

Moving Memories in Vieques: Towards a Memory Approach in Mobilization Research

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Abstract

The literature on social movements has established that narrative structures are essential forms in the articulation of claims of resistance, challenge and action. However, in light of current debates within cultural sociology about the role of memory in the elicitation of meanings and its relation to the narrative structure, certain revisions are in place. Grounded in the growing literature on collective memory as a cultural process, this article draws attention to the mobilization processes of the antimilitary movement in Vieques, Puerto Rico (1999-2003) as an instance where memory processes intervene in the articulation of narratives for mobilization. Here is suggested an analytical model that situates features of remembrance along the narrative approach to examine the meaning making processes resulting in action by collective actors.

Keywords: Vieques, collective memory, mnemonic practice, social movement

1. Introduction

The literature on social movements has established that narrative structures are essential in the articulation of claims of resistance, challenge and action. This approach has become foremost in accounting for the cultural processes within mobilization, as opposed to less reflexive approaches. In light of current debates about the role memory plays in eliciting meanings, however, the narrative approach may need to be revisited. Recent scholarship in cultural sociology has gained ground opening a discussion on the cultural significance of the memory making process. The literature has established a relationship between memory and meaning making, remembering as a social process, and the problematic nature of collective memory. With these advances in the conceptualization of the memory process and the way the narrative approach has articulated memories in the construction of stories in mind, a review of this position is in order. Moreover, the proposal to revise the concept of collective memory towards a set of practices with the nuances of remembrance practices as significant features of solidarity and identity building necessitates a thorough analysis of the role of memory practices in mobilization processes.

Grounded in the growing literature on collective memory as a cultural process, this article sets forth an analytical model that places memory processes within the narrative approach to examine the meaning

making processes resulting in action by collective actors. To that end, this article puts the narrative approach in perspective, highlighting the areas in which the research has benefited from a deeper examination of mobilization articulations, as well as those areas in which the memory literature can inform this model. Proposing a combined approach – a mnemonic-narrative model – the latest wave of protest from the antimilitary movement in Vieques, Puerto Rico (1999-2003) is examined and presented as an instance of memory-based articulation of narratives for mobilization. This case will make evident how memory-making processes serve as significant features in the creation of narratives to engage social protest. Approaching the antimilitary movement in Vieques through the lens of a mnemonic-narrative model, this article will highlight that the previous understandings of the Vieques Movement offer an incomplete explanation of the successful mobilization because the mnemonic dynamics prior to the mobilization are not included in the analysis.

This analysis will be drawn from a series of twenty-seven semi-structured and in-depth interviews done in Vieques with permanent residents of the island between 2002 and 2006. These interviews focused on three general issues: the lives of residents and their experiences growing up on the island, their experience living with the military presence, and their understanding of the mobilization process on the island. Because of the depth and detail of these interviews, they are treated here as *autobiographical accounts*, providing a personal vantage point on the significance of the military presence in residents' lives and experiences.

2. The Narrative Approach in Perspective

Narration and storytelling has become a paradigmatic feature in the social movement research field on the grounds of its relation to processes such as solidarity building, identity construction and claims articulation (Polletta, 2002; 2005; Davis, 2002a; Fine, 1995; 2002; Jasper, 1997; Benford, 2002; Yates and Hunter, 2002; Eyerman, 2003; Johnston and Klandermans, 1995; Jacobs, 2002). Fine (1995) suggests “it is helpful to conceive of a social movement as a bundle of narratives, which when expressed within an interaction arena... strengthens the commitment of members to shared organizational goals and ... identities” (p. 128). The proliferation of narratives as an analytical tool for mobilization has provided the field with both clarification of less effective approaches and nuances for a distinctive cultural paradigm.

The scholarship on narratives emerges as an answer and challenge to the frame alignment approach that argues for the articulation of interpretative frames by movement organizers to illustrate grievances, define their sources and propose solutions in resonance with their target audiences (Fine, 2002; Snow and Benford, 1992; Snow et al. 1986). The narrative approach has responded to the exogenous nature of the meaning structures that sustain the mobilization frames in the field of action by stressing the capacity of participants – including audiences – to interpret, create and allocate meaning through their communicative process (Polletta, 2002, p. 37; Williams, 2002, p. 250). Seemingly, this perspective on mobilization better illustrates the “negotiating” and “conflictive” nature of meaning construction (Yates and Hunter, 2002, p.128). Narratives better present the “competing concerns and contradictions” present in the movement processes as “cultural workings” (Tatum, 2002, p. 181). By accounting for the cultural dynamics at play prior to the establishment of a movement organization – shared understandings, cultural themes and ideologies – this model avoids the exteriorization of meaning structures (Davis, 2002b; Kane, 1997). Thus, narratives present the articulation of mobilizing discursive features and meaning making as an open system instead of fixed and closed, while at the same time expanding the attention to the “cognitive liberation” (McAdam, 1983) and the triggering of mobilization that rises beyond resonance (Davis, 2002b, p. 24; Williams, 1994, p. 791).

Indeed, the narrative approach produced a foundation for a stronger cultural scholarship on social movement research particularly with its focus on meaning construction processes and how these dynamics come into play in the engagement of collective action. In some instances, narratives help explain the creation of collective identities (Somers, 1994, p. 606; Davis, 2002b, p. 20) and the direction and boundaries of the movement (Benford, 2002, p. 53), while in others, they become performative spaces upon which participants and actors can draw “scripts”, allowing and feeding the constitution of actions with the potential for meaning-making (Eyerman, 2003, p. 3; Fine, 1995, p. 129; Iser, 1972, p. 279). It is in this context of “social transaction,” where the participants – activists and audiences – are involved in the “interpretative work” of their field action through the storytelling, emotional hitchhiking, and transmission of both ideas and emotions (Davis, 2002b, p. 19; Iser 1972, p. 284). Narratives provide an epistemic window into these micro-processes taking place in social movement moments. Hence, it is the narratives’ nature as workings of sense making and cultural artifices that illustrates their capacity to engender action and mobilization (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997, p. 1; Chatman, 1978, in Carr, 1997, p. 9).

While narratives bring understanding of these key features of the mobilization process and address the shortcomings of the frame alignment approach, recent analyses of memory processes, within this cultural paradigm, may address a number of significant issues overlooked by the narrative approach and in need of possible revision. “Since the events earlier in time take their meaning and act as causes only because of how things turn out later... in the future” (Davis, 2002b, p. 11-12), the interpretation of narratives in social movements as vehicles of meaning rests on the recognition that their explanation operates retrospectively. This means that the source of a narrative’s explanatory power – through emplotment – relies on the rendition of past events, a remembrance of some sort. To that extent, this implies a link between those renditions of the past and the meaning construction process, of which the literature only makes inference rather than addressing properly (Davis, 2002a; Polletta, 2003; 2005). These brief recognitions of memory in relation to narratives leave a gap open in the analytical model as the subject of memory is interpreted as a *fixed* system of meanings.

This reading of memory as a *closed* system contrasts with current discussions on the subject within the cultural scholarship in two ways: first, the recognition of memory as a social (and cultural) process (Falasca Zamponi, 2003; Halbwachs, 1992; Olick and Robbins, 1998; Wagner-Pacifici, 1996); and second, the acknowledgement of memory’s subjective nature (Olick and Levy, 1997; White, 1978; E. Zerubavel, 1996; Y. Zerubavel, 1995). The treatment of memory as an entity ignores the social dynamics at work in the constitution of collective memories, namely the “group settings” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 39), the influence of our “particular social surroundings” (E. Zerubavel, 1996, p. 286), and “the mediation between the past and the present” (Falasca Zamponi, 2003, p. 49). In recent years, scholars have suggested that social/collective memory is better approached as *practices* that serve to maintain shared meanings – images, experiences, events, etc. – as part of “an ongoing dialogue” (Olick, 2003, p. 264). This interpretation of memory – *mnemonic practices* – argues for a “processual approach,” in which renditions of the past are constantly negotiated and debated (Falasca Zamponi, 2003; Olick, 2003; Olick and Levy, 1997; White, 1978). The cultural nature of the mnemonic practices goes beyond the process root, establishing a direct relation to the meaning construction process.

According to Eviatar Zerubavel (1996) mnemonic practices are an integral part of the cultural works of any social project. “[Being] social presupposes the ability to experience events that have happened to groups and communities to which we belong long before we joined them as if they were part of our own past” (p. 290). From socialization to identity construction to solidarity building, the enactment of memory practices serves these processes through the interactive opportunity to tune the symbolical repertoire with those of the community (Y. Zerubavel, 1995, p. 4). However, collective memory practices are “regulated by

social rules” (E. Zerubavel, 1996, p. 296) which are grounded on views of a “moral order” and “political culture” (Olick and Robbin, 1998, p. 111; Y. Zerubavel, 1995, p. 214). These *mnemonic dynamics* of the memory process bring to our attention the forces at work in the production of remembrances and renditions of the past. Yael Zerubavel (1995) stresses this when arguing that the articulation of a collective memory “is not simply a recording of ‘what happened’”, but “a progressive re-description of sets of events in such a way as to dismantle a structure encoded in one verbal mode [...] to recode [it] in another mode” (p. 225). This means that mnemonic practices involve not only selectivity, but also the transformation of the denotation of the selected events; the meaning of the memories that comprise a group’s past are changed or adapted in the process whereby the cultivation, maintenance and legitimacy of a collective self are served.

Thus, the appraisal of memory by means of the narrative approach as an unproblematic and closed system from which the authors pick images and meanings, fails to account for these cultural dynamics. The narrative model overlooks the ways in which mnemonic dynamics potentially affect the emplotment process, the interpretative outcome and the triggering effect of such narratives. It can be argued further that if the meaning allocation and interpretative power rests on the emplotment of past events in a causal direction, particularly when those renditions of the past are the result of social, cultural, and political dynamics, we must look at the memory construction process as a root of meaning allocation. In other words, the meaning process begins before the narrative, in the constitution of memories or representations of the past. The analysis of meaning articulation and allocation in the mobilization process, therefore, must start with the examination of the mnemonic dynamics that precede the articulation of narratives. The examination of the memory processes will shine more light on the features eliciting the cognitive liberation and trigger action within the narrative structures.

3. Towards a Mnemonic Approach

The model to be discussed here seeks to connect both the embedded meaning sources of *mnemonic structures* – remembrance meaning structures – and the capability and mobility of narratives for mobilization. The goal is to trace the meaning source of the narratives for mobilization back to the memory process. The latest wave of protest launched by the antimilitary movement in Vieques (1999-2003) provides an apt illustration. A careful analysis reveals that the military presence experience is worked into a set of narratives for mobilization bringing to the surface the subjective nature of remembrance and the reflexivity involved in articulating experiences.

The antimilitary movement in Vieques dates back to the 1940s in response to the establishment of a naval installation on that island on the eve of U.S. involvement in the war in Europe in 1941 (Barreto, 2001; McCaffrey, 2002; Melendez, 1989). The goals of the movement were to close the base – cornerstone for military maneuvers and training of the Atlantic Fleet and NATO – and to remove the military presence from the island (Garcia Muñiz, 1987; Melendez, 1989; Murillo, 2001; Rodríguez Beruff, 1999). Although the movement had been active for over sixty years, it reached peak in the spring of 1999 after a civilian – David Sanes Rodríguez – was killed in a military accident at the target range (McCaffrey, 2002; El Nuevo Dia 1999). This accident set off the latest wave of resistance and protest and resulted in the eventual termination of military maneuvers and the permanent shutdown of the military installation. During the subsequent four years of protest a set of narratives were articulated as claims for change and engagement. These narratives were grounded on shared meaning structures that represented cues of the military presence experience. By examining the construction of these cues into mnemonic structures, as well as the articulation of these structures into narratives, and revealing the conflicts, tensions and negotiations that such processes involved, we can produce an outline of the meaning allocation process that transformed the narratives for mobilization of the antimilitary movement in Vieques into triggers of collective action.

We will work retrospectively, examining the narratives activated during the mobilization event in order to extract those elements that sought to present an articulation of the military presence experience. We will look at one of these narratives – *¡Ni una bomba más!/Not one more bomb!* – to see how the bombing was significant as a shared experience. After these elements are identified, we will then trace them back to the mnemonic community, placing their origin in the past and their remembrance process. This will illustrate the primal link between the narrative emplotment – meaning allocation – and the memory process.

3.1 Not one more bomb!: A Narrative for Mobilization

The community in the island in general, and those advocating the removal of the U.S. Navy in particular, were indignant at the death of David Sanes in 1999. While some observers have characterized the rapid mobilization in Vieques after the incident as spontaneous, the main organization on the ground, the Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques [*Committee For the Rescue and Development of Vieques*] (CPRDV) had been building an outreach project for mobilization since 1993 (McCaffrey, 2002; 2005). Their groundwork, we should argue, served as the bedrock for the mobilization process of 1999. Moreover, the CPRDV's advocacy and outreach work provided a discursive framework upon which the narratives were to be constructed.

The constitution of CPRDV in 1993 must be understood as part of a reorganization of the collective efforts of the antimilitary movement. This reorganization involved the establishment of a common ground for the leading actors and sectors involved since the 1960s and presented a new program that resonated with the different ramifications of the military presence and the current political dynamics. From these discussions, the CPRDV produced a plan they referred to as the *4Ds*. The *4Ds* – demilitarization, decontamination, devolution, and development – represented the organizations long-term plan concerning the future of the island. More than a plan, it represented a projection, the stages in a process towards a desirable future, beginning with the departure of the U.S. Navy and ending with the economic development of the island. Viewed through the lens of narrative analysis, the *4Ds* adhered to the structure of beginning, middle and end attributed by scholars to myths, making it a mobilization discourse (Davis, 2002b, p. 11). According to the literature on narrativity in mobilization, the resonance between narrative plot and the expectations of broadcasters and audiences, i.e., movement interests and conventions, determines the extent to which the narrative effectively transmits its meanings (Polletta, 2002; Nolan, 2002; Kane, 1997). The context for narratives takes the form of a mobilization discourse, the constructed conditions upon which the narrative is built, providing consistency and guidance relative to the movement's goals, interests, identities and constraints. This discourse responds to the movement's idioculture (Fine, 1995, p. 128), and conventions (Nolan, 2002, p. 149), establishing the causal direction of the narrative.

By the time of the accident in 1999, the *4Ds* – ratified in popular assemblies – had been circulating within the community for more than five years. We can assume that this served to guide the narratives and actions to follow as the CPRDV approached toward organization and mobilization (Polletta 2002: 35). The accident provided an opportunity to enact the first stage of the program, the demilitarization of the island, not in a random way, but informed by that discourse. The articulation of narratives for mobilization involves the construction by movement agents of structures that carry meaning and causality with the intention of eliciting action among its recipient audience. The establishment of meaning for action can be seen as the chief function of narratives in mobilization (Davis, 2002b, p. 14; Brooks, 1985, p. xi; Fine, 1995, p. 128). These articulations appear as loose compositions that project a picture of the current state of affairs in light of the past or future. This composition places the meaning of past states of affairs in context so that it is better understood and appropriated by the audience in the present (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997, p. 1; Polletta, 2002, p. 34).

The first of these articulations that appeared in Vieques was the demand for an end of the bombing. “[After the accident] a sense of indignation started to grow. Then the people claimed for the bombing to stop. Not one more life! That is one of the first claims of viequenses: Stop the bombing now!” (Hector). ¡Ni una bomba más! [Not one more bomb!] became the popular cry that began to be heard in every space and forum after the accident. The bombing became the epitome of the problems and concerns of the island’s population and, hence the immediate target of the struggle. According to some activists, this process was rooted in a new awareness that connected the accident, and personal safety to the military presence. “The threat changed from, ‘It is possible that one day a bomb can fall on us...’, to ‘the bomb just fell on one of us...’” (Clara). This new awareness then was contextualized within the rubric of the discursive feature of demilitarization by tying one act – stop the bombing – with another – end the military presence. “Everyone was aware that if the bombing was stopped, the Navy had no other reason to be here...” (Hector). In other words, the bombing became the most elemental connection between the existing military presence and its end; to force an end to the bombing was to remove the primordial value of the island to the U.S. Navy (Rodriguez Beruff, 1999, p. 65). The demand for an end to the bombing represented a direct challenge to the structure of the military presence, giving the movement’s participants a clear goal to fight for. The phrase, “¡Ni una bomba más!” was adopted by every supporting group, sector and community, appearing in newsletters and on bumper stickers, t-shirts, and murals. In its demand for the end of the bombing, the movement was clearly insisting on an end to the military presence.

This articulation represents only one of multiple narratives for mobilization that arose in the movement. This narrative proved to be an effective call to action as it was contextualized within the demilitarization discourse, linking the termination of maneuvers with that of the military presence. However, this discursive resonance does not explain the triggering effect of the narrative within the community, other than providing a vantage point for their cognitive liberation. To assume that such resonance was the source of mobilization is to reiterate the argument presented by framing scholars, namely that recognizing the existence of a problem would result in collective action (Williams, 1994, p. 791). Rather than looking at the narrative of *¡Ni una bomba más!* as the source of mobilization, we will emphasize how the bombing as part of the military presence experience became a source of meaning of their past.

4. The Bombing: A Mnemonic Structure

The military presence in the island of Vieques has left deep impressions in the collective memory of local residents. The exposure of the residents to an element such as the military presence and its different expressions over a sixty-year period surely engraved itself within the life experience of viequenses for more than three generations. While the literature on collective memory and mnemonic practices makes a clear distinction between individual experience memory and collective memories (E. Zerubavel, 1996, p. 293-4; Olick and Robbin, 1998, p. 111), they also argue that these individual experiences are the primal material from which the collective memory is developed (E. Zerubavel, 1996). “[Collective memory] is the existential fusion of our own personal biography with the history of the groups and communities to which we belong” (p. 290). Within the scope of mnemonic practices, these private experiences are not isolated from public event-memories, instead they interact together (Wagner-Pacifici, 1996, p. 312). Halbwachs (1992) asserts that such memories are individual in their abstraction, however, they are elicited and revisited, through “social frameworks of memory,” making remembering a social process in response to social conventions and constraints.

The exploration of autobiographical accounts from island residents enables us to see the initial links to a past shared as islanders who endured an experience with the military presence. In the constellation of stories that local residents contributed in their autobiographical accounts, three themes recur in connection

with the military experience: the expropriation of land, the conflict between the military and civilians, and the bombing. These three themes embody the military presence experience for residents in the island of Vieques. They represent the very experience that the islanders associated and linked to the military presence. Moreover, “what is shared in terms of autobiographical memories are types of experiences [from the collective memory] of which the specific memory of individual remembrance are tokens” (Conway, 1997, p. 29). The accounts of individual residents therefore present samples of specific events and/or experiences regarding the more general shared occurrence in the island, the military presence.

The stories of the expropriations have their origin in the series of evictions that took place on the island between 1941 to 1946 as a result of the entrance of the United States into the war in Europe, and, later, with the reorganization by the military per NATO (Ayala and Carro-Figueroa, 2005; Garcia Muñiz, 1987). These stories focused on the loss of land, homes and access to properties, the impact on the labor market, and the reorientation of the population in relation to their space. Most expropriation stories are told from the perspective of the “affected” as victims or witnesses, presenting the first tangible effect of the military arrival. The second set of stories are those concerning the clash – physical or cultural – between civilians and the military, embodied largely in narratives of intrusion by foreign elements into public spaces and the resulting changes in the social interactions within those spaces. The context of these stories is that of a surge of military troops in the 1950s to 1970s, as maneuvers in the Cold War became both more extensive and intensive (Ayala and Bolivar, 2006). As the soldiers were granted access to civilian spaces, a new set of interactions was generated in the community; from legal and illegal commercial transactions to consensual mingling in bars and dance clubs to predatory harassment of civilians. Stories of this experience range from testimonies of physical collision – fights and riots – to assertions of victimization – sexual harassment – and observations of spatial constraint – displacement of public spaces.

While these two sets of stories have deep roots in the definition of the military experience, the bombing became a signifier of the omnipresence of the military as its physical tangibility and temporal proximity became manifested in the accident of 1999. The bombing epitomized the military presence experience because its occurrence, although outside the realm of the civilian population, made its way into the quotidian routines of residents to the point where it lost its exogenous nature. As it was occurring, the bombing experience became conditioned to carry both a traumatic and normal interpretative meaning. This conditioning encased the different viewpoints and experiential outlooks of the maneuvers into an abstract formulation: the bombing.

The bombing is often remembered as a pervasive *traumatic* experience, accentuating its foreign nature. Dolores, resident and activist, recalls the bombing in her childhood and how it became a haunting reality.

“The most awful experience of my youth were [the bombs]. All the time, while you slept, played, in school... there was the boom. It was very traumatic for me... [Taking] a shower, the [explosion] of the bombs... sometimes one after the other, boom, boom, boom... Then you stay in a kind of shock and silence...and all of a sudden a louder boom.”

Elsa, a retired teacher, presents a similar pattern in daily activities: “*You could not even take a nap because they were doing their bombing... At our house in Florida [a local neighborhood], a piece of the ceiling almost fell on top of [my husband] because of the cracks. Caused by the vibrations...*” Elsa also recalls how the bombing started to become a part of her teaching routine; “*As a teacher, on many occasions the class was interrupted by the jets and the bombing... it did not allow students to focus, neither could we...*” This view of the bombing as a disruption in the lives of residents is better expressed by Claudio, who commented,

“I cannot describe a normal day prior to [the civil disobedience]. Because... for you to say that you have a normal day, you would have to be off the island. Not feeling the bombing, the roar of the

machine guns up there, none of that... Only by leaving the island could you not hear it... So, if you left Vieques, you could have a normal day, but when you returned, Vieques was hell. This was hell."

This depiction is significant for its incursion into the meaning of normalcy, as normal is relational to the military presence and its practices.

The bombing became an experiential element of the military presence, defining the way individuals understood their new realities and themselves.

"From the time I was born, the Navy has been in Vieques. Because I was born in the 1970s and the Navy has been here since 1942. So, one might say that I was born as part of the Navy... It's not the same for those who were here before the [Navy] arrived, and then this thing was integrated into their lives. They didn't have it, and now they do. No. I was born with that Navy" (Mariano).

In this way, the bombing changed the way of life on the island as it became integrated into daily routines, even transforming the concepts of normalcy and the ordinary. Jonathan, a youngster, reinforces this view of the bombing as normal in his reflection on the military presence: *"When you are ten, eleven years old, they talk to you about the bombing and the noise, and you do not look at it as a problem. Instead we thought that is was something normal, not a problem."* He concluded, *"As a kid, I grew up with the bombing, the jets, and made it part of my daily life..."*

These accounts illustrate how the bombing was conditioned into *mnemonic meaning structures*, seminal elements, of the military presence experience. This conditioning involved the attachment of certain meaning structures to that experience, making it part of the social frameworks of memory of that given community (Halbwach, 1992; E. Zerubavel, 1996). These meaning structures reside in the idiosyncratic articulations of "what it means to be a viequense" and the signifiers of the islander's experience. They can be understood as condensed meaning representations of a given event or memory layered with essential images, emotions and voices. They are better represented in a structural form, for they exist only within the social order or "coding" of a given community, rendering them indigenous products and subject to the cultural and social dynamics of that community. I will refer to them as mnemonic meaning structures because they sustain claims of significance for mnemonic practices and devices. Retrospectively, these practices and devices are able to activate these meanings through commemorative narratives, memorialization and remembrance. It is in the context of the new events of 1999 – the death of David Sanes and the mobilization – that such meaning structures were elicited.

But, how did these elements move from dormant to active structures of meaning? Harris (2006) argues that certain events from the social memory are engaged by movement organizers through "social appropriation" (p. 22). This process gives movement organizers the capacity to utilize past events with potential structural opportunities in such a way to be "framed" into claims for collective action. While this model resonates with the idea of conditioning events of the past, its reliance on framing to explain engagement underplays the openness of the meaning system and the potential of audience/participants to affect the meaning allocation process. It is in situating new events in relation to past events that meanings are elicited, an appropriation of a new event in the context of the past.

The memory process in Vieques involved the conditioning of the bombing experience among others as a signifier of the military presence, a mnemonic structure that provides meaning and emotional responses associated with the event. The David Sanes event had to be integrated within the "stock of plots" of the mnemonic community (Polletta, 2002, p. 34). As the accident was socially appropriated within the existing social frameworks of memory of the military presence experience, it was associated to the bombing and its meaning structures. Thus, the narrative *"¡Ni una bomba más!"*, as articulated and enacted in the shadows of the tragedy, steered the memories of members of the community – physical and mnemonic – revisiting those

images and emotions. As the community recognized and reflected upon those memories and the meanings that such memories provided to the narratives, it was triggered to action.

Thus, the narrative, however effective in articulating the mobilization discourse and contextualizing the tragic event in a call for action, achieves its triggering of engagement only because of the embedded meanings of the mnemonic structures. In other words, it was because the bombing was already a condensed representation of a memory event, as opposed to the narrative in itself that those meanings were elicited and individuals were engaged. The interaction of participants as audiences in the interpretative process – decoding the narratives, revisiting images and memories, and reconnecting with emotions – produced the trigger for engagement. People were remembering rather than rationalizing through the narratives for mobilization.

The process of appropriating and adopting the narrative cemented the significance of these meanings and the memories involved in the decoding of the bombing as a traumatic feature of the military presence experience. It was in this context that a request for an end to the bombing appeared as the spearhead of the CPRDV discursive strategy consistent with the strategies of civil disobedience and peaceful resistance, defining the very field of action. For instance, the state government in Puerto Rico created the Special Commission on Vieques to examine the impact of the military maneuvers on the island, relying on the testimonies of residents about their bombing related experience. It is in this context that we witness a ratification of the bombing as a traumatic experience even as local residents revisited those memories, simultaneously bringing together, in a semiotic sense, the bombing and the military as a single experience.

However, this appropriation of the narratives and the cementing of the bombing as the signifier of the military presence experience are no less the outcomes of subjective cultural dynamics. This was a contested process and outcome, in response to the conventions of the mobilization discourse – 4Ds – and the exclusion of certain voices, plots and interpretations. A leading voice of challenge was that of women, who not only contested the bombing as a primary signifier of the military presence, but also the very mobilization discourse that contextualized the cycle of protest. Accounting for this challenge serves to illustrate a feature of the excess of meanings that mnemonic structures carry, the presence of reflexivity in meaning allocation processes for mobilization narratives.

5. Women's Countermemory Narrative

The mobilization of women in the antimilitary movement in Vieques for the most recent wave of protest has been considered by observers as “unprecedented,” for they moved from the background to the forefront, taking on roles as organizers, community leaders and spokespersons (McCaffrey, 2008). Even so, the mobilization of women had a more subtle impact on the mobilization of the antimilitary movement. Most activist and leaders of the women's initiative in Vieques have highlighted the process of mobilization as a challenge to the existing approaches of mobilization that were operating in the island by the year 2000, including the narratives for mobilization. They emphasize that since the early 1960s, women's viewpoints have not been represented in decision-making bodies and demand articulation in Vieques, and, further, that such a situation was a reflection of systemic patterns of gender dynamics in community organizing. (p. 165).

The exclusion of their viewpoints from narrative accounts inspired viequense women to gather stories, which would amount to an account of women's experience. While the narrative that women constructed challenges the commemorative narratives concerning the military presence, its purpose was to introduce additional seminal sources to the existent pool of meanings. In other words, they added new points of reference in the form of anecdotes and viewpoints that would enhance the elicitation capacity of already articulated mnemonic structures. This represented a *countermemory narrative* of the military presence experience, an alternative account of events and happenings that sought to highlight the views of

marginalized groups while simultaneously challenging existing *master* commemorative narratives — for instance, those of men (Y. Zerubavel, 1995, p.11).

This was illustrated in one of the hearings of the Special Commission on Vieques when, appearing as a witness, one of the members of the only women-led organization, Alianza de Mujeres Viequesenses (*Vieques Women Alliance*), exposed certain contradictions of the bombing as the symbolic and mnemonic epitome of the military presence.

“After I presented the written statement for the hearing, a Committee member told me that she knew how talking about these things affect us, but that she wanted me to say how I was bothered by the bombing. I looked at her and said, ‘Look. It was not only the bombing. Yes, the bombing scared us because you thought that the houses would fall apart and all that... but here what bothered us was the attitude of those people [the soldiers], and how they behaved...’ And then I told the story of my mother and me growing up...The fear at night and the threat of them knocking on doors in search of women...The archbishop was there and he later said, ‘I have never heard anyone from Vieques talking about this...’ Nobody had said that [before] because there were no women, only men...”
(Julia)

This testimony challenged the notion of the bombing as *the* defining element of the local experience and altered the repertoires of meaning upon which the local experience was created. Scholarship on narratives in mobilization argues that such stylistic or conventional discrepancies may result in challenges of the master narratives or the legitimacy of the storyteller as it steps outside the boundaries of expectations (Nolan, 2002). For Alianza this was an opportunity to bring new viewpoints into the arena of public discussion and highlight the civilian-military interaction as a primordial source of meaning for women on the military presence experience and their past. This did not necessarily undermine the role the bombing played in shaping local livelihood, but served instead to emphasize how the underplayed experiences of women challenged and changed the rendered imagery of the island’s military experience. This opened the door for women’s viewpoints to be included in the inquiry of the military presence experience and broadened the imagery of the movement’s mnemonic practice.

The challenge of the *¡Ni una bomba más!* narrative was driven by the improper representation of women’s experiences in the mnemonic-narrative articulation. This was very evident in the ways the movement had articulated its claims and issues of concern prior to the mobilization of women. Women’s accounts sought to break with the generic status of the experience of islanders by giving them a face and a voice, thereby making them relevant to others. Laura affirmed this when she contrasted their narrativity, referring specifically to the CPRDV’s 4Ds.

“Until then, [the struggle for] Vieques was the land, decontamination, devolution... but it was not common to see the faces of those who cry and laugh, or those who are concerned. It had no face. Then, we [Alianza] started to give one, to give a face, to give emotions, and sensibility. It is not only about the devolution of the land; it is also about the fact that I was born in this land...”

While the women’s articulation of a challenging narrative had serious implications for the mobilization of the antimilitary movement in Vieques the observation of this reflexive countermemory account serves to highlight the subjective nature of memory processes (See Vélez-Vélez 2011 for more on this case). Moreover, by incorporating countermemory narratives, we stress the dynamics that the narrative approach seeks to include in its analysis while acknowledging the problematic nature of memory processes.

6. Conclusion

This article is intended to move the narrative approach in mobilization research along in the current debates within cultural sociology that suggest a reconsideration of memory as a cultural and problematic

process. This move would imply a step away from the current *closed system* view of memory in narrative analysis to reconsider the way different mnemonic dynamics may affect the articulation and interpretation of narratives for mobilization. Within the rubric of a “processual approach” to memory, yet expanding the analytical scope of the narrative approach, an alternative model is suggested here – a mnemonic-narrative approach – that argues for the examination of mnemonic dynamics prior to the articulation of narratives so as to explain the triggering source of these narratives.

The examination of the narrative articulation in the antimilitary movement in Vieques (1999-2003) through the mnemonic-narrative analytical model suggest primarily that the success in mobilizing the community on the island was the result of a combination of factors: a) how the mnemonic structures of the military presence experience were constituted – the bombing as cultural trauma – and b) the way the narratives for mobilization articulated these mnemonic structures in their claims for action – a demand for the end of bombing and the military presence. The consideration of the mnemonic dynamics at work prior to the articulation of the narratives allowed us to delve beneath the surface of the mobilization – illustrated mainly by the narratives for mobilization – and appreciate in detail the meaning allocation processes that fueled and sustained the engagement of participants. This suggests that Vieques residents were compelled to act as they decoded the narratives within their repertoire of mnemonic structures concerning the military presence, and the emotional and symbolic baggage of their memories were elicited.

Other approaches would likely point to the resonance of the demands to end the bombing narrative, or the achievement of “cognitive liberation” through the moral outrage after David Sanes’ death. None of these features, however, would have explained the mobilization of the Vieques community to action. Only by engaging the question of meaning and the role of memory are we able to unearth the causality of action in the articulation of narratives for mobilization of the antimilitary movement. This analysis suggests that it was the mnemonic dynamics of the bombing as a meaning structure rather than the narrative to end the bombing that triggered the people of Vieques to mobilize to end the military presence.

This opens a window for expanding the significance of memory processes in mobilization research and formulating new inquiries on social movement events of the present and the past. Such an approach would bring a more comprehensive consideration of the cultural dynamics at work in mobilization processes. By bridging the literature pertaining to memory and mobilization, the mnemonic-narrative model bolsters the cultural argument in mobilization research by strengthening and deepening the understanding of meaning making and allocation in social movement events.

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