OPPOSING POWERS AT THE HELM: THE PRODUCTION OF (IM)MOBILITIES OF MARITIME TRANSPORTATION IN VIEQUES, PUERTO RICO

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

At the twenty-year anniversary of the Viequense success in their struggle to kick out the US Navy from controlling and harming their land, residents remain stranded facing issues like dispossession through real-estate speculation affecting the island's most poor, alongside slow clean-up efforts, and deteriorating health outcomes. This thesis uses a mobility justice framework to understand how the afterlives of over 60 years of direct militarized colonial violence continue to repeat through Viequense mobile life. I extend the concept of a mobility regime through a twofold effort of exploring policies and practices surrounding the maritime transportation system, and residents' construction of meaning and representation of their advocacy strategies and desired alternatives. I gathered and analyzed public policies from 1999 until 2022 covering the two decades in which the Maritime Transportation Authority was the main institutional actor responsible for providing the ferry service for the municipal islands. Then, to understand the continued struggle for participation in the decision-making processes, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Vieques and interviewed ten ferry advocates from Vieques during the summer of 2022. I focus on the creation of the Maritime Transportation Authority as an institutional entity in charge of Viequense mobilities, detailing how it was enmeshed in fiscal and political tensions that resulted in extreme im/mobilities to its passengers. By dividing my findings into two chapters, the first discusses how the struggle for ownership over mobilities is a characteristic of the politics of mobility of the ferry service, defined by an unequal power distribution between institutional actors and users, codified by public policies. In the second chapter, I discuss that it is the interrelatedness of the effects of the poor ferry service across the other conditions of colonial neglect in the islands which makes the access barriers so dire and what has historically guided ferry advocacy and visions of governance alternatives. I conclude by arguing that while it is an important demand to ask to be listened to in decision-making, it has also become important for Viequenses to engender a dignified life beyond improvements to the maritime transportation system through solidarity efforts that broadly redress mobility injustices.

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My grandmother Celia (right) and her sister-in-law Selenia (left) on board a ferry to Vieques, likely in the 1940s. Photo taken by my grandfather.

To the memory of my grandparents Tutú and Celia,

whose love for each other, their family, and their home island of Vieques

continues to guide my work, always.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATM	Maritime Transportation Authority
AAFAF	Puerto Rico Fiscal Agency and Financial Advisory Authority
AFI	Authority for the Financing of the Infrastructure of Puerto Rico
ATI	Integrated Transportation Authority
DTOP	Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works
ELA	Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
HMS	HMS Ferries
P3 Act	Puerto Rico Public-Private Partnerships Act of 2009
PRFF	Puerto Rico Fast Ferries
PRHTA	Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority
PROMESA	Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act
PR-PA	Puerto Rico Port Authority
PR-P3	Puerto Rico Public-Private Partnership Authority

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Esa es nuestra carretera". This is our road.

In March 2021, the residents of Puerto Rico's municipal islands were in the midst of protests demanding a *transporte marítimo digno* after an all-too-familiar pattern of events disrupted an essential part of their welfare: their freedom of mobility. Earlier that month, a barge transporting tanker trucks could not disembark after local authorities built an infill ramp with sand, leaving the island's gas stations without fuel. Since there is no hospital in Vieques, passengers made up of mostly elders traveling to medical appointments on the Big Island boarded the ferry without adequate protocols that safeguarded social distancing given the risk of COVID-19, while others remained home indefinitely out of fear of being left stranded given the years of built-up uncertainty at the ticket booth. An expensive contract with a private operator was underway, but residents were still unaware of how their road would change. Activists met with state legislators to reject the contract and demanded a seat at the decision-making table to no avail. After having exhausted all avenues to make their demands clear and their frustrations heard, they plunged into the water.

Figure 1: Protestor on the Vieques terminal holding the municipality's flag, uploaded to Facebook on March 27, 2021. Photo by Jose Mangual.

The island of Vieques in eastern Puerto Rico has been left stranded to face issues such as the increase in real-estate speculation driving dispossession of the island's most poor, alongside slow clean-up efforts, food insecurity, and deteriorating health outcomes since the US Navy's departure in 2003. The afterlives of over sixty years of direct militarized colonial violence continue to repeat throughout Viequense daily life and as I discuss throughout this thesis, their mobilities.[1] This becomes sharpened when considering the colonial state's continuous failure to deliver an essential service to their everyday lives, the maritime transportation system.

The close to 10,000 residents between Vieques and Culebra are the only people in the Puerto Rican islands entirely reliant on a public transit infrastructure. Everything that comes to these islands is through the ferry service. For years, those who live on the islands continuously endure an inefficient maritime transportation system operated by a neglectful colonial state.[2] Vessels are sporadically maintained and run without rest leading to their untimely deterioration, with periods of transportation crises occurring due to a lack of available ferries to sail according to scheduled timetables. This has led to numerous accounts of scarcity on the islands with empty shelves in grocery stores and gasoline shortages, and of families left stranded overnight on terminals because they were not able to board a ferry to return home after traveling to the Big Island.[3] These precarious and uncertain travel conditions only worsened after the impetuous

[1] I use the concept of *mobilities* throughout this thesis in reference to the mobilities paradigm which researches how movement and stasis create social and material realities. The concept of *im/mobilities*, which I draw upon Mimi Sheller's extensive work within the Caribbean, refers to the co-production of mobility for some and immobility for others.

[2] My definition of *colonial state* subscribes to Angeliz Encarnación-Burgos's (2021, p. 32) conceptualization which refers to how Puerto Rican legal and political governance is structured in resemblance to the United States because of the island's non-sovereign status, shaping state functions through changing conditions of subordination imposed by the US.

[3] I use Big Island throughout the thesis to refer to the island of Puerto Rico, a rough translation of how locals call it "la isla grande" or simply "la isla".

move of the ferry terminal from Fajardo to the abandoned Roosevelt Roads Naval Base fifteen miles south which disrupted existing links to the port town. Amidst this neglectful and violent infrastructural landscape, island residents have been im/mobilized with many choosing to not travel at all to avoid facing any irregularities.

The colonial state, through its public corporation the Maritime Transportation Authority, or ATM as it is locally known, has pushed for the privatization of the ferry service as a solution to their own mismanagement. After various efforts over a ten-year period to pass the ferry service to private hands, the procurement process culminated in the 2020 contracting of an Indiana-based company HMS Ferries for a 23-year, $750 million contract. Island residents have not stood idly as the government dismantles their most important infrastructure. For years, Viequenses and Culebrenses have taken to the streets, the terminals, and the water in protest in favor of a *transporte marítimo digno* through claims such as affordable fares, expanded sailing schedules, broadened participation in decision-making processes, and most recently to reject the privatization of their lifeline. The consistent service issues with the maritime transportation service create access barriers for residents who travel out of need creating an avoidable familiarity to its everyday users. Residents have pushed to denounce these problems, catching the attention of the American Civil Liberties Union, the Puerto Rican *Colegio de Abogados,* and others who have published reports detailing how these commonplace issues interfere with their right to freely move, the right to choose one's place of residence, but most importantly the right to stay in the place they call home.

Purpose of the study

While ferry users widely recognize that the ATM's routine yet arbitrary service issues stem from limitations in capacity due to mismanagement and accusations of corrupt behavior

from public officials, this thesis seeks to examine the structural causes by examining the governance of the maritime transportation service. My interest in researching the structural problems surrounding the maritime transportation service began in the Spring of 2021 when my social media was flooded with images and videos of Viequenses in protest after cargo brought over to the island with a barge failed to disembark, leaving the island without gasoline. This sparked further protests that took place in the terminals, outside of the ATM's offices in Puerto Rico's capital San Juan, and in the water. Yet, in the immediate months afterward, the operations of the ferry service still passed on to HMS Ferries under contested terms.

My research took off from the recent privatization of the ferry service and considered the governance of the maritime transportation service as imparted by the ATM through disentangling its politics of mobility in an effort to reveal the deeper impacts of coloniality on infrastructures of mobility in Puerto Rico. My reading of governance is attentive to the fact that the islands of Vieques and Culebra are marked by a history of militarized colonialism, which has created what Mimi Sheller calls a mobility regime that governs who and what can move, when, how, under what conditions, and with what meanings. I extend the concept of a mobility regime through a twofold effort of exploring policies and practices surrounding the maritime transportation system, and residents' construction of meaning and representation of their advocacy strategies and desired alternatives. I intend to contribute to a fuller understanding of how coloniality operates in the organization of power of systems governing transportation following a mobility justice perspective to underscore the consequences of the violence of militarized colonialism in producing im/mobilities.

Using a case study design focusing on the politics of mobility specific to Vieques, I reviewed policy documents such as statutes, plans, reports, and letters by government officials

over a period of twenty years in which the ATM was the central institutional actor governing the mobilities of island residents. I turn to Rocio Zambrana's notion of a *coloniality of debt* to understand that the purpose and origins of the ATM, coinciding with the anti-Navy struggle between 1999 and 2003, emerged out of a contradictory premise of granting the public corporation expanded financial autonomy which only failed to improve the ferry service. Zambrana, who borrows from feminist scholar Verónica Gago, describes that debt "lands" and exacerbates colonialism and coloniality through dispossession, which has been the outcome of the dismantled and dilapidated ferry service through creating im/mobilities among passengers whose welfare depends upon it. In addition to the policy analysis, over the summer of 2022 I traveled to Vieques to meet with ferry advocates to learn about the ferry struggle from their perspective, and to explore the alternatives residents have envisioned to take control over the provision of the maritime transportation service. I organized my research activities by responding to two main questions:

1. How is the coloniality of debt expressed in Puerto Rican transport policies and planning? What are the resulting im/mobility practices?
2. How are municipal island residents' mobility potential (or motility) affected by transportation governance practices?

Organization

In the pages ahead, a literature review in Chapter 2 covering scholarship from critical transportation geography, mobilities studies, and Puerto Rican studies begins to connect how the politics of mobility of ferry-dependency are formed through an uneven distribution of power between institutional actors and everyday users. Then in Chapter 3 follows an overview of Vieques's history attentive to important moments that are interwoven to long-time demands for a

transporte marítimo digno. I discuss my methodology in Chapter 4 and separate my narratives of the politics of mobility surrounding Vieques ferry mobilities into two chapters. Chapter 5 addresses the policy analysis through a chronological narrative that links my various sources, specifically attentive to the ATM's creation and eventual dissolution after the privatization of the service to HMS Ferries in 2020. Then, Chapter 6 narrates the ferry struggle from the perspective of the ten ferry advocates I interviewed, focusing on their strategies to make their claims heard while navigating through various governance and provision alternatives, and transportation motives. I conclude in Chapter 7 by considering the breadth of im/mobilities across Viequense daily life through the metaphor of the constellations of ferry mobilities as speaking to the networked characteristic of the ferry service issues across advocacy strategies and the alternatives engendered throughout.

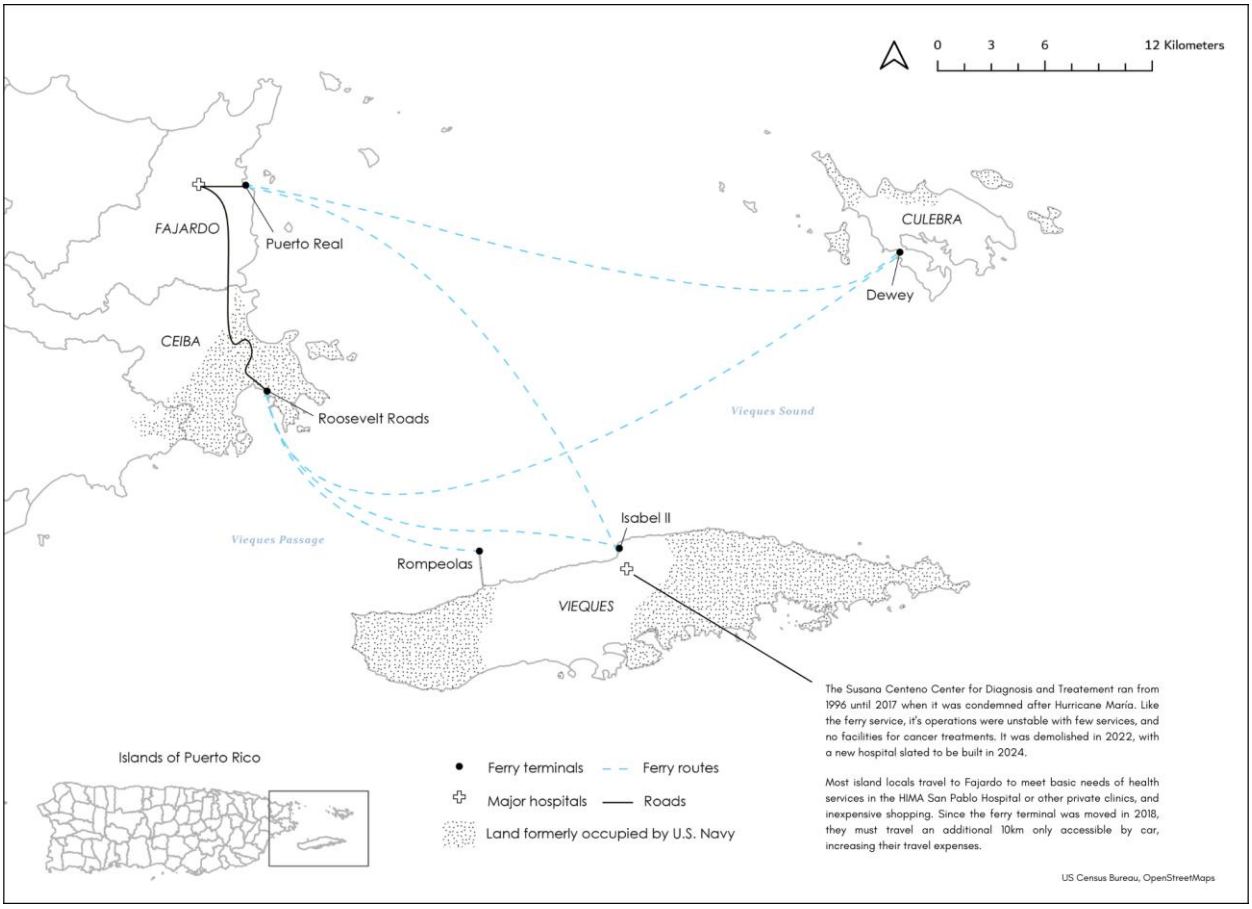


Figure 2: Maritime transportation routes for the municipal island ferry service. Map by author.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As transportation geography turns to questions of power, access, inequalities, and justice, research on urban transport systems in cities of the Global North opaques the lived experiences with transportation in the left-behind geographies of colonial fringes. There is an absence in such work that seeks a fuller understanding of how coloniality[4] shapes and is shaped by infrastructures of mobility. This research project is informed by the recent turn to critical transportation geography where I drew upon a mobility justice framework throughout my efforts. I use mobility justice as a central framework since it seeks to understand the effects of colonialism and coloniality in transportation infrastructures and knowledges, while also centering "recognition, participation, deliberation, and procedural fairness to be up for discussion" of differentially enabled subjects (Sheller, 2018). By focusing on the production of im/mobilities of insular geographies marked by imperial violence, this research seeks to complicate our understanding of the organization of power in the transportation systems of margins like Vieques. My aim is to critically understand how ferry-dependency in Vieques is shaped through a historically constituted politics of mobility that creates an uneven distribution of power between institutional actors and everyday users.

To this aim, in this chapter I engage with various texts across transportation geography, mobilities studies, and Puerto Rican studies to create a conceptual framework that accounts for the interrelatedness between colonialism in Puerto Rico, imperial violence in Vieques, and the

[4] Coloniality, a term developed by Anibal Quijano in the 1990s, identifies that the remnants of power imbalances, exploitation, and marginalization of colonialism are still present in contemporary societies and knowledges, reflecting the ongoing influence of colonial structures and ideologies.

contradictions of the debt crisis in shaping the island's infrastructural landscapes. I begin my review by summarizing recent efforts that attempt to describe decolonial approaches in transportation geography highlighting Wood, Kębłowski, and Tuvikene's (2020) recommended approaches by considering the effects of colonialism and coloniality in the governance of the maritime transportation system of Vieques. Then, I introduce the role of transportation justice activism in the discipline's critical turn to underscore how activist claims connect the provision of transportation to broader goals of social justice. I also highlight the importance of the legal geographies of transportation since it is often where the decision-making of transportation is, and its provision is outlined through statutes and policies.

Previous scholarship on ferry-dependent sites shows how ferries act as a technical object that contributes to a geography of islandness that complicates our understanding of movements and governance. While this work has focused on the cultural and affective dimensions of ferries in creating distinct lifestyles, I seek to extend this through a critical engagement in understanding the politics of mobility by considering the influences of coloniality in shaping governance. I begin by referencing scholarship from the Caribbean which has argued how US imperialism on the region and its territories gave shape to Puerto Rico's contemporary debt crisis. I use Rocío Zambrana's definition of coloniality, in particular her concept of a coloniality of debt to understand the relationship between debt and how the provision of transportation is intimately shaped by neoliberal governance. In using debt as an analytical framework to understand transportation investments in Puerto Rico, I reference work about infrastructures of mobility from the island that identified how the colonial state creates a tension between the intended purpose of these investments and its outcomes of financial extraction does not yield improved mobility to passengers.

Critical geographies of transport: emerging perspectives

Recent years have seen increasing connections between geographies of transport and mobilities, brought together by scholarship that studies transportation and mobility justice through a critical lens. In his first of three reports published in *Progress in Human Geography*, Schwanen (2016) identified that this recent re-engagement was pushed through the mainstreaming of mobilities scholarship and transport's immersion across various disciplinary approaches. While the discipline's shift towards the overlooked transportation geographies of the Global South has been considered "long overdue", a step towards critical engagement entails disengaging from global epistemic and empirical practices (Schwanen, 2018a). A call to work from decolonial frameworks has been one way towards disrupting hegemonic practices within the discipline, challenging the coloniality within transportation knowledge production through epistemological, siting, and conceptual shifts (Schwanen, 2018b). Extending Schwanen's call, Wood, Kębłowski, and Tuvikene's (2020) introduction to a special issue in the *Journal of Transport Geography* goes further in describing how these "three-interrelated, counter-hegemonic shifts" must involve expanding the geographic scope of siting and of epistemologies; challenging technocentric approaches focused on "utility, efficiency, and economic growth"; and through researching informal transport practices. These approaches have not significantly engaged in contexts outside of urban settings in the Global North, with scholarship under the mobilities paradigm filling in these gaps.

Thinking through a mobility justice framework

Since there are important silences in the critical transportation geography literature that engages with the Caribbean region or Puerto Rico, I turn to the scholarship of Mimi Sheller as a

point of departure toward understanding the coloniality in Puerto Rico's transportation geographies as expressed through the maritime transportation system. Sheller's articulation of mobility justice (2018) connects the three crises of urban, migration, and climate as problems arising from the politics and power relations of im/mobilities, expanding upon transportation justice (Verlinghieri & Schwanen, 2020):

> Beyond access to transport, we need to understand the ways in which uneven mobilities produce differentially enabled (or disabled) subjects and differentially enabling (or disabling) spaces. We need a kinopolitical lens on the interdependent production of mobility spaces and (im)mobile subjects. (Sheller, 2018, p. 28).

Sheller expands from thinking of justice through the distributive towards the deliberative, procedural, restorative, and epistemic justice. Her broad approach to theorizing mobility justice is attentive to the colonial histories and historical formations of patterns of global im/mobilities, seeking to repair the creation of unequal spatial conditions and differential subjects:

> We cannot focus on questions of distributive justice alone, or even simply of expanding deliberative or procedural justice, without understanding the more deep-seated workings of neoliberal governances of mobility and the ways in which it orders freedom and unfreedom, centrality and marginality, recognition and expulsion. This is done by exposing the multi-scalar processes of uneven (im)mobilities and the political and social struggles over conflicting mobilities that take place at many different scales. (Sheller, 2018, p. 42).

Sheller's work on the uneven politics of reconstruction after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti speaks to the legacies of coloniality in mobility systems through the concept of motility, "a crucial dimension of unequal power relations across differentially positioned individuals, cities, regions, or nations" (2020, p. 33). Motility, as Hoyer notes "is located in processes of decision-making, but also in the dreaming of, planning for, or fear of mobility" (2016, p. 143). Thus, motility interrogates *what rights to mobility exist and how are they exercised and protected*, and *what capabilities are valued, defended and extended to all involved?* (Sheller, 2020). A consideration of the differentiated provision of mobility as a resource is central in my development of a mobility justice framework in understanding the governance of the maritime transportation system servicing the municipal islands of Vieques and Culebra.

The role of activism in extending mobility justice

Drawing linkages between the uneven power relations within and across the supply of transportation infrastructure has been a major accomplishment of activism. Activists' struggles have contended how the provision of infrastructures of mobility is inherently tied to, and produced through political space (Enright, 2019). In writing about the politics of transit networks, Enright posits that transit as a political object "materializes a particular organization of collective life" (p. 666), condensing social and political ideals. She alludes to how transit justice must also engender the capacity for activists to transform mobility through commoning practices, tied to Sheller's notion of a mobile commons as a pathway towards mobility justice. Moving in the direction of mobility justice through commoning practices is important to this case study. As I discuss in Chapter 6, the proposal of the cooperative model for the governance of the ferry service challenges existing structures of state and/or privately administered transportation

infrastructure, and instead seeks a commoning of the residents' mobile life through collective ownership and management. A framing of infrastructural activism as described by Maharawal (2021) further pushes the notion of transit justice beyond thinking of transportation through the lens of infrastructure by interconnecting the Bay Area's housing crisis and the privatization of public transportation. The interruption of transit through Google bus blockades joined these issues through a critique of the differentiated access to resources the privatization of public transit created.

Activism has played an important role in achieving epistemic justice within mobility justice, pushing transportation scholars to contend with the field's research norms. For instance, The Untokening project, a US-based collective that centers the lived experiences of marginalized communities in addressing mobility justice has called for epistemic justice as arising through the experiences of people of color in informing transportation knowledges. Since it is often in the systems of decision-making in which power over transportation is held, The Untokening recognizes how mobility justice materializes in this scale: "Decision-making processes must meet communities where they are, and embrace full leadership from these communities – not in ratifying or amending pre-ordained ideas but building new ways of interacting and sharing power" (The Untokening, 2016). One important element in achieving epistemic justice within transportation knowledges has been by complicating the notion of accessibility. Lowe, Barajas, and Coren (2023) enhance the notion of lived expertise to make a normative claim of experiences as a form to achieve epistemic justice. The authors draw upon focus group sessions in Chicago from structurally disadvantaged groups to "elevate the data of lived experiences as credible and valuable", finding how participants' lived expertise connected transportation issues to other issues with housing, employment, and education.

The legal geographies of mobility justice

Turning back to Sheller's notion of mobility justice, her questions on *who is connected, who moves, who is displaced, and who benefits* push us to consider the politics of movement as codified in law. As Prytherch (2018a) writes about the recent connections between mobilities approaches to transportation scholarship, "it cannot escape their enduring policy relevance." Policies and legal disputes are an important dimension to understanding the politics of mobility, acting as the institutional scaffolding behind uneven power relations that shape how mobility and transportation are understood and governed (Prytherch, 2018a; Attoh, 2019). Addressing the law is essential in understanding the politics of mobility, especially when considering how to engender alternatives to transportation as part of broader demands for the conditions and capacity to participate in collective life (Attoh, 2019).

The geographies of rurality and ferry-dependency

The multi-scalar mobility justice framework has galvanized transportation scholars to adopt it in their research agendas primarily exploring injustices in urban transportation systems (Verlinghieri & Schwanen, 2020). Although Sheller asserts how processes of urbanization include cities, suburbs *and* rural hinterlands, the latter appears to be neglected in the emergent scholarship under the umbrella of mobility justice. As Michael Bell and Giorgio Osti describe, "the rural has rarely been envisioned as a source of activeness on its own" (Bell & Osti, 2010). The authors define how "mobility is central to the enactment of the rural", detailing the series of movements that take place within, across, and to-from rural settings, which in turn create new and dynamic situations. In the years following Bell and Osti's call for mobilizing the rural, efforts to view the power and politics unique to rural geographies under a mobile ontology have

been few, with Philip Vannini's multi-sited mobile ethnography of ferry travel in British Columbia being a noteworthy exception.

Disentangling the geographies of islandness and ferry mobilities

Ferries are an important infrastructure of mobility for coastal cities and rural or insular areas where there is no access to a bridge. Its differences in capacity, costs, and governance create distinct politics of mobility from ground-based travel modes. Philip Vannini (2011a; 2011b; 2011c) has made significant contributions in interpreting the local experiences and politics of ferry mobilities from his ethnographic work on insular communities on the western Canadian coast. His project follows a non-representational theory approach which he carefully uses throughout his writing in describing the affective dimensions of ferry travel. In his description of what it is like to take a ferry, Vannini creates an account detailing the creative performances involved in the event leading up to a ferry departure:

> Capricious weather, dramatic tides, pesky alarm clocks, strange road rules, unpredictable staff and crew, complex norms, changing vessels and mutating sailing conditions are all material, spatial, and temporal actors playing important roles in the performances of islanders' everyday mobilities. (Vannini, 2011c, p. 1035)

He stresses how the journey to and from the ferry is "rich with social significance", considering how crossing the water is only one part of a larger trip that involves embarking, disembarking, and arriving at the destinations. Vannini turns to Tim Cresswell's notion of a constellation of mobility to account for how the organization of ferry travel speaks to practices, representations, and socio-political dynamics of power (Cresswell, 2010). Vannini describes ferry-dependency as

relationally constituted through simultaneous desires of insulation or the positive feelings of being removed from "hegemonic spatial mobilities", and isolation, the negative feelings from "peripheralization and marginalization" (Vannini, 2011b). He views the ferry as a tool that carves distinct lifestyles through a geography of islandness. In this thesis, I view the geography of islandness and remoteness of Vieques and Culebra as relationally produced through the ferry service through an uneven politics of mobility that leaves differentially enabled/disabled passengers stranded. These ferry mobility constellations also have an affective dimension felt through a differential understanding of accessibility that considers how ferry-dependent communities experience inconveniences through friction, motives, and costs. Frictions are the physical impediments to movement, motives are the reasons to travel and their intensity, and costs include fares and indirect costs such as taxes and meanings given to travel (Vannini, 2011c).

Vannini's work was critical in underscoring how the geographic constraints of ferry-dependent communities create transport challenges and experiences absent in urban settings. Roseman (2019) further complicates traditional notions of (in)accessibility in urban transport systems by focusing on how ferry-dependent communities demonstrate differentiated transport inequalities, emerging as issues of insecure and irregular access to basic services, creating complicated waiting experiences. Her 2019 paper focuses on the "culture of precarity" behind the excessive line-ups to access the ferry, often adding hours to their daily commutes across the water. She links the conditions of ferry dependency to the production of precarious mobilities, where infrastructure insufficiencies reflect and reinforces broader socioeconomic and socio-political inequalities, revealing systemic factors that restrict the delivery of public services.

Another dimension of the ferry commute explored by Royal and Roseman (2021) speaks of the gendered nature of passenger relationships in easing strenuous, multi-modal commutes.

Rectifying the coloniality of mobility-depravations

The contributions to ferry mobilities literature by Vannini, Roseman, and Royal are seminal in introducing the different elements of a ferry mobility constellation for the ferry service in the municipal islands of Vieques and Culebra, but residents' long-time demands for a dignified maritime transportation need critical attention in the organization of power in a context marked by a history of militarized colonialism. Additional research to further understand how coloniality shapes the dynamics of the politics of mobility for ferry-dependent communities is required. To address this gap, I look toward recent mobilities scholarship which has looked at the asymmetric power relations of colonial subjects and settler colonial legal mechanisms. An exception, albeit not in a ferry-dependent community but still a mobility-deprived one, draws considerable connections with the experiences of ferry mobilities of patients in Vieques. Cidro, Bach, and Frohlick's (2020) paper on the indigenous reproductive mobilities of the First Nations women of Cross Lake, Manitoba discusses how they were systematically displaced from their cultural practices of midwifery in situ, being forced instead to assimilate western medicine for birthing that involved perilous prepartum travel to urban areas. This paper underscores how birth evacuation policies and Cross Lake's remoteness pushes pregnant people to become highly mobile with im/mobilizing and violent outcomes. Marie Cruz Soto's (2020) narration of Vieques travel birthing parallels the experiences in Manitoba where the struggle for reproductive justice is an important step toward rectifying colonial and imperial exercises of forced displacements and im/mobilities.

The geographies of debt and infrastructural landscapes in the Caribbean

In this last section, I remit to the literature on the Caribbean to situate debt as an important element in understanding the politics of mobility for the ferry service of the municipal islands of Puerto Rico, as its shifts in the organization of power and provision of service are intimately tied to debt discourses. By recognizing the close relationship between the fiscal crisis and infrastructural landscapes in Puerto Rico, I use debt as an analytical tool to explain how it is constitutive of mobility regimes on the island. I draw upon work from Caribbean scholars who have mapped the forces of US imperialism on the region and beyond its territories in influencing Puerto Rico's debt crisis (Fusté, 2017; Gahman & Thongs, 2021; Negrón-Muntaner, 2018). For example, Sheller emphasizes debt's central role across the region's mobile politics, connecting extraction and exploitation practices to the disproportionate effects of climate "vulnerability" (Sheller, 2021). Although Sheller writes from her work in the post-disaster conditions of Haiti in 2010, the aftermath of the 2017 hurricane season across island nations and territories drew further connections in how debt shapes modern infrastructural landscapes and mobility regimes across the Caribbean. As other scholars have argued, colonial processes created conditions of "neoliberal economic coercion, external military domination and 'disaster capitalism'" (Fusté, 2017; Negrón-Muntaner, 2018; Sheller, 2018; Bonilla, 2020).

Contemporarily, the growth of foreign and US-based investments in heavy industries during the mid-to-late twentieth century underscored the contradictory nature of the Caribbean's "borderless mobilities" of neoliberal financialization that coexisted with restrictions to locals caused by "highly differentiated and controlled mobility regimes" (Sheller, 2021). In Puerto Rico, such contradictions were most acutely felt in the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and Maria in

2017 as the infrastructural collapse produced by "slow violence of colonial and racial governance" revealed how the archipelago was "already in ruins, already prey to vulture, disaster, and imperial capitalism" (Bonilla, 2020). Thus, connecting the historical formations of Puerto Rico's debt accumulation is critical in understanding how mobility regimes come about on the island, and how they are produced through governance shaped by a coloniality of debt.

Debt as an apparatus of capture

Upon the creation of the *Estado Libre Asociado* in 1952, the island's new constitution prioritized the repayment of public debt, making the island a "site of US investment and Puerto Rican debt" (Bonilla, 2020) In describing the US's colonial relationship with Puerto Rico as a "laboratory for the excesses of unfettered capitalism", Ed Morales (2019) begins to define how the debt crisis did not occur in isolation from US imperial motives in the region:

> Following a pattern of indebting or speculating on the debt of several Caribbean island nations, including Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico was established as a place where US corporations could set up shop without being taxed. Because the island had no national sovereignty, it was restricted from making trade pacts with neighbors, unable to develop a national economy that repatriated profits, and forced to go into deep debt in the form of bond issuances that were needed just to maintain operating expenses for governmental agencies and essential services." (Morales, 2019, p. 117).

The contemporary debt crisis in Puerto Rico takes on new forms of financial extraction and goes further through what Rocío Zambrana describes as reinstalling the colonial condition. I follow Rocío Zambrana's articulation of debt as an apparatus of capture which stresses how debt is itself a form of coloniality that produces and reifies race, class, and gender hierarchies (Zambrana,

2021). Zambrana discusses how debt "lands" and exacerbates colonialism and coloniality through dispossession: I seek to extend this by arguing how debt im/mobilizes Viequenses through the privatization of the ferry service through a multi-million-dollar contract that goes against their mobility needs.

The unmet promises of infrastructure development in Puerto Rico

When tracing the origins of the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico, infrastructure investments take a central role in exacerbating the accumulation of public debt as they were financed by public bonds to support foreign industries during the island's industrialization period until the 1960s, and later during the phase-out of section 936 of the US Tax Code in the 1990s. The expansion of infrastructures of im/mobility exists across Puerto Rico's modern debt accumulation, reflecting a complex mobility regime put forth by an ensemble of competing and sometimes contradictory interests (Encarnación Burgos, 2021).

Critical engagements that connect the current fiscal crisis with the development of Puerto Rico's infrastructures of mobility are not clearly present in the literature with Rubén Dávila Santiago's *Crónicas de un confinamiento abierto*[5] (2018) being an important exception. His historic account of automobility in Puerto Rico traces the relationship between road construction in the mid-twentieth century and its unmet promise of economic growth, considering that the road administration became one of the first public corporations to exploit its debt-issuing authority. Dávila Santiago's narration of the rise of automobility in Puerto Rico underscores the contradictions of road development highlighted by infrastructure studies scholars, especially in their capacity to hold "competing and often quite divergent hopes and expectations together" (Harvey & Knox, 2012, p. 522). Dávila Santiago discusses how road development played a

[5] Translated title: Chronicles of an open confinement.

crucial role during Puerto Rico's industrialization between the 1940s through 1960s tracing how automobility, and its associated externalities contradicted and instead trounced the colonial government's goals of economic production:

> Parallel to this development, Puerto Rico lost productivity through expanding road development, highlighting unproductive activities, and at the same time, opening debt as a form to solve increasing consumption without funding sources, leaving the financial market as the only mechanism to refinance the debt. The credit system expanded considerably. (Dávila Santiago, 2018, p. 295).[6]

The recent improvements in urban public transit share similar tensions to early road development, as the Tren Urbano[7] mega-project is widely considered a real-estate development investment project rather than an infrastructure of mobility (Villanueva, Cobián & Rodríguez, 2018). The authors problematize what they call the Criollo bloc or the local capitalist class's role in contributing to the current financial crisis through profit-seeking practices designed to "attract financial investments and tourism revenues from the US; catering to their needs, wants, and racial and class expectations" (p. 1420). They develop the concept of causal spaces to define how publicly funded large-scale projects did not consider the social benefits to the public, instead centered upon the latent benefits of capital futures. Although the paper's focus is the

[6] Dávila Santiago, R. (2018). El geometrismo mórbido del espacio. In Crónicas de un confinamiento abierto (p. 295). Quote excerpt in Spanish: "Paralelo a este desarrollo, el país fue cediendo terreno a nivel de la productividad, ampliando, de forma considerable, los márgenes de la utilización de los recursos para la siembra de asfalto y cemento, acentuando las actividades improductivas y abriendo, cada vez más, la puerta del endeudamiento como forma de solventar un consumo creciente sin fuentes de apoyo, teniendo como mecanismo reproductivo el mercado financiero para refinanciar la deuda. El sistema de crédito se expande considerablemente".

[7] The Tren Urbano or Urban Train is an elevated metro line in Puerto Rico that goes from Bayamón to San Juan crossing Guaynabo whose cost ascended from $1.25 billion to $2.25 billion. Since its inauguration in 2004, it operates at a loss each year and struggles to meet its ridership goals.

development of the Puerto Rico Convention Center District Authority, it does mention how the Tren Urbano is a clear example of this practice as it was created as a monumental structure built for appearance and not functionality, having failed in encouraging modal shifts among San Juan-metropolitan area commuters. Like Dávila Santiago's work, this article also indirectly interacts with existing literature on the neoliberal discourses and the "economic imaginaries of cities" that support transit megaprojects (Olesen, 2020; Siemiatycki, 2006).

The colonial state's use of infrastructures of mobility to extract economic value has not intended to increase economic development nor more just mobilities across the island. I focus on this tension as it has defined the policies and practices for the maritime transportation project with harmful and life-threatening consequences to passengers. In the next chapter, I provide an overview of the contemporary history of Vieques to understand how the politics of mobility of the ferry service interact with long-time demands for better travel conditions and the right to remain.

CHAPTER 3: NAVIGATING ALONG LA ISLA NENA: THE HISTORIC STRUGGLE OVER THE RIGHT TO REMAIN

Introduction

Vieques is a 52-square mile island located ten-miles southeast of the main island of Puerto Rico. Alongside neighboring Culebra to its northeast, it is one of two ferry-dependent municipalities in Puerto Rico. With a population estimate of over 8,255, 48% of families in Vieques live below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The close to 10,000 lives between both islands live at the mercy of a ferry service characterized by delays, sudden cancelations, and irregular ticket sales that come in between residents seeking access to healthcare, affordable groceries, and economic opportunities across the Vieques Passage. The neglected provision of an adequate maritime transportation service through delays or outright trip cancellations contributes to the higher cost of living on the island and creates uncertain travel conditions for residents who struggle to meet their everyday needs.

In order to situate the politics of mobility for the maritime transportation service and the conditions that led to the contested privatization, this chapter summarizes important moments in Vieques's contemporary history that are interwoven to long-time demands for a *transporte marítimo digno.*[8] The sixty-year episode of militarized colonialism and its ongoing aftermath shaped the current mobility regime undergirding the ferry service. In this chapter, I make an effort to disentangle the complexities of the post-Navy struggle in relation to the twenty-year period that the ATM was the primary institutional actor in charge of the governance of the ferry service.

[8] For fuller accounts of the history of Vieques, see Cruz Soto, 2008a; Cruz Soto, 2008b; Ayala and Bolívar, 2011; McCaffrey, 2002; Zenón, 2018.

This chapter is divided into three sections. I begin by providing a brief overview of the militarized occupation of Vieques from 1941 until 2003 to underscore its continuing effects in the present time in the production of im/mobilities. I discuss the two major protest movements that took place between 1978 through 1983 and 1999 through 2003 to understand how this activism shaped the post-Navy struggle. After the Navy's departure, the island began to face challenges from the unmet promises of environmental remediation to the rapid increase of tourism and accompanying dispossession of the island's poor spurred by wealthy white migrant tourists. The post-Navy challenges took on a stronger character over the right to remain with women-led activism broadly following feminist frameworks. Specifically, the struggle for reproductive rights was important in articulating the differential accessibility to the maritime transportation service as a mobility injustice. This situates health justice from the post-Navy period as interconnected to the demands for a dignified maritime transportation service. I conclude with a summary of the existing travel and port conditions as highlighted by a report published in 2020 which denounced the poor provision of transportation as violating island residents' human rights.

Militarized and toxic colonialism: struggles and resistance

Vieques's history is marked by a continuous struggle among its residents to exercise control over the island. Marie Cruz Soto's narration of the imaginings and memory-making of Vieques across five centuries describes how, despite being a colonial fringe, it has been positioned at the center of imperial dramas. Throughout her narrative of the birth of Vieques as a distinct island community, Cruz Soto emphasizes how Vieques's geographic positioning has been considered crucial by imperial powers by means of exercising control of the nautical and through its subordination by the main island of Puerto Rico. The contemporary history of

Vieques and the violent six-decade-long episode of militarized occupation by the US Navy caused the most visceral transformations to the island, turning the sugar plantation-based economy and its wealth landscape into “one big graveyard unable to reproduce anything that was not death” (Cruz Soto, 2008, p. 182).

In the run-up to and during World War II, the US expanded its existing militarized use of the Caribbean by ordering the expropriation of 26,000 acres of Viequense land to expand the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base situated in the eastern town of Ceiba. Through controlling the Vieques Sound, the US Navy originally intended to create a naval station of a similar scale to Pearl Harbor in Hawai’i as a means to exert control and secure the Caribbean region and the Panama Canal. Yet the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 reoriented the Navy back toward the Pacific and altered plans for Roosevelt Roads, dramatically decreasing construction due to the difficulty in securing supplies (McCaffrey, 2006b). Instead, Roosevelt Roads and subsequently the land expropriated in Vieques were used to create a training installation and fuel depot. Following a Congressional order approved by the Puerto Rican state legislature, the expropriated land transformed and divided Vieques into three sections: the western 8,000 acres became the Naval Ammunition Facility, a storage for weapons and explosives; the central one-third of the island squeezed the population into new and existing settlements within and nearby Isabel II; and the eastern 11,900 acres became the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility, divided into the Eastern Maneuver Area and the Live Impact Area. The land use in eastern Vieques experienced the most damaging toxic militarism through training exercises, oftentimes eclipsing permits, that included documented use of “non-conventional” arms like uranium and napalm (Berman Santana, 2002).

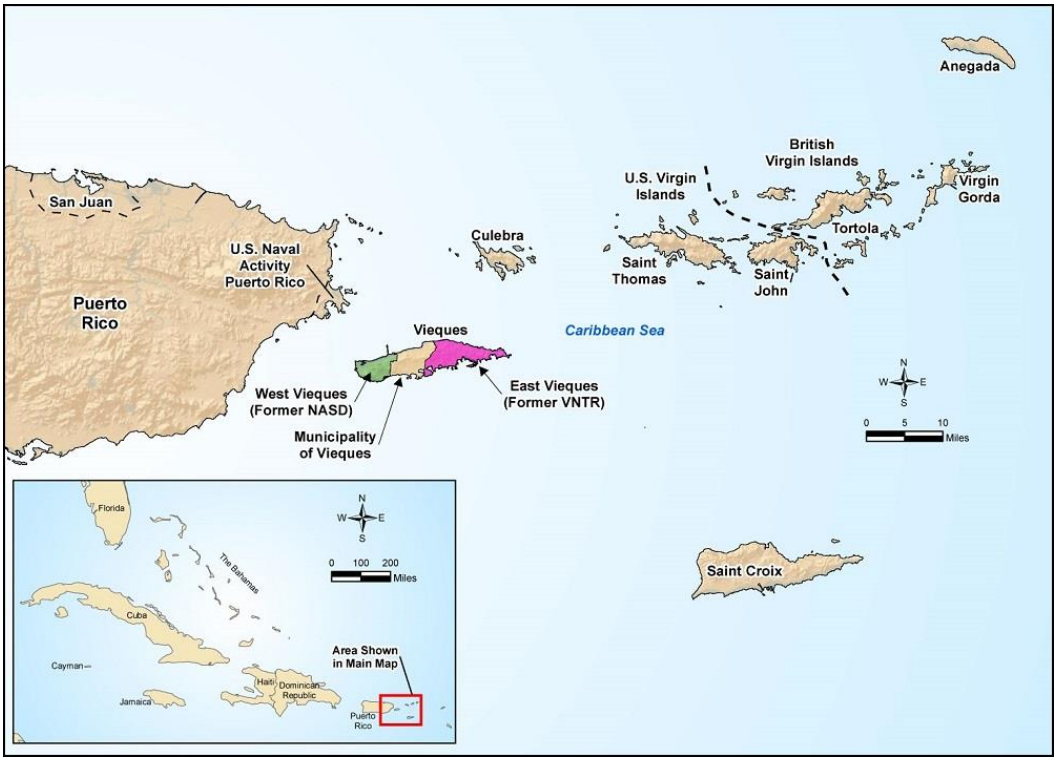


Figure 3: Land uses map Vieques until 2003. Map by the Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command representing the US Navy's formerly controlled land across the Vieques Sound.

While expropriated Viequenses struggled to settle in the remaining center of the island, others chose to migrate to the main island of Puerto Rico, Saint Croix, or to the US. The militarized control of Vieques entailed efforts to constrain the population growth of civilians, with the Department of Defense supporting the full expropriations of the islands in the late 1950s in efforts that later became locally known as "Plan Dracula". This plan supposed the complete removal of island residents and their dead from cemeteries, so as to totally restrict civilian visits to the island (Cruz Soto, 2008; Berman Santana, 2002). Viequenses mobilized against this plan, decisively marking anti-Navy activism in the following years. Meanwhile, the remaining Viequenses living on the island bared the brunt of militarized control through the island's complete environmental degradation of land and marine ecosystems. Among the affected were fishermen's livelihoods who navigated heavily restricted and contaminated waters, and the health

of residents, observed in the rise of cancer diagnoses by the 1980s. Any prospect of economic growth was stifled by the Navy as well, primarily through restricting traffic between Vieques and its surrounding islands, forcing the passenger and cargo maritime transportation service to "shuttle a circuitous 21-mile route across the rough waters of the Vieques Passage to Fajardo", discontinuing previous nautical routes that connected ports in Ceiba or Naguabo to the westernmost point of Vieques.

The first major anti-Navy movement took place between 1978 and 1983 led by *Cruzada Pro Rescate de Vieques* which joined fishermen and other civilians under a generalized claim challenging weapons testing practices on the island. Fishermen in particular led momentary interruptions to maneuver exercises as part of their grievances over the restrictions on the use of fishing areas. These interruptions summoned US Congressional hearings in 1981 that recommended the Navy's departure from the island (McCaffrey, 2006b). Yet the fishermen-led movement failed in recovering land and pushing the Navy out, as the focus on local economic concerns outweighed broader political concerns.

Figure 4: Fishermen-led disruption to US Naval exercises. Photo by Ricardo Alcaraz in 1979, published in Claridad, 2023.

Figure 5: Protests in 2001 in Vieques. Photo published in 80Grados, 2021.

The second movement of anti-Navy protests took off after the accidental death of a Viequense civilian, David Sanes Rodríguez, who worked as a security guard on the base, from the explosion blast of a 500-pound bomb that missed its target. From 1999 until 2003, the struggle became reoriented as a struggle over peace (McCaffrey, 2006b). Shortly after the death of Sanes Rodríguez, non-violent civil disobedience took off through protest camps in the bombing range, once again interrupting military maneuvers. The second wave of protests drew massive support across political and religious division lines, galvanizing both main island Puerto Ricans and the international community calling for the ceasing of bombs and the Navy's departure from Vieques. The civil disobedience succeeded in closing the ammunition depot in 2001, and later the complete ceasing of bombing in the live fire range on May 1st, 2003. Yet the Viequense struggle of exerting autonomy on the island continued to repeat in the immediate post-Navy years as residents reckoned with sixty years of military presence turned into an incomplete departure of the federal government and rapid increase in the tourism industry. The land transfer between the US Navy and the US Fish and Wildlife Service contradicted the demands for decontamination and devolution since the creation of the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge only opened limited access to the public, with the rest remaining off-limits (Baver, 2006b).

During the second movement of anti-Navy protests, Viequense activists worked on addressing the island's post-Navy challenges by advocating for the four D's of "Demilitarization, Decontamination, Devolution or the return of lands, and community-based sustainable Development" (Berman Santana, 2006). The challenges in achieving the four D's have been closely documented in environmental justice literature (Baver, 2006a; Baver, 2006b; Berman Santana, 2006; McCaffrey, 2006a). Viequense efforts to take ownership of their future began

through the development of a comprehensive plan with technical assistance from Puerto Rican planners, scientists, and economists, requested by the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques (CRDV). From this community-based planning effort, the technical advisory group drafted the *Guías para el desarrollo sustentable de Vieques*[9] in 2002, which then prompted the Puerto Rican government's commissioning of the Master Plan for Sustainable Development of Vieques and Culebra in 2004 by a local planning and engineering firm *Estudios Técnicos*. The guides and master plan symbolized some support from the colonial state during the island's post-Navy transition, with a string of statutes and executive orders presented in the following years focusing on the context-sensitive needs for socio-economic development of the municipal islands, such as Law 153 of 2002 to create a special district of economic development in Vieques and Culebra (Solá Sánchez, 2017). As Galanes Valldejuli notes, "the future of Vieques already exists in paper" (2018, p. 125), and one could argue in law.

Although the struggle to remove the Navy was successful in several respects, the "stage two" (Baver, 2006) opened new challenges for island residents in line with the four D's of demilitarization, decontamination, devolution, and development. Even as the guides supported bottom-up, community-based alternatives, most of these initiatives never took off. Instead, as the Navy left, white US, Canadian, and European migrant tourists replaced the military's role in occupying Viequense land as they participated in a "speculation bacchanal" in what was marketed as the last virgin island, creating a shift in the dispossession structure (Galanes Valdejulli, 2018). The island's tourism industry exponentially grew, and most Viequenses were excluded from the wealth generated by the visitor economy.

[9] Translated title: Guides for the Sustainable Development of Vieques.

Post-Navy challenges and the struggle over the right to stay

Figure 6: Sign warning of explosive hazards at a trailhead on the eastern portion of the Vieques Wildlife Refuge. Photo by author, January 2022.

Unmet environmental remediation

With limited community oversight, the decontamination of the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge has been a highly contentious process run principally by federal authorities with little community oversight or participation, or involvement from the local Puerto Rican science community (Baver, 2012; McCaffrey, 2018). The environmental struggle has instead unfolded as a technocratic process that limits participation from stakeholders, "sidestepping the more encompassing issues of community health, lack of land sovereignty, and competing narratives of risk" (McCaffrey, 2018, p. 81). The tensions between community access and control over natural resources have profound implications for remediating both the environment and residents' health. Throughout the anti-Navy struggle, Viequenses demanded the expropriated land be returned to them in the conditions that the Department of Defense found them in. This has been critical in the post-Navy years from the perspective of questions surrounding new developments

on the island's highly limited land use. Who are we developing for has been a guiding query since 2003 considering that environmental remediation supposes a unique challenge in controlling profit-driven tourism-based development. The delay in Vieques's tourism industry boom when compared to other Caribbean islands took off after the Navy's departure with the rise in luxury home buyers and developers interested in purchasing and developing coastal landscapes, with the most extreme example of the *Bravos de Boston* neighborhood just north of the ferry terminal in Isabel II which changed from mostly rescued lots occupied by Viequenses to dominated by new migrant tourists, dramatically increasing property values.

Baver (2012) identified three ongoing and interrelated efforts in Vieques that are connected to what Galanes Valldejuli describes as the struggle for the "right to exist as a distinctive community". Overall, this is a land-based struggle in which Viequenses are marginalized by the privatization of coastal landscapes through the rise in luxury second homes built on historically squatters-based neighborhoods in the limited civilian area, but also the unmet remediation of health consequences of over sixty years of toxic exposure. First, residents have asked for federal compensation as reparations for the harmful health effects of exposure to weapons testing. The outcomes of this effort have been cumbersome. The federal agency in charge of documenting toxicity levels of Vieques, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATDSR), had originally concluded in 2003 that there was no significant evidence linking human illness and contamination, later amending this report in 2009. Secondly, the ongoing clean-up efforts make use of open detonations of remaining explosives and burning of contaminated vegetation, which only continues to expose residents to toxic substances. Residents have lobbied for alternative and safer forms of ammunition removal such as closed detonation chambers, challenging the Naval Facilities Engineering Command's cost-saving priorities.

Finally, the status of the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge comes in between residents' wishes for sustainable development of the island since the majority of Viequense land remains underdeveloped, constraining the development of new and affordable housing for residents.

The right to remain in place as a feminist issue

The post-Navy challenges reaffirmed to Viequenses an important precept: defending the environment and the right to remain in place are inextricably linked. Viequense women in particular have played a protagonist role in the "stage two" of the ongoing struggle by connecting health justice as critical in communitarian issues (Galanes Valldejuli & Vale, 2020). Women have diversified and broadened their activism and initiatives, vastly expanding the community's access to health services through outpatient clinics and fundraising events for cancer patients. Although men were understood to have taken the lead in the initial anti-Navy protests prior to 1999, the organization of the *Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses* (Viequense Women's Alliance) reoriented the struggle in framing health justice as a crucial aspect of the demands for peace (Kadalie, 2009). The *Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses* set forth the foundation for post-Navy activism, putting in motion not only the shift in gender of leadership positions, but also the interweaving of health across other aforementioned issues on the island, but also reproductive rights (Cruz Soto, 2020) and improving the ferry service.

Figure 7: Image taken in May 1999 upon the organization of the *Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses* where women were invited to tie white ribbons in the naval base fence in support of peace efforts for Vieques. Photo published on the Alianza's Facebook page, 2022.

The 1983 closing of the municipal hospital's maternity ward made travel birthing a ubiquitous practice for over twenty years and continues at present. Cruz Soto traces how its closure is attributed to changes in medical knowledges, displacing long-time midwifery practices, and the neoliberalization of medical care increasing costs and prevalence of lawsuits. Makeshift deliveries in transit to hospitals on the main island became prevalent, coming in between mothers' safety and comfort during pregnancy and birth. Viequense women denounced both the inadequacy of travel birthing as an unnecessary practice mothers had to endure, but also connected it as infringing upon the creation of a Viequense identity, as infant birthplaces were recorded in whichever town on the Big Island's medical institution the birth took place in, instead of where the child would be from. The *Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses* pushed forward issues surrounding reproductive rights, succeeding in the expanded services of the municipal hospital by 2002 through the reopening of a maternity ward in Vieques. Travel births still took place as the maternity ward ran under neglectful conditions, only to completely shut down as the municipal hospital was decommissioned after Hurricane María in 2017 and demolished in 2022.

This complex health infrastructural landscape may be what contributes to Vieques's high fertility and low birth rates, as Viequense mothers are found to have later prenatal care, and high rates of fetal deaths (Ramos Gutiérrez, 2021). The Fajardo region, which services most municipal island residents, was found to have the worst maternal and child health status in 2018, only contributing to the "high economic, emotional, and psychological costs just to give birth and cover the basic needs of their children" (Ramos Gutiérrez, 2021). The poor condition of medical services on the Big Island used by Viequenses and Culebrenses only sharpens the production of im/mobilities for patients who are forced to travel to use insufficient services.

Differential accessibility as mobility injustices

Women-led advocacy for health justice and reproductive rights has served as a catalyst in drawing attention to how the poor ferry service creates uneven movements, instead producing im/mobilities based on the differential access to resources and power. I seek to connect the legacy of health and environmental activism in Vieques to ferry advocacy as an important dimension to health justice as the demands for fair access to medical services lie at the heart of calls for a dignified maritime transportation system. I turn to the opinion study by Ana Fabián in 2009 and the Santa Clara Law School 2020 report as a starting point to understand how the politics of mobility of the ferry service are characterized by an uneven power distribution between actors and users creating a struggle over ownership and power of mobilities.

The survey study in 2008 upon a request by ferry advocacy group *Grupo Transmar* documents resident opinions of maritime transportation issues in light of continued issues with the ferry after the Navy's departure and creation of ATM in 2000. The research was done in close collaboration with ferry advocates Edgardo Sánchez, Ibis Cintrón, and Francisco Romero, University of Puerto Rico faculty and students, and local high school students who administered

the surveys. Ferry dependency only increased around the time the survey was administered in parallel with the erosion of public services on the island. Among the main findings of the survey, 78% traveled by ferry to go to the Big Island, but 80% of respondents faced issues with transportation. When asked what ought to be done to solve the continuous transportation problems, close to 30% selected to "fix the boats", followed by 22% that supported a bridge. Less popular options included adding more sailing trips at 15%, the short route at 11%, and removing the government from the management of the service at 8%, with this last one not defining an alternative form of governance.

Colonial neglect through infrastructural abandonment

As I discuss at length in Chapter 5, the ferry service as run by the ATM ran into the same financial and service issues as the preceding Port Authority-run service did. Even though the ferry crises received attention from the media and the Puerto Rican state legislature neither changes nor improvements came about the increased interest. I trace how long-term improvements to the ferry service did not occur due to larger structural issues being handled beyond the scope of resident control. As ferry crises became more frequent, the service issues centered upon the lack of capacity contributed to by the absence of maintenance on the fleets, making delays or cancellations recurrent. The ATM often ran vessels without breaks in between sailings, while also disregarding routine maintenance checks such as oil changes, contributing to the untimely deterioration of the fleet. The Federal Transit Authority, which regulates the maritime transportation service in Puerto Rico, sets the default useful life benchmark (ULB) for ferries at 42 years, while the ATM quickly broke down vessels that were barely 15 years old. (Federal Transit Administration, 2021; Puerto Rico Highways and Transportation Authority, 2020).

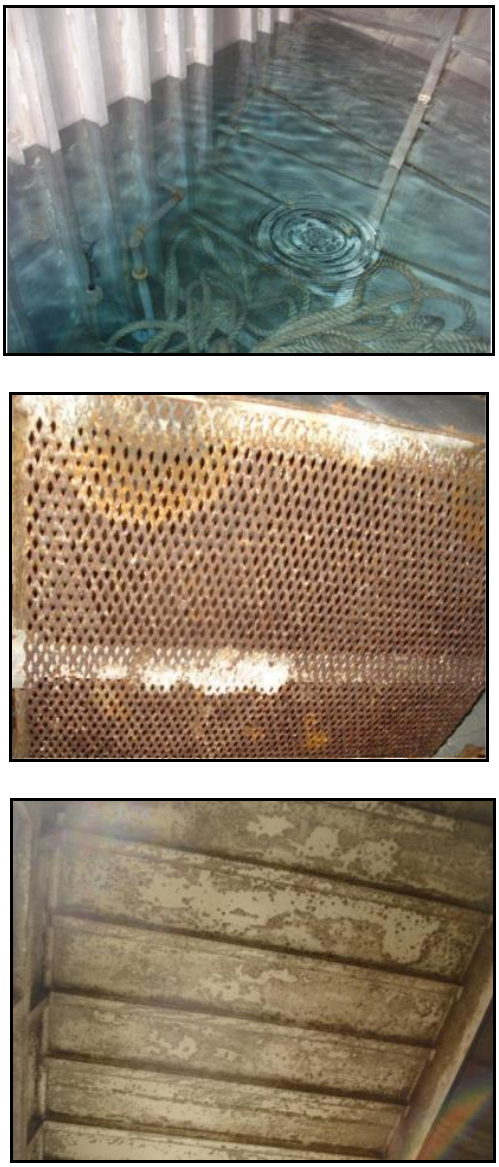


Figure 8: Images of condition survey performed on Culebra II passenger vessel.[10]

[10] In early 2011, the DTOP commissioned a condition survey of its ferry service vessels as part of early efforts to privatize the operations and maintenance of the maritime transportation system. Of the ten vessels surveyed, three were found in bad condition, reinforcing a culture of infrastructural neglect. These images are of passenger vessel Culebra II. On the left, the forepeak tank is full of rainwater. On the center, a rusted air grill. On the right, grime below the staircase in the passenger area. This vessel was eventually disposed by 2021. (Scope of Work Invitation for bid 12-0011C, Appendix C.4 Vessel Culebra II Condition Survey, 2011).

Table 1: ATM rollingstock condition as of 2023 for the island-service fleet

Vessel name	Type	Year built	Vessel age in 2020	Status in 2020	Status as of 2023[11]	Capacity
Cayo Blanco	Passenger	2008	12 yrs	Operational	In Tampa, FL since March 2022	596 pax
Cayo Largo	Passenger/Cargo	2007	13 yrs	Operational	Operational	300 pax
Isleño	Passenger	2003	17 yrs	Operational	In San Juan, PR since September 2022	208 pax and cargo
Santa María	Passenger/Cargo	1989	31 yrs	Out of order	In Roosevelt Roads out of order.	149 pax and cargo
Isla Bonita	Passenger/Cargo	2012	8 yrs	Out of order	Operational	400 pax and cargo
Culebra II	Passenger	1996	24 yrs	To be disposed	Disposed	523 pax
Caribeña	Passenger	2003	17 yrs	To be disposed	In San Juan, PR since November 2021	272 pax
Fajardo II	Passenger	1996	24 yrs	To be disposed	Disposed	272 pax
Vieques II	Passenger	1995	25 yrs	To be disposed	Sank during Hurricane María in 2017	696 pax

Source: Transit Asset Management Plan for the Puerto Rico Maritime Transportation Authority 2020 (p. 19-20)

[11] Vessel updates for 2023 were found in marinetraffic.com.

Figure 9: Cayo Blanco, currently in Tampa, FL under maintenance.[12]

The infrequent maintenance of the fleet responds to the ferry service's politics of mobility shaped through motives of colonial neglect. Since vessels were barely receiving routine maintenance in the local service area in Fajardo, ferries were often taken out of schedule and transported to either the Isla Grande maintenance base in San Juan, the St Thomas subbase in the US Virgin Islands, or Jacksonville, FL for weeks or months at a time, with high-cost contracts that were denounced by locals and the Puerto Rican state legislature on several occasions. Even prior to the hurricanes in 2017 which completely collapsed the service, the ferry service occasionally ran a triangle route between Fajardo, Vieques, and Culebra in moments when there

[12] Cayo Blanco is one of the largest passenger vessels to have serviced the municipal islands, primarily Vieques. It would often be scheduled in the first sailing from Vieques to Fajardo, allowing island residents to secure a seat without concerns about sold-out tickets. It is currently in Tampa, FL under maintenance. Source: Bristol Harbor Group, Inc.

was only one vessel available for both islands since most of the fleet was out of service for maintenance without an estimated date of return.

On top of not maintaining the fleet, the physical conditions of the terminals were also neglected by the ATM and the Port Authority. The recent move to the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base in Ceiba took off after the decommissioning of the Fajardo terminal due to structural damages from Hurricane Maria in 2017 which were considered too costly to address. Many residents have been highly critical of the abrupt process of moving the ferry terminal from Fajardo to Ceiba taking place within a week's notice. The additional fifteen miles by land to reach amenities in Fajardo involve extra time and transport costs to residents who must now budget for less time on the Big Island to do their stops at medical offices or shops, while paying more in gasoline and tolls. While the distance between the Fajardo terminal and amenities in the town was relatively short and somewhat walkable, since the Ceiba terminal is within Roosevelt Roads, the former base barely has adequately paved roads for vehicles, much less paved sidewalks for pedestrians who would still have to walk more than three miles to reach the entrance, only to access a residential neighborhood. Island residents who do not own a private vehicle have also seen increases in their transportation costs with the *público*[13] service since they still continue to rely on Fajardo as a commercial and health service center. There were also issues with the transfer of parking services from Fajardo to Ceiba, where some residents were able to keep the same monthly fee, but new parking users had to pay increased fees, and some are not even able to have access to the monthly fee system with the daily parking rate at $11.25 as of 2022. There are other available parking lots in the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base nearby the airport, but this too involves additional distance from the ferry terminal.

[13] *Públicos* are a special demand transit service of small buses operated by independent drivers, subject to state regulations and varying fares according to how many riders are on board.

Stranded report

The years of poor service, unheard demands, and declining infrastructural conditions were summarized by a report that outlines the consequences of colonial neglect in the ferry service through an international law framework. The International Human Rights Clinic of the Santa Clara Law School published "Stranded: Humans Rights Implications of an Inadequate Transportation System between the Islands of Culebra, Vieques, and Puerto Rico" in 2020 after visits to the islands following periods of unstable ferry conditions and protests calling for the resignation of the ATM's executive director at the time Mara Pérez. The authors of the report interviewed community residents from both islands and hosted forums to gather testimonies that described the five violations of human rights perpetrated by the ATM through its neglectful service. From these testimonies, many of the issues brought up by community members emerged after the 2018 terminal move to Ceiba, while also underscoring how limited capacity and irregular scheduling are the main factors that contribute to the service violating human rights.

1. <u>Violates right to health by impeding access to healthcare and medical services.</u>

   The report begins by describing how the lack of timely access, restricted availability, and adequacy of the maritime transportation system violates the right to access healthcare. The inconsistency of service through delays in sailings or downright cancellations has a two-fold effect on healthcare. First, island residents often are left stranded in the Ceiba terminal as they endure long waiting times to return to their homes, or the changes in schedules make it difficult to plan for an appointment and arrive in time, with residents regularly having to postpone medical attention for weeks or months at a time. Secondly, the inconsistency in scheduling makes it so it is difficult to attain a commuting medical workforce, contributing to medical personnel shortages. The report also documents how

the terminal move from Fajardo to Ceiba adds time and travel costs to residents, in addition to having interrupted existing transportation and service links that were relatively accessible from Fajardo. Finally, it highlights how the ATM appears to violate ADA compliance from its lack of a boarding protocol that considers passengers differentiated ability to move and the inadequate infrastructure conditions at the terminal, such as the unpaved sidewalks connecting the parking lot to the waiting area.

2. Violates the right to work and to pursue economic development.

   Cognizant of the islands' tourism-based economies, the report stresses that there must be a reliable maritime transportation system in order for there to be adequate economic growth, as it is the lifeline to bring goods and tourists to the island. The schedule changes come up again as a barrier, this time to explain how it constrains tourist visits but also island residents who may seek employment on the Big Island but cannot commute given the uncertainty of travel. This section also highlights the logistics issues caused by scheduling problems; the inadequate cargo and delivery system contributes to the islands' increased cost of living since truck drivers coming from the Big Island must travel to Ceiba in advance to purchase a cargo slot which can cost over $200. The limited capacity for cargo to cross the Vieques Sound means the islands frequently face shortages of food, gasoline, and other supplies, making them highly susceptible to food insecurity.

3. Violates right to accessible public education.

   The inconsistency with sailing schedules also comes in the way of students who wish to pursue higher education through commuting to the main island, as they often face long waiting times at the Ceiba terminal to return home. This also affects the prospect of having commuting educators or teachers who wish to move to the municipal islands

given the uncertain travel conditions. The ferry has an impact on students with disabilities who may not receive their full schedule of therapies from special education professionals on the island and instead may have to travel to the main island. Teachers who reside on the municipal islands are also disadvantaged through limited access to professional development opportunities, affecting curriculum and programming for students. Finally, recreational activities such as field trips or sports exchanges are hard to plan since capacity may be limited and the schedules impede knowing when students will come and go.

4. Violates right to freedom of movement and to choose one's residence.

   The report references the right to liberty of movement and freedom according to the international framework it does its legal analysis, but it also references residents' desire to remain on the island as tied to the legacy of the anti-Navy protests.

5. Violates the right to access public transportation without discrimination.

   The report concludes by stating how the government's inadequate response to address the continuous issues with the maritime transportation service constitutes a violation of access to public transportation. From interviews with residents, the report also highlights that there have been experiences of favorable treatment to tourists, placing the demands of the visitor economy above the needs of residents.

With HMS Ferries taking over control of operations of the maritime transportation service in July 2021, it remains to be seen if over time it will reconcile these five violations of human rights through improvements to service. Given efforts on behalf of ferry advocates to remove them from control of the ferry service, HMS Ferries is likely seen as the most recent actor running the mobility regime with little interest in resident welfare. A year passed since they began operations

when I traveled to Vieques, and residents still felt that a *transporte marítimo digno* had not been imparted. In the next chapters, I will discuss my research activities in disentangling the politics of mobility to make sense of the Viequense ferry struggle.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

While recent insights within mobilities studies and critical transportation geography underscore the importance of power and politics in studying movement, access, inequalities, and justice (Verlinghieri and Schwanen, 2020), there has been limited engagement attentive to understanding how coloniality operates in transportation systems and knowledges (Cidell et al, 2021). This thesis research responds to this gap through a qualitative case study design that explores how the organization of power for the maritime transportation system servicing the municipal islands of Puerto Rico produces im/mobilities to its passengers. I draw inspiration from Sukaryavichute & Prytherch's (2018) study on the uneven politics of mobility involved in the planning processes for a bus rapid transit lane in Chicago's Ashland Avenue who used both documentary and interview methods to narrate the differing views about the project. My research activities took place in two parts beginning with a document analysis of policies followed by ethnographic work consisting primarily of interviews with key informants, and informal conversations with Viequenses throughout the summer of 2022. First, to understand the governance practices for the maritime transportation system, I gathered and analyzed public policies from 1999 until 2022 covering the two decades in which the Maritime Transportation Authority was the main institutional actor responsible for providing the ferry service for the municipal islands. Then, in an effort to understand residents' continued struggle for participation in the decision-making processes, I interviewed ten ferry advocates from Vieques during my fieldwork in the summer of 2022. I analyzed interview data using Atlas.ti to create both descriptive and analytic codes in connection to my research questions.

Ethical considerations

The fieldwork portion of this research project received authorization from the University of Illinois' Institutional Review Board. Yet although receiving institutional approval was the only formal barrier between myself as a researcher and informants, my personal connection as the granddaughter of Viequenses whose ties to their birthplace were defined through the San Juan-Fajardo-Vieques land and maritime route involved broadening my ethical considerations through a continuous practice of reflexivity. A priority throughout the research project was to reflect on my position as someone whose relationship to Vieques has been defined, through an extension of my grandparents, by travel for family reasons and that my experiences and frustrations with the maritime transportation system worked as an opening wedge to understand and responsibly represent resident experiences. While I did not arrive at Vieques without prior knowledge about the historic struggle to remain, this was a point of departure to critically understand and listen to ferry advocates' stories of their activism as part of broader and interrelated efforts in *la lucha viequense*.

Although there has been limited research studying transportation issues through its organization of power in Vieques, with the notable exception of Ana Fabián's opinion study in 2009, the anti-Navy struggle and the socioeconomic challenges unfolding after the military's departure have drawn the attention of researchers beyond the Puerto Rican islands. This has been especially critical in the last twenty years of the island's post-Navy stage, where while research activity has been considerably high, the material conditions for island residents have not significantly improved given a complex combination of slow clean-up efforts and a neglectful colonial state. In light of this, Tuck and Yang's (2014) research axioms pointing at *inquiry as invasion* and a practice of refusal have been constructive in my research practice where I have

made an effort to shift my unit of analysis "away from people, and toward the relationships between people and institutions of power." This attempt to "refuse" took place through a careful and purposive sampling of informants. My original efforts for the ethnographic work were to collaborate with a ferry advocate who had been involved in organizing the maritime transportation cooperative and with a faculty member of the University of Puerto Rico to continue these discussions on the island. Yet, once I arrived in June 2022 it was clear that interest in the cooperative had significantly waned with efforts in ferry advocacy centered on auditing or calling for the cancellation of the contract with HMS Ferries. There was a feeling of having lost the ferry struggle. Viequense activists, who participate in various organizations and collectives throughout the island, were focused on addressing other issues such as displacement amidst the exponential increase in short-term rentals, food security, and the just construction of the municipal hospital since they were eclipsed by the ferry struggle. Because of this, I sought to speak with informants who at the time of the fieldwork continued to publicly make claims over the service, considering how ferry advocacy has scaled down since the maritime transportation service's privatization with HMS Ferries in 2021.

Data collection methods

Documentary sources

I sought out primary sources broadly defined as public policies that involved the Maritime Transportation Authority or the ferry service in general. This included documents such as legislative acts, statutes, plans, grant proposals, reports, and letters (appeals, memorandums, and public comments requests). A crucial step in my analysis of these documents was to critically evaluate each source since they were not all equally relevant to constructing a narrative attentive to the complexities of the Maritime Transportation Authority's governance.

Additionally, my focus on documents produced by institutional actors from the Puerto Rican state responds to understanding how the legal geographies of transportation are governed by regulations and statutes rendering the provision of mobility as "inextricable from the legal" (Prytherch, 2018).

Accessing these public policies involved searching far beyond the state's own online records. This became so given that the effects of Puerto Rico's public debt crisis are also present in the government's maintenance of its websites. It is not uncommon to come across outdated clearinghouses, broken links, and missing information; this was the case for the Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works which does not include accessible links to important policy documents such as the Puerto Rico Long Range Transportation Plan. Thus, to create a coherent account of how the decision-making power for the maritime transportation service shifted during the Maritime Transportation Authority's two-decade control of ferry affairs, I sought out various primary sources available online that were either available through the state's websites or through community digital archives I gained access to during the fieldwork.

First, Puerto Rico's Office of Legislative Matters (SUTRA) hosts a clearinghouse of all legislative matters and their reports since 1992; from this website, I created a database of all legislative efforts associated with the Maritime Transportation Authority or with transportation issues for the municipal islands and categorized each legislation. Secondly, I accessed the yearly budgets of the Maritime Transportation Authority between 2000 and 2015 on the Office of Management and Budget's website. After 2015, the Maritime Transportation Authority operated

under the Integrated Transportation Authority in compliance with Law 123 of 2014.[14] Thirdly, the Puerto Rico Comptroller's Office includes access to all contracts involving public agencies; here I sought out contracts signed by the Maritime Transportation Authority, or contracts involving Puerto Rico Fast Ferries and HMS Ferries. Finally, the Public-Private Partnerships Authority website includes documentation for the most recent procurement process that selected HMS Ferries. All other public documents (such as plans, reports, and grant proposals) were made retrieved through community digital archives.

In addition to the public policies, I also used newspaper sources to chronologically situate major events such as crises with the ferries, protests, and other major changes to the service. I accessed articles from Puerto Rican newspapers with island-wide circulation such as *El Nuevo Día*, *Noticel*, *Primera Hora*, and *Caribbean Business* through the University of Illinois library databases. I also accessed the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC) to retrieve historical newspapers from Vieques and eastern Puerto Rico such as *Isla Nena la Voz del Pueblo*, *Página del Este*, *The Vieques Times*, and *El Nuevo Vieques*.

Activists, journalists, and community organizations in Vieques have taken to social media outlets and digital technologies to document and challenge the state's narratives of the service quality of the maritime transportation service. These digital geographies have transformed the strategies and temporalities of ferry advocacy where denouncing issues occur at the speed at which someone can document, comment, react, and publish on Facebook or Twitter. Online materials produced by ferry advocates in this research project were particularly important in their ability to "transforming of epistemological claims to truth" (Prouse, 2018). These digital

[14] Integrated Transportation Authority Act, or "Ley de la Autoridad de Transporte Integrado de Puerto Rico" in Spanish.

practices can be understood as creating new forms of participation in which expressing the hardships of ferry travel does not have to take place at public hearings or through protests.

Increasingly, online materials have drawn the attention of geographers in their use as objects for analysis. Beer and Burrows' (2013) loose typology of online social data describes social media as an online archive of the everyday. While online meta-data is increasingly considered a primary source for research, there are ongoing ethical dilemmas relevant to using social media that center on the privacy of participants, noting how the "awareness of posting things publicly is not the same as consenting with research" (Stommel and Rijk, 2021, p. 277). With this conundrum in mind, my use of social media posts in written materials such as this thesis or articles for the research project was limited to posts by pages or groups and not individuals. I mainly used Facebook to seek out posts, pictures, and live recordings of protests, public hearings, or documentation of irregularities with the service. This exercise was helpful in chronologically situating resident reactions to the decision-making process by the state.

Ethnographic methods

Between June and August 2022, I traveled at least once a week to Vieques to meet with informants, and occasionally stayed on the island with family members. Since my trips in general began in an opposite direction from that which a resident would travel in, my observations at the ferry terminals and on board constitute a limited perspective of how a municipal island resident experiences travel. With HMS Ferries fully working the service during my travels, I was keen to notice any of the issues residents spoke of while in transit. For example, while talking with an activist one afternoon, our conversation was interrupted by a phone call from her son who was almost held back from boarding the ferry on the way to Vieques. He said that the terminal was unusually policed that afternoon with local and state police present, and even federal agents from

the Drug Enforcement Administration. These stories of arbitrary service changes in the terminal were common in my informal conversations with Viequenses. Their anxieties became my own. While traveling to Vieques, I worried about having enough time to find parking, walk the roughly 500 meters or wait for the shuttle, and purchase a ticket to get on the boat, or of any random change that would come in between my travels to and from the islands.

I traveled at different times to observe passenger profiles to holistically understand the day-to-day operations of the ferry service and gain a cursory survey of trip purposes by date, time, and point of departure. Guiding questions for the participant observations include: what are passengers carrying? How soon did they arrive at the terminal before the scheduled departure time? How are the employees treating passengers? Did the vessel depart on time?

I recruited interview participants using both purposive sampling and the snowball sampling method, in which previously identified key informants recognized as ferry advocates identified other ferry advocates who fit the criteria to participate. The only selection criterion in place was for participants to be 18 years and above and to currently reside on the island of Vieques. My definition of a ferry advocate points toward someone who has played an active role either as an activist, as an elected official, or as a community member and has publicly made claims proposing changes to the ferry service. This meant including non-Viequenses among informants, since white residents on the island have increasingly advocated for improved maritime transportation service. Informants were offered compensation for their participation in the research study. I interviewed a total of twelve informants for this research project between February 2022 and September 2022. Nine informants were full-time Vieques residents with three being non-Viequenses. These interviews took place in Vieques between June and August 2022. One informant is a Viequense who resides in Ceiba, and our interview took place over Zoom in

August 2022. My interest in learning about the community's efforts to create a maritime transportation cooperative led me to also interview two professors from the University of Puerto Rico who had been involved on separate occasions with efforts to create the maritime transportation cooperative steering committee.

Through the semi-structured interviews, I sought to explore residents' opinions and identify their broader views on how the governance of the ferry service affected their mobility. Examples of interview questions include:

- How often do you travel via ferry to the main island?
- What are your typical trip purposes to the main island?
- Are you ever discouraged from taking the ferry to the main island?
- What has changed ever since HMS Ferries began its service?
- Have residents ever participated in the decision-making processes? If so, how?
- How might the ferry service run if residents participate in the decision-making?
- Is there anyone benefiting from the poor ferry service?

Examples of the interview questions asked for the University of Puerto Rico professionals are:

- How did you become involved with the Vieques community?
- What would a maritime transportation cooperative look like?
- What are the potential challenges to the maritime transportation cooperative?

Analysis

The first part of the research project began by analyzing policy documents to gain an understanding of the organization of power in the politics of mobility for the ferry service. The document analysis allowed for an appreciation of the institutional framework for maritime transportation governance. My analytical review traced the expressions of the coloniality of debt;

this was central in responding to the calls to decenter transportation scholarship. Recognizing the narrow relationship between debt and infrastructural landscapes in Puerto Rico, I examined the materials with a focus on governance and its outcomes for the ferry service. My analysis was attentive to the practices, priorities, and absences within the public policies as shaped by Puerto Rico's complicated fiscal scenario. Through this analysis, I traced how the creation of the Maritime Transportation Authority as an institutional actor in charge of Viequense mobilities was enmeshed in fiscal and political tensions that resulted in extreme im/mobilities to its passengers.

Broadly, the research questions provided a framework for analyzing the interviews. The data analysis of both the documentary sources and the interview data reflexively engaged with Mimi Sheller's *Mobility Justice: The politics of movement in an age of extremes* (2018) and *Island Futures: Caribbean survival in the Anthropocene* (2020), as well as Rocio Zambrana's *Colonial debts: The case of Puerto Rico* (2021) allowing for the emergence of concepts that adequately describe the power and politics of the ferry service, and how this affects its passengers. I began organizing the qualitative data collected by transcribing and translating important excerpts from interviews that were conducted in Spanish. I coded interview data with Atlas.ti software. The analysis entailed coding different levels, beginning with descriptive codes of the interviews through two broad categories of processes and outcomes, and later creating meaningful and theoretically meaningful analytical codes.

Each research question has its own chapter with findings that are interwoven across my data sources to narratively situate the mismatch between the governance of the ferry service as articulated through its policy framework, how the policies were enacted, and how ferry advocates reacted.

CHAPTER 5: OPPOSING POWERS AT THE HELM

Consideramos que la transportación a los residentes de las islas municipio se les debe hacer más llevadera y accesible, ya que solo el hecho de estar separados de la isla grande y tener que viajar constantemente para recibir servicios esenciales, que recibe cualquier residente de Puerto Rico, es sacrificado y oneroso.

We consider that the maritime transportation for the municipal island residents should be more accessible and easygoing, since the fact of being separated from the Big Island and having to travel constantly to receive essential services, which any resident of Puerto Rico receives, is sacrificed and onerous.

—Excerpt from the joint report of the Senate bill that created the Maritime Transportation Authority, passed in January 2000.

Introduction

In this chapter, I respond to my first research question of how is the coloniality of debt expressed in Puerto Rican transport policies and planning. Through answering this question, I seek to explore the ensuing im/mobility practices emerging out of how coloniality operates in the organization of systems of mobility. My analytical review tracing the expressions of the coloniality of debt recognizes the narrow relationship between debt and infrastructural landscapes in Puerto Rico. This chapter is attentive to the practices, priorities, and absences within transportation public policies as shaped by Puerto Rico's complicated fiscal scenario. My focus on policy materials is tied to Prytherch's (2018) framework of the legal geographies in transportation as codifying beliefs and norms about mobility. I trace how the creation of the ATM was enmeshed in fiscal and political tensions that only continued to produce extreme im/mobilities to its passengers. I interweave both documentary and ethnographic data in this section to narratively situate the mismatch between the governance of the ferry service as articulated in public policies, how the policies were enacted, and how locals responded to these changes.

Tracing the mobile politics of the Maritime Transportation Authority (1999-2007)

Origins of the Maritime Transportation Authority

The ferry service for the municipal islands transferred towards public management and ownership in 1967 when the Puerto Rican Port Authority expropriated part of Calderone Lines fleet, and purchased two additional boats, *La Graciosa* passenger vessel, and *Borinquen* ferry. This effort was an initial attempt to address concerns from residents who complained about long, slow trips across the Vieques Sound. The Port Authority adopted a top-down approach in its organization of power leaving residents from the municipal islands nor their mayors represented within its decision-making structure (Fabián, 2009). While the Port Authority took charge of the ownership, management, and purchase of vessels, its service was limited given the Authority's financial constraints, coupled with a sailing schedule structured around the US Navy's control of the Vieques Sound, limiting sailings to twice a day.

Throughout the years in which the Port Authority ran maritime transportation service, its executive directors often suggested fare increases to the ferry service as a means to improve continuing issues. The unstable vessel conditions triggered regular disruptions, in which the Port Authority claimed the $2 one-way fare for adults was insufficient to cover maintenance expenses. During the 1990s, to ameliorate their constrained fiscal situation, the Port Authority executive director José A. Buitrago announced fares would increase for single rides from $2 to $5, and eventually $10 to meet the financial demands of running the ferry service.[15] Locals from Vieques and Culebra rejected this increase as their only means to travel would become unattainable. Led by the advocacy group *Comité Pro Mejor Transportación Marítima de Vieques y Culebra*, they fervently protested the fare increase through a passenger boycott and a civil

[15] I received a transcription of a speech delivered by one of the Comité's leader, Victor Émeric, in 2007 from one of my informants where this episode of the ferry struggle is narrated.

lawsuit against the Port Authority, succeeding with an expanded sailing schedules from two to four trips daily, two new vessels, and $2 fares that remain today.

Isla Nena
LA VOZ DEL PUEBLO

LA SOLUCION A TODOS LOS PROBLEMAS ES EL PUENTE
INFORMACION PAG. 3

ABRIL 1991 — EL PERIODICO GRANDE DE VIEQUES — AÑO II NUM. 12

EXITOSO EL PARO BOICOT A PUERTOS

OTRAS INFORMACIONES EN PAGS. 2, 3, 7 Y 12

El miércoles, 20 de marzo, centenares de viequenses se congregaron en el muelle de Vieques en protesta contra los anunciados aumentos tarifarios en el servicio de lanchas por parte de la Autoridad de los Puertos en las rutas Vieques-Fajardo-Culebra. Esta acción de los viequenses fue resaltando el llamado de el Comité Por Mejor Transportación Marítima de Vieques a boicotear el servicio de transportación marítima durante un día. Dicho comité se ha dado a la tarea de organizar acciones consertadas de puerto contra el mal servicio de lanchas y los proyectados aumentos.

Aunque admitido por líderes del Comité, de que algunos pasajeros y vehículos utilizaron las lanchas ese día, dieron calificaron el paro como un éxito. Según fuentes del Comité, "el primer ferry que salió por la mañana de Vieques hacia Fajardo viajó con un solo vehículo. Y en la lancha de pasajeros apenas el promedio fue de 20 personas por viaje". "Nos parece que apenas viajaron 100 personas en los 4 viajes de pasajeros ese día", afirmó Víctor M. Emeric, portavoz del Comité y este redactor. Otro miembro del Comité, Ismael Guadalupe manifestó "que los centenares de personas que se congregaron en el muelle en respaldo al paro, demuestran el apoyo a la campaña del Comité contra el aumento y el rechazo a las propuestas de la Autoridad de los Puertos".

Según Emeric, lo más difícil fue controlar el movimiento de pasaje y carga Fajardo vía Vieques ya que centenares gente organizada en Fajardo "que pernoctaron a la gente a no moverse en las lanchas". De hecho la mayoría de los que viajaron en la lancha ese día fueron compañeros de la Isla Grande que no sabían lo que pasaba. Al llegar a Vieques se mostraron sorprendidos y nos pedían excusas. Ni carros públicos había para brindarle el servicio de transportación terrestre", añadió Conchoy, "es lamentable que la Autoridad en su ineptitud no advirtieran a estos compatriotas lo que pasaba en Vieques ya que realmente volvieron a pasar un mal día".

Interrogado por este redactor sobre la situación en Culebra el día 20, Emeric afirmó "que realmente hubo una efectiva coordinación con Culebra y la gente se montó en la lancha. Tenemos que admitir que la coordinación no fue la mejor, pero coordinaremos mejor próximas actividades. La integración del pueblo de Culebra en esta campaña es necesaria. Ya actuamos conjuntamente en 1987 cuando fuimos juntos a Fortaleza y a las oficinas centrales de la Autoridad en Isla Grande reclamando nuevas embarcaciones y tuvimos éxito aunque ya actualmente las mismas están deterioradas por la falta de mantenimiento y uso adecuado.

El Comité tiene proyectada una manifestación frente al Capitolio para el miércoles 24 de abril. Según las fuentes del Comité estas son las actividades para el mes de abril. "Con el piquete al Capitolio vamos a llevarle el mensaje a los legisladores. No descartamos la posibilidad de otro boicot de lanchas en el mes de mayo, esto aquí para adelante", concluyeron las fuentes del Comité.

Consigna
Ese aumento criminal
no lo vamos a pagar

Figure 10: Front page of local newspaper reviewing the successful passenger boycott on March 20, 1991. The protester sign reads "We will not pay that criminal price hike".

As the anti-Navy civil disobedience increased in Vieques after the 1999 death of David Sanes Rodriguez, so too did the visibility of the poor ferry service. Main island Puerto Ricans and others traveled to Vieques after a US Navy pilot in practice dropped five bombs, one of which fell a mile from the Isabel II town center. With the increase in passenger traffic, the lack of maintenance on the fleet drew attention as contributing to the island's poor quality of life since the few vessels in service limited the capacity for passengers and cargo to cross the Vieques Sound with ease.

The state legislature of Puerto Rico sought to solve the financial pressures of the ferry service by enacting the Maritime Transportation Authority Act in 1999, passed in 2000. The Senate Bill 1937 determined that a public corporation was the government instrumentality equipped to efficiently administer the maritime transportation service for the municipal islands. The measure received support from municipal island residents, including the Vieques and Culebra mayors, and members of advocacy groups like *Comité Mejor Transportación Marítima*, and *Comité Reclamo Viequense*. In written statements attached to the bill, the Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works (DTOP hereafter) argued that the structure of a public corporation would improve ferry service efficiency, as it would possess greater financial resources and access to transportation expert knowledge that will allow for a "uniform implementation of transport as a whole", without bureaucratizing the provision of the service.[16]

Municipal island residents who offered support to the measure particularly emphasized the promised expanded financial capabilities, stressing that their mobility needs could not be considered a financial burden. At the time Vieques mayor Manuela Santiago stated in a written statement attached to the bill how maritime transportation was an indisputable right for municipal island residents:

> We understand, and the Puerto Rican government has to understand once and for all that the ferry service between Fajardo-Vieques-Culebra is a service that has to be offered to residents of Vieques and Culebra, and therefore it cannot be thought how the Authority will make a profit, instead thinking of how they will offer the service.

[16] PS 1937, 1999, 13th Legislative Assembly, 6th Sess. (PR. 1999). At-length quote in Spanish of the DTOP, found in page 5 of the Joint Report: "La ubicación de la Autoridad bajo la égida del Secretario del Departamento de Transportación y Obras Públicas permitirá que este componente de la transportación se beneficie de la implantación uniforme de planes y medidas en beneficio de la transportación vista como un todo y por componentes. Esta ley permitirá alcanzar estos importantes objetivos, sin burocratizar el proceso…".

> We also have to understand that it is time that the Puerto Rican government does real justice to Vieques and Culebra with our collective transport in a way that we will receive equal treatment as our other Puerto Rican brothers, and that we will not be seen as an economic burden to the government.[17]

As a public corporation, the Maritime Transportation Authority was legally separate from the government of Puerto Rico, granting it autonomy over debts, obligations, contracts, expenses, and funds. It was run by a board of directors comprising the secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Transportation, the Maritime Transportation Authority executive director, the executive director of the Puerto Rico Port Authority, the two mayors of the municipal islands, and one citizen representative nominated by the Puerto Rico governor; of this group, only the two mayors are directly accountable to island residents. The public corporation was organized in the year 2000 with a $15 million budget allocation from the Puerto Rican state legislature to match with other funding sources such as fares and federal grants.

While the Puerto Rican state legislature envisioned the Maritime Transportation Authority as the definitive solution to the decades of grievances by locals, promises of improved service did not go as desired. The public corporation continued to struggle with the same financial limitations as the Port Authority did, and there were no adequate procedures in place

[17] PS 1937, 1999, 13th Legislative Assembly, 6th Sess. (PR. 1999). At-length quote from former Mayor Manuela Santiago in Spanish, found in page 4 of the Joint Report: “Entendemos y el Gobierno de Puerto Rico tiene que entender de una vez y por todas que el servicio de lanchas y "ferrys" entre Fajardo-Vieques-Culebra es un servicio que tiene que brindarse a los residentes de las Islas de Vieques y Culebra y que por ende no se puede pensar en que forma o manera la Autoridad va a generar ganancias, sino en cómo se va a brindar tal servicio.” Pero, también entendemos que ya es hora que el Gobierno de Puerto Rico le haga una verdadera justicia a los pueblos de Vieques y Culebra con nuestra transportación colectiva de manera tal que recibamos un trato igual a los otros hermanos puertorriqueños y que no nos miren como una carga económica más para el Gobierno de Puerto Rico.”

for the maintenance of vessels, which often ran for long hours without rest, causing them to break down and create delays in sailing schedules.

Since the ferry service continued to face the same, decades-long issues, other governance alternatives were proposed in the immediate years after the incorporation of the Maritime Transportation Authority. A proposal for a municipal consortium between Vieques and Culebra administering island ferry service received attention from the *Comité Pro Mejor Transportación Marítima* and was recommended in the Master Plan for Sustainable Development in 2004 created by the Puerto Rican engineering and planning firm *Estudios Técnicos*. The second report to the plan which included specific recommendations cited how "the premise should be that ferry and cargo services to Vieques and Culebra exist fundamentally to satisfy the needs of the islands' population; the service for other users is secondary" (Estudios Técnicos, 2004). It goes on to describe:

> The same logic of focusing the service primarily for Culebrenses and Viequenses suggests that the administrative offices should be in Vieques and Culebra, not in Fajardo. It is desired that service personnel are recruited among residents since they would be more sensible to the needs of users. The current system concentrated in Fajardo follows a bureaucratic structure of administration distanced from the principal service users. The creation of a Municipal Consortium, ascribed to the municipalities of Vieques and Culebra, would represent an improvement in this service so essential to residents of both islands. For the Port Authority, who has an enormous responsibility across all of Puerto

> Rico, Vieques and Culebra are not a priority. For the municipal consortium, the islands would be a priority.[18]

This alternative would eliminate the role of the state government as the intermediary between the decision-making process and the service, yet it was not taken up by the Puerto Rican state legislature.

The unimproved ferry service became one of the immediate unfulfilled promises for Vieques's post-Navy development period after 2003, with rapid changes in the island's economy taking residents by surprise. The dormant tourism industry intensely took off as waves of North Americans and foreigners were drawn to Vieques's "unspoiled" landscape, purchasing inexpensive land in what was considered the "virgin territory of the Caribbean" (Galanes Valdejuli, 2018). The community-based Guides for Sustainable Development were largely ignored by the colonial state, excluding most Viequenses from reaping the wealth created by the new visitor-based economy. While tourism grew quickly, the clean-up efforts did not take off at a similar pace. Environmental remediation proceeded as a highly technocratic effort that excluded residents from overseeing clean-up efforts (McCaffrey, 2018). Viequenses continued to

[18] Estudios Técnicos. (2004). Plan Maestro para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques Parte II: Recomendaciones, p, 66-67. Excerpt in Spanish: "La misma lógica de enfocar el servicio primordialmente en los culebrenses y viequenses sugiere que las oficinas de servicio principales deben estar en Vieques y Culebra; no en Fajardo. Es deseable, además, que el personal de servicio sea reclutado entre los residentes, ya que así serán más sensibles a las necesidades de los usuarios. El sistema actual concentrado en Fajardo conduce a una estructura burocrática de administración distanciada de la clientela principal del servicio. De hecho, la creación del Consorcio Municipal, adscrito a los municipios de Vieques y Culebra, para atender la transportación marítima según estipulado en la Ley Núm. 231 de 26 de agosto de 2004, que enmienda la Ley 1 de enero de 2000 (Ley para establecer la Autoridad de Transporte Marítimo de Puerto Rico) representará una mejoría en este servicio tan esencial para los residentes de ambas islas. Para la Autoridad de Puertos, que tiene enormes responsabilidades a través de todo Puerto Rico, el servicio a Vieques y Culebra no es una prioridad. Para el consorcio municipal propuesto, si lo sería."

struggle to thrive in their own land, intensifying transportation needs for the island's most vulnerable residents.

The Maritime Transportation Authority was criticized for not fulfilling its responsibilities of ensuring a safe and efficient ferry service. By 2007, a ferry advocacy coalition *Grupo comunitario por un buen servicio marítimo*[19] submitted a list of demands to the at-the-time executive director Juan Cirino denouncing the poor service conditions (Fabián, 2009). That same year, the Puerto Rican state legislature sought to investigate the service deficiencies of the Maritime Transportation Authority. Senate Bill 3380 of 2008 revealed how the mayor of the Municipality of Vieques had not been involved in the planning efforts of the ATM, despite being a member of the board of directors. On top of denouncing how the ferry service did not improve with the public corporation, its decision-making structure did not allow for long-time ferry advocates from the *Comité Pro Mejor Transportación Marítima* nor other coalitions to participate given the structure of the board of directors. Once more, it was observed that the public corporation's funding was insufficient to sustain the service operations, with the Senate committee recommending sustained funding for the ports and the adequate maintenance of the fleet, while also suggesting different fare increases to local tourists (visitors from the Big Island) and foreign tourists.

Infrastructural neglect and ongoing ferry crises (2009-2016)

Public-Private Partnerships Act of 2009

The intensification of the Puerto Rican public debt crisis in the mid-2000s came in the way of the execution of public policies concerning the mobility needs of Viequenses. When the Puerto Rican state government's revenues did not meet debt demands and operational expenses,

[19] Name in English: Community Group for an improved maritime service.

a fiscal stabilization plan was introduced in 2008 where cost-cutting measures took place to prevent the public debt from increasing (Meléndez, 2018). Governor Luis Fortuño strongly supported the financialization of public assets and introduced legislation to create the Puerto Rico Public-Private Partnerships Act of 2009 (P3 Act hereafter) which was specifically amenable to "solve" the operational deficits of Puerto Rico's public corporations that obstructed investing in infrastructure development, following neoliberal discourses about the government's fiscal inefficiency of its public corporations:

> The current state of fiscal emergency of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is not tied to its central government. […] Each of its eight main public corporations faces an operational deficit that fluctuates between $20 million and $180 million each. These deficits are the result of weak expenditure control, excessive personnel, and ineffective use of resources.[20]

The act created the Puerto Rico Public-Private Partnership Authority as a new public corporation, led by a board of directors comprising five unelected officials including the executive director of the Puerto Rico Fiscal Agency and Financial Advisory Authority (AAFAF), the secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Treasury, the president of the Puerto Rico Planning Board, and two public interest representatives.

Starting in 2009, the Maritime Transportation Authority entered a period of contradictory investments to facilities given that the service quality continued to be poor due to supposed budget limitations, with its limited funding was oriented towards infrastructure improvements.

[20] Public Private Partnership Act of Puerto Rico. Excerpt in Spanish: "El estado de emergencia fiscal del Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico no se circunscribe al Gobierno Central. […] Actualmente, cada una de las ocho principales corporaciones públicas de Puerto Rico enfrenta un déficit operacional que fluctúa entre $20 millones a $180 millones cada una. Estos déficits operaciones son el resultado de débiles controles de gastos, exceso de empleados, y la utilización inefectiva de sus recursos."

Specifically, ATM introduced investments in renovations for the metro ferry service terminals in Cataño and the purchase of new vessels. The first of five executive directors appointed over the quadrennium by Governor Luis Fortuño lamented the corporation's $8 million deficit while introducing over $77.1 million in investments to port facilities and new vessels.[21] The disparate focus on improvements to the metro ferry service adversely affected municipal island residents who faced continued service disruptions as the ATM failed in providing adequate maintenance to vessels.

The disparity between the million-dollar spending and poor service quality was denounced by municipal island residents who were still being left stranded due to the lack of available vessels, especially after some boats had been taken to drydock after delayed repairs. Between 2011 and 2012, protests took place questioning the strategic dismantling seen as favoring private interests. Protestors believed that the service's intentional vulnerability caused by the vessels' lack of maintenance encouraged privatization, with a public-private partnership set to start in 2012. The protests drew attention to the state legislature which sought to investigate the irregularities in the ATM's fiscal spending. The state legislature presented Chamber Resolution R1991 of 2012, an interpellation to the previous and current executive directors' responsibility in allowing the ferry service to decline:

> This legislative body has to ask questions of rigor, investigate the reasons, procure the documents and testimonial evidence about the people who have been in charge of the administration of the Maritime Transportation Authority to evaluate firsthand where it has failed, and what circumstances have provoked the current crisis for the public

[21] Thurston, L.D. (2009, March 26). Maritime Transportation Authority to invest $77.1 million in 2009. *Caribbean Business.*

transportation system operated by the government of Puerto Rico in the Anegada Passage.[22]

Figure 11: Image circulated in 2011 on social media denouncing the financialization of the ferry service on behalf of ATM.[23]

[22] RC 1991, 2012, 16th Legislative Assembly, 7th Sess. (PR 2012). Excerpt in Spanish of the measure's scope in page 2: "Se tiene que reunir este Cuerpo, y en Comisión Total, hacer las preguntas de rigor, investigar las razones, procurar documentos y evidencia testimonial de las personas que tienen y han tenido a su cargo la administración de la Autoridad de Transporte Marítimo, para poder evaluar de primera mano en donde se ha fallado, y qué circunstancias han provocado la actual crisis en el sistema de transporte público que opera el Gobierno de Puerto Rico en el Pasaje de Anegada."

[23] Figure caption reads: "ATM is adrift (and they do it on purpose). Now they rent private ferries because four of them are damaged. Warning: the government wants to privatize the ferries through creating chaos. The sinister plan to dismantle the system has only one purpose: to hand it over on a silver platter to political doners and speculative businessmen. The ferries are ours. Good service. Zero privatization."

Figure 12: Elder Viequenses protesting in September 2011, picture uploaded to social media by Ricardo Bouyette.[24]

Even though the House of Representatives approved the bill, a final findings report was never presented. Meanwhile, as the municipal islands continued to have problems with the ferry service, the Secretary of the Department of Transportation and Public Works acted above the ATM board of directors in procuring a charter contract with Puerto Rico Fast Ferries (PRFF hereafter). While this would be the first attempt to supplement the ferry service with a private operator, it did not work under the legal structure of a public-private partnership as defined by the P3 Act. Instead, the "emergency" conditions of the ferry service made it so that the Secretary surpassed the powers of the ATM's board of directors in procuring and awarding a charter contract to PRFF. The board of directors, including the few members who are directly accountable to municipal island residents, reported not being informed of this effort. The $20 million contract was paid through the Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority. Since PRFF had only been organized as a limited liability corporation a year prior to receiving a

[24] Signs read: “The sick and disabled have been forgotten”, and “Treating the passenger correctly is not a waste of money.”

government contract, it acted as an intermediary in chartering the boats requested by the government; in other words, it did not own any vessels.[25] The original boat charter ran from 2012 to 2014 and provided three vessels: two crew boats functioning as ferries, and a high-speed passenger ferry.

As the ATM kept residents adrift over the proposed plans to privatize the system, other Puerto Rican state institutions took interest in establishing the short route to efforts to ease the transition for a private operator. While the ATM failed to comply with long-term planning activities given the maritime transportation's absence in the Long-Range Transportation Plans for 2012 and limited review in 2018, decision-making related to the ferry service shifted toward other institutions involved in the redevelopment of the former Roosevelt Roads Naval Base in Ceiba. The Puerto Rico Infrastructure Financing Authority presented a grant proposal in 2014 to the US Department of Transportation requesting funds to initiate a planning project to explore the feasibility of implementing the short route from Ceiba to Vieques, tying the route change to tourism-related projects in the eastern region of Puerto Rico. Debates surrounding the ferry route became a secondary concern amidst broader discussions about real estate development in the naval base. The focus was not on latent benefits to locals, but instead on prospective tourism activities as a primary economic stimulus (Puerto Rico Infrastructure Financing Authority, 2014). The grant was not approved, and efforts to redevelop Roosevelt Roads remain uncertain (Ramos Gutiérrez, 2020).

[25] Ortiz Rivera, J. (2012, March 15). "Controversia por las lanchas privadas". *El Nuevo Día.*

Legally codifying limits to public input and accelerate privatization (2017-2021)

Puerto Rico's fiscal crisis continued to intensify in 2014 as the public debt ascended to $74 billion, out of which a considerable majority was linked to infrastructure investments by public corporations (Meléndez, 2018). Since Puerto Rico is not covered by the U.S. Bankruptcy Code, most of the debt held by public corporations was not eligible for federal court restructuring, largely affecting them since meeting operational costs was unforeseeable. Struggling with fiscal insecurity, the Puerto Rican government continued to narrowly promote public-private partnerships to resolve the incongruence between public corporation debts and operational expenses.

While the paths for the privatization of public assets were instituted in 2014 with the amendments to the P3 Act, they became legally codified into future fiscal plans with the US Congress's enactment of the PROMESA Act in 2016. Established to ensure debt payments to bondholders, the fiscal control board promotes austerity policies primarily in public services.

The amendments made to the P3 Act in 2014 were among the initial efforts put in place to facilitate the privatization of the ferry service by narrowing the organization of decision-making power within a Small-Scale Projects Committee. Section B of Article 8 of the P3 Act designates its five members among representatives from the Puerto Rico's Department of Transportation and Public Works, the Fiscal Agency and Financial Advisory Authority, the Department of Economic Development, the Municipal Affairs Commissioner, and the executive director of the agency involved who had the powers to procure and select a small-scale privatization project without a final vote from the governor. Following this amendment, the ATM issued its first request for qualifications and later published a Desirability and Convenience Study in 2016. This study conducted a cost and benefits analysis and modeled the potential

impacts of ridership changes in reducing sailing schedules or increasing fares, finding that while raising fares to $10 would reduce ridership by half, it would still increase revenues for the service. Additionally, a passenger survey was conducted in early August 2015 concluding that "municipal island residents account for less than one-third of passengers". This passenger profiling was used to justify how downsizing the ferry service through a private operator would not impact overall ridership, despite island residents likely becoming mobility deprived. Their perspectives beyond the passenger counts were not included in this study.

With the new legal framework in place upon the enactment of the PROMESA Act, the P3 Act was further amended to facilitate project developments under the island's new governance structure. The new austerity regime, tied to the damages caused by the hurricanes in 2017, only served to further advance interests to privatize public services. The course of hurricanes Irma and María created an unprecedented degree of destruction on the island, with essential communications, energy, and transportation infrastructures entirely collapsed. The ferry service to the municipal islands was suspended due to the risk of storm surges in the days after the hurricane, leaving island residents stranded for four days (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2017). A vessel sank, the Fajardo Port suffered critical damages, and the municipal hospital in Vieques was condemned and closed, remaining closed until its demolition in June 2022.

While locals were left in the dark with uncertainty over when the ferry service would be re-established to its regular scheduling, the Puerto Rico Public-Private Partnership Authority continued efforts to privatize the ferry service. Backed with the recent amendments by Senate Bill 497 that vastly expanded the Public-Private Partnership Authority's decision-making power as the main stakeholder in privatization projects, the privatization of the ferry service proceeded just short weeks after the hurricanes made landfall. With the new amendments to the P3 Act, a

second draft request for qualifications was issued on October 16, 2017[26], and Desirability and Convenience Study as required by the P3 Act published in April 2018. They continued to use the same passenger survey data from the previous study sampled from the Fajardo Port in 2015 to explain how the ferry serviced predominantly visitors instead of locals. Once again, everyday municipal island passenger input was not taken into consideration for this study.

As other essential services slowly began to be re-established after the hurricanes, the ferry service continued to run in haphazard conditions. In the months after the hurricane, the ATM on occasion only had one vessel to run trips between the three islands, using a triangle route from Fajardo to Vieques to Culebra or vice versa. These unstable infrastructural conditions were used to justify the slow communication from the government about the ongoing changes both in the day-to-day operations and in the broader efforts to privatize the ferry. Despite the Fajardo Port being condemned prior to the hurricanes, ferry trips continued to set sail from there.

The only instance that directly sought to gather public input from passengers took place in the summer of 2018 when the ATM scheduled six public hearings after announcing potential fare increases as part of the efforts to privatize. These meetings took place in compliance with a state statute that requires public hearings in the event of proposed fare increases to a public service. The ATM hired a meeting examiner A2Z Legal Services. Participation among Viequenses in these public hearings was widespread, with many making the effort to deliver comments in meetings outside of Vieques. Yet while the overwhelming majority of deponents expressed opposition to fare increases, the final findings report created by the hearing examiner concluded that the current fare is financially unsustainable as the ATM relies on state subsidy to keep the fares at $2 for everyone, suggesting that the fare increase for non-residents can increase.

[26] I received a digital copy of the Information Request from its author in the summer of 2022 during our interview.

Table 2: Summary of participants in a fare increase public hearings from 2018

Place	Date and time	Participants
Ceiba	July 30, 2018, at 10 am	10 comments, 6 from participants with specific interest in Vieques ferry travel
Fajardo	July 30, 2018, at 2:30 pm	2 comments, one from a Viequense.
Culebra	July 31, 2018, at 11 am	20 comments
Cataño	August 2, 2018, at 10am	4 comments, one from Vieques
Old San Juan	August 2, 2018, at 2 pm	3 comments, one from Vieques
Vieques	August 3, 2018, at 11:30am	31 comments from Vieques residents

Figure 13: A widely attended public hearing on fare increases in Vieques on August 3, 2018. Photo by Kathy Gannett.

Since these public hearings were only a medium in which residents could express comments and not receive answers from the proposed changes to the service, the abrupt terminal change took them by surprise. In September 2018, the ATM suddenly revealed the route would change from Fajardo to Ceiba short days after the announcement. This move only pointed further toward the fact that the government was advancing with the privatization of the ferry service and

residents were not being informed of this. Advocates from *Vieques en Acción* went through the official channels and submitted an Information Request regarding the request for qualifications issued in 2017, copies of the contracts signed with Puerto Rico Fast Ferries in 2018, and the final report from the fare increase public hearings; the relevant authorities never replied.

The apparent lack of interest in responding to the Information Request on behalf of the institutional actors managing the privatization of the ferry service was backed by recent amendments made to the P3 Act in 2017. Article 7 section 13 which concerns mechanisms for citizen participation outlines how citizens can only make comments during the convenience study phase of a project, yet this "participation" would not have active legitimacy to challenge the proposal:

> Evaluation of possible changes to the proposed partnership as a result of public participation and local industry. Said participation can be done informally and only through written comments. When the Authority is in the procurement process as required by this Article, it will publish an announcement in Spanish and English in at least one major newspaper in Puerto Rico, and in Spanish and English online. […] Citizen participation in this process will not confer active legitimacy nor a "part" character with the right to challenge judicially nor administratively the partnership proposal.[27]

With the process to privatize the ferry service, this became evident between 2018 and 2019 when Viequenses protested the continuously worsening conditions of the ferry service along with

[27] Excerpt in Spanish: Evaluación de posibles modificaciones a la Alianza propuesta como resultado de participación ciudadana y de la industria local. Dicha participación podrá hacerse de manera informal y solamente mediante comentarios escritos. Siempre que la Autoridad se encuentre en el proceso del estudio requerido por este Artículo, publicará un aviso al respecto, en español e inglés por lo menos un periódico de circulación general en Puerto Rico, y en español e inglés en la Red de la Internet. […] La participación ciudadana en este proceso no le conferirá legitimación activa ni carácter de "parte" con derecho a impugnar judicial o administrativamente la propuesta de la Alianza."

heightened demands for involvement throughout the procurement process. From these protests, they met with the governor to present their proposals for governance alternatives, but the privatization proposal was “quite advanced”, and residents would only be able to participate once “everything became public”, effectively limiting any local input.[28]

The partnership committee overseeing the privatization process announced it selected HMS Ferries in 2020. Since residents only had access to the contract after the selection process was finalized, they acted through legal mechanisms via memorandums presented to the municipal and state legislatures. Major concerns with the contract focus on which processes will take place to make decisions about schedules and fares, given its unclear policies. Since then, the Viequense municipal legislature has approved three measures involving the HMS Ferries contract, with two requesting its cancellation and one demanding an investigation of the use of federal funds in the acquisition of vessels by the private operator. ATM is notably absent from representing the best interests of locals throughout and after the privatization process. As of 2022 it is no longer a separate public corporation and has been absorbed by the Integrated Transport Authority, leaving island residents to contend with fragmented and bureaucratic governance of their most important infrastructure.

[28] Vega Alicea, Y.A. (2018, October 11). “Hay que adaptarse al cambio”. Periódico El Oriental. https://periodicoeloriental.com/1/noticias/hay-que-adaptarse-al-cambio/

CHAPTER 6: CONSTELLATIONS OF FERRY ADVOCACY AND ALTERNATIVES

El pueblo debería tener algo que ver en la toma de decisiones porque desde afuera tú puedes ver una cosa, tú puedes haber estudiado algo, tú puedes tener una opinión profesional, pero el que usa el servicio día a día, semana a semana, es quien realmente te puede decir qué funciona y qué no.

The people should be involved in decision-making because from the outside you might see one thing, you might have studied something, you might have a professional opinion, but the people who use the service every day, every week, are who can really tell you what works and what doesn't.

—Karla[29], Viequense activist, and supporter of the maritime transportation cooperative

Introduction

As Marie Cruz Soto writes, "the need to be unruly is perhaps the one thing Viequenses can count on" (2020, p. 375). Since the provision of the maritime transportation system closely intersects with the island's welfare, the ferry struggle is an important terrain to develop demands intimately tied to resident well-being. The struggle for a *transporte marítimo digno*, or a dignified maritime transportation shares similar motives to what Cruz Soto calls *la lucha viequense* as island residents have been at the center of voicing claims for an improved ferry service that meets their needs first. In a decision-making context where the opportunities for residents to provide input are scarce, it is not uncommon for changes in the ferry service to be met with public claims challenging them via protests, letters, petitions, and social media posts. In the absence of procedures that allow residents to become informed about proposed changes to the ferry service, and participate in decision-making processes, fragmented ideas of possible alternative forms of governance beyond the failure of extant centralized options have emerged throughout the years.

[29] I use pseudonyms throughout this chapter to protect the identities of informants.

In this second section of findings, I will discuss the governance practices that led to the privatization of the ferry service from the perspective of ferry advocates, focusing on the strategies they engendered to make their claims heard while navigating through different governance and provision alternatives, forms of advocacy, and transportation motives. This section responds to my second research question, how are Vieques residents' mobility potential affected by governance practices that limit their participation? I answer this question by analyzing interview data with ferry advocates from Vieques who have been involved at different times and capacities in the struggle for a dignified maritime transportation system. I specifically sought to explore *who* gets to participate and *how* through making an empirical connection to the concept of motility which interrogates which rights to mobility exist, how are they exercised and protected, and what capabilities are valued, defended, and extended? (Sheller, 2020).

Important to this chapter is Enright's 2019 piece which connects how activist struggles over the provision of transit infrastructures is produced through political space. I also draw upon Vannini's study of the geographies of islandness to extend his use of interpreting local experiences of passengers through the metaphor of *ferry mobility constellations*. Mobility constellations, according to Tim Cresswell, are historical and geographical ways of understanding movement attentive to its meanings, practices, and how they are interrelated (2010). I adapt these elements into a politics of mobility to discuss two relevant to the maritime transportation system for the municipal islands of Puerto Rico: the forms of advocacy amidst the lack of procedures that allow participation, and the emergent alternatives as a response to the poor service.

My aim is to illustrate how the different elements of these constellations are present and to underscore how advocacy and the alternatives are relationally produced. I draw upon interview data from my ethnographic work conducted over the summer of 2022, and archival sources to accompany the stories from ferry advocates. The chapter begins with a brief overview of ferry activism in Vieques, followed by an introduction of the ferry advocates I spoke with. I use pseudonyms to protect the identities of informants. Then, I turn to discuss the strategies used by advocates given the limited procedures for public participation in the maritime transportation decision-making process. Finally, I discuss the four alternatives proposed by residents. I raise a distinction between *governance alternatives* and *provision alternatives*. By governance, I refer to the way in which the power of decision-making is organized concerning the ownership and management of the fleet and terminals. For provision, I refer to the way in which the service is provided.

Background on ferry activism

The geography of islandness of Vieques and Culebra contributes to the reproduction of the islands' colonial relationship funneled by Puerto Rico's colonial state through the port. Prior to the US Navy occupation in the 1940s, Vieques's prospering sugar industry made the island an important port of trade within eastern Puerto Rico. Not until the militaristic control began to take effect did the port create mobility depravations by controlling who and what gets to navigate across the Vieques Sound, at what time, and for what cost. The Navy's land use restrictions to civilians appropriated the natural short route connecting the islands of Puerto Rico and Vieques. This increased the distance to navigate across Vieques Sound with few departures a day since the sailing timetable acquiesced to the Navy's maneuvers exercises in times it was safe for civilian nautical traffic. The chokehold effect this had on Viequenses marked the initial iterations of ferry

activism where the poor service offered by the Puerto Rico Port Authority was characterized as inadequate and insufficient in addressing the imperial control of Vieques.

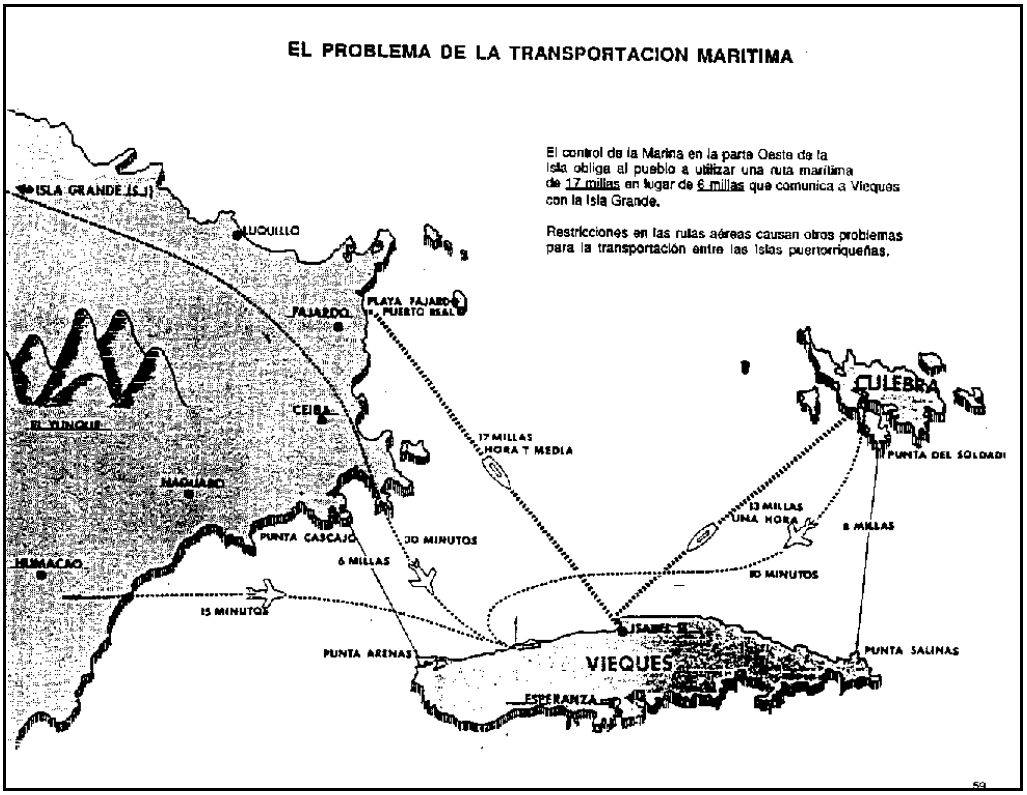


Figure 14: Map created by the Vieques History Club, likely in the 1980s.[30]

By the 1980s, the Puerto Rico Port Authority's only efforts to address resident concerns, who had no forms to participate in the decision-making process, was to continue to purchase vessels to add to the fleet and not consider the broader structural issues that came in between their provision of the service. Instead of addressing activist concerns about the harmful effects the Navy had on maritime transportation, the Port Authority announced fare increases to meet the operational costs of the ferry service. Ferry activism connected the provision of maritime transportation with the welfare of the island and focused on rejecting fare increases and

[30] Title: The maritime transportation problem. Caption: "The Navy's control of the west forces the people to use a 17-mile maritime route in place of a 6-mile route. Restrictions to air routes cause other transportation problems across the islands."

demanding expanded sailing schedules since island residents had extremely limited mobility to travel to the Big Island for their errands. Viequenses protested proposed fare increases and contended that the short route ought to be reinstated tying these demands to anti-Navy sentiments. Later in the 1990s, the Port Authority once again announced intentions to increase fares to meet operational expenses and was met with resistance by the *Comité* who rejected the fare increases through protests, passenger boycotts, and a civil suit against the Port Authority asking for fares paid by residents as compensation for damages associated with their unequal access to transportation when compared to other Puerto Ricans residing on the Big Island. The results of this political action were fares that remain at $2 one-way, and additional scheduled sailings from only twice to four times a day.

Ferry advocacy by the *Comité* took a different character as they became involved in lobbying in favor of the incorporation of the ATM. The creation of the ATM, which coincided with the anti-Navy struggle between 1999 and 2003, briefly placated resident pressures to improve the service once they purchased new vessels and expanded the fleet, but it began to run into the same issues as the Port Authority since the fleet was not adequately maintained for. The *Comité* supported the ATM at first, but the actual service and decision-making structure was severely limited for any resident participation to take place, even when there were at least two members of the board of directors who were directly accountable to island residents. Furthermore, the ATM's tenure as the central institutional actor in providing the maritime transportation service also coincided with the exponential increase in tourism traffic following the US Navy's departure, with residents observing how the service gradually reoriented favoring visitors instead of residents by means of scheduling and irregular ticket sales through corrupt practices that sold tickets to tourists in San Juan for higher costs. As the issues with the ATM

only evolved from those with the Port Authority and added new challenges in between residents receiving adequate maritime transportation, activism by this time shifted with the diversification of coalitions formed across dividing lines of proposed solutions: some supported provision solutions such as the short route or building a bridge, and others supported structural changes in governance through a public-private partnership, the municipalization of the service, and later on a maritime transportation cooperative.

The intersecting post-Navy challenges of environmental remediation, housing affordability, and health articulated the transportation problem as one concerned with the overall welfare of the island. A concise demand for a dignified maritime transportation service became necessary as it continued to come in between the quality of life of residents through producing im/mobilities to everyday passengers, affecting freight travel that increased the cost of goods on the island, and prioritizing tourists through scheduling. Coming together under shared demands became ever more urgent with the incipient threat of privatization with the 2009 creation of the Public-Private Partnership Authority. Upon the ferry service's collapse in 2011 when various vessels were taken out of the schedule for maintenance, ferry activists reorganized into the *Colectivo Somos Más que 100 x 35*, a coalition movement whose name means "Collective we are more than 100 x 35" to refer to how Puerto Rico's problems go beyond the Big Island alluding to the colonial state's neglect toward the maritime transportation service. The division lines among ferry activists were put aside in protests to meet goals within a collective space that allowed for differing opinions to coexist. Still, both experiences with the small-scale privatization of Puerto Rico Fast Ferries in 2012, and the long-term privatization with HMS Ferries in 2021 demonstrate that decision-makers final calls contradicted resident demands and actual needs. As ferry

advocates now demand accountability with HMS Ferries, their calls for broadened participation remain unheard.

Contours of ferry advocacy

This section regards with greater depth the different strategies used by ferry advocates to create a political space of denouncements and possibilities through alternatives discussed ahead. When writing about the informants, I make a distinction between an advocate and an activist, with the former referring to anyone who has made a public claim about the ferry service, and the latter to someone who has taken an active and political approach in demanding changes. During the fieldwork portion of this research project, I interviewed nine ferry advocates/activists who reside in Vieques and one who resides in Ceiba. The intersecting issues across Vieques make ferry advocacy one dimension of various communitarian efforts informants are involved in; they engage in environmental remediation campaigns, health justice efforts, agroecological projects, and efforts to stop the gentrification of the island, to name a few.

A common aphorism among Viequenses is that the ferry is their road: it transports freight with resources like food and gasoline, albeit at a higher cost than in the Big Island, and they are entirely reliant on commuting across the Vieques Sound for most healthcare needs. Elisa, one of the original organizers of the *Colectivo Somos Más que 100 x 35*, stressed how transportation is more of a necessity than a choice: “If our needs were covered maybe a 150-person boat will suffice”. In general, every resident experiences the geography of islandness and its associated inconveniences in travel either directly as users of the poor ferry service or indirectly through its effects in overpriced goods and the lack of medical services on the island. Undoubtedly, the years of arbitrariness and uncertainty characterizing the service quality is an important marker defining ferry advocacy; however, the intensity with which residents experience these issues

creates differences in the interest and involvement in ferry advocacy. It is important to stress that being ferry-dependent in Vieques does not necessarily mean a resident is deprived of mobility.

Throughout this section, I interrogate whether advocacy is a continued legacy of the anti-Navy movements, or if emergent forms of creating denouncements reflect the social changes since the Navy's departure. While most ferry advocates recognized the legacy of the anti-Navy movements in informing ferry activism as a land-based struggle through its framing as a struggle over the right to remain, I find that the demographic changes spurred by the sudden increase in the tourism industry have shifted original concerns over welfare from its political meaning through viewing the poor ferry service through a strictly technocratic lens.

The advocates

It is highly unlikely to meet an island resident who does not have an opinion about the ferry service. The intensity in which residents position themselves as ferry advocates changes throughout time with three of the informants having participated since more than ten years ago, and others becoming more vocal during the recent efforts to privatize with HMS Ferries. For example, Kelly is a white resident of Vieques who moved to the island as the anti-Navy movement took off in 1999 to practice civil disobedience in the bombing range. Since then, she has resided in Vieques operating a guest house, and has been an active community member through different fronts including ferry activism and denouncing the increased dispossession of local Viequenses through real estate speculation. During our interview, she stressed how despite her privileged position with respect to her accessibility to other transport options, she can't escape feelings of fear and uncertainty in light of the challenge of living alone in Vieques owing to the lack of access to healthcare, such as the fact that there is only one ambulance available in the island since the hospital shut down. She contends that the poor provision of the ferry service

goes against Viequenses' rights, tying the im/mobilities produced by transportation to the highly bureaucratic environmental remediation processes with the US Navy. In other words, it is the coalescence of inaccessibility with unmet toxic clean-up that contributes to worsened health outcomes for residents, plus the highly competitive land uses that create what some informants described as an "artificial demand" for island residents' ferry dependency. Yet, even though transportation is regarded as a backbone for the island's prosperity, Kelly and others view that ferry activism turned into an unending struggle that stole away attention from other issues on the island.

This became a theme across informants that, by the time our interview happened, it had been around HMS Ferries' one-year tenure in running the service. Many informants recognized that although ferry activism continued to be an important struggle, it had significantly waned to prioritize the island's other unresolved problems. Since the privatization, advocacy scaled down and activists are focusing on creating conditions within Vieques aligned with the right to remain. This was the case for Elisa, a Viequense middle school teacher and former member of the municipal legislature who had been one of the original organizers of the *Colectivo Somos Más que 100 x 35*. While she has taken a step back from ferry activism, her involvement in an agroecological project still intersects with ferry problems by addressing Vieques's food security in promoting food sovereignty with the goal of reducing dependency on the ferries for resources. She recognized how taxing organizing a political movement was and cited this as one of the reasons for reorienting her activism to other projects she considered feasible in undertaking. For example, Elisa shared how frustrating it would be to participate in public hearings where she nor others would be allowed to challenge ATM bureaucrats' contradicting accounts of the service quality.

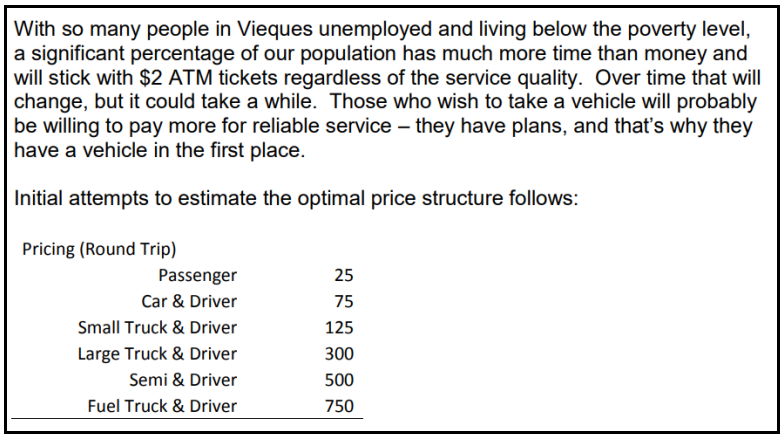
My visits to Vieques took place over the summer of 2022, close to the one-year mark of HMS Ferries' tenure as the service provider for the maritime transportation. While some protests had taken place sporadically over the previous months, this period was somewhat calm when contrasted with the activity of the Spring 2021. Just a few weeks before I visited in June, ferry advocates participated in public hearings hosted by the Puerto Rican state legislature in Vieques where, after being invited at the last minute, they stressed their concerns over the ambiguous contract terms with HMS Ferries. Over the summer and in my conversations with Viequenses, I noticed how ferry activism through protests scaled down since the privatization, with advocates turning to the law through information requests and legislation to denounce the concerning procedural aspects of the privatization, such as the systemic limitation on access to information during the procurement process.

While protests still occur in moments of transportation injustices, legal tools broaden the possibility of continuing demands for a dignified maritime transportation service at a juridic scale. From the advocates who participated in the public hearings hosted prior to my field work, I contacted Patricia, a lawyer and community organizer whose legal analyses of the contract with HMS Ferries and various information request attempts underscore how the public-private partnership procurement process only created barriers that strategically limited the municipal island community from participating in the process. Like Elisa, her experiences in public hearings seconded issues with ATM's dishonest accounts of service quality and future plans, going even further through ignoring her information requests of documentation about the privatization process. She has offered legal advice to the city council which recently passed three measures associated with the contract out of four that were presented. These legislative efforts, drafted by Debora and Eric, caught the attention of members of the Puerto Rican state legislature

who have followed through by supporting legislative acts requesting an audit or inspection of the contract with HMS Ferries. Debora, a retired schoolteacher, and Eric who works as an engineer became members of the Vieques city council in 2020 and have authored measures calling for closer scrutiny of the contract with HMS Ferries, using their positions as elected officials to examine ferry issues. I also had the opportunity to briefly interview the current mayor of Vieques to discuss his participation in the board of directors, which he assured he works in favor of his constituents' best interests in maintaining extended sailing schedules. Yet some attribute his political affiliation with the New Progressive Party (PNP) as a challenge for the city council to critique and audit HMS Ferries' performance, since it is the political party that introduced the legislation at the state-level that limited resident participation during the public-private partnership procurement process.

Even with these scattered legal efforts underway holding the contract under scrutiny, other informants believe they are not enough to seriously challenge the privatization. Across informants, there were many accounts concerning corruption by the ATM or the Puerto Rican government in general. Some spoke of petty instances of corruption such as ATM employees deceitfully delaying sailing timetables to extend their schedules and earn overtime wages, while others recounted larger schemes of corrupt ticket sale practices benefiting certain business owners on the island who had permanent slots on the cargo boats. These corrupt practices operate on various scales, triggering perceptions that the ATM enables and allows its continuity. This influences ferry advocacy in materializing the precept of *la protesta con propuesta*, or the protest with a proposal, through imagining governance alternatives considering the government's failure to provide the service responsibly and ethically. Most island residents would agree that removing the ATM from control would minimally show some improvements to service.

In line with recent provocations pointing at corruption as a technology that enables domination, exploitation, and extraction (Atiles-Osoria, García López & Villanueva, 2022), informants' narrations of the issues with the ATM's administering of the ferry service agree with this premise, although the effects of corruption on mobilities have differential impacts considering the positionalities and privileges of residents. This was clear during my interviews with Stan and Peter, two white Vieques residents whose ferry advocacy took a different character than that of Viequenses since they mainly use social media to denounce these corrupt practices, record keep irregularities, and draft recommendations addressing sailing schedules, capacity, and fares. They oriented their frustrations as a consequence of the ATM's corruption which they believe is a direct cause of the inefficient service affecting their businesses within the tourism industry. Their concerns centered upon the mobility of tourists or cargo to reach Vieques, but not their personal mobility to access the Big Island for essential services. Generally, white residents in Vieques try to avoid the ferry if they can pay for a flight instead.



With so many people in Vieques unemployed and living below the poverty level, a significant percentage of our population has much more time than money and will stick with $2 ATM tickets regardless of the service quality. Over time that will change, but it could take a while. Those who wish to take a vehicle will probably be willing to pay more for reliable service – they have plans, and that's why they have a vehicle in the first place.

Initial attempts to estimate the optimal price structure follows:

Pricing (Round Trip)	
Passenger	25
Car & Driver	75
Small Truck & Driver	125
Large Truck & Driver	300
Semi & Driver	500
Fuel Truck & Driver	750

Figure 15: Screenshot of the pricing section of a "ferry vision", a document summarizing proposed changes to the ferry service, drafted by Peter in 2014.

Meanwhile, flying is not an option for Viequenses who regularly go to the Big Island out of necessity, leading to an unequal experience of corrupt practices and opposing views for alternatives between some Viequenses and white residents. Instead of seeking solutions based on

discourses of efficiency and seamlessness of transport, some Viequenses envision systemic changes rooted in cooperation and solidarity frameworks through models of collective ownership of the ferry service and other essential infrastructures. Central to this is an understanding of Viequense travel experiences as affording a great deal of lived expertise contributing valuable knowledge that contrasts ATM's narrow focus on cutting corners to service while paying for consultants that provide "empirical" support to their decisions. Karla, a community organizer, and a supporter of the maritime transportation cooperative believes that everyday passengers should be at the center of decision-making processes. She describes how everyday commuting makes visible issues that ATM bureaucrats cannot consider since they do not use or much less rely on the ferry. Examples of travel experiences absent to ATM bureaucrats concern capacity issues within vessels of residents who bring carts with goods purchased on the Big Island, and boarding protocols that disregard the mobility of elder, disabled, or pregnant island residents. Karla is part of the group of island residents who support a ferry co-op as an opposition to privatization, believing that allowing for an ethics of care to guide transportation in place of technocratic solutions, which have not significantly improved the seamlessness of travel, is essential to the struggle for mobility justice.

Figure 16: Viequense residents outside of the ferry terminal with shopping carts. Photo by author, taken in July 2022.

Like long-time ferry activists who have recently reoriented their activism to other issues on the island, Melody returned to Vieques in January 2020 after having lived all her life in the US to contribute to the island's welfare through a project that addresses the gaps in the maritime transportation service and the state's neglectful provision of healthcare. Her father is a Viequense who left the island after living subject to the poverty imposed by the US Navy, with Melody being born outside of the island and only visiting for the first time in the summer of 2019 and reconnecting to the land and the struggle. At present, Melody is organizing a health solidarity house in Ceiba which also runs an informal community transportation scheme that shuttles residents from the terminal to medical appointments. Her very recent involvement in ferry advocacy reiterates the intersection of transportation justice with Viequense struggle over the right to remain.

The strategies

The maritime transportation decision-making process for the ATM does not include specific procedures that outline if and how service users can participate. The only exception is

tied to Law 21 of 1985[31] which indicates that public hearings must take place in moments of proposed fare increases. Beyond this, there are no other mechanisms in place that have not been implemented as a result of residents' continuous struggles to be heard. In this section, I discuss the strategies brought up during interviews for advocates to make demands in the face of procedural limitations that limit their participation.

For the most part, protests are the main strategy used to make political claims for an improved maritime transportation system. Protesting goes beyond objecting to the poor conditions of transportation that create inaccessible and exclusionary mobilities by also challenging the procedural character of decision-making. Amidst a structure that only allows passengers to participate through a citizen representative in the ATM board of directors, who is nominated by the governor without confirmation on behalf of a citizen committee, protests are the only strategy that empowers alternative possibilities to the current governance and provision of the ferry service. Viequense protests are thoughtfully organized with the exercise of making demands acquiring different meanings in relation to where protests take place. As Elisa recalls in one of the first protests organized by the *Colectivo*, they interrupted the flow of traffic in one of San Juan's major roads located between the ATM's administrative offices and the Puerto Rican capitol with the goal of paralleling island resident experiences of uncertainty and feeling adrift when their commutes back home get interrupted for hours on end. The contentious relationship between residents and the ATM made it so protests were multi-sited, taking place in several locations to ensure nobody would be left stranded by ATM for protesting or subject to police brutality. Still, the ATM would announce sudden changes to service if protests were taking place on terminals. In recalling an instance of a family member who had gotten arrested after diving

[31] Law 21 of 1985: Ley Uniforme para la Revisión y Modificación de Tarifas, Article 3.

into the harbor in protest, Debora shared how the ATM tried to skew protests in their favor by either canceling trips or sailing without passengers:

> [After protests], the boat would leave empty per ATM orders. It wasn't because someone didn't allow the boat to enter the harbor. They would punish us that way. You're protesting? Well, the boat won't leave. This was to make it clear that the people who protest are the ones who left you stranded, not the ATM.[32]

In continuing with the legacy of anti-Navy protests, the *Colectivo's* efforts in building a coalition of groups within Vieques and Culebra also sought to include organizations from the Big Island of Puerto Rico. The goal was to create a convincing movement with enough support to spur changes. Perhaps the *Colectivo's* major achievement as a movement was to bridge together differing perspectives under a single voice, becoming a vehicle for residents to participate through their town hall meetings hosted in the Vieques public square which were widely attended. At first, the town halls were dedicated to coordinating protesting strategies like civil disobedience in interrupting flows of maritime traffic building off the momentum gained in the first major protest in San Juan, but later the town halls turned to proposal developments for alternatives to governance of the ferry service. The *Colectivo* originally did not seek to support one proposal and welcomed several alternatives during protests and meetings with decision-makers, but its eventual goal was to democratically select and pursue a proposal that best reflected resident interests.

Viequenses' diligent protests allowed them some access to decision-makers. Yet the effectiveness of this outcome remains contested since advocates recognize that although being

[32] Debora quote in Spanish: "Y la lancha salió vacía porque ATM lo indicó así. No fue porque nadie le impidiera entrar. Ellos nos castigaban de esa manera. ¿Tú protestas? Pues la lancha no sale. Pa' decirle al pueblo, mira, estos protestando te dejaron a pie."

given a forum to express concerns is an achievement, their claims were not taken seriously. A first example was the outcome of the first protests organized by the *Colectivo* in 2012, in which the government's response was the initial "small-scale" privatization of Puerto Rico Fast Ferries. The contracting of PRFF went against a basic demand for broadened decision-making power to residents, and for the provision alternatives to privatization to be weighted equally. While thinking back on the *Colectivo's* accomplishments, Elisa holds mixed feelings about the success of its first protests: "The government responded to the protest by contracting a private company. It did help with some things. It wasn't what we wanted, but we saw that we could achieve certain things, but we had to be more specific."[33]

Protests also took on interruptions to visits by decision-makers or their delegates in scheduled public hearings or last-minute visits to the islands. Typically, public officials would only make the trip to Vieques or Culebra to attempt and feign interest in hearing resident concerns after ferry crises received publicity in Puerto Rican media. The mistrust in the colonial state weigh interruptions as an important tactic to make a statement, bringing to light the poor conditions a priority above wanting to speak with decision-makers out of concerns that they would disregard resident demands. For example, if a public official visits Vieques after periods of poor ferry service, residents refuse to let them disembark the ferry in which they came in. In September 2019, at the time executive director Mara Pérez was stuck after Viequenses blocked the ferry from setting sail to Ceiba. Even when officials circumvent boarding the ferry to go to Vieques and travel through patrol vessels of the Puerto Rican Police instead, residents are even more emphatic to disrupt their disembarking and highlight the contradiction of their ease of

[33] Elisa quote in Spanish: "La respuesta para ellos de eso fue la contratación de las compañías esas privadas. Si ayudó en ciertas cosas. […] No era lo que queríamos, pero vimos que se lograban cosas. Lo sabemos que se logran cosas, pero hay que ser más específicos."

access to go to and from the islands in opposition to the uncertainty that characterizes their day-to-day travel.

Thus, interruptions were successful in forcing public officials to directly confront disgruntled residents. The pressure from protests that took place in 2018 after the ferry service collapsed following the hurricanes Irma and María created the space for some participation to take place by securing meetings with high-level officials such as executive directors for the ATM and twice with the governor. Still, these meetings were in bad faith since there was no apparent commitment on behalf of the government to seriously listen to Viequense concerns as the privatization effort with HMS Ferries was already advanced and underway. Karla remembers how in one of the visits that took place in 2019 with the former governor Wanda Vázquez, there were no concessions made:

> I went to one of those meetings that were called at the last minute. The governor asked us to have some delegates ready, but it was really another way to limit us. This was a day she suddenly came out of nowhere, and we went to city hall. We tried to not let her out of the ferry, but they tried to shut us down so they could continue their tour through the island. They went to the hospital to show that everything was great. They gave us five minutes, and their solution was "well, organize yourselves and bring your proposals", which we did, but we never got a response from them.[34]

[34] Karla quote at length in Spanish: "Yo vine a esa reunión que fue aquí fue de hoy para hoy, porque Wanda Vázquez no está pidiendo para mañana que tengamos como unos delegados y eso pasó, pero realmente fue un tapaboca más. Que yo lo sabía porque fue un día que ella vino por ahí de paracaídas y claro, le llegamos a la alcaldía, le llegamos por ahí. Intentamos no dejarlos bajar del ferry. Y pues, para poder taparnos la boca y que ellos pudieran continuar su recorrido, que fueron al hospital, para demostrar que todo estaba súper. Pues, nos dieron cinco minutos y esa solución, ese curita de que "bueno pues reúnanse y tráigannos sus propuestas y quienes -" y les llevamos esto, esto y esto, y yo creo que nunca hubo una respuesta de parte de ellos ni de parte de nadie de la gobernación desde ese entonces."

Passenger-led day-to-day interruptions to service also occur in transit as a reaction to injustices perpetrated by the ATM. One instance took place in 2012 when residents forced themselves on board a ferry after the ATM denied sailing per the schedule, claiming there were not enough passengers to justify a trip (Vázquez Ortiz, 2012). Debora and Karla shared stories from occasions where they used refusal as a way to denounce the inadequate terminal infrastructure in Ceiba. The sudden move in 2018 only increased existing frustrations with the service given that the terminal conditions leave much to be desired. Even five years after the terminal activities moved to Ceiba, the waiting area is a large tent, sidewalks are not paved, the parking lots are far from the terminal, and there are not even permanent restrooms. Informants doubt that the terminal conditions are ADA compliant, with Debora recalling how the lack of shading between the waiting area and the boarding area can be dangerous for elder passengers when it rains:

> When it rains, I refuse to get off the ferry until the downpour passes, even if the ferry must depart in fifteen minutes. That's not my problem. They must have a tent over us, so we won't get wet. These are things that can be easily fixed.[35]

[35] Debora quote in Spanish: "Cuando está lloviendo, yo les digo "yo no me voy a salir de la lancha, yo me quedo aquí hasta que pase el aguacero porque yo no me voy a bajar de esta lancha, aunque esta lancha tenga que salir en quince minutos". Ese no es mi problema. Tienes que tener una carpa que me cubra porque yo no me voy a mojar. Sabes, son cosas que se pueden corregir con facilidad."

Figure 17: After a significant rain event in June 2022, the tents for the taxi waiting area had not been put up. Photo by author.

Karla shared of a separate instance when she traveled with an elder Viequense to the hospital on the Big Island for surgery and rushed back to the Ceiba terminal to catch the next available ferry and avoid waiting for hours until a later departure. The elder Viequense could not walk the distance from the terminal to the boat, but there were no wheelchairs available for him, and Karla got on the ferry to let the captain know that they could not leave a patient stranded on the terminal without his travel companion. They were both able to board the ferry, but only after Karla had refused to endure long waiting times. She remembered the experience with frustration:

> I was not going to leave him behind, but if I didn't do that, the patient would have spent four hours stranded there. I had to do that, but I ask myself why? Why do we have to go through these extremes if the service is for us? He is an elderly person whom everyone knows has many needs. Why don't they work together in service to our elders?[36]

[36] Karla quote in Spanish: "Yo no pensaba dejarlo atrás, pero si yo no hago eso el paciente se tiene que quedar cuatro horas allí tirado. Tuve que hacer eso y digo, pero ¿por qué? ¿Por qué tenemos que llegar a esos extremos si el servicio es para el de aquí, es un envejeciente, es una persona que tiene, sabes y la gente conoce que tiene tanta necesidad? ¿Por qué no apoyarlos en este trabajo en equipo de que estamos haciendo algo por nuestros envejecientes, lo que sea?"

While many passengers at present continue to use a terminal whose neglected conditions have, in extreme circumstances, resulted in harmful outcomes to their safety, the subject of the ATM's lack of ADA compliancy precedes the poor conditions of the terminal in Ceiba. A federal lawsuit from 2006 against the Port Authority denounced the absence of protocols for disabled passengers, showing how legal mechanisms are another important strategy to create demands for improving the service. The outcome was a loss of federal funding for not complying with ADA requirements.

In line with the legal support that the municipal islands received during the immediate post-Navy years in the form of state statutes and executive orders, the ferry struggle has found in legal actions an important strategy to raise their claims. Yet these efforts, akin to the post-Navy legal scaffolding, have been bereft of any significant advances in raising the general claim for more participation and for their voices to be heard. One of the *Comité's* efforts in the 1990s was a lawsuit against the Port Authority demanding compensation for the sum of fares paid for by residents for damages on the basis of unequal access to transportation when compared to Puerto Ricans on the Big Island. With the recent privatization process that selected HMS Ferries, Debora and Eric have argued through the city council that the vote finalizing the procurement process was illegal since not all the board members were present to vote. They use this argument to challenge the validity of the contract by proposing an injunction that would call for its cancellation. Even though the city council approved measures that request some scrutiny over the contract, a measure that Patricia helped in drafting that involved a more thorough approach to investigating the transition period initiated when HMS Ferries took over in July 2021 was not taken up:

> We were invited by the City Council to draft a request for information to start an investigation concerning the transition period and phase one of the contract, which already started despite not meeting the conditions. We offered help by providing questions, but they did not endorse this measure. It is unfortunate because I believe that it is the town's elected officials' duty to demand transparency and accountability over how much has been paid for the contract, and how much has been invested, but that was not done.[37]

While Viequenses take to the law, the terminals, and the water to express their frustrations with the ferry service, for the most part, white residents on the island use other methods to denounce issues, with Kelly's dedicated involvement being an exception since she participates in almost every protest and has been a careful recordkeeper of events. Both Stan and Peter have lived in Vieques for around fifteen years and arrived during the post-Navy real estate boom. It was not long until their new lives in paradise became swept up by the issues in maritime transportation Viequenses were already familiar with. They both arrived at the island to start businesses associated with the flourishing visitor economy but noticed how the ferry service deterred their business from easily running through limited cargo trips or limiting access to tickets on the basis of discrimination.

[37] Patricia quote in Spanish: "Fuimos invitados para presentarles la necesidad de hacer un requerimiento de información que la legislatura municipal de Vieques iniciara un trámite investigativo para preguntar precisamente todo lo relacionado a la fase de transición y a la fase uno del contrato que ya comenzó supuestamente a pesar de que no se cumplía con las condiciones, pero estábamos dispuestos a ayudarlos proveyéndoles las preguntas, ayuda para llevar a cabo esta investigación y desafortunadamente nos recibieron pero no hicieron suya ese reclamo y no van a llevar a cabo esa investigación. Es bien lamentable porque yo entiendo que es un deber de los alcaldes y de las legislaturas municipales de cada municipio exigir transparencia, exigir que se rindan cuentas sobre cuánto se ha cobrado, cuánto se ha invertido y eso pues no se hizo."

The recent increase of wealthy residents on the island have generally not made the demands of ferry advocacy claims of their own, and if they have it is usually in support of seamless travel that may help their businesses. Since their already limited ferry advocacy is not necessarily influenced by a legacy of the anti-Navy movement, this may be why white residents on the island are not as involved as Viequenses. The land-based struggle and the right to remain are not a concern they intersect with maritime transportation issues. Yet, Peter and Stan believe that the more exploitative white residents are those who only live on the island part-time and are afraid of changes. They both questioned how some part-time residents even welcome the poor ferry service as being bad enough to keep people out and maybe even push out those who can barely afford to stay. Since their view of the ferry problems takes on a different meaning than that of Viequenses, the public claims made by non-Viequense residents of the island exist in online spaces like social media groups. A popular Facebook group "Vieques Culebra Ferry Watch" has some nine-thousand members, mixed between residents and tourists, with most of the posting activity consisting of queries for information regarding delays or changes to service. Elisa recalled how the *Colectivo* ran a similar page in 2014 to keep a record of the scheduled departure time versus the actual time of arrival for residents during another crisis that occurred after PRFF's contract ended and several vessels were in maintenance. When Elisa, Peter, and Stan remember the effectiveness of their online activities in creating spaces to make denouncements of poor service, there was a clear distinction over whose efforts went further than the others. Peter, who used Facebook to share his essays about the ferry problems and some provocations for solutions, mentioned that his writing got him some credibility with decision-makers from the ATM and was invited to meet with them on several occasions. This passive

advocacy contrasts the Viequense experience who only gained access to decision-makers through putting themselves on a picket line.

Negotiated and contested possibilities: alternatives in provision and governance

Across the different strategies, proposals for alternative forms of service provision and governance lie at the heart of the ferry struggle. The years of unjust service have pushed residents to imagine alternatives where they minimally gain some power and take ownership over their mobility. The general claim for more participation in the decision-making process is often accompanied by demands for systemic changes in the organization of power for the ferry service, with residents interested in having expanded representation. Yet this demand has been taken up by the state in ways that contradict local needs through insincere efforts for improving the ferry service that excludes residents from decision-making. In this section, I account for the historical production of the alternatives through an overview of their origins, underscoring how the state's efforts oftentimes conflicts with local demands, creating a politics of mobility marked by opposing interests between actors, actions, and motives. Throughout the years, alternatives to the top-down, centralized administration of the ferry service emerged in circumstances where this model failed in providing adequate maritime transportation.

In general, the narratives surrounding each alternative make sense of the inadequate ferry service beyond just a transportation injustice. The politics of mobility for each alternative consider the breadth of the representations and experiences that ferry mobilities touch upon Viequense daily life. This is exemplified throughout the alternatives which seek to prioritize resident mobility above visitors through differentiated fares, dedicated protocols, and priority ticket sales as examples. Privileging resident mobility has been historically constructed, as dependence on the ferry has been a means by which Viequenses have struggled to exercise

autonomy over their home. Nonetheless, the alternatives proposed also negotiate with ideas of desired fixity to the island, in which there is a greater wish to fulfill needs within the Vieques and not rely on the maritime route for survival.

Provision alternatives: socio-technical solutions to the geography of islandness

Prior to the US Navy's occupation of the Vieques Sound, maritime transportation between the islands of Puerto Rico, Vieques, and Culebra navigated through the "natural" short routes connecting each island to shorten the time spent on the water. In the early 20th century, sailboats were commonly used by merchants who transported goods either from Fajardo or San Juan directly avoiding the need for island residents to travel for shopping. The introduction of motorized ships coincided with the US Navy's arrival, marking the initial efforts to pass on the maritime transportation system from independent merchants to the colonial state. The Navy's control of the Ensenada Honda inlet in Ceiba and western Vieques imposed limitations on land use and nautical routes, forcing the passenger maritime transportation system to travel 17 miles from the Puerto Mulas port in Isabel II to the Puerto Real port in Fajardo to avoid navigating through restricted waters and danger zones.

By the late 1970s, as the anti-Navy protests led by fishermen began to take off, the *Cruzada Por Rescate de Vieques* tied the island's constrained development to the limitations in land use and the longer nautical route for civilian passengers. During the fishermen-led interruptions to maneuver exercises, the demands for the western lands to be returned to the town linked the positive effects of devolution through two fronts: Vieques could have more development and the short route could be reinstated, with political pamphlets from 1983 stating how the short route equals progress.

Figure 18: (Left) Cruzada Pro Rescate Bulletin from 1983. Caption: Short route equals progress (Right) Cruzada Pro Rescate bulletin from 1979. Caption: Recover the west. A shorter route.

While the short route was a symbol associated with anti-Navy land recovery efforts during the 1980s, a decade later resident demands shifted toward denouncing fare increases without the claim for the western lands to be returned. It wasn't until after the Navy left in 2003 that the recently incorporated ATM took interest in establishing the short route since the lands and nautical routes were now partially available for civilian use. In 2007, the ATM allocated funds to begin construction of a new terminal in the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base in Ceiba in anticipation of establishing the short route. These plans would not materialize until ten years later upon the sudden terminal change from Fajardo to Ceiba as a result of its decommissioning after Hurricane Maria in 2017. The sudden change of terminals from Fajardo to Ceiba is a main reason why currently some residents disapprove of the short route since it disrupted and disconnected existing transportation links on the main island while making travel distances farther and more costly. Now, residents must travel around ten miles by car to access amenities in Fajardo. Frictions with the short route also have to do with the infrastructural conditions of the Ceiba terminal, too, since it has not been adequately conditioned, and many consider it

dangerous for mobility-constrained passengers. It is also important to clarify that the short route involves a longer route for Culebra, which negates arguments that it saves money on fuel.

Another provision alternative some residents have supported has been to eliminate the whole maritime transportation system with a bridge connecting Vieques and the Big Island. The bridge has received sporadic support throughout the years on behalf of residents, with most worrying over environmental damages, costs, and traffic congestion in Vieques. The promise of the bridge as having the potential to be one of Puerto Rico's major megaprojects has not only received attention from the island's state legislature, but it has been the only provision alternative to have succeeded in mobilizing the colonial state to directly consult residents through a referendum in 2016, with 82% supporting the bridge, however only 17% of registered voters participated. The feasibility of a bridge connecting Vieques and Ceiba was originally studied by the US Department of Defense in the 1940s with the concept of a cement and stone breakwater connecting Vieques's Mosquito Pier to Roosevelt Roads as a safety measure during World War II. These plans fizzled when Roosevelt Roads became reoriented as a training installation instead. Sixty years later, another feasibility study requested by the Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority was conducted by CSA Architects and Engineers in 2008, but no plans have been made to push the idea of the bridge forward. None of the informants believe it is a serious alternative, especially in light of the colonial state government's fiscal crisis and austerity regime.

Governance alternatives: passing the helm to a private operator or taking collective ownership

Even among informants who supported the public-private partnership during interviews, they were still apprehensive about how the selection process for HMS Ferries took place. Their support of the public-private partnership relates to their mistrust to the colonial state, with a

private company being the next best option in trying to solve the continuous maritime transportation issues. This draws from previous positive experiences with PRFF's supplementary service from 2012 and later again in 2018 which improved scheduling issues by renting additional vessels. Eric justifies his support of the public-private partnership by recognizing that it is the only plausible alternative in making improvements to the service upon the government's continuous failure to provide a dignified maritime transportation:

> I understand that a public-private partnership with a serious and responsible company that understands our transportation needs alongside adequate government control would work because the truth is that the government has always failed us in that aspect, there is never any control nor consistency.[38]

Although he supports the public-private partnership, he does recognize that residents ought to have a voice in decision-making for it to work: "I think that a public-private partnership could deal with the situation, as long as there is also a citizen committee that knows the issues."[39] Nonetheless, he highlights the contradiction of the procurement process itself, characterizing it as corrupt, since the company would still have to handle a great deal of scrutiny of a highly disliked contract:

[38] Eric quote in Spanish: "Yo pienso que con una alianza publico privada con una compañía seria y responsable que entienda que es necesidad el transporte marítimo y entonces el gobierno administrándola con todos sus debidos controles porque la realidad es que siempre el gobierno nos ha fallado en ese aspecto, nunca hay control, nunca hay consistencia."

[39] Eric quote in Spanish: "Yo pienso que con una alianza público y privada pueden bregar la situación obviamente y con un comité que se ponga de ciudadanos viequenses que sí sepan el problema medular de la situación. Que sean viequenses y culebrenses".

> The privatization was *amiguismo* (cronyism) from the government and they privileged HMS in the selection process. Though, I wouldn't call that *amiguismo* because I wouldn't throw my friend to the lions with a contract that I know everyone will criticize![40]

For some white residents in Vieques, privatization seemed like the only feasible alternative shift in the governance of the ferry service that resulted in improvements since it would remove the corrupt decision-makers from power. Yet, Stan, who has been a vocal supporter of privatization, also did not share the enthusiasm over privatization once it arrived recognizing it as the "least-worst option" available:

> I like the privatization thing because my experience with ATM was so appalling that I thought it was the least-worst option, which is always the case in these situations. Ideally, you'd have a government operation that would run really well, that worked for the people, that would spend their tax dollars really well, and everyone was happy, but that clearly was not going to happen.

The contract with HMS Ferries became subject to critique due to its vague clauses concerning potential increases in fares and service reductions. Residents interpreted the contract as allowing HMS Ferries to make these decisions according to what is financially beneficial to them. When the company took over the operations of the service, privatization was understood as changing the structure of decision-making granting the company greater autonomy over decisions made regarding service provision above the ATM and its board of directors. This is partially true since HMS Ferries' responsibility per the contract is based on running the operations with the

[40] Eric quote in Spanish: "Lo recalco, que eso fue un amiguismo del gobierno central y pues, se conocían y dieron ese privilegio a esa compañía. Y por cierto, eso no se llama amiguismo porque a mi amigo yo no lo voy a tirar a los leones con ese contrato que yo sé que no, que todo el mundo lo va a criticar!" His use of the word *amiguismo* when speaking of the cronyism plays with its meaning as "friendship".

possibility to suggest changes to schedules to their benefit only if the ATM board of directors approves their requests. Peter, who also welcomes the public-private partnership, believes that now it might be easier for residents to make demands directly to HMS Ferries foregoing any interaction with ATM bureaucrats:

> To a certain extent, I feel as though we can deal with Matt Miller (president of HMS Ferries). But it's delicate, you know, getting them to make changes. Dealing with the ATM is out of the question. There's just no sense in trying to deal with them at all. We have to go through HMS if we want something, and I think the lines of communication have to be kept up with Matt Miller.

Some Viequenses would consider this wishful thinking since their day-to-day experiences as passengers with HMS Ferries have made it challenging to communicate with higher-ups, with the ATM notably absent from representing passengers' best interests. Since HMS Ferries took over, various informants shared stories of the ATM not taking responsibility for passenger grievances over the service, occurring in moments where they were denied boarding or when they faced problems in buying tickets:

> We don't know who to call in HMS Ferries. Now there is no one to call. Before we had some way to talk to an assistant or with the executive director, but now there is nobody to talk to. HMS has a representative neither in Ceiba nor in Vieques to answer questions people may have.[41]
>
> I was asking to speak with a supervisor, and in between all of this I could have gotten inside the ferry, but they insisted otherwise. To top this off, there is no one from ATM

[41] Debora quote in Spanish: "Desconocemos a quién de HMS hay que llamar. Ahora tú no tienes a quién llamar. Antes por lo menos podíamos hablar de una forma u otra o con el ayudante o con Droz. Ahora no hay con quién hablar. HMS no tiene un representante allí en sí ni aquí en Vieques para contestar las dudas y preguntas que puedan tener las personas."

> that you can make a grievance to. It is only HMS now. ATM no longer has this responsibility; everything is with HMS now.[42]

Is it reasonable to consider these frictions between passengers and the operator, a company that was selected for its merits and experience in the ferry industry, as growing pains during the transition process? Some Viequenses who reject privatization consider these frictions as deliberate efforts in advancing the dispossession of locals. The privatization of the ferry service is seen as a strategy to further displace Viequenses not only from the decision-making process governing the maritime transportation service but also from having broader autonomy over island affairs. When I asked Karla why she thought the government was so insistent on privatizing and dismissing resident-led proposals for governance alternatives, she connected the financialization of the ferry service with the goal of further dispossessing residents from the island:

> I would say that the first thing is that, for them to make more money, and support the gentrification plan. Because if they know that there are few of us left, elder residents who say, "I am from here, where am I going to start over?", they know that those of us who are still young will not stand this. We pack up and leave and never come back.[43]

For Viequenses who support a ferry co-op, it exists in contrast to privatization since the premise would be for a bottom-up, partnership-based democratic decision-making. Under the legal

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[42] Elisa quote in Spanish: "Déjame hablar con el supervisor" y le digo, entre todo esto que estamos hablando ya yo hubiese llegado a la lancha, me hubiese montado y ellos insistían en que no. Pa' colmo, no hay alguien de ATM que tú le puedas hacer la queja. Es solo HMS. Ya como esa responsabilidad de ATM no existe, está todo con HMS."

[43] Karla quote in Spanish: "Yo diría que lo primero es eso, para lucrar su bolsillo y yo diría que sí con el plan de gentrificación. Porque si saben qué quedamos unos pocos, personas envejecientes que dicen, "yo soy de aquí, ¿voy a empezar en cero desde dónde?" o que pues sí, arraigado a sus cosas, pero saben que el que viene subiendo no lo aguanta. Se va y no vuelve."

framework of the Puerto Rican state, a ferry co-op could be organized as a non-financial cooperative worker, consumer, or mixed co-op organized by a steering committee and members assembly. Cooperatives as a tool for community organization received support in the community-led development guides from 2002 with several ideas of consumer cooperatives like a grocery store or a gasoline station, a housing cooperative, worker cooperatives for agriculture, tourism, and fishing, and even a health services cooperative in line with existing examples from Latin America. Aside from a savings and loan cooperative on the island, Viequenses organized the *Cooperativa de Cine y Teatro*, a cultural activities co-op that hosted free moving screenings on the public square.

The origins of a maritime transportation cooperative are attributed to anti-Navy activist and organizer of *Vieques en Acción* Ismael Guadalupe who along with Hugo Quiles and Carmen Valencia hosted weekly meetings in the Vieques public square to discuss actions to address issues on the island. Organizing a ferry co-op materialized as an alternative once privatization became a possibility upon the approval of the P3 Act in 2009. Residents interested in the maritime transportation cooperative brought resources from the Big Island like Dr. Martha Quinones, a professor at the University of Puerto Rico, Arecibo who has deposed in public hearings endorsing a special corporation of municipal development, and Dr. Pedro Santiago, a professor at the University of Puerto Rico's Institute of Cooperativism.

These efforts were wholly independent of any involvement with institutional actors from the colonial state's agencies in charge of the ferry service. Ironically, three measures were presented between 2011 and 2017 in the Puerto Rican state legislature about creating a maritime transportation cooperative without having considered the community's interest. The 2011 measure proposed a worker's co-op comprised of ATM employees under the premise that they

are the ones who know the service and needs best. This measure was sent to the Transportation and Infrastructure Commission of the Puerto Rican state legislature which shut it down since it was not attended to within the ninety-day deadline. This measure was presented again in 2013, only that this time it was sent to the Cooperative Commission of the state legislature which reported back with responses from the *Liga de Cooperativas*, the main collective organization for cooperatives on the island, and CDCOOP or Cooperative Development Commission of Puerto Rico ascribed to the executive branch of the Puerto Rican government whose role is to guide cooperative public policies on the island. Both organizations did not endorse the measure given the lack of detail on how the cooperative would be organized although they did include that it could be a successful model for the maritime transportation system if done correctly. A third measure from 2017 proposed a referendum asking residents if they support a cooperative that did not materialize either.

The colonial state's intense involvement in regulating cooperatives is a challenge called out by professionals from the Institute of Cooperativism at the University of Puerto Rico since it comes in the way of governance by controlling essential functions that limit the autonomy of co-ops (Reyes Núñez & Rosado Rodríguez, 2023). The process of organizing the ferry co-op ran into this challenge since it would have to uphold various regulatory frameworks and standards. A maritime transportation services co-op's vessels and sailors must comply with the Jones Act of 1920, along with other safety, labor, and environmental regulations at the federal and state level. Informants alluded to the complex governance structure for a maritime transportation service as a barrier for the co-op, underscoring the tension with the role of the state. Elisa and Patricia in particular interrogated what should the role of the state be in a collectively operated transportation infrastructure. Would ownership remain public through the state but collectively

operated through the ferry co-op steering committee, or would ownership of the service be passed on to the ferry co-op? While they agree with the idea of collective ownership in decision-making, they also caution against the government handing over a service to free themselves from responsibility. For example, Elisa considers that in line with P3 Act, the ATM could consider establishing a public-*community* partnership in place of privatization:

> I support co-ops and the premise that users are partners and co-owners. But I also believe that the government must cover essential services. If it is an essential service, the government must find a way to do it because that's what they're for. They can't say "we can't do it" and hand it off to a private operator. If we must do a public-private partnership, it should be through a co-op.[44]

Beyond the structural issues that weigh the state's role in regulating cooperatives in Puerto Rico, the informants who supported the co-op mentioned several frictions among its supporters that came in between moving forward with organizing the steering committee and taking the required coursework from the University of Puerto Rico's Cooperative Incubator. Since the struggle for a dignified maritime transportation service speaks to a broader struggle over the right to remain, some Viequenses resisted the premise of including the new white migrant tourists in the co-op as partners whose presence on the island is linked to the dispossession of local Viequenses. Karla spoke of the tension of who gets to claim residency in Vieques as an island marked by im/mobilities pushed for through violent means:

[44] Elisa quote in Spanish: "Yo creo en las cooperativas. Definitivamente que los usuarios, las personas que lo usan sean socios y sean dueños y eso cambia infinitamente. Pero también yo creo que el gobierno tiene que cubrir los servicios esenciales. Si es un servicio esencial, el gobierno tiene que buscar la forma de hacerlo porque para eso está ahí. No puede simplemente decir "yo no lo puedo hacer" y por eso se lo voy a dar a un privado. Si hubiese que hacer una alianza publico privada, que la hagan con una cooperativa."

> Who counts as a resident? Is someone who has lived here for five years a resident? What about someone who has four properties but doesn't live in any of them? Is someone a resident if they have a house in Vieques and in Puerto Rico? Is someone's child who is studying in Puerto Rico still a resident? [45]

While this remained an unresolved debate among co-op supporters, it continues to be an important question on the island since one of ATM's remaining responsibilities is to create a database of residents in an effort that will likely lead to fare increases for non-resident travelers. Kelly does not agree with differentiated fares for residents or non-residents out of a concern that it would negatively affect Viequenses who do not permanently live on the island:

> The government of Puerto Rico couldn't maintain a database of ten people who won the world record for baseball. They couldn't! They can't create a database, they won't be able to maintain it, they don't understand the concept of maintaining it. Do you think they could tell me who a resident of Vieques is? And anyways, people in Vieques will never play that game. Being a resident is like being a Puerto Rican who has a home either in Puerto Rico or the United States. Could you figure that out for most Puerto Ricans? No, you can't! Because you're over there, you're over here. It's a different animal, it's a different thing. You have to create a system that allows for that, which is reality. People over here come and go.

Recognizing the circular migration patterns of residents and the complexities of who is defined as a resident, Karla does not take an exclusionary position on who gets to participate in the co-

[45] Karla quote in Spanish: "Entonces sí existía esta discusión de que, ¿quién es residente? ¿Es residente el que vive cinco años? ¿Es residente el que posee cuatro propiedades y no vive ninguna? ¿Es residente el que tiene casa allá y acá? ¿Es residente el hijo del residente que está estudiando allá?"

op, especially since she considers that it would be beneficial to have different perspectives and levels of expertise behind the steering committee, as long as they live in Vieques:

> The meetings I convened were announced with a *tumba coco* (loudspeaker). We wanted that everyone who was in Vieques to come because that's the point. Whoever is in Vieques and uses the service would participate. And gringos did come, they were welcome too. You live here and you use the service? They were welcome on my behalf. If by the time the general assembly defined who can and cannot participate in the cooperative and they were left out, that was out of my hands. There were people who thought if they were not a resident but still had the financial means to contribute, then why would we limit the co-op membership to residents if people outside of Vieques could also financially assist the co-op? It was very difficult to make these decisions.[46]

Debates over who could become a partner in the cooperative were never settled, and even if they had been, in accordance with the Law 239 of 2004 that regulates cooperatives it would be illegal to set membership parameters on the basis of race, gender, and ethnicity hindering exclusions to the non-Viequense residents or vice-versa. A second round of co-op workshops took place in late 2019, and as those interested in forming the steering committee agreed to continue with the coursework at the University of Puerto Rico, the pandemic put these efforts on hiatus with residents focused on mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in an already vulnerable island. A perfect storm of the selection by the public-private partnership committee of HMS Ferries as the

[46] Karla quote in Spanish: "Y sí, hubo estos conflictos, estos diálogos no oficiales de que quién va a ser parte de la cooperativa, residentes. Entonces sí existía esta discusión de que, ¿quién es residente? ¿Es residente el que vive cinco años? ¿Es residente el que posee cuatro propiedades y no vive ninguna? ¿Es residente el que tiene casa allá y acá? ¿Es residente el hijo del residente que está estudiando allá? No hubo una, como un diálogo para definirlo por completo, pero sí extraoficialmente existía esa, ¿quién es residente? ¡El gringo no puede ser residente! Sabes, hubo todo tipo de opinión y yo creo que eso sí era algo como tal vez lo más difícil que se iba a definir."

recipient of the 23-year contract by late 2020, and service issues that made the constrained capacity evolve from a risk of being stranded to the risk of overcrowding and being exposed to coronavirus, contributed to the ferry co-op regaining attention among island residents. The protests that took place in the Spring of 2021 included among its demands for more participation and for the cancellation of the contract, to also consider the ferry co-op as a serious proposal. This time the state legislature accepted these demands through Senate Resolution 147 of 2021 which ordered the Finance Commission, the Federal Affairs Commission, the Fiscal Oversight and Management Board, and the Cooperativism Commission to study the viability of a co-op proposal. The final report submitted on February 9, 2023 recommended a municipal corporation or a co-op to administer the ferry service under the conditions of having the support of the mayors of Culebra and Vieques, to identify personnel with the necessary administrative expertise, and ensure that island residents are able and willing to administer the service. It goes on to say that if these conditions are met, it is necessary to cancel the contract with HMS Ferries through the courts. Since this final report, the status of the injunction against HMS Ferries or the organization of the co-op steering committee remains uncertain.

Cooperative futures as a long-term goal for ferry advocacy

What will be the outcome of the Puerto Rican Senate's conclusion deciding that there are other viable forms of governance beyond privatization to run the ferry service? From my interviews with activists like Karla and Patricia, and even Peter who had been involved in the co-op workshops hosted some years ago, the procedural scope of a maritime transportation cooperative overwhelmed island residents who doubted there could be enough financial resources to proceed with the necessary planning to administer the service. Patricia believes that a ferry co-op is only one example of any kind of organization motivated by social interest as a

goal that addresses Vieques's needs. She mentioned how there could be solar energy, recycling, or composting co-ops on the island as examples to prove to residents that the steering committee model works, while also recognizing how interest in the co-op has waned to only a few residents willing to put in the effort:

> I do think that as citizens we can make decisions about transportation through a co-op, but before we are given any power over the co-op we would have to gain experiences and knowledge we don't have yet. We would have to start with a steering committee to administer something like a parking lot or some type of business that will give us experience. This will make it so others will see the benefits of the cooperativist model. But right now, I don't see how with whom we have left would be able to run a maritime transportation co-op. We would need a solid steering committee to subcontract administrative services and maintenance for vessels, and things like that.[47]

Those who support the ferry co-op recognize that scaling down to consider other cooperative projects might be a step forward by temporarily putting aside the larger scale project. For Viequenses who want the island to be of and for Viequenses, practicing cooperation and solidarity are increasingly urgent with the threats of dispossession through real estate speculation and the continuing health injustices as the island remains without a hospital. By bringing down the scale of activism to address gaps in public services rather than a complete reworking of their organization of power, Viequense advocates are putting an ethics of care in their self-motivated

[47] Patricia quote in Spanish: "Sí entiendo que podemos ser los ciudadanos, pero para que llegue a ese momento tenemos que todavía acumular unas experiencias y unos conocimientos que no los tenemos. Tendríamos que yo creo empezar con una junta cooperativista para administrar, quizás un estacionamiento, otro tipo de empresa que nos fortalezca, que nos solidifique como – seguir creciendo que la gente comience a ver los beneficios de ser cooperativista y entonces emprender eso. Sería una alianza, que en vez de ser público-privada sería público-comunitaria. Entonces tener ahí un *partnership* de esa índole o eventualmente tomar la rienda de eso. Pero ahora mismo no veo como nosotros los que estamos ahora en esta lucha echarnos a costa eso."

and voluntary actions of mutual support. Melody's activism through health justice is exemplar of this. She reconnected to Vieques through her anti-military advocacy across the US's imperial margins where the Viequense struggle was continuously brought up. Upon returning to Vieques, she has carried the generational baton in service to continue *la lucha viequense* through the struggle for health justice and access to healthcare. She experienced the hardship of accessing healthcare while living in Vieques during the pandemic, which spurred the creation of the medical solidarity housing she continues to work on:

> The attempt to form an actual network at first didn't pan out because everyone is putting out fires everywhere in Puerto Rico, and we're all limited with our resources. While I was recovering from COVID, I had to leave Bieké to recover so I could access medical care and I had the good fortune of having a friend I could stay with, and that was close to the hospital, and they weren't charging me money so I could maintain my rental in Bieké. That's when I talked with Bob [Rabin] again and I said, "I'm gonna have to be here for a while for my recovery. I might have to rent a place out here", but while I've been looking I saw this house for sale. It's almost in perfect condition. It's right by the ferry port. Maybe we could start building our solidarity network ourselves.

Since October 2021, Melody resides in Ceiba and offers housing to residents who find themselves looking for alternatives to stay while in transit between medical care. Melody continues to run the house with the wish of having full repairs done soon to be able to receive patients with more delicate medical needs. Her efforts are now one among many other examples within Vieques that show that other ways of organizing solidarity initiatives in broader service to the community are possible, if not necessary, to redress the mobility injustices of the ferry service.

Figure 19: The health solidarity house in Ceiba, with the view towards Vieques. Photo by author, June 2023.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This thesis' focus on the politics of mobility of the ferry service has sought to respond to the recent call within critical transportation geographies by extending Sheller's (2021) provocation to view the Caribbean as a site of "complex evolving socioecologies", important for the theorizing and understanding mobility (in)justice(s). I have explored how the persistent maritime transportation issues, unresolved by the ATM, reifies the colonialities of governance, producing mobility injustices. Despite drawing attention to how the coalescence between the poor ferry service and the lack of healthcare on the island limits access to such services, this represents only a portion of the mobility injustices unique to Viequense mobile life. If we begin to consider the breadth of im/mobilities across daily life, reflecting upon the question of *can you go where you want to go* reveals the deeper outcomes of the colonialities of governance in shaping mobility regimes: can the children of elderly Viequenses visit their parents with ease? Can student-athletes participate in tournaments outside of Vieques? Can young adults stay connected to their hometown as they pursue education?

The metaphor of the constellations of ferry mobilities speaks to the networked characteristic of the ferry service issues. The uncertainty of obtaining a ticket, boarding, and disembarking a ferry is only one part of a larger series of im/mobilities that connect to the constellations, which I have sought to highlight throughout this thesis. After coming to an understanding of how the coloniality of debt is situated in the organization of power of the ATM, the contours of collective action on behalf of ferry advocates, and the alternatives they have engendered cast light into the possibilities envisioned by everyday users to move beyond the structures of coloniality in decision-making. In the following two sections, I will discuss how

each chapter responds to my research questions and close with general conclusions from this case study along with recommended steps forward.

The coloniality of island mobilities

The politics of mobility governing the ferry service are characterized by an uneven power distribution between institutional actors and users creating a struggle over ownership and control of mobilities. Through analyzing policies and practices across a 20-year period, an emphasis on the governance from shifting institutional actors (from the Port Authority, to the Maritime Transportation Authority, and finally to the Public-Private Partnership Authority) demonstrates how debt, as a function of coloniality, imbues the everyday running of the ferry service. In other words, discourses of funding limitations were used to justify the poor service even though large investments were made in terminal infrastructures, pushing forth the colonial state's intentions to privatize with a public-private partnership. Within its procedural qualities, debt acts as an apparatus of capture by enforcing distance between institutional actors and everyday users in the decision-making processes.

Even though Viequense critical mobility needs are acknowledged on paper in plans, laws, and reports, everyday users became systematically excluded in practice after the amendments to the P3 Act removed them from even receiving information about the procurement process that selected HMS Ferries. The existing procedures of resident representation in decision-making through the participation of the island mayors and citizen representatives did not establish robust mechanisms to ensure their demands were heard, acknowledged, and addressed. Instead, the creation of the ATM which intended to solve decades of poor service through fiscal autonomy was not conducive to ensuring just transport due to the board of directors' lack of balanced resident representation. The public corporation's supposed fiscal autonomy also speaks to the

coloniality of debt, with the ATM's operational expenses relying on funding allocations from a colonial state with mounting debt problems, pushing privatization as the desired solution to the financial constraints and poor service.

This reinforces how the ferry service barely runs given conditions of colonial neglect, shaping a broader mobility regime that both creates a mobility demand while restricting travel to everyday users who must bear with capacity issues stemming from erratic schedule changes and inconsistent ticket sales once vessels were taken out of the schedule for untimely and costly maintenance. This mobility regime, arranged primarily through debt demands, makes it so debt acts as a form of dispossession expressed as the contradiction between the constant poor service offered by the ATM with the million-dollar spending in contracts and boat charter requests from private operators that did not materially improve travel conditions for users. Debt exceeds its origins (Zambrana, 2021), as it was discursively reworked to dismantle the service to justify privatization, all while extracting wealth and producing im/mobilities to the ferry-dependent. These im/mobilities were used to defend privatization, yet the perspectives of those immobilized by the poor service were not considered throughout the privatization process, despite their efforts to participate.

At the heart of the ferry struggle were demands tied to advancing lived expertise as valuable transportation knowledge. Advocates, especially the Viequense activists who have years of experiences traveling via ferry, wanted decision-makers to meet them where they were and validate their lived expertise as a way to rectify the harms caused by hegemonic technocratic transportation expertise. Informants' stories of their strategies to make their claims heard reinforce how debt acts as a form of dispossession through the incongruence of the money spent by the ATM in contracts to consultants who did most of the "engagement" in researching

passenger profiles and resident opinions. First, this was evidenced in the ATM's request for the survey done in 2015 to justify how residents were not the majority of ferry users and how increasing fares would reduce half of an "insignificant" ridership. Secondly, the contradictions of debt as an apparatus of capture became evident through the use of a hearing examiner in place of ATM resources to conduct public hearings who were not in any capacity to divulge information about proposed changes since they were only paid to receive comments one after the other. These restrictive forms of resident involvement contribute to a perception of the ATM and the Puerto Rican government as highly corrupt, with various informants bemoaning how executive directors hardly had any expertise in administering a maritime transportation service since they were only assigned a leadership position due to their merits for cutting corners financially. Accusations of corrupt behavior directed at the selection committee for the procurement process also materialize through the denouncing of the voting process as illegal. Certainly, the coloniality of debt has made for a legal framework of procuring a public-private partnership that carries more inconsistencies favoring dispossession than fairness to users in procedures.

Considering the afterlives of militarized devastation through the health consequences of Viequenses, the poor ferry service has reproduced and reified im/mobilities, turning issues of inaccessibility into mobility injustices. The coalescence between the distance and debt demands of the colonial state left users with the most critical needs excluded in policies and actions. Although the colonial state developed legislation after the Navy's departure that sought to rectify the impacts of environmental injustices, they failed to sufficiently incorporate the constant maritime transportation issues, producing mobility injustices. The conditions of colonial neglect throughout the infrastructural landscape, heightened by the gradual dismantling of health services on the island produced a mobility/immobility binary for sick Viequenses: while they

became highly mobile, it is out of immobilizing circumstances since their travel purpose derives from the lack of adequate healthcare in Vieques. This neglected infrastructural landscape reifies the slow violence of racial and colonial governance (Bonilla, 2020) through im/mobilities each time a Viequense misses a doctor's appointment due to a ferry delay, a medical professional cannot travel to the islands because they could not purchase a ticket, or when locals decide to not travel at all to avoid dealing with a service that has historically excluded their needs.

Forms of transportation motives

What drives residents' ferry advocacy? To answer this, I remit back to the concept of motility which asks what rights to mobility exist, the ways in which they are organized, and what capabilities are valued, defended, and extended to all. I summarize advocacy motives through two distinct but intertwined concerns: transportation as engendering a dignified life and the right to remain, or transportation as producing seamless mobilities through ease of movement. Most Viequenses travel out of need and experience im/mobilities; they become highly mobile out of immobilizing circumstances. An important question to consider in the production of these im/mobilities is if the transportation system is solely responsible in this matter. I argue that it is the interrelatedness of the effects of the poor ferry service across the other conditions of colonial neglect in the islands which makes the access barriers so dire. Fixity then emerges as an important theme in the struggle for mobility justice: how can residents bargain for an improved and efficient ferry service while also creating the conditions that make them less reliant upon it?

Capacity takes on various meanings and lies in the intersection of these concerns: is there a physical capacity to facilitate the movement of people and freight? Is there a procedural capacity to allow people to deliberate over infrastructures they rely upon? Who is allowed to take up space on the ferry, and who is allowed to have their claims made in decision-making be heard

and acknowledged? The ferry struggle has tirelessly sought to find answers to these questions, yet significant advances have not been made in minimizing the gap between everyday users and decision-makers. Then, what capabilities are valued, defended, and extended to all involved through the ferry struggle? The struggle for a dignified maritime transportation originated as part of demands of the anti-Navy struggle and carried the legacy of improved welfare to island residents as a central theme. Once the ATM became the main institutional actor providing the service, the demands for a dignified transportation system built on new concerns over the state's prioritizing tourism-related traffic over resident mobilities. The ATM's failure to provide efficient public transportation to island residents drew the attention of the state legislature and legal organizations who went as far as denouncing their service as violating the human rights of Viequenses and Culebrenses. Meanwhile, instead of addressing these issues, other state actors through the Public-Private Partnership Authority were focused on pushing forward privatization and turning down residents' proposals for alternatives based in solidarity frameworks, such as the co-op.

The demands of the tourism industry are an important element influencing how collective actions think of alternatives to the public corporation or a public-private partnership. Viequenses have it clear: the service is and should be oriented to their needs first. However, beyond imagining futures of efficiency and ease of travel, Viequenses' desires for the right to remain in their hometown with dignity remits to how recent ferry advocacy goes above addressing health injustices, framing the struggle through the multi-scalar character of mobility justice. Thus, while it is an important demand to ask to be listened to and for their voices to matter in decision-making, it has also become increasingly important to think of ways to create a dignified life outside of improvements to the maritime transportation system and instead through the other

neglected transport links. Existing solidarity practices work around instead of through mobility injustices to address the service gaps since demands by advocates and passenger lived expertise continue to be ignored. One example is of an informal community transport scheme run by *Vieques en Rescate*, a non-profit organization that grew out of the activism of the *Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses* that assists cancer patients in Vieques with medical costs and transportation to the Big Island for treatments. Volunteers pick up patients from their homes, accompany them on the ferry ride and drive them to their appointments on the Big Island. Another recent solidarity practice by Melody came about after discussing health services gaps in Vieques with long-time Vieques advocate Robert Rabin. On top of the medical solidarity housing in Ceiba, Melody also informally offers transportation to patients after recently acquiring a minivan that can comfortably accommodate families, a wheelchair, and luggage. These solidarity practices come out of years of poor service with ATM, and will likely continue if HMS Ferries suggests changes to service that will continue to limit island resident mobility in the future.

Still, the impacts of privatization to these solidarity practices remain to be seen in the years to come. Meanwhile, the procurement process for HMS Ferries and the structural limitations to resident participation throughout made it clear to residents that their mobilities are secondary to tourism demands despite their continued efforts to make their needs a priority. This is made evident even through the tourism-laden language used by HMS Ferries in describing their service with the islands as “destinations” and the ferry ride as a “journey”. Advocates on the island interrogate what is the purpose of such a transparent framing of the service for tourists. Has the privatization really fulfilled promises of seamless transportation? If not, what is the purpose behind perpetuating the mobility depravations to residents through reorienting the service as a tour for visitors and not as an essential infrastructure to residents?

Many frictions occurred during HMS Ferries' first months in service and were denounced through social media. It was not clear what was the role of the ATM in keeping performance measures for the private operator. Was the ATM or the Puerto Rico Public-Private Partnership Authority accounting for HMS Ferries' issues in service as non-compliance? Unless the company's performance is called into question for a breach of contract through neglectful service or other issues, it will continue to be the operator until 2044 making millions each year. That leaves any other governance alternative, including the ferry co-op, contingent on canceling the contract which does not specify what will happen to the service if that occurs, nor what will happen to the vessels owned by ATM but maintained by HMS Ferries. Even if a ferry co-op instilled doubts among residents over what its service would look like, its accountability would be placed upon its partners/passengers through the structure of collective ownership, contrasting the current experience with the public-private partnership. In other words, I find that the structure of a ferry co-op engages with Mimi Sheller's notion of a mobile commons through creating shared spaces of decision-making by shifting the power through a claim of epistemic justice in raising lived expertise as valuable transportation knowledge. I find that the cooperative model offers residents an opportunity to think of their mobility needs outside of existing paradigms that perpetuate coloniality and colonialism.

Future directions

The demands for a *transporte maritimo digno* are another iteration of *la lucha viequense* as the historic struggle for well-being (Cruz Soto, 2020), always present so long as Viequenses have had to travel outside the island to access essentials. Their most important struggle over transportation dignity has always been for their needs to be heard and acknowledged by those who run the ferry service. This illuminates how the politics of mobility interweave multiple

dimensions of justice. Then, why has the colonial state resisted basic demands for increased participation, instead delivering diluted solutions that further promote dispossession? Why have certain governance alternatives centered on cooperative and social solidarity values not been given the space to flourish? If it is clear how unjust forms of mobility emerge, what might a just counterpart look like? These questions should be central in future research about mobilities and the transportation geographies of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean to posit mobility justice as necessary to disrupt existing colonial mobility regimes, allowing for the region to take ownership over its mobilities.

It is my hope that this thesis will act as a starting point for future research along the intersections of transportation, mobilities, and coloniality in Puerto Rico. In considering future directions for research on the politics of mobility specific to this research project, I open with the question of what are the mobilities that are not taken into account in an examination of ferry governance? For example, future work could consider the fuller experiences of women, elders, and the disabled who are often brought up as those affected by the hardships of access by choosing to not travel at all, often suffering the consequences of neglected health. Nevertheless, in recalling Tuck and Yang's axiom of inquiry as invasion, I caution against research on mobilities specific to Viequenses without consent, interest, and direct involvement from the community. Secondly, I understand that a thorough examination on the mobilities of the white, non-Viequenses residing on the island will contribute to a fuller understanding coloniality of the island's politics of mobility, especially since my conversations with informants and other Viequenses stressed that they do not use the ferry service, pointing toward a distinct kinopolitics between Viequense and non-Viequense inhabitants of the island. Another question extends from Sheller's work by asking how mobility has been deployed as a form of colonization? A more

thorough history on the maritime transportation of the municipal islands may provide rich accounts of how the ferry service was another modernization project by the Puerto Rican colonial state while also interrogating the role of the US Navy in shaping its structure.

Corruption was an important theme across my interviews and has been recently conceptualized as an analytical tool for Puerto Rican studies following an understanding that US colonialism relies upon the colonial state's corrupt practices for its survival. Future research can go further by interrogating what is the relationship between this dependence and the production of im/mobilities in Puerto Rico to island residents. Researching corruption as a framework instead of an object of study puts into question the role of decision-makers as holding claims for transportation knowledges, opening up opportunities to continue exploring community efforts in taking control of governance and the stickiness of the role of the state.

The Viequense experience of ferry advocacy underscores the tension with transportation improvements attained through activism as accomplishing increases in efficiency or seamlessness akin to taking a step closer toward mobility justice. While the struggle for a *transporte marítimo digno* succeeded throughout the years in elevating the claim for an improved ferry service, the ways in which said "improvements" were done did not consider resident's basic claims for their voices to be heard and matter in decisionmaking. Instead, ferry users have been left to contend with a private company that, while they have done some improvements in comparison to the service as imparted by ATM, still does not prioritize their mobility needs through scheduling and inconsistent service quality. Then, how can improvements with the ferry service meet resident needs for more access while also considering the demands of the visitor economy with the limited capacity on board to ferry passengers across the Vieques Sound? Perhaps this is why ferry advocacy has scaled down with other forms of

solidarity practices now regaining power. Beyond imagining futures of efficiency and ease of travel, some Viequenses simply want the right to comfortably remain in their hometown, and this means creating the conditions of being able to stay in Vieques with dignity. At the twenty-year anniversary of the ceasing of weapons testing and war games, the struggle toward justice remains alive as some issues became more complex and others developed over time. The Viequense advocates I spoke with expressed wanting more fixity to the island where traveling for basic needs is only an option, not a necessity. In other words, the Viequense struggle toward a *transporte marítimo digno* interrogates mobility in favor of stillness expressed through the desire stay in their hometown as their way of reckoning and surviving the afterlives of militarized colonialism.

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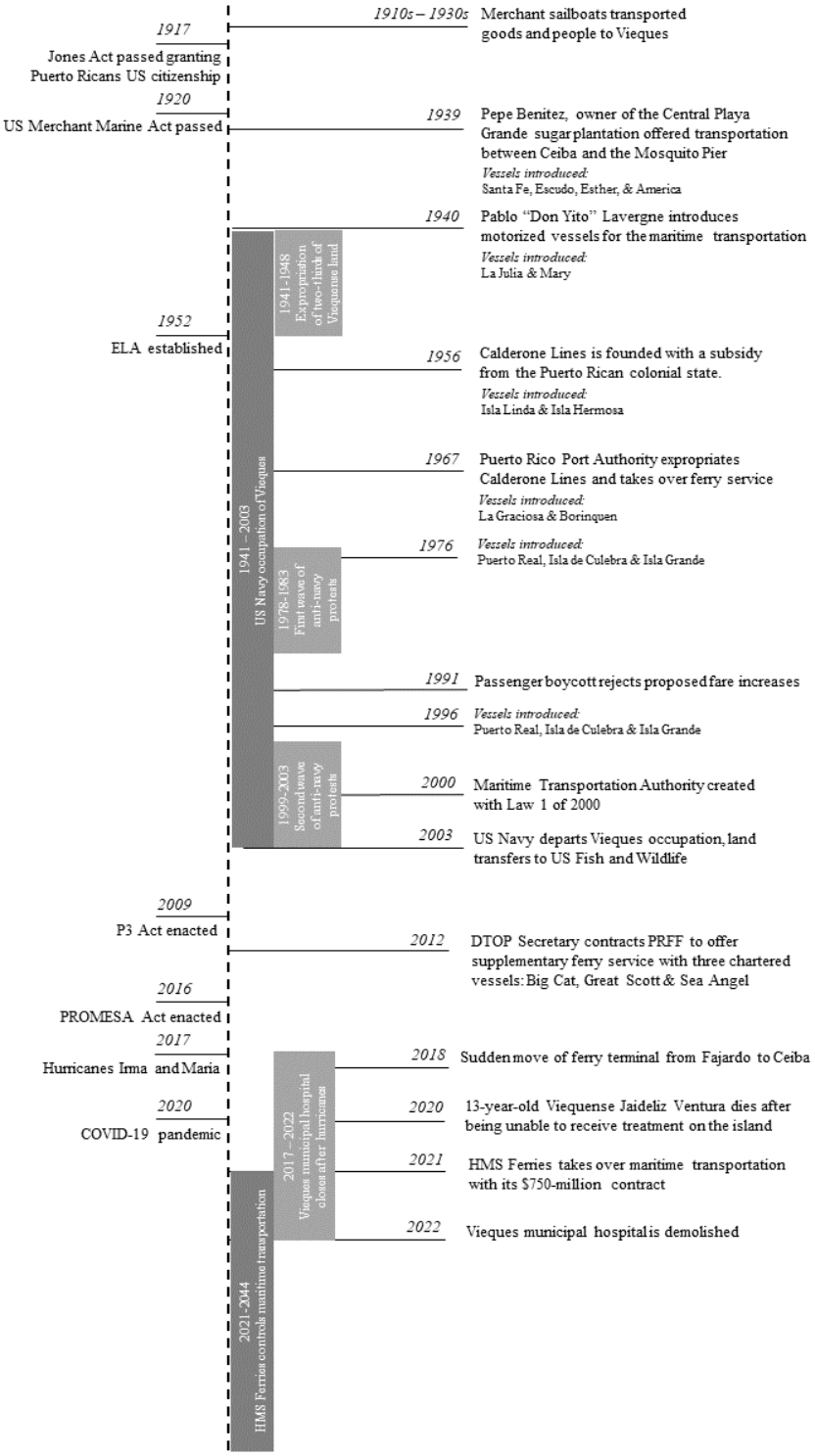
APPENDIX A: TIMELINE OF KEY HISTORICAL MOMENTS IN MARITIME TRANSPORTATION



APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF VIEQUES AND PUERTO RICO (2000-2021)

Table 3: Hispanic or Latino by race by total population for Puerto Rico

	2000	2010	%Δ	2021	%Δ
Hispanic or Latino:	3,762,746	3,716,870	-1%	3,270,361	-12%
White Alone	3,030,896	2,727,777	-10%	1,665,237	-39%
Black or African American Alone	297,869	270,432	-9%	325,953	21%
Some other race Alone	259,626	393,593	52%	711,104	81%
Two or more races	155,769	308,119	98%	558,592	81%
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	12,773	7,367	-42%	5,283	-28%
Asian Alone	5,085	9,510	87%	3,947	-58%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	728	72	-90%	245	240%
Not Hispanic or Latino:	45,864	45,452	-1%	40,913	-10%
White Alone	33,966	33,731	-1%	28,414	-16%
Black or African American Alone	5,064	4,411	-13%	3,698	-16%
Asian Alone	2,875	2,904	1%	2,316	-20%
Two or more races	2,646	1,927	-27%	2,561	33%
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	563	48	-91%	124	158%
Some other race Alone	385	2,402	524%	3,800	58%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	365	29	-92%	0	-100%
Total Population	3,808,610	3,762,322	-1%	3,311,274	-12%

Table 4: Hispanic or Latino by race by total population for Vieques

	2000	2010	%Δ	2021	%Δ
Hispanic or Latino:	8,870	8,913	0%	7,662	-14%
White Alone	6,439	5,625	-13%	2,083	-63%
Black or African American Alone	1,228	1,337	9%	580	-57%
Some other race Alone	794	1,247	57%	4,766	282%
Two or more races	300	688	129%	219	-68%
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	65	0	-100%	0	0
Asian Alone	44	16	-64%	14	-13%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	0	0	0	0	0
Not Hispanic or Latino:	236	400	69%	655	64%
White Alone	182	347	91%	509	47%
Black or African American Alone	28	46	64%	49	7%
Asian Alone	8	0	-100%	0	0
Two or more races	9	7	-22%	97	1286%
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	4	0	-100%	0	0
Some other race Alone	5	0	-100%	0	0
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	0	0	0	0	0
Total Population	9,106	9,313	2%	8,317	-11%

Source:
US Census Bureau. (2000). T15. Hispanic or Latino by Race. 2000 Decennial Census.
US Census Bureau. (2010). A04001. Hispanic or Latino by Race. 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates
US Census Bureau. (2021). A04001. Hispanic or Latino by Race. 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Table 5: Unemployment rate for civilian population in labor force 16 years and over

Puerto Rico					
	2000	2010	%Δ	2021	%Δ
Total	1,151,863	1,380,477	20%	1,236,011	-10%
Employed	80.8%	83.3%	3%	85.4%	3%
Unemployed	19.2%	16.7%	-13%	14.6%	-13%
Vieques					
	2000	2010	%Δ	2021	%Δ
Total	2,386	3,328	39%	2,355	-29%
Employed	71.8%	88.7%	24%	84.8%	-4%
Unemployed	28.3%	11.3%	-60%	15.2%	35%

Source:
US Census Bureau. (2000). T73: Unemployment rate for civilian population in labor force 16 years and over. 2000 Decennial Census.
US Census Bureau. (2010). A17005: Unemployment rate for civilian population in labor force 16 years and over. 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates
US Census Bureau. (2021). A17005: Unemployment rate for civilian population in labor force 16 years and over. 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Table 6: Poverty rate for Puerto Rico and Vieques

	2000		2010				2021			
	PR	Vieques	PR	%Δ	Vieques	%Δ	PR	%Δ	Vieques	%Δ
18 and under	1,081,511	2,710	926,506	-14.3%	2,245	-17%	593,300	-36%	1,557	-31%
In poverty	58%	81%	56.3%	-4%	66.6%	-18%	56.3%	0%	86.0%	29%
Not in poverty	42%	19%	43.7%	5%	33.4%	79%	43.7%	0%	14.0%	-58%
18 to 64	2,271,053	5,115	2,276,437	0.2%	5,486	7%	1,993,374	-12%	4,856	-11%
In poverty	44%	59%	41.4%	-6%	42.9%	-27%	40.1%	-3%	44.8%	4%
Not in poverty	56%	41%	58.6%	5%	57.2%	40%	59.9%	2%	55.2%	-3%
65 and above	417,218	1,280	512,014	22.7%	1,516	18%	696,377	36%	1,904	26%
In poverty	44%	52%	42.1%	-4%	36.1%	-30%	38.5%	-9%	47.9%	33%
Not in poverty	56%	49%	57.9%	3%	63.9%	32%	61.5%	6%	52.2%	-18%

Source:
US Census Bureau. (2000). T180: Poverty status in 1999 for children under 18. 2000 Decennial Census.
US Census Bureau. (2010). A13003A: Poverty status in 2010 for children under 18. 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.
US Census Bureau. (2021). A13003A: Poverty status in 2020 for children under 18. 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

US Census Bureau. (2000). T180: Poverty status in 1999 for population age 18 to 64. 2000 Decennial Census.
US Census Bureau. (2010). A13003B: Poverty status in 2010 for population age 18 to 64. 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.
US Census Bureau. (2021). A13003B: Poverty status in 2020 for population age 18 to 64. 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Table 6 continued:

US Census Bureau. (2000). T180: Poverty status in 1999 for population age 65 and over. 2000 Decennial Census.
US Census Bureau. (2010). A13003C: Poverty status in 2010 for population age 65 and over. 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.
US Census Bureau. (2021). A13003C: Poverty status in 2020 for population age 65 and over.2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Table 7: Housing tenure for Puerto Rico and Vieques

	2000		2010				2021			
	PR	Vieques	PR	% Δ	Vieques	% Δ	PR	%	Vieques	% Δ
Housing units	1,418,476	4,388	1,474,026	4%	4,418	1%	1,553,791	5%	4,967	12%
Occupied units	1,261,325	3,319	1,227,039	-3%	3,231	-3%	1,196,790	-2%	2,374	-27%
Owner occupied	919,769	2,659	888,755	-3%	2,517	-5%	814,154	-8%	1,670	-34%
Renter occupied	341,556	660	338,284	-1%	714	8%	382,636	13%	704	-1%
Vacant	157,151	1,069	246,987	57%	1,187	11%	357,001	45%	2,593	118%
For rent	27,363	61	25,623	-6%	127	108%	26,977	5%	237	87%
For sale only	16,248	31	22,460	38%	51	65%	21,090	-6%	221	333%
Other vacant	113,540	977	198,904	75%	1,009	3%	308,934	55%	2,135	112%

Source:
US Census Bureau. (2000). T155: Housing Units. 2000 Decennial Census.
US Census Bureau. (2010). A10001: Housing Units. 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates
US Census Bureau. (2021). A10001: Housing Units. 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

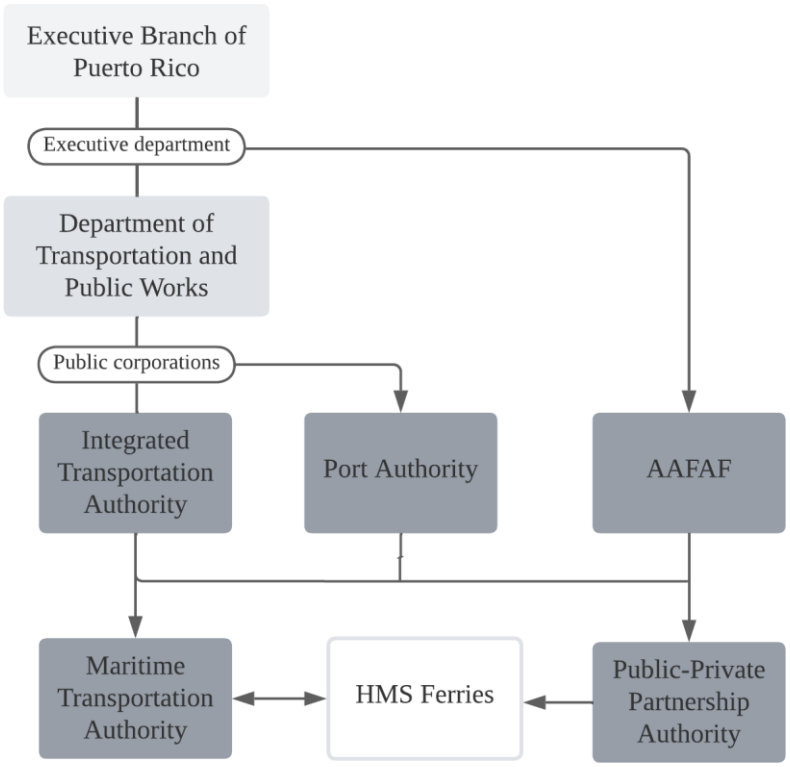
US Census Bureau. (2000). T156: Tenure. 2000 Decennial Census.
US Census Bureau. (2010). A10060: Tenure. 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates
US Census Bureau. (2021). A10060: Tenure. 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Table 7 continued:

US Census Bureau. (2000). T157: Occupancy status. 2000 Decennial Census.
US Census Bureau. (2010). A10044: Occupancy status. 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates
US Census Bureau. (2021). A10044: Occupancy status. 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

US Census Bureau. (2000). T158: Vacancy status. 2000 Decennial Census.
US Census Bureau. (2010). A10047: Vacancy status by type of vacancy. 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.
US Census Bureau. (2021). A10047: Vacancy status by type of vacancy. 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

APPENDIX C: ORGANIZATIONAL CHART FOR MARITIME TRANSPORTATION AS OF 2021



Since July 2021, the organizational structure for the maritime transportation service comprises the private company HMS Ferries (HMSI) as well as various government agencies, each assigned specific responsibilities in running operations and maintenance. At the apex of the structure is the DTOP, which serves as the overarching authority responsible for strategic planning, policy formulation, and overall coordination. Underneath, several key government agencies play crucial roles. At the core of the public-private partnership is the Maritime Transportation Authority, which continues to act as the key regulatory and oversight body for the maritime transportation service. Their primary responsibilities include overseeing HMS Ferries operations, in addition to making decisions about fares and sailing schedules. Most decision-

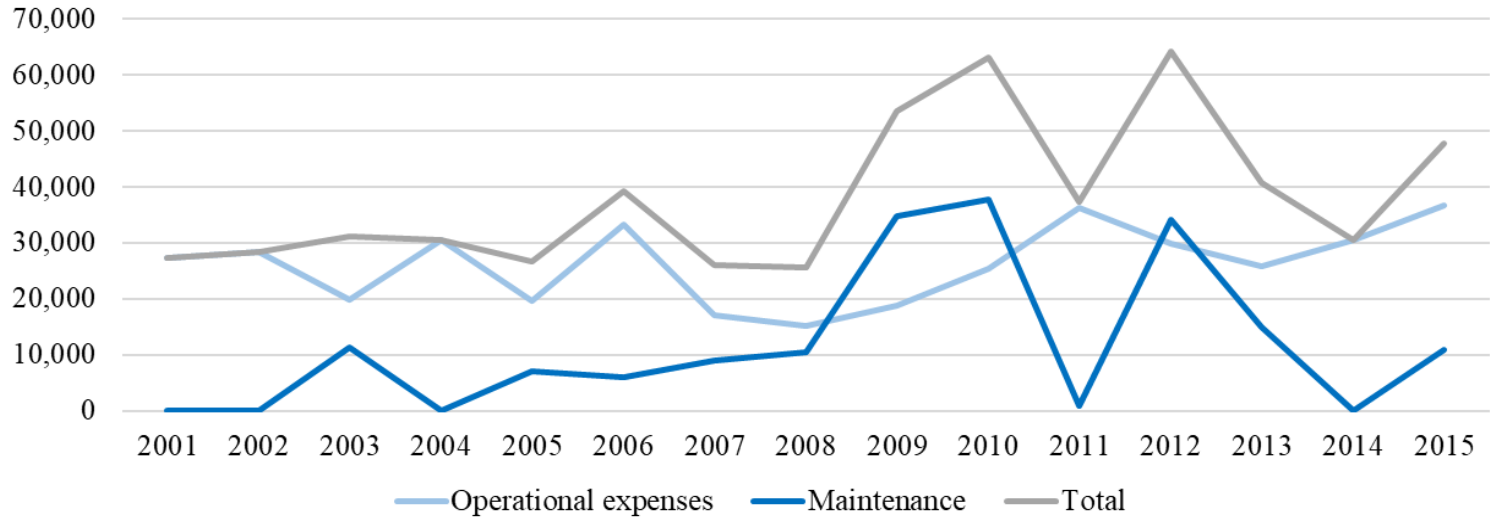
making rests upon its board of directors. Since 2022, the Maritime Transportation Authority no longer operates as a public corporation and functions as a program under the Integrated Transportation Authority. With the public-private partnership, HMS Ferries has the exclusive right to operate and maintain the maritime transportation service including specific responsibilities to implement a new ticket system and engage in other commercial activities that may be economically beneficial to the operator. In accordance with the P3 Act, the Public-Private Partnership Authority takes charge of implementing public policies on public-private partnerships; it conducted the request for qualifications, the desirability and convenience study, and created a committee that selected the operator for the contract award. Another important agency, the Puerto Rico Port Authority, focuses on overseeing and regulating port activities. Furthermore, the Local Redevelopment Authority for Roosevelt Roads leases the lands used for the ferry terminal and parking lots in Ceiba.

APPENDIX D: ANNUAL EXPENSES OF THE MARITIME TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY, 2000-2015

Table 8: Annual expenses of the Maritime Transportation Authority, in thousands.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Operating expenses																
Special assignments	19,000	15,500	15,500	15,500	15,500	15,500	15,500	11,750	12,000	17,000	20,848	23,957	24,604	22,377	26,827	33,291
Federal funds					674			1,800	1,800	241	120		2,696			
Fare revenues	4,151	5,371	3,399	4,458	3,986	4,198	2,777	2,732	1,326	1,603	4,382	12,301	2,691	3,500	3,600	3,500
Other revenues		6,416	9,508		10,369		15,001									
Loans and bond emissions								814								
Total	25,151	27,287	28,407	19,958	30,529	19,698	33,278	17,096	15,126	18,844	25,350	36,258	29,991	25,877	30,427	36,791
Permanent improvements																
Federal funds				7,229		5,900	4,800		10,400	34,800	33,248	800	19,200	11,966		5,201
Fare revenues						600	1,200							2,990		
Other revenues				4,053		500					100					
Public improvement funds								9,000					15,000		150	
Special assignments											4,500	200				
ARRA federal funds																5,725
Total				11,282		7,000	6,000	9,000	10,400	34,800	37,848	1,000	34,200	14,956	150	10,936
Total	25,151	27,287	28,407	31,240	30,529	26,698	39,278	26,096	25,526	53,644	63,198	37,198	64,191	40,833	30,577	47,727

Figure 20: ATM Expenses on Operational Costs and Maintenance, in thousands (2001-2015)



Source: Puerto Rico Fiscal Budgets, https://presupuesto.pr.gov/Pages/PRESUPUESTOSANTERIORES.aspx/af2002/dhtmlpag/presupugood.htm

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEWS

Pedro Santiago, director of the Institute of Cooperativism of the University of Puerto Rico, February 22, 2022

Debora, Vieques city council member and retired teacher, June 23, 2022

Stan, white business owner in Vieques, June 28, 2022

Eric, Vieques city council member and engineer, June 28, 2022

Patricia, Vieques lawyer and community organizer, July 6, 2022

Karla, supporter of the maritime transportation cooperative, July 12, 2022

Peter, white business owner in Vieques, July 12, 2022

Kelly, white business owner and community organizer, July 16, 2022

Elisa, Vieques school teacher and community organizer, July 27, 2022

Current mayor of Vieques, August 11, 2022

Melody, project leader of the health solidarity house in Ceiba, August 26, 2022

Martha Quiñones, professor from the University of Puerto Rico, Arecibo, October 3, 2022

APPENDIX F: LETTER OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research & Innovation
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Exempt Determination

May 12, 2022

Principal Investigator	Julie Cidell
CC	Andrea Pimentel Rivera
Protocol Title	*Cooperative futures in ferry travel for Vieques, Puerto Rico*
Protocol Number	23021
Funding Source	Women's Transportation Seminar Helene M. Overly Memorial Scholarship Graduate College Master's Travel Grant GGIS Summer Research Grants Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Illinois Written Fellowship
Review Category	Exempt 2 (ii)
Determination Date	May 12, 2022
Closure Date	May 11, 2027

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) has reviewed your application and determined the criteria for exemption have been met.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing major modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

Changes to an **exempt** protocol are only required if substantive modifications are requested and/or the changes requested may affect the exempt status.