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Mimi Sheller

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Retouching the “Untouched Island”

Post-military Tourism in Vieques, Puerto Rico

Mimi Sheller

Tourism Mobilities and Place-making

Tourism has long been crucial to the spatialisation of the Caribbean, but is especially so now as the region faces the ending of preferential trade agreements with Europe and the pressures of neoliberal restructuring. Tourism remains the most important economic sector in the Caribbean as a whole, although unevenly distributed (Duval, 2004; World Bank, 2005). That sector plays a special role in spatial restructuring. Three key modes of assembling the tourist space in the Caribbean are the all-inclusive resort, the cruise ship, and the private island. In this article I briefly introduce each of those strategies of spatial control, and then focus on one example of extreme territorial restructuring of Caribbean land: Vieques Island, Puerto Rico. I aim to interrogate how that island used as a US Navy bombing range for over sixty years has been reinvented as an “untouched” natural paradise ripe for tourism development.

Studies of tourist mobilities emphasize that there is an unstable and ever-changing interrelation of places, persons, technologies, and natures connected through performances and practices (Edensor, 1998, 2000, 2001; Sheller and Urry, 2004, 2006b). Those fluid relationships create the complex spatialities and temporalities of contemporary tourism development. Tourist space takes shape through sets of practices and performances, as people, things, and information move around and reassemble. Tourism depends on geographies of mobility and interconnectivity that bring foreign visitors into a country, transport local po-



Red beach, Vieques (Puerto Rico).

Photo: Tom MacKenzie, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

pulations to work in tourist areas, and tie “destinations” into sophisticated webs of product advertising, place promotion, and information processing technologies for booking reservations, ticketing, and airport or port logistics. In Vieques we can see a particularly acute example of the spatial restructuring of land, infrastructure, and media representations in order to produce a new performance of place – one that would support tourism rather than militarization.

Places are not fixed but are implicated within complex networks by which hosts, guests, buildings, objects, and machines are contingently brought together to produce certain performances and atmospheres in certain

places at certain times (Hetherington 1997; Bærenholdt *et al.*, 2004; Sheller, 2004b). Tourism development strategies thus have a powerful impact on place-making via the construction of transport and communication infrastructures, land-use patterns, and forms of representation in the international media and on the worldwide web. The transformation of a former military weapons testing range and naval training site into an “untouched” natural paradise is an extreme example of the processes of spatial restructuring and symbolic “retouching” by which Caribbean tourist destinations are created and marketed. Through a study of Vieques Island, we can better understand processes of re-spatialisation occurring across the region.



The creation of the all-inclusive resort throughout the Caribbean carves out spatial enclaves by cutting off resorts from the surrounding locality (Tittley, 2005; Pattullo, 1996). The gated, security-guarded, and semi-fortified private enclave of the all-inclusive resort is exemplary of a development strategy that makes Caribbean space more accessible to foreigners and less accessible to local inhabitants. Indeed, as Gavan Tittley argues, all-inclusive resorts function as “carefully spatialised and curated stages, [which] attempt to secure a generic, deterritorialised Caribbean of desire through modes of performance,” representation, surveillance, and policing; they blunt any sense of interconnectedness or responsibility in the very act of “travelling closer to others” (Tittley, 2005 : 190; Sheller, 2003). Although now in competition with newer forms of niche marketing such as small-scale ecotourism, such resorts remain an important (though controversial) development strategy throughout the region.

Expansion of the cruise ship industry and private yachting are creating new geographies of access to Caribbean ports, beaches, and remote islands. Deterritorialised cruise fleets are detached from place and operate as “mobile floating chunks of multinational capital” flying flags of convenience that protect them from international labour laws, environmental protection, and “from territorially based state and regional regulation in the Caribbean” (Wood, 2004 : 160).¹ Cruises often involve brief stopovers at specially designed port areas, the creation of isolated private beaches or entire islands for the exclusive use of cruise ship customers, and the trend towards huge liners that function as entire floating theme parks of “shopertainment” from which passengers need never alight. New cruises leave direct from New York and there are investments in new infrastructures such as the \$45 million Grand Turks Cruise Terminal, in the Turks and Caicos. Customized itineraries allow for short-term cruises and “individualized” on-and-off cruises such as Stelios Haji-Ioannou’s new easyCruise service in the Caribbean (Passey, 2006). Although making a physical journey, in many regards the cruise-tourist visits only a virtual Caribbean, either of the kind that has been invented around specific shopping ports or private beaches to serve their needs, or of the kind where they never leave the ship.² Such cruises draw on the history of the Caribbean as a “tropical playground” (Sheller 2004b), while also exploiting new

technologies of mobility and immobility to reorganize Caribbean space to serve external interests (Sheller 2004a).

If all-inclusive resorts create exclusive spatial enclaves, and cruises fragment Caribbean space into a series of stops, a third strategy for re-localizing Caribbean space folds it into metropolitan territory by expropriating entire islands for tourism development. Such developments involve the purification of space by removing all local traces and uses, the connection of the destination to metropolitan transportation links, the building of new physical and communicational infrastructures to support affluent needs and desires, and usually the super-valuation of land, villas, and hotel rooms to exclude all but the super-rich from accessing the destination.³ Examples include the plans for Dellis Cay in the Turks and Caicos, in which a series of world-famous architects will design various elements (Sheller, forthcoming), and Atlantis, Bimini Bay Resort and Casino, or Chub Cay, all in the Bahamas, which include features such as marinas, luxury hotels, spas, shopping villages, and golf courses. These isolated luxury developments are enabled in part by new airports, heliports, and transport accessibility (Sheller, forthcoming), but also by colonial histories and neo-colonial presents that shape Caribbean space in relation to external needs, mobilities, and fantasies.

Vieques Island in Puerto Rico offers a remarkable example of place remaking in the Caribbean. When the US Navy finally closed down its long-existing bombing range and weapons facilities there in 2003 in response to a well-publicized local resistance movement to it, the island was suddenly promoted for its potential tourism development. Artists Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla created the Land Mark Exhibition and various related projects to highlight the resistance movement’s ongoing role in driving out the Navy and reclaiming the bombed and contaminated land.⁴ The Land Mark project asks: “Who develops this land? Who will benefit culturally, economically, and politically?” These are pertinent questions throughout the Caribbean that might equally be asked of other tourism developments. Here I address conflicts over Caribbean tourism development in relation to the processes of “land marking” explored in the case of Vieques. My analysis draws on the Land Mark project, recent travel writings about the island in the US media, and histories of the military presence

and the struggle over Vieques. Above all, I consider the processes of eviction and expropriation by which Caribbean spaces are unpeopled, “developed,” abandoned, and then represented as “natural,” “pristine,” and “untouched.”

Dismantling a US Bombing Range and Weapons Training Facility

Puerto Rico became a Commonwealth or “free associated State” of the United States of America in 1898, following Spain’s defeat in the Spanish American War.⁵ In the post-World War II era, “Puerto Rico became the hub of the US military presence in the Caribbean... [and] US security became identified with military hegemony in the Caribbean” (Garcia Munoz and Beruff, 1994 : 116). In 1941 the US Navy arrived in Vieques, a 21-mile long island just off the east coast of Puerto Rico, and purchased by demand 26,000 acres, or 72% of the territory, to use for manoeuvres, bombing practice, and storage of military explosives. In 1947 the US Interior Department was defeated in its plan to forcibly relocate the entire population of Vieques to St. Croix, so a population of about 9000 remained squeezed between a live firing range and a weapons storage area of the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility (AFWTF). The Navy used the island “for training in Marine amphibious landings, naval surface fire support from offshore, and air-to-ground bombing from Navy and Marine Corps aircrafts launched from carriers” (Marcella, 2002 : 315). The island was part of the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base, which was the heart of LANTCOM, the Navy’s unified command for the entire Western hemisphere (Garcia and Beruff, 1994). Vieques was a staging ground for US interventions such as Guatemala in 1954, the Dominican Republic in 1965, and preparations for the Balkans, Haiti, Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Korea, the Persian Gulf, and Somalia amongst others (McCaffrey 2002). The land was also marketed to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and US allies, who were charged up to \$80 million for its use in training aircraft carrier battle groups. As recently as 1998, up to 23,000 bombs were dropped in the 900-acre live impact zone (Land Mark, Tate Modern, 2003).⁶ The Navy effectively “controlled the fate of the entire island” and its plight “dramatically exposed Puerto Rico’s lack of sovereignty and subordinate status within the US orbit of power” (McCaffrey, 2006 : 88; and see Barreto 2002).



Over the years a protest movement grew, especially when concern over environmental destruction and restrictions on use of fishing areas led local fishermen and their supporters to physically block NATO naval manoeuvres in 1978-1979. Thousands of islanders and their supporters in the US were mobilized, but according to Katherine McCaffrey, the local framing of the movement, alongside external events that increased military entrenchment and tensions over Puerto Rican independence, undermined its success. Post-cold war restructuring of US military strategies and moves to close bases kept the issue alive, as did secretive plans to build a major radar station to be used in the war on drugs. Then, in April 1999, two F-18 airplanes dropped two five-hundred pound bombs outside their target area, killing David Sanes, a civilian security guard, and injuring four others (Baver, 2006; McCaffrey, 2006). That event provoked the resistance movement to establish civil disobedience camps inside the bombing range (for a full account see McCaffrey 2006) and, in February 2000, the largest mass demonstration in Puerto Rican history was organized in San Juan, the *Marcha para la Paz de Vieques*. Drawing on a more widely accessible “peace” discourse and non-violent tactics (McCaffrey, 2006), that protest became “a public relations disaster for the service, rippling back into cities with large Puerto Rican populations

like New York” (Adams 2003 : 36). Through “new and old media technologies, from Internet sites to film festivals, newspapers to television, the civil disobedience campaigns of the late 1990s and early 2000s made the Vieques Libre struggle for peace internationally known” (Land Mark, Tate Modern, 2003).

In January 2000, President Clinton finally issued an order for the return of the entire naval ammunition facility to civilian use, and implied devolution of the land to the municipality of Vieques or to the commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The process of withdrawal began in May 2001, and was finally completed in May 2003. After 60 years of US Navy presence in Vieques—which allegedly included testing live ammunition, depleted uranium shells, napalm, and germ and chemical warfare—the resistance movement had driven out the Navy (Baver, 2006). In any case, the cold war was over and the prevailing military practice had turned towards discourses of “precision bombing” supported by global positioning satellite (GPS) technologies (Kaplan, 2006). By the 1990s, bombing targets could be simulated as imaginary islands and weapons training could use Virtual At-Sea Training (VAST),⁷ a program that was accelerated in 2002 after the decision to pull out of Vieques. As Caren Kaplan (2006) argues, the rise of GPS and global information systems (GIS) have sup-

ported changing cultural practices of targeting within the military-industrial-media-entertainment complex. But other kinds of virtual realities were at play, and the question I want to explore is how various futures for Vieques have been imagined, projected, and contested, especially those concerned with tourism in the island, and in the entire Caribbean region.

According to artists Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, the “whole project of Land Mark was about [...] how land can differentiate itself from other land by the way that it’s been marked, historically, socially, politically” (Schmelzer, 2004) through processes such as colonization, gentrification, war, and preservation. The project explored the following questions: What implicit power relations are evidenced in these land marking processes? Whose interests are served in the designation of certain places for preservation and others not? What are the strategies for reclaiming marked land? What are the stakes? How does one articulate an ethics of land use? Who decides what is worth preserving and what is worth destroying? (Land Mark, Tate Modern, 2003).

While those questions focus on the specific extreme case of the US bombing range on Vieques, they are applicable to Caribbean development as a whole, and to wider issues of mobility, neoliberalism, and respatialisation. The sea and air mobilities of the US Military are the foundational condition for all economic development in the Caribbean insofar as military interventions or the threat thereof has played a crucial part in upholding the neoliberal order in Jamaica, Guyana, Grenada, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, for example, and the ongoing economic embargo and political isolation of communist Cuba.

Inventing Wilderness: From Bombs to Nature

Most of the US Navy land was returned not to the Government of Puerto Rico or to the municipality of Vieques, but to the US Federal Government. Large portions were designated as a nature reserve and wildlife refuge under the direction of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Baver, 2006). Presumably that gesture of natural “conservation” was supposed to create a beneficent image of the military; yet it also served to conceal the damage to the island under the cover of “nature” and benefits to “wildlife”...



Target tank on impact area, Vieques (Puerto Rico).

Photo: Tom MacKenzie, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



This land, now plighted with thousands of unexploded ordnance, high levels of heavy metal concentrations in the soil, and other forms of contamination are represented by its newest proprietors, the US Departments of Interior and Fish and Wildlife Services, as the largest wildlife refuge in the Caribbean.⁸ (Land Mark, Tate Modern, 2003)

That designation of the land shields it from the environmental clean-up that would be necessary were it to revert to residential use. After extensive community mobilization, the land and waters surrounding Vieques were federally designated as a “Superfund site” in February 2005, but any remedial action could take more than a decade (Baver, 2006 : 108)⁹. Without clean-up, the land cannot be devolved from Federal Government control, and that ensures a loophole by which it can later be reclaimed for military purposes (*idem* : 112).

Moreover, the continuing exclusion of the local population from the “conservation zone” has set the scene for a new round of development in the name of tourism expansion and new employment opportunities. The new threat faced by Viequenses is the rapid emergence of the apparatus of tourist development on the island. As Sherrie Baver (2006 : 109) notes, Viequenses are considering contending futures for the island in terms of three related questions: Who will control Vieques’s development, outsiders or the local community? Will tourism be the large-scale enterprise common throughout the region or a smaller-scale, ecologically and culturally more sensitive version that will provide more benefits to long-time residents? How “green” will Vieques be in the future?.

Allora and Calzadilla call attention to the barrage of major media articles that have begun promoting the island, including one that argued that “the Navy’s ‘priceless gift’ of ‘untouched land’ [...] protected from crude development by an accident of history shouldn’t be squandered” (Land Mark, Tate Modern, 2003). In the US tourism press, we can see how easily the Navy bombing range slides into valuable real estate, for example in this article subtitled “Thank the US Navy for keeping Vieques Island largely off-limits to tourists and developers for 60 years”:



Historic lighthouse, Vieques (Puerto Rico).

Photo: Tom MacKenzie, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The US Navy, which used Vieques as a bombing range for 60 years, is largely responsible for maintaining the island’s low profile. Though the Navy shelled only a small portion of Vieques a few times a year, travel agents apparently did not consider a live-fire training facility a prime vacation destination. In 2003, following years of protests against the Navy’s presence, the boys in blue withdrew. Now Vieques has become a buzzword among travelers looking for the next “undiscovered” frontier. (Laughinghouse, 2005)

Such articles minimize the Navy’s detrimental impact on the island by turning it into a bonus “untouched” landscape and an “undiscovered” bonanza for new investors and travellers. Other articles describe Vieques as “unspoiled” and “a pristine world” (Stephens, 2004).

Real estate prices are described as having “gone through the roof” since the Navy’s departure, while the island is touted as having been discovered by stars such as Jennifer Lopez, Uma Thurman, Will Smith, and Richard Gere. Yet travel writers insist that “few people

want to see Vieques turned into another St. Thomas or San Juan, with their accompanying hotels, cruise ships, advertising clutter, and traffic congestion” (Luxner, 2006 : 41). A New York Times Travel article also emphasizes the departure of the military and the distinctiveness of this “limited-access” territory in contrast to other nearby Caribbean destinations:

This sudden power shift transformed nearly 80% of Vieques from a limited-access military enclave to the Caribbean’s largest wildlife refuge. Unlike its nearest Caribbean neighbours—the main island of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands of St. John and St. Croix—Vieques is not packed with the high-rise hotels, chain restaurants, or duty-free malls that often accompany large-scale tourist development. (Johnson, 2005)

Like the spatial strategy of the all-inclusive resort, the limited access of the military “enclave” as depicted here also serves to keep local people from ruining their land with over-development. That same journalist refers to some traces of military activity on the island, but emphasizes the protection from



development this has afforded and the natural attractions it has left behind, ignoring the possibility of environmental contamination:

Six decades of military restrictions insulated Vieques from change, including a regional boom in Caribbean commercial development. Bombs have paradoxically preserved much of the island's natural beauty and delicate tropical ecosystems by preventing the unchecked land speculation and slowing the pace of modernization. As its island neighbours play host to cruise ship passengers and charter-trip vacationers, Vieques is still best known for the natural attractions that inspired the island's newfound fame—secluded beaches, crystal-clear snorkeling waters and stunning forest vistas. (Johnson, 2005)

Again the island is differentiated from its neighbours, who followed the alternative strategy of cruise-ship and charter entrepôts, which are less exclusive and require greater infrastructural development and intensive commercial land-use. Bombing and the trampling of local rights ironically become a mode of wilderness conservation, supporting “natural beauty” and “delicate tropical ecosystems.” By slowing modernization, the island is preserved in aspic and can supposedly catapult itself straight to the frontier of post-modern Caribbean ecotourism—small scale, high-end, exclusive, undiscovered.

Post-military Development

“St. Barts? Oh, it's become impossible—but thank goodness Vieques is still real.” (The Talk, *New York Times Style Magazine*, Travel section, winter 2006.)

Crucial to the revaluation of the scarred landscape of Vieques was the Commonwealth Government's \$40 million subsidy (Baver, 2006 : 111) for the building of a “plantation style” hotel, the Wyndham Martineau Bay Resort and Spa, in 2003, which in the fall of 2006 was renovated and remade into a member of the W hotel chain, a high art and style-oriented global boutique hotel “collection.” A 2005 news release on W Hotels Worldwide's acquisition of the 42-acre beachfront property from Reig Capital Puerto Rico, Inc. describes Vieques as “untouched” and observes that “The island, which until now has managed to fly below the radar of the more fashionable crowds, is slowly becoming a destination for the

same kind of global trendsetters that discovered St. Bart's twenty years ago.” No irony seems to be intended in the description of a bombing range as untouched or the use of the fashionista phrase “below the radar” for a former bombing target. With its 156 rooms, 20 luxury villas, two restaurants, bars, pools and health-oriented spa, the W Vieques is described by a chief marketing officer as

a sanctuary to those who want to surround themselves with an aesthetic sense that is both modern and comfortable, while at the same time, part of the incredible natural setting [...] The hotel will pay homage to the peaceful and welcoming nature of the island with a style and service that reflects it. (Hotel Online, 2005)

A centre for war-training is now “peaceful,” a populace engaged in long-term civil disobedience and protest are now “welcoming,” or perhaps it is just the empty beaches that are welcoming.

When “high cement walls” were built around the “exclusive” resort in 2003, there were some concerns over its environmental impact, eliciting evident tensions over tourism development. Robert Rabin of the Committee for the Rescue & Development of Vieques was quoted as saying “We support sustainable economic development. This is not a sustainable economic development, but we are very much in favor of any project to help alleviate the economic situation.” (San Martin, 2003) The article continues:

“It's not the type of tourism I support because it's not ecotourism. It's expensive tourism,” said Juan R. Fernandez, commissioner of Vieques. Still, the potential job market is important for a municipality of 9,300 with an unemployment rate as high as 45 percent. At least 200 people are expected to be hired, making Martineau Vieques' largest private employer. Most will fill housekeeping and maintenance posts. (*ibid.*)

That development of Vieques highlights both the legacies of neo-colonialism and military presence in the region, and the current conditions of neoliberal development, in which local people become chambermaids and smiling servants in the service of international tourism (Alexander, 1997). Another crucial feature of development was

the million-dollar airport upgrading financed by Reig Capital Puerto Rico Inc., the developers of the Martineau Bay Resort and Spa, allowing American Eagle Airlines to operate Super ATR Aircraft with a capacity of 64 passengers and complying “with TSA requirements for thorough security screening” (World Publications, 2006). Opened in December 2006, the airport significantly extends previous access by ferry and by small prop planes operated by carriers such as Vieques Air Link (Luxner, 2006 : 44). It is part of a process of airport expansion and securitization happening across the Caribbean thanks to privatization and “Open Skies” agreements (Sheller, forthcoming).

By 2006 another New York Times travel reporter could report hand-painted messages on the pavement of a newly paved remote beach road: “GRINGO WE DON'T WANT YOUR BUSINESS HERE, GRINGO DON'T PUSH, GRINGO GO HOME.” (Healy, 2006 : 136) The reporter, however, states that he is not going home, although noting that “the residual tension is understandable: the end of bombing opened up a lot of beaches, but it hasn't closed all the wounds” (*idem* : 138). Like much Caribbean travel writing, Healey blithely re-inscribes colonizing visual tropes of Vieques as an unspoiled paradise isle (Sheller, 2003, 2004b): “Almost no island in the Caribbean—and certainly no island in America's own Caribbean territories—can claim nearly as many unspoiled, uncrowded beaches. And even fewer can match Vieques's picture-perfect ideal of swaying palms, fine white sand and aquamarine water.” (Healey, 2006 : 138) Still, he recognizes that the “big gringo threat that looms over Vieques today is overdevelopment” with real estate sales picking up thanks to “unmanned beach property and worldwide exposure brought on by the protests and the subsequent naval withdrawal” (Healey 2006 : 138). Just as the title of this article uses unfortunate double entendres linked to military aggression (“the coast is clear,” “the developers are circling,” “Healey hits the beach”), use of the term “unmanned” here elides the violence of military bombardment while ignoring the potential environmental impacts on the island. It also seems to blame the protest movement, rather than the international tourism development market, for bringing the island “exposure,” and hence attracting developers.



The twisting of the truth proceeds with a visit to “a series of semicircular bunkers built into the hills at one of the island’s prettiest perches” (Healey, 2006 : 141). Wandering around the picturesque site, Healey admires the wildflowers and then wonders “if the sailors that were stationed here appreciated the spot. There are worse places to have waited out the cold war” (*ibid.*). It is as if the cold war did not really happen on that island described by historians as “a hostage of the cold war” (McCaffery, 2006 : 87), as if this were not a major military installation, as if the constant large-scale bombing of that island were just a form of “waiting” for something to happen, rather than a real military exercise with real consequences for the people of Vieques and for the wider Caribbean. The self-avowed gringo Healey finally makes the following extraordinary claims.

Part of the island’s preservation can actually be attributed to its gringo oppressors, who controlled most of the island’s beaches, as well as two-thirds of its land, including the entire eastern end. “Vieques would be a huge slum if it weren’t for the Navy,” says Carlos Latimer, a lawyer from San Juan who has had a second home there since the 1980s. “The Navy kept it pristine.” Others would disagree, but Vieques’s history is less a concern than its future. The pressing question is who, if anyone, will keep the island pristine now. (Healey, 2006 : 138)

The assumptions here are: (a) that the island is pristine simply because it is unpeopled, ignoring charges of environmental contamination; (b) that the Navy should be thanked for this, rather than recognizing the expropriation that took place; and (c) that local people would have created a “slum” if left to their own devices. Nowhere in the article does the journalist bother to quote those who disagree, thus giving implicit agreement. The combined soft-soaping of military power and the silencing of civilian protest upholds US imperialism. Such a structure of legitimation echoes the original US self-legitimation of its role in Puerto Rico as a whole—industrious capitalist gringos saving Puerto Ricans from their own failings, backwardness, and racial degeneracy.¹⁰

Conclusion: The Vieques Resistance Movement and Counter-development

The Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques, which claims one thousand local members, is calling for four things: “devolution of lands to Viequesenses, demilitarization, decontamination, and ecologically just and sustainable development” (Land Mark, Tate Modern, 2003). Allora and Calzadilla understand the protest movement and the art projects generated out of it as fitting into a vernacular tradition of “emergency designs [...] within a very creative history of Caribbean culture” (Schmelzer, 2004). They suggest that local people engaged in “spirited, creative, tactically disruptive actions [...] that embodied the ethical ideals of the civil rights movement as well as the playful remixing of symbols, codes, and languages emblematic of Creole and carnivalesque Caribbean culture” (Land Mark, Tate Modern, 2003). That connects the movement to wider Caribbean resistance movements, cultural interventions, and cultures of resistance, including protests against inappropriate tourism development by a growing Caribbean environmental movement (Baver and Lynch, 2006).

Their project Land Mark (Foot Prints), 2001-2002, for example, used civil disobedience in the form of walking into the restricted bombing zone with special rubber soles that left marks in the sand. “To walk, in the context of this geography, took on a much denser meaning. To leave an index or a trace in the sand was to contest, to refuse, to critically disrupt the ‘official’ meaning of that site.” (Obrist, 2005 : 205) Like the protesters who had occupied the bombing range, such actions also draw attention to the problem of unexploded ordnance, which the US navy has not yet cleaned up.

The counter geography of Vieques is envisioned as an “alternative testing range” for the “future development of this contested geography.” The Land Mark project ran a course at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas and the Universidad Politécnica de Puerto Rico in which the students were asked to envision what a future Vieques might look like. Many of the designs they came up with addressed issues of reusing the cratered bombing targets, the contaminated soil, and extreme conditions of the Live Impact Zone to create a memorial or testimony to the people of Vieques that could also con-

tribute to their project of demilitarization. Unlike the reporter Mark Healey’s anodyne visit to the wildflower enlaced bunkers, these student projects offer proposals such as “Target City” (by Anaid Cabrera Quiara), which suggests “using the wounds that mark a place as the very foundation of its future growth and recovery”; “Food Cooperative Design for Contaminated Soils” (by Julio Morales), which offers an “emergency design that can be implemented immediately for agriculture in contaminated soils” by using discarded white goods from the dump as containers for organic agriculture; “Memorial Watching Tower” (by Neftali Carreira), which “will function as a site to present and to witness the physical and psychological wounds produced on this island for the last 60 years,” including “survival gear that will enable the visiting public to walk in this extreme geography, as aliens in their own estranged earthly environment”; and the “Liberation Research Center” (by Diego), which will include walks tracing the principal civil disobedience routes with histories and testimonies marked along the way, and an interdisciplinary research centre installed in the largest bomb crater in the “fire polygon,” that will explore local and global sustainable development strategies, what a participatory democratic practice might look like today, and the importance of “civic initiative, independent media, ecological tourism [...] and new de-militarization tactics” (Land Mark, Tate Modern, 2003).

Actions by conceptual artists and community activists can help to educate the wider public and tourists, especially if supported by those travel writers who do offer slightly more thoughtful accounts of the conflicts over development on the island (DuBow, 2004). The imagined projects described above bear many resemblances with Richard Misrach’s Bravo 20 proposal, which was designed “to provide the virtual tour of a bombing range [in Nevada] as an educational tool promoting disarmament and an ethic of environmental stewardship” (Sullivan, 2004 : 192; Misrach, 1990). They also share some of the aims of artist/geographer Trevor Paglen’s innovative work on uncovering secret US military bases and weapons facilities in the Western US.¹¹ Those artistic interventions promote alternative geographies through counter-hegemonic means of “marking” land, unveiling secret sites and information, and creating new forms of counter-tourism that



challenge conventional presumptions about where we go, why we go there, and what we seek to see, experience, and learn when we travel. They offer a model of how movements for participatory democracy and environmental justice can form alliances with the arts and with socially responsible tourism to promote alternative forms of development. While Vieques is a unique example, it is indicative of how communities throughout the entire Caribbean region might engage in reclaiming their own lands and protecting their environments while still promoting forms of non-colonizing tourism.

Mimi Sheller is visiting Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Swarthmore College, and Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Mobilities Research, Lancaster University, UK.

Notes

- 1 The Caribbean cruise industry is described as “uniquely deterritorialized” in the sense that the three companies with the biggest share of the Caribbean market are Carnival Corporation (with 43.3% of the market in 2003), which is incorporated in Panama and headquartered in Florida, and Royal Caribbean International (with 35.4%), which is incorporated in Liberia and also based out of Florida, and Norwegian Cruise Lines, whose Malaysian-based owner is incorporated in Bermuda (Wood 2004 : 159).
- 2 Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines recently launched *Freedom of the Seas*, the Largest Cruise Ship in the History of the World, with 154,000-plus tons, 1815 guest staterooms, a shopping and dining arcade, multiple bars and restaurants, a miniature golf course, a surf-wave simulator, a children’s water park, a rock-climbing wall, and a regulation boxing ring (Solomon 2006; [www.royalcaribbean.com]).
- 3 That strategy has a long history in the Caribbean, where “celebrity havens” have been created around luxury villa developments such as those on Mustique or Necker Island in the British Virgin Islands (see Sheller 2004a). Private Caribbean enclaves are also popular in cinematic representations, such as several of the James Bond films.
- 4 I viewed the Land Mark exhibition at the Tate Modern, London, in 2003.
- 5 The concept of “extended statehood systems” may be used to describe within one frame the diverse arrangements governing the relation between the USA and Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands; the Netherlands and the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba; France and its Départements d’outre-mer (DOM); and the United Kingdom and its Caribbean Overseas Territories (COT) (de Jong and Kruijt, 2006). Residents of Puerto Rico are US Citizens who serve in the US Armed Forces, but they have no political representation in Congress and cannot vote in presidential elections. The future status of Puerto Rico remains hotly contested, and I cannot fully address this topic here. (For discussion of citizenship and national identity specifically in relation to Vieques, see McCaffrey, 2002 and 2006.)
- 6 The Land Mark exhibit was accompanied by an oversized graphic and text pamphlet, from which the quotes and some of the historical information used in this paper are drawn, however no page numbers are provided in the pamphlet so none have been cited.
- 7 “One of the Navy’s most advanced training systems, VAST uses computers that create a virtual island (or any other venue), based on photography of actual locations. Though military personnel involved in the exercise will see the island on their computer screens, their actual target is cordoned off by up to five sonar buoys far out at sea. Those buoys pinpoint ordnance hits, calculate where they would have struck the island, and provide smoke and explosions to signal the impacts. A predator drone is used to provide a simulated view of the target area.” (Adams, 2003 : 36)
- 8 A study by epidemiologist Carmen Ortiz-Roque of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Puerto Rico found that inhabitants had elevated levels of explosive residues including mercury, aluminium, cadmium, and lead in their bodies. The Vieques cancer mortality rate is also 30% higher than in the rest of Puerto Rico. The Navy refuses to acknowledge any causation of these health problems (DuBow 2004 : 82). A class action lawsuit against the Navy is pending. A study has also been carried out by the Federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), which found elevated levels of aluminium in land crabs, but did not find significant levels of toxicity in local seafood (Luxner, 2006 : 45).
- 9 Superfund is a US government program for the identification and cleanup of areas contaminated with hazardous waste. Once an area is declared a Superfund site, the polluting party is obligated to pay for its decontamination and restoration.
- 10 See Briggs (2002) on the racialization of Puerto Ricans in the USA, which I cannot fully address here, and the experimental use of birth control devices to control Puerto Rican “over population,” which is relevant to the imagery of “slums” being used here.
- 11 Paglen is “constructing an ambitious mapping project to document the geospatial boundaries of what military types call the ‘black world’ of classified military spending [...] Paglen’s work is a hard look at the hegemony of technology’s right over space, and ultimately the role of a military economy in the production of space” (Finoki, 2005; and [paglen.com]).

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