisms are staged” (Allora & Calzadilla quoted in Smith 36). It also is not entirely mundane, as it partly contrasts the monotonous with the abstract (specifically a monotonous action with an abstract design). The trumpet instead of the muffler on the moped and the upside-down conference table being used as a boat were intended to be part of a message about absurdity. Allora and Calzadilla argue that to be able to make use of that absurdity is to claim agency over it (Allora & Calzadilla Interview Art 21). As Vieques has been referred to by scholars as “the epitome of the absurd,” the emphasis on the absurd designs act as attempts to reconcile the absurdity in their daily life and productively add to it (Arbino 271).

While there may have been no intended symbolism, there is significance in the fact that the installation pieces from “Returning a Sound” and “Under Discussion” were continually used in day-to-day life. As of 2005 (after the pieces were finished with) the moped and the boat were still in use. Allora and Calzadilla were asked in an interview about the state of the vehicles from their works and they responded that Homar still used the moped as his main mode of transportation. The trumpet had fallen off so he re-replaced it with a muffler. The table-boat was being used as a dinghy by fishermen to travel to their larger boats in the southern harbor of Esperanza (Allora & Calzadilla quoted in Smith 36). The fact that the muffler was reinstalled also is significant if one considers it in the context in which it was created. A trumpet attached to a vehicle driven by a Viequense activist symbolizing a call to action has now been muffled, or effectively silenced. This has alarming connections to resistance attempts throughout Puerto

Rican history that I mentioned previously. The fact that both of these vehicles are still being used as main modes of transportation (for Homar at least) highlights that both then, and we know now, the stalemate which motivated the creation of “Returning a Sound” and “Under Discussion” has proven to be perpetual.

“Half Mast/ Full Mast” (2010):

“Half Mast/ Full Mast” is the last piece in this series produced in 2010, about five years after the first three pieces (see fig. 4). It projects two different screens, connected by flagpoles with a Viequense gymnast hoisting themselves up on it in either the half mast or full mast position. The screens feature different images because one image is supposed to represent a site of victory in Viequenses’ struggle against the US for the return, decontamination and restoration of their land, and the other, a defeat.

The central message conveyed by “Half Mast/ Full Mast” is the importance of the local Viequenses and their embodied experiences. Some aspects of the piece can be taken at face-value. For example, the gymnast’s clothes, specifically the red shirt and blue jeans which represent the Puerto Rican colors, may symbolize solidarity for Vieques and Puerto Rico. However, the main focus of this piece is what cannot be understood at first glance. Specifically, Allora described the sites’ projection on each screen as “nondescript,” meaning that there is no clear indication of whether that screen is projecting a victory or a setback (Allora and Calzadilla; Newfields). Allora and Calzadilla chose each background based on how Viequense residents viewed the landscapes, specifically which places highlighted victories and which highlighted defeat to them. The gymnast’s position on the pole, whether he is positioned at half mast or full mast is what indicates whether this site represents victory or setback. In this way, it can only be

understood in its entirety by local Viequenses because without the gymnast, one would never understand. Given what we know about the tourist industry and the media's promotion of Vieques as "pristine," the green and natural appearance of the two frames could likely be interpreted incorrectly if one is not aware of the historical background.

Backgrounds that the artists used for victory were sites related to the civil disobedience campaigns, while backgrounds used for defeat were sites of unsustainable development such as the Luxury W Hotel which was being constructed to the dissatisfaction of many Viequenses (Lisson Gallery). Essentially, Viequense residents might consider places related to grassroots campaigns against the US as a site of victory because it was a time where Viequenses and mainland Puerto Ricans demonstrated their individual and collective strength against their oppressor, and in doing so were seen and heard by the international community. Viequenses might consider the Luxury W Hotel construction site as a defeat because increasing tourism on the island has contributed to the further marginalization of Viequenses, impeding their efforts to create local solutions for the future of their land. However, one would not understand that historical context from merely observing this piece. Thus its purpose is to emphasize the necessary role of local Viequenses and their historical memory and experiences to fully understand, be immersed in Viequense culture, and troubleshoot sustainable solutions.

The piece is essentially "in code" which is especially revealing when one considers this in the context of the various barriers between local Viequense residents and tourists and home-buyers that I mentioned earlier. Tourists' perceptions of Vieques differ due to different levels of historical knowledge (in part perpetuated by the media) and the invisibility of contamination. This has led to what Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones deemed a "cultural contamination" of tourists with no intention of integration, further heightening the divisions

between the two groups and contributing to the marginalization of Viequenses in their own home. “Half Mast/ Full Mast” confronts this issue head-on by emphasizing not only the fact that the contamination and sites of struggle are largely invisible, but also that it is essential that the public hear Viequenses’ stories.

As mentioned previously, there are significant barriers to communication and understanding between visitors and local residents so it is not surprising that Allora and Calzadilla turned to the body as a form of translation. We recall from Goldberg’s work on the history of performance art theory that the body is often used as “an instrument of communication” that can be understood universally (Goldberg 238). It may be the case that Viequenses’ voices in large part have not been heard or understood, so the artists turned to a medium that everybody can understand: the body. In this case, Viequense bodies served as an instrument for translation. It obviously requires grit and stamina to be able to overcome these substantial barriers to communication. This is exemplified by the great physical strength it takes the Viequense gymnast to hold this position, which should also be considered as a further demonstration of the agency of Viequenses in their ongoing battle against the US. However, it is notable that the specific stories of the projected sites the gymnasts are pointing to will never be understood unless one asks the local residents.

Allora and Calzadilla revisited this series five years later to produce this final piece which demonstrates that the struggle continues, and that Viequenses are fighting to maintain their fortitude and need to be heard. The fact that this piece constantly switches between sites of victory and defeat suggests that Viequenses have not fully achieved victory nor been fully defeated. The perpetual vacillation is thus indicative of Vieques’ reality as stuck in the liminal space.

Discussion:

After examining the related literature and analyzing the four pieces, I realized that this art series, like Puerto Rico, occupied a space in-between. First, Allora and Calzadilla's series existed in the space between the political and apolitical. I agree with scholars that these pieces function as a political critique of the US actions, but I also agree with the artists' general claims that they did not have any political agenda in creating these pieces. The messages of the art, such as providing a platform for people to comment on the US occupation of Viequense land, questioning the solution of land transfer to the US FWS, suggesting that Viequenses should be leading discussions about the island's future, and the centrality of Viequense residents in Viequense narratives, are not political in themselves. That is, the art pieces can raise questions and implicitly frame issues without being overtly political. Yet they have political implications. As the artists have said, their work can have various interpretations. For example, if one interprets "Under Discussion" as a call for Viequenses to be put in charge of community development and land transformation, that would require Puerto Rico to have political sovereignty and no longer be subject to US federal jurisdiction.

Interestingly, the distinction between the political and apolitical was also important for the Vieques social movement, which framed their struggle as an apolitical fight for peace and demilitarization. It achieved what seemed to be a decisive victory against a US institution and clearly communicated the strength and resolve of Puerto Ricans to the US government. On the one hand, it seemed that the movement was successful largely due to its apolitical framing which was employed in order to avoid antagonizing the US in that way. On the other hand, McKee and Bobrow-Strain argue that in actuality, the Navy no longer needed to be in Vieques because of its new technology, thus implying that the US may have not even viewed it fully as a loss.

Evacuating and decommissioning the base seemed to have only been an inconvenience, further demonstrated by the US's transfer of the formerly occupied land to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. As I discussed previously, that is typically a strategy to avoid full responsibility for its decontamination. However, if the movement had articulated more explicitly political demands, I wonder if the US would have felt that they needed to stay to reinstate its authority.

I also see the pieces occupying the space in-between what James C. Scott's calls "everyday acts of resistance" and the actual social movement in Vieques. In the social movement theory section, I discussed Scott's theory about how the "poor and oppressed" engage in resistance through everyday acts which require little planning and do not involve directly confronting the oppressor (Scott 29). I believe this series functioned in the space in-between as the first piece, "Land Mark," was the closest to actual social movement as the artists worked directly with protestors to create the piece on the site of the naval facility. This required coordination and to some degree a confrontation as it was done illegally at the site of the struggle. If one considers there to be a continuum between everyday acts and social movements, the creation of "Land Mark" lies closer to the actual social movement, but it does not quite reach it. The later three pieces are more subtle as they were created legally and did not require direct encounters with the Navy (although they are now on display in museums, this is a more indirect, detached way).

The series also occupied the space in-between the fields of performance art and social movements. In my performance art theory section I discussed scholars such as Kraus and Reed who suggested that in the future, comprehensive analyses be done on how the two fields often merge (Reed 77-84; Kraus 386-387). This argument suggests that social movements almost always have an aesthetic dimension and performance art, a political dimension. By producing

artistic responses to the man-made disaster in Vieques, Allora and Calzadilla joined the community of artists creating work alongside the protest movements. For example, in 2000, the Accion Urgente Mail Art Collective initiated their project, “Postcards for Vieques.” The project essentially was a mass call to action by metaphorically “bombing” the White House with physical and electronic postcards expressing the slogan, “Peace for Vieques.” Months later that same year, a group of artists sponsored by Artists for Peace in conjunction with the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques and the Peace and Justice Camp of Vieques, created a three-part simultaneous installation and performance as part of their own artistic civil disobedience. They created a “human mural” on the physical site of the restricted naval facility (like “Land Mark,” and another directly outside of the facility, the latter replicating Picasso’s famous anti-war painting “Guernica.” The third group announced their support from the Puerto Rican mainland and drew attention to what each group was doing and how each artistic act was politically motivated (Paravisini-Gebert 125-127). My case study of Allora and Calzadilla’s series in Vieques also found evidence to support Reed and Kraus’s claims that the fields of performance art and social movement are often intertwined and I support their call for future research in this area.

Finally, Allora and Calzadilla’s series served in the space between being site-specific and portable. The pieces were site specific, in that they required an understanding of the cultural and historical background of the situation in Vieques. But, they were also framed broadly enough to be transported and translated for other contexts. Essentially, the pieces in the series communicated individual embodied experiences of Viequenses in their fight against the US Navy and while the messages are specific to the island, various themes conveyed can be adopted as a lens for struggles elsewhere. In fact, one of Allora and Calzadilla’s goals with these pieces was to

raise awareness of the situation in Vieques beyond Puerto Rico to build a larger global network of support. In that regard, it succeeded. After they produced “Under Discussion,” which contained an underlying message of Diego driving the discussion to other contexts, communities across the world began advocating for Vieques or relating their own domestic struggles to Viequenses’ struggles (Sheren 134). For example, in the village of Maehyang-ri in South Korea, residents began to call their town “the Vieques of South Korea,” and adopted strategies reminiscent of those in Vieques to resist bombing campaigns in their home. Similarly, there was a conference in Glasgow, Scotland titled “Lessons from Vieques- a Conference Celebrating Peace, Resistance, and a Commitment to a Military-Free Scotland,” and in the German town of Fretzdorf, 9000 protestors occupied the streets in support of Viequenses (Allora & Calzadilla quoted in Smith 36).

It is difficult to measure the impact of Allora and Calzadilla’s series domestically for various reasons. Mainly, scant information exists regarding the pieces’ reception and whether the impact has endured. I can only speculate why there was minimal critical attention given to the performance art pieces and their reception, but it may have something to do with the general lack of attention paid to Viequenses in the world, which could be attributed to their marginal status. This is the way the US preferred and tried to keep it, until Viequenses began organizing in an attempt to shape their own future after decades of naval abuse. For several moments in time, Viequenses were heard and seen. Allora and Calzadilla’s first piece “Land Mark” helped to accomplish that, in part by emphasizing the previous invisibility. When the movement began to fracture in its fight to hold the Navy accountable for the cleanup and development of the land, Allora and Calzadilla’s work continued framing those issues in their series. They made local Viequenses’ memories and bodies central to each piece following the 2003 naval departure

which served to keep the fight going when the movement could not. However, as of 2023, the moments of visibility have passed, and Viequenses seem to have been forgotten again. The total cleanup does not even have an end-date, the Navy has not yet apologized and it continues to blame Viequenses' "distrust" for the slow progress (Government Accountability Office 2021). The pieces are displayed in various galleries and whether that has sufficient impact is up for debate.

Conclusion:

I have argued that the tension between the art and the artists in terms of the function of the pieces and the artists' claimed intent runs parallel to the tension inherent in Puerto Rico's indeterminate status as neither country nor state, not fully accepted by the US and rejected by Latin America for being bound by American influence. I examined literature from several different disciplines such as social movement theory and performance art theory along with the history of Puerto Rico and Vieques in particular in order to put them in conversation with one another. As the series itself showcased the liminal or in-between space, I argued that it served in the space between the political and apolitical, "everyday acts of resistance" and actual social movements, the fields of social movement and performance art, and being site-specific and portable.

This project has implications for small and large-scale activism. It makes clear that in the face of disaster, in this case explicitly a man-made one, art has the power to make the invisible, visible. And in the wake of technology, that visibility can be spread around the globe. This is certainly the case with Allora and Calzadilla's series which raised awareness about the events that unfolded and are continuing to unfold in Vieques. We saw the messages spread to South Korea and Scotland where activists used this series as a lens through which to view their own

struggles against their governments. I wonder if it can apply to other relevant cases such as the war in Ukraine, in which the individual lived experiences of Ukrainians tend to be under-acknowledged because the international community is focusing on the broader implications of this war for the global order (DeBlasio). For example, Ukrainians have always been narrating their lived experiences through the arts and humanities. Ukrainian poets who had been trying to get their works translated into English for decades have now succeeded in creating a market for themselves in the US largely due to the unfortunate circumstances (DeBlasio). The case in Vieques I believe is more complex due to Puerto Rico's indeterminate status which contributes to its invisibility. In any case, Viequesens are also on the frontlines of disaster which has been entirely caused by their oppressors who legally and politically retain control of their fate, and who also happen to be the world's greatest power (although their power in the global order is arguably being challenged by the day). Because of this, the situation and its aftermath have in some senses been "swept under the rug" in favor of tourists and animals, although Allora and Calzadilla have tried to draw attention to that. In part, they have done so by attaching new meaning to the island and creating a new type of language to talk about it.

My case study demonstrates the potential promise of further research on the intersection of performance art and social movements as Reed and Kraus recommended. In addition, future research could explore connections between other types of art interacting with social movements, such as poetry, music, mural art, and dance. One might also look into the *Ricky Renuncia* protest movement that mobilized its forces on the Puerto Rican mainland and achieved success in ousting Governor Ricardo Rosselló in 2019. There was certainly an aesthetic and performative element to the political movement. I cannot help but consider the in-betweenness - even after

collectively dethroning the Puerto Rican head of government, not much changed politically which makes sense given that Puerto Rico remains without sovereignty.

Appendix A:



Figure 1 Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla. *Land Mark*. 2001-2002, <https://publicdelivery.org/allora-calzadilla-landmark/>.

Appendix B



Figure 2 Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla. *Returning a Sound*. 2004,
<https://sound-art-text.com/post/180967641853/jennifer-allora-guillermo-calzadilla-returning-a-sound>.
[ng-a](#).

Appendix C



Figure 3 Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla. *Under Discussion*. 2005,
<https://art21.org/read/allora-calzadilla-under-discussion-and-vieques>.

Appendix D



Figure 4 Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla. “*Half Mast/ Full Mast*. 2010, https://www.lissongallery.com/artists/allora-and-calzadilla/artworks/half-mast-full-mast?image_id=732.

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