

ISSA Proceedings 2002 - Vieques At The Vortex: Identity Arguments In Crosscurrents Of Puerto Rican And American Nationalism



As situations change, so too do argumentative opportunities and constraints (Bitzer; Burke, 1973). Identity is also transitory and adaptive: as circumstances change, so too may individual identities change (Burke, 1950). Those arguments which grow out of situational dimensions and adapt identity to circumstances we call *constitutive arguments*: it is by and through these forms of argument that we constitute who we are both individually and collectively at any given time, and these identity formations will change as both situations and constitutive arguments change (Lake, 1989; Lake, 1997; Winkler). Changes in identity may, in turn, change the nature and types of non-constitutive arguments which one subsequently advances (Hingstman). One of the most pervasive and influential forms of constitutive argumentation is that which involves *national identity* (Ishiyama, et al.; Williams) particularly when arguments of national identity are foregrounded by precipitating events, which, following Scheff (1994, 278), we will call “triggers,” and take the identity-coercive form of appeals to nationalism. In this study, we examine how situational “triggers” change constitutive arguments of nationalism, precipitating attendant shifts in collective and personal identity formations. Our case study focuses on constitutive arguments of national identification in the American territory of Puerto Rico in the wake of two distinctly different situational triggers: the death of civilian guard David Sanes Rodriguez by an errant bomb at the U.S. Navy practice range on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques in April of 1999 and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and the ensuing “war on terrorism.”

Puerto Rico provides a relatively unique venue for the study of constitutive arguments of national identity. As a territory, Puerto Rico both is and is not a part of American national and political culture. A “spoil” of the Spanish-American War of 1898, Puerto Rico evolved from its initial status as military territory to that of

semi self-governing “Commonwealth” in 1952. Yet fifty years “after the U.S. government announced to the United Nations” following the establishment of the Commonwealth “that Puerto Rico had ceased to be a colony” (Caban 19), the “Puerto Rican people and the United States government” still face what Melendez and Melendez have termed “the colonial dilemma” (1). Over the span of its hundred year history as a “neo-colony” (Melendez & Melendez 1), Puerto Rico has struggled to define itself within the tensions of unresolved colonialism, and as Puerto Rico has sought definition of its status so too have Puerto Ricans sought self-definition of their individual and collective identities as Puerto Ricans and, since 1917, U.S. citizens. Within this context, the question of national identity has remained a persistent conundrum for Puerto Ricans. As Juan Manuel Carrion has observed, “All national identities, the world over, have lots of ambiguity; in Puerto Rico, ambiguity seems to be a fundamental feature” (183).

In developing our analysis of changes in the constitutive arguments of national identity in Puerto Rico, we shall first discuss the rhetorical constructedness of “nation” and its attendant national identities before analyzing in sequence the argumentative contestation of national identity in the wake of the Sanes killing in 1999 and again in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

1. Approaches to the study of arguments of national identity in Puerto Rico

We begin with a distinction: constitutive arguments of national identity, when used within a sub-nationstate context, may be read as employing at least two fairly distinct rhetorics of “nationalism”:

- 1. the rhetoric of sovereign nationalism, and*
- 2. the rhetoric of cultural nationalism.*

In what follows, we explicate these rhetorics of nationalism theoretically and by way of illustration apply the distinctions to constitutive arguments of national identity from the first phase of the Vieques case study, prior to September 11, 2001. In doing so, we explicitly recognize the rhetorical constructedness of nationalist appeals, despite the “categorical and fixed” way in which the arguments are advanced, elevating their claims so that they trump “all other sorts of identities, from gender to region, class to political preference, occupation to artistic taste” (Calhoun 314). National appeals are often claimed “as an inheritance rather than a contemporary construct” (Calhoun, 312). A sense of historical precedence, often involving a *mythos* of origin and a sense of familial or ethnic kinship, accentuates the potency of such nationalist appeals. In the case of

Puerto Rico, there is no recognized nationstate history to which contemporary nationalistic arguments can appeal. Nonetheless, there are a multitude of groups which make nationalistic appeals within Puerto Rico (*independentistas*, statehooders, and Commonwealthers), but the nature of those appeals is not consistent. In other words, in Puerto Rico the constructedness of nationalism – and national identity – is immediately evident.

Although the literature on nationalism is filled with various definitional distinctions (see Carrion 163; Kallas 3), we offer the distinction between the *rhetoric of sovereign nationalism* and the *rhetoric of cultural nationalism* as a useful division based on public arguments about nationalism; hence, the distinction focuses on discursive characteristics and argument strategies, that is to say, on the constructedness of the nationalism. This focus is essential for our purposes, for it is from the discursive characteristics, the constructedness of nationalism, that identifications derive and that senses of national identity arise. As Calhoun notes, “The issue is not just whether people are members of one nation or another nation, or whether a particular claimed nation has the right to self-determination, but what it means to be a member of that nation, how it is to be understood, and how it relates to the other identities its members may also claim or be ascribed” (312). The rhetorical component of the “national identity dynamic” (Bloom) is central to the construction and mobilization of national identity, perhaps especially in times of crisis, but it is not always the same dynamic. In the constructions of “nation” and “national identity” at work in the Vieques controversy, we find evidence of the two variants of sub-nationstate nationalism.

The *rhetoric of sovereign nationalism* tends toward the legalistic: it aspires directly for nationstate sovereignty. It is a nationalism that is bound by geo-political borders, and in more advanced forms it can be both a rhetoric of division and revolution as when one state splits from another or it can be a rhetoric of unification as when the nationalities are brought together under the rubric of a single nationstate. The *rhetoric of sovereign nationalism* moves “beyond” cultural nationalism: it “completes” and “perfects” cultural nationalism in seeking to instantiate “the people” of the culture geo-politically in legally recognized and defined sovereignties. Sovereign nationalism links the people to the nation through geo-political statements.

In Puerto Rico there are two radically divergent forms of the rhetoric of sovereign nationalism at play, with a third form playing ambiguously between the two. What

we have in mind are the “nationalizations” of the rhetorics of Puerto Rican status: the *independentistas* seek sovereign nationstate status for Puerto Rico; the statehooders seek sovereign incorporation into the United States Constitutional framework; and the Commonwealthers seek an ambiguous form of “sovereign autonomy” in an “enhanced Commonwealth.” Each variant of the rhetoric of sovereign nationalism has distinct implications for national identity.

The *rhetoric of cultural nationalism* tends toward transcendent appeals for a unitary national “people” through, for instance, construction of a *mythos* of common origin in a repressed historical past, and it is neither focused on issues of sovereignty nor bound by geo-political boundaries. Thus, a rhetoric of cultural nationalism and its corresponding national identity may bind together a homeland and its diaspora. Its concept of “nation” is not a legalistic one. Following Kellas, a “nation” may be understood as “a group of people who feel themselves to be a community bound together by ties of history, culture, and common ancestry” (2). Sovereignty and external recognition are not requirements. For example, in making a scholarly argument in support of the Puerto Rican “nation,” Carrion appeals to cultural nationalism: “A nation can not exist without a collective consciousness. A shared national identity is the basic subjective requirement that permits us to speak of a nation when referring to a given populational aggregate. As quite clearly has been pointed out by Benedict Anderson the nation is an ‘imagined political community’” (159).

The extent to which identification with the Puerto Rican “nation” is internalized by the people determines its rhetorical potential. “National identity,” writes Bloom, “describes that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols - have internalized the symbols of the nation - so that they may act as one psychological group when there is a threat to or the possibility of enhancement of, those symbols of national identity” (52). The process of making that identification is by no means assured; rather, the identification must be situationally *appropriate*, must fulfill needs of the people and provide perceived benefits: “the evocation of a shared group identification can be triggered only be meaningful and real experience. This is... any identification is only made if, in the first place, the dynamics of the situation are such that it is positively, psychologically beneficial for the individual to do so. This point... requires to be bluntly stated lest it be thought that an image or set of symbols can evoke identification simply because they are presented - logically, attractively or otherwise - to an individual. For an identification to be made, the

symbols have to be *appropriate* as a mode of behaviour and attitude for a particular and real experience.” (Bloom, 51-52). They must adequately “encompass the situation,” to paraphrase Burke. In the case of nationalism, specific precipitating events may trigger conditions of appropriateness for different orders of identification with the national symbols and nationalistic arguments constitutive of national identity. It is in conditions of appropriateness that Bloom locates what he terms “the national identity dynamic” (53).

Bloom defines “national identity dynamic” as “the potential for action which resides in a mass which shares the same national identification” (53), drawing heavily upon the psychological theories of George Herbert Mead and Sigmund Freud and others (23). Drawing upon much the same theoretical underpinnings, Kenneth Burke offers a more specifically rhetorical formulation of the interconnections between identification, identity, and collective unification (and division); in “weaving together his dramatized incorporation and adaptation of both Mead’s symbolic interactionism and Freudianism, Burke constitutes a rhetorical understanding of ‘self’ and human identity.... [W]hether conscious or unconscious, identification is constitutive of our construction of ‘self’ and is motivational in our engagement of self in society: through our identifications we construct both our personal and social identities” (Williams 183). Burke writes, “Even when considered close up, the identity of ‘self’ or ‘person’ becomes part of a collective texture involving language, property, family, reputation, social roles, and so on - elements not reducible to the individual” (1973, 265). From within this textile of ambient influences, a person “may *identify* himself” or herself with “some special body more or less clearly defined (family, race, profession, church, social class, nation, etc., of various combinations of these)” (1973, 268). Such a process of identification involves the *internalization* of the “special body” as a fundamental aspect of individual identity: this “merger” in which the two are one yet still necessarily separate is what Burke terms “*consubstantiality*” (1950). And when woven into other Burkean conceptions such as *entelechy*, or the perfectionist principle, internalized categorical claims of identity - such as national identity - may, where situationally appropriate in the perspective of the individual, trump, envelop, or encompass competing constituent elements, or competing identifications, of individual identity. And for Burke, such identification must be understood not only as a preparation for action but indeed as a form of symbolic action itself. Here, in other words, lies the “national identity dynamic” as we understand it: the processes of identification which culminate entelechially in

an encompassing, categorical national identity claim, one which merges, however ephemerally, competing, incipiently fractious identity claims, and thereby facilitates a unity of consciousness, a collective consubstantiality, which in turn allows for mass action.

The situational and rhetorical processes that generate and sustain identity may be understood in terms of “triggers” and “motors”: “triggers, causes of single events at the macro level, and motors, microsystems which continuously maintain stability and conflict” (Scheff 278). Both triggers and motors have rhetorical components, insofar as triggers may function as catalytic events (Darsay) or rhetorical exigencies (Bitzer) while motors may be the frequent referencing of particular ideographs in particular ways (McGee), use of particular slogans, public declarations of identity claims, displays of representational symbols of identification such as national flags (Palczewski and Williams), etc. In what follows, we view the Sanes killing in 1999 and the terrorist attacks in September, 2001, as major triggers which dramatically altered the conditions of appropriateness for certain identity claims, and we treat of recurring ideographs such as “nation,” “patriot,” “traitor,” and “national security,” public declarations of identity such as “I am Puerto Rican” or “I am American,” and displays of representational symbols such as the Puerto Rican flag or the American flag as motors that bind a “people” together and provide tangible proof of their unity or consubstantiality.

2. Constitutive Arguments of National Identity in the Wake of the Sanes Killing

Since the end of World War II, the U.S. military has used a portion of the Puerto Rican island of Vieques as a live-fire training range for naval and air forces and amphibious landings. Although the actual bombing range is relatively small, the majority of the island was purchased from the Puerto Rican government by the U.S. government in the post-war period. Presently, over 9,000 *Viequenses* live on the non-military portion of the island. In April, 1999, an errant bomb struck a watchtower on military land, killing local civilian guard David Sanes Rodriguez, wounding two others, and sparking a tinder-box of Puerto Rican resentment against the U.S. military and, in some cases, the U.S. more generally. Within weeks, hundreds of protesters were camped across the bombing range, offering themselves as “human shields” to prevent further bombing. The standoff lasted over a year, until then-President Clinton and then-Governor Pedro Rossello agreed to the terms of a Presidential Directive issued in December, 1999, which allowed for the forced removal of the protesters in May, 2000. Among the terms

of the Directive, the frequency of military training was reduced by more than half, only inert or “dummy” munitions could be employed, and within three years of the Directive Viequenses would hold a binding vote on whether the Navy could stay after May, 2003, or whether they would have to leave Vieques. The Directive sufficiently altered the argumentative situation that we divide our analysis here into two parts: the rhetoric of cultural nationalism before the Directive and the rhetorics of sovereign nationalism after the Directive.

The pre-Directive period was rife with burgeoning signs of nationalism, from repeated calls for the recognition of the Puerto Rican “nation” to seemingly omnipresent displays of Puerto Rican flags. The Puerto Rican flags were often used in ways directly oppositional to the U.S. flag, such as replacing the U.S. flag at the gates of Camp Garcia (the main military preserve) with a Puerto Rican flag. Puerto Rican “national heroes” ranging from Jennifer Lopez to Ricky Martin to Felix “Tito” Trinidad all wrapped themselves in the Puerto Rican flag, either figuratively, or, in the case of Tito’s boxing trunks in his well-publicized title bout with Oscar de la Hoya, literally. And virtually all of the island’s political leaders took firm rhetorical stances toward stopping the military training, including pro-statehood Governor Rossello’s declaration before a Congressional hearing of “not one more bomb!” A singular political consensus occurred between the three main political parties, a type of consensus heretofore unheard of between parties that stay in perpetual logomachy over status preferences. Moreover, the shared political consensus, a very real part of the shared Puerto Rican experience in the aftermath of the Sanes killing, blended into, or arose from, the burgeoning nationalism to create a strongly felt psychological unity and cultural cohesion.

These identification processes can be seen clearly in the immediate trigger of the Sanes killing and the rhetorical constructions which followed that placed the “nation” of Puerto Rico in opposition to the nationstate of the U.S. and created the situational appropriateness for the internalization of a categorical Puerto Rican national identity. All three parties unified in the protests, calling for an immediate halt to the bombing, and because the appeals used in these arguments were premised on a common cultural history, they allowed for a transcendent merger to occur at the level of being culturally Puerto Rican, regardless of the claims of the duty of “American citizenship” that the Navy and its supporters advanced. In addition, these proclamations of Puerto Rican national unity and national identity permeated public and private discourse formations, an indication we believe of the internalization of the categorical identity claims. Consider the

following excerpts, all taken from letters to the editor of The San Juan Star:

1. "We have our own culture, our own language and we are loyal to Puerto Rico first and foremost" (Lebron).
2. "We are definitely a nation. We are, above all, Puerto Ricans" (Davila).
3. "While all of the other Americans can be labeled as American first, and, say, Buckeyes from Ohio or Hoosiers from Indiana, etc., the representatives of the species of Puerto Rico are all Puerto Ricans that are also of secondary importance, Americans of convenience, for things like passports, but they are universally all first Puerto Ricans, and then Americans" (Tryon).

One commentator, an out-spoken nationalist, concluded from such declarations, "The reality is that Puerto Rico is behaving 'as' a nation, something that only minorities have done before.... Now, sparked by the death of David Sanes in Vieques a year ago, and convened by the call of a dozen religious leaders of all denominations, it is a majority of the people that is behaving as 'nationalist'. Fact" (Garcia Passalacqua, 2000, 30).

The *appropriateness* of these identity claims was re-enforced by an overt *moralizing* of the controversy. Representatives of the Catholic Church declared the bombing to be "immoral," and Church campsites, complete with clergy and alters, were established as part of the "human shield." Columnist Herberto Acosto observed, "The Vieques situation has been impregnated by a dogmatic nationalism that appears to be more a kind of religious dogma. It has come to the point where some religious leaders are claiming that the 'will of God' is behind them" (53). Indeed, San Juan Archbishop Gonzalez Nieves, who earlier had declared the bombing "immoral," wrote to protesters jailed for violating no trespassing regulations on the bombing range: "Christ is with you in jail in a particularly dramatic fashion, exactly as he was before Pontius Pilate, representative of a colonial power that didn't respect the identity of the people" (as quoted in "Navy Takes"). With such moralization, the distinctions drawn between "us" and "them" in identity clashes became far more highly charged, and the *appropriateness* of identity constructions aligned with the forces of moral right became more compelling.

Proclamations of Puerto Rican nationalism exploded in the year following the beginning of the protests. Following the removal of the "human shields" in May, 2000, columnist Susan Soltero asked rhetorically, "How many times have we heard the word 'nationalism' or 'nation' in the last 12 months?" In part answering

her own question, Soltero describes the confluence of issues bearing of the question: "Vieques, civil disobedience for a whole year, constant talk of nationalism, support from some religious groups, media exposure, booming sales of Puerto Rican flags, civil society, endorsement from the other two political parties of [independence party leader] Ruben Barrios and the elevation of the figure of Pedro Albizu Campos as the perfect patriot" (71). The enactment of this cultural nationalism may also be found in diasporic celebrations such as the annual Puerto Rican Day parades held in New York; indeed Albizu Campos, the nationalist leader associated with assassinations and other acts of terrorism in the 1930s and 1950s, was designated as the titular honoree of the 2000 Puerto Rico Day parade in New York City.

As already suggested, this unprecedented Puerto Rican unity was a variant of Burke's slogan, "congregation through segregation;" that is, the Puerto Rican "us" was galvanized in distinction from, and at least implicit opposition to, the United States "them." The stakes in Vieques were thus seen as much larger than the resolution of a military-civilian dispute; rather, Vieques became rhetorically representative of the relations between the powerful other and the colonially victimized Puerto Rico. In the words of Ronald Walker, "Vieques is turning into more than just Vieques. It is becoming a metaphor for the real and imagined flaws in the wider political relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States" (73). Indeed, Vieques became a synecdoche through which Puerto Ricans could experience the historical sweep of colonial oppression and thus discover the appropriateness of unified cultural national identity. In Vieques, the "nation" was literally under attack, and the "patriotic" and psychologically rewarding response was unprecedented unity, or consubstantiality, in the cultural "nation."

At this juncture, two points need to be emphasized: first, the "nationalist surge" which swept Puerto Rico in the months following the Sanes killing was predominantly a surge in the rhetorical of cultural nationalism. This is not to suggest that appeals of sovereign nationalism were not present, nor to suggest that for some the appropriateness of corresponding identity formations did not become compelling. It is to suggest that over-arching rhetoric of cultural nationalism transcended in most instances previous divisions over the issue of sovereign nationalism and facilitated a more unified and cohesive "people" of the Puerto Rican "nationality." The second point is that this period of unification crested late in the early months of 2000, following the issuance of the Directive which slowly pushed the issue of sovereignty back into the nationalist equation

and laid open the fissures of possible division. In a letter to the editor following the largest “Peace for Vieques” march through San Juan in early 2000, Roberto Tellechea, a supporter of Clinton’s Directive, writes, “It is clear that the march protest was much more than a claim for human rights for the people of Vieques. We all played ‘*independentistas*-for-a-day.’ It’s something we all carry within ourselves regardless of political party – a sense of patriotism, a desire to defend our rights as a sovereign country. And it felt good.”

But it also was not an identity that could be sustained because it did not reflect an internalized identity: to play *independistista* is not to be *independentista*. The morning after the unifying party of patriotism the headache of status pounds through the body politic, and the revelers recoil in dismay when they recall with whom they had danced the night before.

The consensus was a veneer, and the Directive had the effect of exposing the seams of status difference within it. Although there could be celebratory unity in an ambiguous Puerto Rican national identity, once cultural nationalism and the cultural national identity it entails (for most embracing dual Puerto Rican and American identities) asserted its limits and diverged from the trajectory of sovereign nationalism and the sovereign national identity it entails, the veneer of consensus worn thin, and the schisms of status differences reappeared. For the *independentistas*, cultural national identity and sovereign national identity merge: they become isomorphic as the culture should be instantiated in a sovereign geopolitical nationstate. For the statehooders, the picture is a bit more complicated. Some envision cultural assimilation into the United States. In the far more predominate view, however, cultural national identity and sovereign national identity diverge; culturally, the national identity is Puerto Rican, but the sovereign national identity is bound-up in U.S. citizenship. For the Commonwealthers, the picture is far murkier; culturally, the national identity is also Puerto Rican, but the sovereign national identity, while linked to U.S. citizenship as well, is tangled in the webs of “sovereign autonomy” and “enhanced Commonwealth.” Depending upon the degree of separation envisioned in such “autonomy” and “enhancement,” the sovereign nationalism of the Commonwealthers ranges widely from similarity to that of statehooders (these Commonwealthers would envision limited autonomy and little enhancement) to similarity with *independentistas* (these Commonwealthers would tend to favor a status of “free association” with the U.S., a status that would first require that Puerto Rico be an independent nationstate). A couple of the Directive’s

implications may be illustrative of its effects. Under its terms, Vieques alone would have voted whether the Navy should leave by May, 2003. By circumscribing the unified "Puerto Rican nation" into geo-political entities, the Directive asserts a primacy of geo-political boundary determinations over transcendent, cultural claims of unitary identity. Vieques no longer functions as a synecdoche for all of Puerto Rico; rather, Vieques is just Vieques. In addition, by affirming the procedural dictates of the nationstate, and in declaring the appropriateness of those procedures, supporters affirmed their U.S. identities, trumping any sovereign implications of their Puerto Rican cultural national identities.

The effects of the Directive on the Puerto Rican "national unity" were more corrosive than explosive. Rossello's replacement as Governor, Sila Calderon of the pro-Commonwealth Popular Democratic Party, campaigned against the Directive primarily on the grounds that the date for the required vote on the retention of the Navy was determined by the Navy itself, and that the ballot would not contain the option of calling for immediate Navy withdrawal. She rejected Rossello's acceptance of the appropriateness of the U.S. procedures. In the immediate afterglow of her narrow gubernatorial victory over Carlos Pesquera of the pro-statehood New Progressive Party, fractured in itself by the issue of the Directive and tainted by a succession of scandals, Calderon declared, "I reaffirm my total faith in the commonwealth. It is a relationship that allows us to conserve what is most important: our Puerto Rican identity" (in Donaldson). And she continued to play-tough on Vieques, calling for immediate cessation of bombing, passing noise-control and other legislation aimed at Navy activities, and filing various lawsuits against the Navy. Under her direction, the Commonwealth sponsored a non-binding referendum in the summer of 2001 in which the residents of Vieques were offered the option of calling for immediate Navy withdrawal, and "almost 70 percent of Vieques residents voted for the Navy to immediately leave the island" (Albertelli and Soledad Calero). Polls of Puerto Ricans from across the island at about the same time showed similar results, if indeed not a bit higher, with "around 80 percent in favor of the Navy leaving Vieques" (McPhaul).

The issue of Vieques had emerged as the litmus test of Puerto Rican identity: to support the protestors (or to be a protestor) was hailed as an act of "patriotism," and its "patriots" were "heroes."; to support the Navy over the protestors was cast as a form of "treason," and its perpetrators "traitors." Between the clearing

of the bombing range of hundreds of protesters in May, 2000, and the tragedies of September, 2001, some 878 protesters were arrested and charged by the U.S. Attorney's Office with trespassing on the Vieques range ("Navy Exercises"). It is commonly accepted on the island that many of the protesters "think of themselves as Puerto Rican patriots and heroes" (McCarroll). Among others, Gov. Calderon is reported to have cast "those who favored the Navy not leaving Vieques as traitors" (Padilla; see also Otero, 2001a). Puerto Rican flags were displayed prominently from homes, offices, cars, shirts, and other sites, including the Statue of Liberty. On the island, symbols of affiliation with the United States, particularly the American flag, were greeted with disdain, revoke, and occasionally violence (see Guzman, Garcia). In a very real social sense, Puerto Ricans were forced to choose between their identities as "Puerto Ricans" and as "Americans." But the ambiguities attendant to Puerto Rican "nation" facilitated complicated and diverse orders of identification in which one could, for instance, be consubstantial both with the Puerto Rican (cultural) "nation" and the American sovereign "nation," comfortable with the political "enhancement" of the former, and unconcerned with potential tensions within those structures of identification. One could be comfortably *Puerto Rican* first and foremost, and *American* in a secondary, often abstract, sense. Even though the seams of status division were apparent, they could still be deferred. Perhaps the view of Radames Tirado, the former New Progressive Party mayor of Vieques, when asked whether he remained a supporter to statehood, was not unusual: "One has to be a Puerto Rican first: when I get to the point where I have to define status, I will think about it, and I will analyze it the best that I can" (2000).

3. Constitutive Arguments of National Identity after September 11, 2001

It is now commonplace to say that "everything changed" on September 11, 2001, and certainly the events triggered changes for the already vulnerable Puerto Rican "national" consensus on Vieques. The point at which one had to consider if not status directly then certainly sovereign national identification had arrived in an unexpected, shocking, and jarring manner. Among the argumentative implications regarding the issue of Vieques, two major shifts emerged quickly. First, the appropriateness conditions for affirmation of Puerto Rican national identity literally exploded: in the broader context of American affirmations of national unity, accompanied by the motors of flags and other patriotic symbols, there was little space left for the vocal assertion of Puerto Rican *national* difference. For instance, in an immediate response to the tragedies, Calderon

called for a telethon to raise funds for the Puerto Rican victims of the tragedy and their families; following immediate criticism, however, the objective was generalized to *all* of the victims (see Otero, 2001b). Similarly, Calderon affirmed Puerto Rico as an “ally” of the U.S. in the war on terrorism. Pedro Padilla responded, “An ally? Hey, an ally is a friendly foreign nation. She could have said our fellow citizens or our brothers and sisters without diminishing her Puerto Ricanness a bit, but she chose a word that depicts us as a separate entity” (2001).

Pressures for “American” unity mounted. Post-September 11, the resources of ambiguity attendant to “nation” and its identity-related terms of “patriot,” “traitor,” and “hero” were immediately constricted: the wave of U.S. nationalism following the terrorist attacks and the subsequent proclamation of the “war on terrorism,” fueled by declarations such as President Bush’s to Congress that “you are either with us or against us,” demanded positive and public declaration of one’s “Americanness.” It was no longer socially – and perhaps psychically – comfortable to be Puerto Rican first and American second. One could still be culturally a “Puerto Rican,” but with regard to “national” identification – or “nationalism” – it was a time to be “American.” Example abound:

1. “... all of us are Americans.... We might love Puerto Rico passionately, but we are also Americans. And American citizens worry about other American citizens. You’ve seen it in New York, in Washington, all over the country. We are committed; we are united” (Tasch Ezratty).
2. “The battle of Vieques is over – buried beneath the ashes of the twin towers in New York.... As the president said in his famous message to Congress last week, you are either with us or against us. There are no alternatives. Anyone questioning his directives is considered an infidel or a traitor” (Vidal).
3. “Whether Puerto Ricans realize it, accept it or not, we are at war. My family came to the United States from Europe when I was 12 years old, and I always felt sort of ambivalent about my identity. Not anymore. The acts of these terrorists have made me realize how unambiguously American I am.... Wake up, Puerto Rico” (Iravedra).
4. “There is no such thing as being Puerto Rican first, American second” (Cordero).

Second, these changes in cultural and national exigence were quickly accompanied by changes in the legal and procedural context of the arguments: many of the terms of the Directive were rescinded, including the stipulation of a

vote by the Viequenses and the firm exit date of May, 2003. These later shifts had the effect of transforming the argument topoi from definitional and value-laden grounds (“justice,” “peace,” “immorality”) to circumstantial grounds, particularly the comparative merits of alternative training grounds. Under the new, post-September 11 rules of the game, the Navy is allowed “to remain in Vieques until the Navy secretary certifies it has found viable alternative training sites” (Llorens Velez). Specifically, the Secretary must “certify the availability of ‘equivalent or superior’ levels of training” at sites other than Vieques (Rivera). As columnist Alex Maldonado phrased it, “It is no longer that the training must stop immediately. Now it is that it should stop ‘as soon as possible’” (2002). And, in large measure, the locus of the public debate shifted to the conditions of such possibility: the focus of protest arguments is now on circumstantial pragmatics rather than identity (see Friedman, 2002).

This is not to imply that the protests have abated. The argumentative re-positioning began almost immediately, with protest leaders both differentiating the type of training conducted at Vieques from the type of war required to defeat worldwide terrorist networks and aggressively “stealing the symbolism” of the attacks in New York and Washington and recasting them in their own struggles, specifically charging the U.S. Navy with 60 years of “terrorism” and casting themselves as victims every bit as much as those in September (see Gerard Delfin, Millan). And, after a moratorium of solidarity with the victims of the terrorist attacks during the only training practices in the fall, the protesters were back in force, if perhaps somewhat diminished numbers, during the training exercises in April, the first conducted in the new year. As the first five protesters of the new round of demonstrations were arrested for trespassing, a reportedly “prostatehood demonstrator carrying an American flag was beaten by an anti-Navy crowd” (“Anti-Navy activists”).

4. Conclusion

Triggered by the Sanes killing Puerto Ricans unified in a rhetoric of cultural nationalism, affirming their cultural national identities as Puerto Ricans. Triggered by the events of and following September 11, Puerto Ricans moved toward unification in the rhetoric of American sovereign nationalism, affirming in many instances their sovereign national identities as “Americans.” Moreover, consistent with the theoretical predictions of Hingstman (2000), the transformation of identity structures following the “trigger” of September 11

seems to have influenced not only the types of arguments now advanced (with greater emphasis on the pragmatic) but also on the assessment of previously “resolved” issues, such as the acceptance, even temporarily, of continued Navy practices on Vieques. Although polling results can be suspect in highly charged political moments, the same Precision Research pollsters that found 80 percent public support for immediate Navy withdrawal from Vieques prior to September, found a substantial drop in October, 2001, “with 49 percent of those polled wanting the Navy to leave compared [to] 39 percent in favor of the Navy remaining,” and a slight reversal in popular opinion by April, when “43.8 percent of Puerto Ricans want the Navy to stay in Vieques, 40.9 percent of those polled want the Navy to leave Vieques, while 15.4% are undecided” (McPhaul).

As the salience of the “war on terrorism” begins to wane in everyday life, as flag-waving displays of national unity subside, as America, at least for the moment, returns toward normalcy (see Weisman), the urgency of the choice between American and Puerto Rican wanes. Indeed, the impetus toward resolution of the ambiguities of Puerto Rican national identity may have exhausted itself in the dramatic identity crises of 1999 and 2001, added on top of several heated status plebiscites, most recently in 1998. On the other hand, as the ambiguities of “nation” and “national identity” grow in proportion to the waning of the salience of American patriotic pressures, the possibilities for new or revived expressions of the Puerto Rican nation, national identity, and patriotism become less constrained. Such are the resources of ambiguity in constitutive arguments of national identity.

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