

## Tourism, Expatriates, and Power Relations in Vieques, Puerto Rico

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Geographers study place and spatial interaction: flows of people, goods, ideas, services, capital, and power between and within places. In the last two decades, with increased mobility resulting from technological, political, and financial transformations, this basic concept has been repackaged and adopted by other disciplines as “the spatial turn” and “the new mobilities paradigm.” In particular, tourism has been identified as “a significant modality through which transnational modern life is organized.”<sup>1</sup> Tourist destinations are “situated at the interface of a transnational web of flows in which tourists, workers, migrants, and residents intersect.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, tourism is a crucial element of globalization.

Most tourism occurs where people already live. The impacts on residents and places are countless, and marginalized local residents may experience immobility and disenfranchisement.<sup>3</sup> A solution – particularly in the developing world – has been to increase local participation in tourism development and control. However, as George Taylor<sup>4</sup> argues, this assumes a cohesive and romanticized view of local community. Not only are community elites known to take charge,<sup>5</sup> transnational migration makes the situation increasingly problematic. In many places, migrants from developed countries, whether retirees, backpackers, or “laid back entrepreneurs” who come to surf or for other amenities,<sup>6</sup> live in the area before wholesale tourism arrives. As with other instances of disparate

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1 Adrian Franklin, and Mike Crang. “The Trouble with Tourism and Travel Theory?” *Tourist Studies* 1, no. 1 (2001): 7.

2 Bianchi, Raoul V. *Place and power in tourism development: tracing the complex articulations of community and locality*. 1st ed. Vol. 1. 13–32: PASOS:Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural, 2003.

3 Raoul V Bianchi and Marcus L. Stephenson. “Deciphering Tourism and Citizenship in a Globalized World.” *Tourism Management* 39 (December 2013): 19.

4 George Taylor. “The Community Approach: Does It Really Work?” *Tourism Management* 16, no. 7 (November 1995): 487–489.

5 John Brohman. “New Directions in Tourism for Third World Development.” *Annals of Tourism Research* 23, no. 1 (1996): 9.

6 Katherine T. McCaffrey. *Military Power and Popular Protest the U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

power relations, an exact equivalence does not exist between migrants from less developed regions who settle in developed regions and migrants from developed regions who settle in less developed regions. While the former usually have to fight to obtain even basic rights, the latter often assume the rights and entitlements once attached only to citizenship, often at the expense of the citizens.<sup>7</sup>

It is relatively easy for migrants to take control. First, regardless of their interactions with indigenous residents, they often assume they are members of the local community and entitled to make decisions. Second, many already own establishments catering to other expatriates that can be expanded to encompass tourists. And third, even when they have little economic capital, migrants from developed countries have the advantage of cultural capital with tourists from developed regions.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, while tourism is a crucial part of the globalization of culture, often what tourists experience in tourist locations is at best a neocolonial appropriation of local culture and at worst a standardized corporate tourist enclave separated from the location and its residents.

In this paper I examine a place, Vieques, Puerto Rico, where the future of tourism is being contested within the context of struggles over rights to decision-making and ownership, as well as environmental contamination and governmental responsibilities. Like the rest of the Caribbean, globalization in Puerto Rico through migration and exploitation can be traced back for generations: the takeover of the island and the decimation of Tainos Indians by the Spanish in the sixteenth century; Spanish resistance to English, French, and Danish attempts at colonization during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the introduction of slavery in the eighteenth century and its abolishment in the mid-nineteenth century; and its appropriation by the United States in 1898.

Vieques itself has a double colonial relationship with both the United States mainland and the Puerto Rican mainland, which Viequenses describe as “colonia de la colonia [the colony of a colony],”<sup>9</sup> as well as a neocolonial relationship with US sugar corporations until 1941. I begin with a history the role of the US Navy on Vieques and the problems and opportunities left behind when the

7 Aihwa Ong. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.

8 Raoul V Bianchi, Raoul V. “Migrant Tourist-Workers: Exploring the ‘Contact Zones’ of Post-Industrial Tourism.” *Current Issues in Tourism* 3, no. 2 (2000): 130.

9 Amilcar Barreto. *Vieques, the Navy, and Puerto Rican Politics*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2002.

Naval base was closed in 2003. I then discuss the conflicts between Viequesenses and North Americans with respect to the nascent tourist industry. I conclude by noting that while disparate forces in Vieques make it difficult to change power relations, these same forces may act to deter the development of a large-scale, foreign-owned tourism industry.

### Vieques, the Navy, and Contamination

Vieques is a small island, 21 miles long and 3 miles wide, east of the main island of Puerto Rico (see Figure 1.1). From the early twentieth century through 1941, two US sugar corporations owned 30,000 acres (eighty percent of the island), employing and housing most of the 12,000 residents on the sugar plantations.<sup>10</sup>

In 1941, the US Navy appropriated 26,000 acres of this land for bombing practice and ammunition storage, resulting in the loss of jobs and homes for most of the Viequesenses. 3,000 residents left the island, while the rest were crowded into the remaining 7,000 acres. The Navy did not house military personnel on the island, precluding the typical legal and illegal local employment opportunities that surround military bases, and expatriates from mainland US (including retired military and their families), mainland Puerto Rico, and Western Europe ~~owned the commercial establishments that provided for themselves and the few tourists who visited Vieques. With the loss of the sugar plantations,~~ more than 75% of the Viequesenses were forced to live below the poverty level, trying to survive through fishing and agriculture.<sup>11</sup>

Even though 9,000 people continued to live in Vieques, the Navy used the island for ordnance storage and test bombing until 2003. They also tested chemical and biological weapons in the 1960's, experimented with napalm in 1993, and dropped uranium shells on the island in 1999.

Responding to years of international protests, the Navy finally closed the base in May 2003.<sup>12</sup> Left behind were discharged chemicals, missile propellants, metal debris, unexploded ordnance, and fourteen inadequately prepared dump sites for solvents, solid waste, and diesel fuel. In the surrounding waters

10 César J Ayala. "From sugar plantations to military bases: the U.S. navy's expropriations in Vieques, Puerto Rico, 1940–45." *Centro Journal* XIII, no. 1 (2001): 23–43.

11 David Griffith. *Fishers At Work, Workers At Sea: Puerto Rican Journey Thru Labor & Refuge*. Temple University Press, 2011: 166.

12 Karen Schmelzkopf. "Scale and Narrative in the Struggle for Environment and Livelihood in Vieques Puerto Rico." In *Contentious Geographies: Environmental Knowledge Meaning Scale*, 131–146. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008.

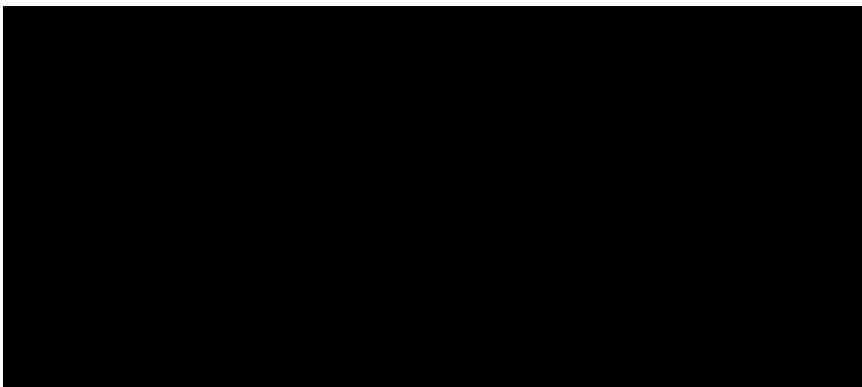


FIGURE 1.1 a) Location of Vieques with regard to Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. b) Map of Vieques.

were two submarine disposal areas and unexploded ordnance.<sup>13</sup> The 980 acres of the actual bombing site were declared uninhabitable, meaning there would be no cleanup. Instead of giving the other 22,000 acres to the municipality, the US government returned 4,000 acres and turned the rest over to the Department

13 United States Environmental Protection Agency. "EPA Proposes the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Area in Vieques and Culebra for Inclusion on the Superfund National Priorities List." August 13, 2004.

of Interior for wildlife preserves. Because residents cannot live on or use the latter, only moderate cleanup is required.

After the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finally declared the island a Superfund site in 2005, the government began exploding ordnance in the open air instead of building a bomb explosion chamber on the island. Between 2005 and 2011, 17 million pounds of scrap metal and more than 38,000 live munitions had been exploded.<sup>14</sup> Cleanup is expected to continue till at least 2025.

In 2007, some 80 percent of the residents sued the U.S. government in order to get cleanup, health care on the island, and monetary compensation. The cancer rate in Vieques is 31 percent higher than on the Puerto Rican mainland, heart disease is 50 percent higher, hypertension is 381 percent higher, and diabetes is 41 percent higher. There are 25 percent more stillbirths and miscarriages than on the mainland, with an overall mortality rate of 10.8 percent.<sup>15</sup> Arsenic, lead, mercury, cadmium, and aluminum have been found in hair samples of 80 percent of the residents, and 60 percent have heavy metal poisoning.<sup>16</sup> Because there is no hospital on the island, people must travel by ferry to the mainland for care.

In 2010, CNN reported on the health crisis and lack of US government cleanup, leading to public outcries for action. The Puerto Rican government finally responded, urging the EPA and the Navy to expedite cleanup. However, rather than focusing on the health of the people, they argued that cleanup was necessary so that Vieques could become a “world class” tourism destination.<sup>17</sup>

In May 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the residents’ suit on the basis of sovereign immunity. Since then the residents of Vieques have been working to admit a petition before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, arguing that there have been human rights violations in Vieques that have never been addressed.

14 César J. Ayala and José L. Bolívar. *Battleship Vieques: Puerto Rico from World War II to the Korean War*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011.

15 Carmen Ortiz-Roque and Yadiris López-Rivera. “Mercury Contamination in Reproductive Age Women in a Caribbean Island: Vieques.” *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 58, no. 9 (September 1, 2004): 756–757; J. Wilcox. “Vieques, Puerto Rico: An Island under Siege.” *American Journal of Public Health* 91, no. 5 (May 2001): 695–698.

16 Ayala and Bolívar *op. cit.*, 164–165.

17 Gay Nagle Myer. “P.R. Tourism in Damage-Control Mode after CNN’s Vieques Report.” *Travel Weekly*, February 5, 2010.

## Identity and Power

When the Navy pulled out of Vieques, fears of land speculation were rampant. In 2003 in the *Vieques Times*, Mayor Damaso Serrano, then mayor of Vieques, quoted the poet Virgilio Davila, saying: "Don't sell your land to the foreigner... whoever sells his home is selling his homeland."<sup>18</sup> The question arises, however, as to who *is* a foreigner. Citizenship and ethnicity in Vieques is convoluted. A simple definition of 'Viequense' is a person who speaks Spanish and is ethnically and historically Puerto Rican. This, of course, disregards the complex heritage of Puerto Ricans themselves. Viequenses also distinguish themselves from the residents of mainland Puerto Rico. Politically, because Puerto Rico is a commonwealth of the US, all Puerto Ricans, including Viequenses, have automatic US citizenship. While they cannot vote in US presidential elections and do not pay federal income tax, they do pay certain US taxes and can serve in the military (and were subject to the draft when it was still in effect). Many spend their lives on the US mainland, visiting or living on the Puerto Rican mainland or Vieques sporadically, if at all. Questions arise as to whether Viequenses who move to the US or the Puerto Rican mainland have as much right to decision-making as those who live on the island. What about those who come back as adults, often with more money and education? Or mainland Puerto Ricans who move to Vieques? Or their children? Or the children of retired US military who grew up in Vieques but are not of Puerto Rican heritage? What about non-Puerto Rican migrants from the US mainland who have spent thirty or more years of their adult lives in Vieques? How about twenty years on the island? Ten? Five? Two? Those who have married Viequenses? Those who have had children with Viequenses?

United States mainlanders are attracted to Puerto Rico for many reasons. There is no need for a passport, many people speak English, and the currency is the US dollar. Non-Puerto Ricans from the US mainland are expatriates: they do not have automatic citizenship but must live in Puerto Rico for a year and not claim legal residency anywhere else – including the US mainland.<sup>19</sup> Taken together, these factors not only motivate migration, but also often give US mainlanders a strong sense of entitlement.

Expatriates number around 1000 in Vieques.<sup>20</sup> Some have lived there since the late 1950's, some are new arrivals, most are somewhere in between. In the

18 Damaso Serrano. "Editorial." *Vieques Times*, Number 5, 2003

19 Jennifer Conlin. "Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico Remind Travelers: No Passports Needed." *The New York Times*, January 28, 2007, Travel: 1.

20 Deborah Berman Santana. *La Lucha Continúa: Challenges for a Post-Navy Vieques*. City University of New York. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 2006.

1960's, Cohen's "drifter" tourists<sup>21</sup> from mainland US and Europe started coming to Vieques. Some become what Bianchi<sup>22</sup> calls 'migrant tourism workers', not strictly tourists or workers, but instead they "constitute an emergent segment of tourist-workers who engage in periods of work within tourism destinations as an integral part of the touristic experience." Some stay only temporarily, others become expatriates. They work in the bars, restaurants, shops, and inns owned by expatriates and live in the English-speaking expatriate enclave of Esperanza on the Caribbean side of the island. Their wages tend not to filter down to Viequenses since they frequent the same expatriate establishments within which they work.

There are a small number of expatriates who immerse themselves in the culture and larger community and who tend to live in Isabel Segunda, on the Atlantic side of the island, where most Viequenses live. Indeed, a former teacher from Boston named Robert Rabin has lived on the island since 1980, is married to Viequense activist Nilda Medina, and is Coordinator of the Fort Mirasol Museum, which is part of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture. He is also one of the major forces behind the community activist group, *Comite Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques* [Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques], or CPRDV, which effectively organized the protests against the Navy and is now active in developing Viequense-controlled sustainable tourism and development. Many Viequenses accept him and consider him one of them; others resent him. Some appreciate his hard work and successes but wish that he would step back and let Viequenses be the spokespersons for the group (personal conversations, August 2003, March 2010). The attitudes of expatriates toward Rabin range from admiration to ambivalence to disdain (personal conversations, August 2003, February 2011). Rabin brushes off criticism, arguing that he is a local resident and a member of the Viequense community, that he has learned the culture and always speaks Spanish, and that when he saw the conditions in Vieques, he tapped into organizing skills he had learned in college in order to help make positive changes in his new homeland (personal communications, August 2006, June 2012, March 2013).

Some expatriates and Viequenses work with and socialize with each other, yet many expatriates maintain a distinct separateness.<sup>23</sup> James Weis, an expatriate

21 Erik Cohen. "Toward a Sociology of International Tourism," *Social Research* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 164–182.

22 Raoul V. Bianchi. "Migrant Tourist-Workers: Exploring the 'Contact Zones' of Post-Industrial Tourism." *Current Issues in Tourism* 3, no. 2 (2000): 107–137.

23 Ivis Garcia Zambrana. "From Bomb Zone to Boom Town: Real Estate Trends and Community Based Practice in Vieques, Puerto Rico." MA Thesis, The University of New Mexico, 2009.



from the mainland US who has owned the Blue Horizon Inn since the mid-1990's and now heads the Puerto Rico Hotel & Tourism Association Small Hotels Committee, is representative of this attitude. When he was accused of dominating the Vieques tourist industry without trying to help the island or its residents fight against the Navy and the contamination, he responded that local concerns were not the business of expatriates since they were not the ones who lost their lands or were lied to or deprived of a livelihood.<sup>24</sup> Sheila Levin, Vieques realtor and expatriate, summarized the situation in the blog she writes for expatriates:

In Vieques, however, people are not all the same. There are differences, significant differences political and economic amongst the indigenous population. Some Viequense see the expatriate community as helpful to the island, others see it as malignant. Amongst the expatriate community there are differences also. Some identify more closely with the Vieques left; others deplore the actions that deface the road and private property.<sup>25</sup>

Although there are different members of the population, Vieques has community organizations that give voice to both the Viequenses and the expatriate business owners. While the latter have the Vieques Chamber of Commerce and Vieques Business Organization, politically active Viequenses and expatriates who have immersed themselves into the Viequense community have the CPRDV, which has proven to be instrumental in developing a sustainable tourism plan for the island.

### Vieques and Tourism

Vieques is located within one of the world's most profitable tourist areas, with spectacular natural resources, including 42 beaches and one of the few remaining unpolluted bioluminescent bays, yet it has had very little tourism. In 1999, the director of the Navy's Department of Environmental Protection, Safety and Occupational Health said, "Vieques is as unique and beautiful as it is today because of the environmental stewardship of the Navy."<sup>26</sup> This is true. During its occupation of the island, the Navy opposed large-scale tourism, arguing that it was incompatible with training activities, and they successfully thwarted

<sup>24</sup> M. Martinez. "Where Is Vieques' Tourism Industry Headed?" *Caribbean Business*, April 22, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Sheila Levin. So, You Want to Live and Work in Vieques. April 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Navy Environmental News. "RADM Granuzzo Testifies to Rush Panel." August 16, 1999.



proposals throughout the 1950's and 1960's, including a Club Med-style project and a multimillion-dollar hotel resort.<sup>27</sup> In the early 1960's, after refusing to allow the extension of an airport runway that would have enabled commercial airlines to land on the island, the Assistant Chief of Staff for Naval Operations said: "The federal government has spent more than \$100 million in developing Vieques and Roosevelt Roads. We're not going to throw away such an investment so that Vieques should be converted into a mecca for tourism."<sup>28</sup>

The Navy changed its position on large-scale tourism in the mid-1990's, when it allowed the Wyndham Corporation to build an enclave tourist resort, Martineau Bay, on prime property along the beach away from the bombing sites. Wyndham received \$40 million in tax credits from Puerto Rico, along with permission to wall off part of the public beach. They hired very few Viequenses, arguing that most did not speak English or have the necessary skills. Never very successful due to its inaccessibility, the resort was taken over by W Hotels in 2009, and was re-opened as an exclusive five-star hotel in 2010.

Today, along with W Hotel, expatriates own over 90 percent of the tourist establishments.<sup>29</sup> Some expatriates, including members of the Vieques Chamber of Commerce and the Vieques Business Organization, claim that the reason they own most of the businesses is because they have the entrepreneurial initiative – conveniently ignoring the fact that it takes more than initiative. For instance, Viequenses have a median household income of \$5,900, an unemployment rate of 22 percent, a low high school completion rate, and no collateral assets. Puerto Rico's small business loan program only lends to people with established credit and business development training is offered only to those that receive the loans.<sup>30</sup>

As is common with "lifestyle migrants,"<sup>31</sup> expatriates want the island to maintain its charm and some accuse Viequenses of wanting more commercial tourism development on the island in order to generate jobs, in spite of what happened with Martineau Bay.<sup>32</sup> Local guesthouse owner Wanda Bermúdez, who grew up in Vieques but lived in Orlando before moving back, exemplifies this position, arguing that the future of Vieques depends on large-scale

27 Katherine McCaffrey. *The Battle for Vieques' Future*. City University of New York. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 2006: 145.

28 Ivan Roman. "Vieques' Anger At Navy Dates To 1940s." *Orlando Sentinel*, July 16, 2001: A1.

29 Jacob Wheeler. "Hasta La Victoria Siempre." *Earth Island Journal*, 2011.

30 T. Carpenter. *Vieques: Pathways Forward*. Graduate Policy Workshop Final Report. Woodrow Wilson School of International and Public Affairs: Princeton, Fall 2010: 83

31 Allan M. Williams and C. Michael Hall. "Tourism and Migration: New Relationships between Production and Consumption." *Tourism Geographies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 5–27.

32 Michael Mastroianni, *op. cit.*

tourism and more residents; that a golf course, marina, hotels, and nice restaurants would also benefit residents and lead to improved infrastructure and services.<sup>33</sup> She asks, “Where does it say in the Guides or the Master Plan that foreigners should be kicked out, or that development applies only to the Spanish-speaking-born-in-Vieques-from-Spanish-speaking-parents-born-in-Vieques?”<sup>34</sup>

Yet the construction of Martineau Bay motivated the CPRDV to create a Master Plan for Sustainable Development in conjunction with Columbia University’s Urban Technical Assistance Project, focusing on locally owned small-scale ecotourism and cultural tourism based upon archaeological resources, fishing, and local artisans. The goal was to “make sure the people of Vieques are the managers, directors and owners of future economic entities – and not, as is the case today, the lowest paid employees in the local tourist economy.”<sup>35</sup> No construction would be allowed on the beach, and instead of large hotels and casinos, the emphasis would be on “paradores” – small inns – managed by Viequense families. The Master Plan was completed in 2004, the same year that the Puerto Rican government implemented a new strategic plan calling for tourism expansion in the form of large resorts on the coasts of all three islands: the mainland, Culebra, and Vieques. CPRDV and other groups challenged the strategic plan, ~~but it was not until 2013,~~ with a change in government, ~~that~~ a special commissioner was appointed to administer the Master Plan in Vieques and Culebra.<sup>36</sup>

Robert Rabin maintains that the goal of CPRDV and the Master Plan is not to appropriate businesses currently owned by expatriates but to prevent large private corporations from developing resorts. The group does insist, however, that Viequenses control any new tourist development, and they acknowledge that in many cases the goals may entail significant changes from the way the tourism industry in Vieques currently operates (Rabin, personal communication, February, 2011).

Rabin points to two examples: the first occurred in 2005, when Italian developers wanted to convert La Casa del Frances, a colonial mansion built at the

33 V. Bauzá. “Some Vieques Residents Protest Development.” *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, November 19, 2006.

34 Wanda Bermúdez. “What’s Happening to Us, Vieques? What Changed?” *Playa Cofi*, October 5, 2006.

35 Robert Rabin. “Development of a Free Vieques.” *Vieques-Island.com*, 2000. <http://www.vieques-island.com/navy/freevqs.html>, accessed September 2013.

36 Caribbean Journal Staff. “Puerto Rico Names Special Commissioner For Development of Culebra, Vieques.” *Caribbean Journal*, June 28, 2013.

turn of the 20th century by a French sugar planter, into the main hall for a new ecotourism resort. Many Viequeses were upset because they considered the mansion to be part of their heritage, regardless of its origins. In spite of the announcement that there would be a few hundreds jobs available for Viequeses as a result of building the resort, CPRDV petitioned the government to appropriate the mansion and the surrounding area from the Italian owner so they could turn it into a locally-controlled heritage tourism site. CPRDV won. Soon after, however, arsons burned the mansion to the ground.<sup>37</sup> Since then, there has been no move to build the resort: apparently the arsonist scuttled the plans of both CPRDV and the developers.

The second example concerns Sharon Grasso and Frank Celeste, organizers of the Bio-Bay Conservation Group and owners of Island Adventures, which provides boat tours on Vieques' bioluminescent bay at night when it glows due to shimmering microscopic plankton. They have been residents since 1986 and 1974 respectively. Grasso researched how to maintain the bay's ecosystem, became certified to run the tours, and went through a long process of getting permits before starting the business.<sup>38</sup> While some activists accuse them of stealing the economic rights to the bay from the Viequeses, there were no tours before Island Adventures was established and the bay was in danger of getting polluted before the conservation group set up protective measures. Rabin argues that CPRDV does not want Viequeses to take over the business; rather, they want to have it shut down and have a bridge built so that all people can walk out over the bay for free. The bay went dark for six months in 2014 for reasons still unexplained and the conflict between the tour owners and the Viequeses became intense,<sup>39</sup> with CPRDV putting the blame on the tour owners. Yet when the bay began to glow again in August 2014, CPRDV were not able to stop the tour owners from resuming their activities.

There has been a significant increase in tourists to Vieques since the Navy left in 2004, some of it due to increased air transportation from San Juan on the Puerto Rican mainland. However, the large-scale tourism many feared would run rampant in Vieques within ten years has not happened. In fact, there has been only limited tourist or commercial development on the island. There has been some improvement in roads and other infrastructure, along with a few new modest tourist facilities, a co-op movie theater, and a pre-Colombian

37 McCaffrey, *op. cit.*, 141–142.

38 M. Martinez, *op. cit.*

39 Lizette Alvarez. "Puerto Rico Debates Who Put Out the Lights in Mosquito Bay." *The New York Times*, June 4, 2014.

archaeological cultural tourist site.<sup>40</sup> But there are no chain stores or fast food restaurants.<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

For the five years prior to the Navy leaving the island, protests against the Navy bombing had received major attention in the international press and had attracted famous celebrities and politicians. However, as soon as the Navy closed the base, instead of the media focusing on the contamination, drugs, crime, and health problems, "Vieques slid seamlessly from social justice talking point to hot tourist destination."<sup>42</sup> Davis, Hayes-Conroy, and Jones<sup>43</sup> note that many visitors to Vieques are not even aware of the past Navy occupation or the problems that were left behind. Using newspaper articles about Vieques since 2004, they point to four common themes: 1) Vieques has a pristine physical landscape (contamination is invisible, military detritus is limited to certain areas, and the island is relatively uninhibited); 2) if local people had been left to their own devices they would have turned Vieques into a slum; 3) the Navy should be thanked for keeping Vieques a place of "uncorrupted nature"; 4) somehow the protest movements are to blame if the island becomes a tourist trap. They argue, "The natural landscape, through its labeling, becomes a primordial place that must be protected from the local population rather than a place where they belong."<sup>44</sup> This is reaffirmed by fact that while indigenous populations are often commodified for the tourist gaze, Viequenses are rarely seen in tourist promotional materials and websites. There is no call for ritual dance or local foods, just for absence. Vieques as a tourist destination is based on the segregation and invisibility of both the Viequenses and the contaminated land.

The disparity between the lives of most Viequenses, expatriate residents, and tourists is considerable. Yet there are also differences among expatriates.

40 Sherri Bayer. "Environmental Politics in Paradise: Resistance to the Selling of Vieques." *North American Congress of Latin American Studies*, August 21, 2009.

41 Leigh Anne Henion. "Puerto Rico Holds One of the Planet's Last Bright Spots." *Washington Post Magazine*, September 15, 2011

42 Liz Gold. "In Vieques, Puerto Rico, La Lucha Sigue." *North American Congress on Latin America*, January 15, 2007.

43 Jeffrey Sasha Davis, Jessica S. Hayes-Conroy, and Victoria M. Jones. "Military Pollution and Natural Purity: Seeing Nature and Knowing Contamination in Vieques, Puerto Rico." *GeoJournal* 69, no. 3 (August 3, 2007): 165–179

44 *Ibid.*, 173.

Most longtime expatriates consider themselves to be locals of Vieques, regardless of their relationship to the Viequense community. They point to their Puerto Rican citizenship as evidence of their commitment to the island. Yet most do not have children in the local schools and they have no immediate interest in the problematic educational system. While some have gotten cancer or other contamination-related illnesses, unlike Viequenses they generally go to the US mainland for treatment. And many want to protect the island from land speculators unless they are the ones buying the properties.

Most entrepreneurial migrants would not identify themselves with neocolonialism, a term they use for big corporations who want to build hotels and restaurants on “their” island, particularly because the majority was motivated initially by lifestyle rather than by business opportunities.<sup>45</sup> Yet neocolonialism is present: expatriates control the tourism industry. As Sheller argues, “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.”<sup>46</sup>

There are expatriates who have settled in Vieques who find a way to exist within the two worlds. While Rabin and others have become completely immersed in Viequense life, some expatriates live in Esperanza but have Viequense friends, shop at Viequense stores, are involved in local Viequense organizations, including CPRDV, and participate in local traditions. They also exhibit the most discomfort about the extreme poverty of the Viequenses, noting that it is easier for many people to deal with it by ignoring the Viequenses (personal conversations, February 2011).

Vieques is a remarkable example of a small island struggling over the control of tourism. Most of the usual problems related to tourism exist: the hiring of non-locals, seasonal work, low pay, leakage, reverse multiplier effect, commodification of public space, pollution from vehicles. However, Vieques is also an island damaged by 60 years of environmental abuse, and many of its residents must contend with brutal health issues within the midst of extreme poverty. Moreover, Vieques also has something that many other tourist sites in less developed areas do not have: a powerful organizational voice for its indigenous residents. It may be that the very complicated circumstances of Vieques – its contaminated land, the CPRDV’s Master Plan, expatriate control over the existing tourist industry – will subvert the threat of large-scale foreign owned tourism...for a while, anyway. Yet the forces of globalization will continue.

45 Williams & Hall, *op. cit.*

46 Mimi Sheller. “Retouching the ‘Untouched Island’: Post-Military Tourism in Vieques, Puerto Rico.” *Teoros: Revue de Recherche En Tourisme* 26, no. 1 (2007): 26.

The island has a geographic location that makes it perfect for tourism, ~~and the island has invisible contamination and none of the infrastructure (yet) of the~~ typical Caribbean tourist locale.

In the meantime, even though the Navy was forced off the land and there is now a Master Plan for Sustainable Development, a description of Vieques written in 1984 cruelly remains true for far too many of the population: “Along with the expatriates there was the perverse attraction of a heritage of colonialism: the bottomless sadness of a native population condemned to food stamps, welfare payments, unemployment – to uselessness, as if the sometime Spanish name for Vieques, Las Islas Inútiles, applied to the people as well as the island.”<sup>47</sup>

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