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Islands of Difference: Design, Urbanism, and Sustainable Tourism in the Anthropocene
Caribbean

By

Amelia Moore

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the Anthropocene idea as a problem space with salience for Caribbean anthropology and the Caribbean travel industry. The term is used by scientists to define the present era in which human processes operate at the scale of the Earth's geologic and biological systems, and it has come to justify a host of current actions in the name of sustainability. Through the examination of a new second-home destination currently being built in The Bahamas, I point out shifting trends in tourism design moving away from the anchor resort model of enclave mass tourism. I make the case that Anthropocene notions of sustainability not only rearticulate building practices and destination branding, but also analytic possibilities for the study of island place making and transnational processes. I advocate for a greater incorporation of design and urban anthropology into the study of Caribbean tourism as a means to understand these emerging events.

KEYWORDS: Anthropocene, Caribbean, design, environmental change, New Urbanism, small islands, sustainable tourism, The Bahamas, tourism product

RESUMEN

Este artículo introduce la idea del *antropoceno* como un espacio problema con importancia para la antropología del caribe y la industria turística de éste. Este término es utilizado por científicos para definir la era presente en la cual los procesos humanos operan al nivel de escala geológica y biológica en la tierra, y ha venido a justificar una gran cantidad de acciones en el nombre de la sostenibilidad. A través de la examinación de una zona dedicada a la construcción de segundos hogares en las Bahamas, identifico cambios en diseño turístico de la isla que va dejando atrás el modelo del resort como enclave del turismo en masa. Argumento que las nociones de sostenibilidad del antropoceno no sólo re-articulan las prácticas de construcción y el “branding” del destino turístico, pero también las posibilidades analíticas para el estudio de fabricación de lugar y procesos transnacionales. Abogo por una mayor incorporación de la antropología del diseño y urbana en el estudio del turismo al caribe como una forma de mejor entender estos eventos emergentes.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Antropoceno, Caribe, diseño, cambio ambiental, Nuevo Urbanismo, islas pequeñas, turismo sostenible, las Bahamas, producto turístico

Long-standing Western fascination with the paradise island as an alluring tabula rasa are today being updated, in a context where islands function as ‘sites of innovative conceptualizations, whether of nature or human enterprise, whether virtual or real’

Sheller 2009, p. 1386, quoting Baldacchino, 2006

Caribbean anthropology has a varied history of engagement with theories of island socio-natural relations. Ortiz’s *Cuban Counterpoint* (1947), Steward et al.’s *The People of Puerto Rico* (1956), and Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power* (1986) are examples of anthropological scholarship in a materialist vein that attribute cultural change and regional coherence in large part to relationships of production involving island agricultural ecologies. In more recent biomedical scholarship, Maurer (1997) has grappled with notions of biogenetic belonging and human nature metaphorically applied to land ownership and citizenship rights in the British Virgin Islands, and Whitmarsh (2008) has examined the creation of Barbados as a naturalized model island for genetic asthma research. In the realm of Caribbean tourism, critiques of mass tourism and ecotourism have theorized island natural environments as highly politicized spaces that obfuscate and amplify the fraught power relations of national tourist industries (Baldwin 2005; Carrier and Macleod 2005; Feldman 2011; Moore 2010b; Skoczen 2008; Sommer and Carrier 2010; Strachan 2002; West and Carrier 2004). This article begins from the position that rather than existing as an under-appreciated theme in Caribbean anthropology, popping up here and there as a subset of other disciplinary concerns, questions of island socio-natural relations must become integral to research in and of the region. My interest in this issue stems from prevailing responses to global environmental change and the emergent notion of the Anthropocene.

The Anthropocene is a geo-scientific term for our present geological era (what would otherwise be the Holocene), and it marks the extreme change in Earth’s systems brought about by human activities. Informally named a decade ago by an atmospheric chemist (Crutzen 2002), the Anthropocene is the second-most popular attempt to label the effects of the human species on the planet after the idea of climate change. But climate change is only a subset of anthropogenic planetary change, and the Anthropocene, as a concept, signifies multiple forms of human-caused global change (from climate change to biodiversity loss to shifts in nutrient cycling to fresh

water scarcity) and unites them under one term. The term's proponents argue that the Anthropocene is an unstable geologic epoch that began in the late eighteenth century with the advent of industrialization and solidified in the twentieth century with the spread of the human population and economic globalization, continuing into the foreseeable future—unless humanity can devise a transition to sustainable systems (Crutzen and Steffen 2003; Furnass 2012). The argument is that the stable Holocene era (that provided the growth conditions for human civilization) has now been displaced by the Anthropocene as a direct result of human activities that influence planetary processes to an unprecedented degree (Rockstrom 2009).

Why should social scholars care about the Anthropocene idea? There are a number of existing justifications. One orientation towards the Anthropocene is usefully summarized by the political economist Elinor Ostrom: “the Anthropocene changes our relationship with the planet. We have a new responsibility and we need to determine how to meet that responsibility” (IGBP 2014, np). Another orientation stems from science and technology studies scholars who examine how the synergistic problems of pervasive anthropogenic change symbolized by the Anthropocene have inspired evolving science and society relations, technoscientific assemblages, and new disciplinary methodologies and research questions (Seidl et al. 2013). And because the idea points to biogeochemical transformations of humanity as a collective force of nature, historians and humanists are beginning to see the Anthropocene as an idea that explicitly merges the notion of human and natural history, arguing for the inextricable nature of each (Chakrabarty 2009, 2012; Slaughter 2012). I am interested in the conceptual tensions stemming from the Anthropocene idea: one debate asks whether our priority for the Anthropocene should be to protect Earth systems that remain relatively unchanged by human activity, or whether we should let go of the idea of “untouched systems” in favor of managing socio-natural working landscapes (Bubandt and Tsing 2014; Caro et al. 2011; Kloor 2013; Lorimer 2012); another debate examines appropriate relationships to pasts, presents, and futures within proposed solutions to the problems of global change. In other words, I see the Anthropocene as more than a “mere” geological category limited to the Earth sciences. The Anthropocene idea is also a persuasive discourse that enables conceptual anxieties, productive contradictions, research opportunities, and entrepreneurial actions; it enables actors to configure an increasing amount of thought and action in the name of anthropogenic sustainability (Rabinow 2003; Rabinow and Marcus 2008).

As a term issuing from the Earth sciences, the concept might seem far from relevant to the tourist industry and cultural politics of Caribbean island nations, but I would like to reposition the study of the Anthropocene idea as vital for Caribbean anthropology and the anthropology of regional tourism. Critical attention to the Anthropocene idea allows Caribbean scholars to recognize emergent cultural events that are framed by the age of anthropogenesis (again, denoting climate change and beyond), and the way these events alter the familiar sun, sand, and sea travel brand-narratives and critiques of the tourism industry across the wider Caribbean region. Analytic attention to “paradise discourse” (Feldman 2011; Strachan 2002) and the commodification of nature and culture within tourist and ecotourist practices (Hutchins 2007) can now be complicated by our recognition of the affects of Anthropocene discourse and practices that increasingly shape the way islands and their infrastructures are produced and consumed as destinations. For example, “anthropogenic drivers” of change in the region include climate change, deforestation, fishing, tourism, urbanization, and coastal development, and these are said to lead, synergistically, to acute problems of coastal flooding, erosion, pollution, salinization, and biodiversity loss (Crossland et al. 2006). In direct response to these warnings from the scientific community, regional environmental organizations and tourism industry networks have devised public awareness campaigns, waste management plans, hotel certification guidelines, and facility and infrastructure design manuals—all in the name of sustainable tourism (Caribbean Environment Programme 2014). I see these events as part of an explicit re-imagination of Caribbean island tourism.

Such awareness of the creativity of Anthropocene discourse leads me to hypothesize that the advent of ecotourism in the region over the past few decades is but the beginning of a rearticulation of development design in the name of coming to terms with anthropogenic planetary change. Therefore, our critical study of these built environments must also undergo reconsideration and attention to design and designers. We must examine the declarations of those who will be actively reconstructing island infrastructures and travel destinations because these declarations open a window onto innovative conceptualizations in the region that have real consequences for the direction of regional development and island imaginaries (Sheller 2009).

An awareness of Anthropocene discourse also highlights the fact that the Caribbean and its islands have been positioned by the travel industry as an experimental space for sustainable design and development practices in the twenty-first century. We cannot follow these

developments, as scholars of Caribbean tourism, without developing an awareness of this emergent problem space and discourse. In addition, this awareness has prompted several questions for anthropological research: will new “sustainable” developments become known as timely destination design models? Will these models spread in the region to reconstitute island socio-natural relations and create branded places identifiable by sustainable principles? Will development in the name of the Anthropocene alter resort infrastructures and travel practices that many identify as overconsumptive of resources and corrosive of social relations? Will Anthropocene discourse alter relations between island citizens and visitors—so-called hosts and guests (Smith 1989; Stronza 2001)? In other words, what does contemporary sustainable tourism enable for Caribbean island place making? What tensions does it exacerbate? What does it constrain?

In order to explore my hypothesis about emergent forms of sustainable tourism in the Caribbean and what the Anthropocene might mean for Caribbean tourism, I present a case from my long-term field site, The Bahamas. I hope to be able to track place-making trends in The Bahamas and the region over the coming years, and I have begun fieldwork in a second-home development project on one of the Bahama Islands currently in initial stages of construction. Without naming the development or the island, this article describes some of the ways the project designers believe they are rearticulating destination development in the name of sustainability. Here, I will refer to the project as “the Development”.

The article is presented as follows: first, I introduce recent iterations of global and Caribbean “tourism products”, discussing the primacy of branding in global markets, the “triumph” of branding that is The Bahamas, and the particularities of the nascent Anthropocene travel industry. Secondly, I highlight a current trend in the redesign and rebranding of the region and The Bahamas—New Urbanist, second-home communities as a form of sustainable tourism—and I utilize select themes from urban and design studies to draw attention to emergent critiques and analytic opportunities. Thirdly, I lay out the ethnographic case of the Development and the design strategies, desires, and challenges of the developers. Finally, I conclude with a critical analysis of what is drawn together in the creation of the Development in The Bahamas, and call for an analytic sensitivity to the emergent tensions and contradictions of the Anthropocene Caribbean.

Tourism Products as “Islands of Difference”

International tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world (Kaul 2009). In 2012 the total number of recorded tourist travelers surpassed 1 billion for the first time (UNWTO 2013). However, not all tourist markets or tourist regions fare well in any given year, and the spread of tourist arrivals and spending is uneven, globally. Therefore, international destination branding for what are known within the industry as national “tourism products” is of primary importance within highly competitive markets (Jefferson and Lickorish 1991).

The Caribbean region is dependent on tourism as the mainstay of many national economies (Harrison et al. 2003). It not only competes in a global market, but Caribbean countries must also compete with one another for elusive travelers and their money (Skoczen 2008). Promoting, distinguishing among, and perpetually redesigning national tourism products as “islands of difference” has become a regional industry in itself.

As I have mentioned elsewhere (Moore 2010a), Coombe shows that the idea of distinction requires the quality of being in a relationship (1998). The Caribbean, as a tourism product, is always in a relationship of distinction with other global destinations, and countries and island locations within the Caribbean are also implicated and configured by their distinctions from one another. National tourism organizations and their consultants constantly engineer distinction from their competitors, positioning destinations in a social system of difference.

It is common knowledge within the region that the brand of “sun, sand, and sea” has lost its edge, as it represents the region but is not the exclusive domain of the Caribbean. However, national tourism officials recognize that marketing their respective countries (and destinations within those countries) as distinct highlights the region and vice versa because branding the Caribbean region influences the collection of representations and affects associated with national products (Moore 2010a, 2010b). This social system of difference is especially heightened in The Bahamas, an archipelago of 30 inhabited islands (out of approximately 700), many of which have been individually branded as unique destinations within the country itself, deriving their value in part from their archipelagic relationship to the other islands in the country and in part from the country’s relationship to the region.

In The Bahamas, the tourist development model in the last quarter of the twentieth century took on the specific form of the island “anchor” resort. National goals involved the

construction of a major resort on each island with a viable population. These resorts took several forms, from mass-market, all-inclusive hotels to luxury second-home communities, to combinations of the two in one exclusive property. These resort plans relied on foreign investment and visitation (usually from the USA or Canada), the promise of near full service employment for island residents, the brand cachet of The Bahamas, and the distinctions among what are labeled “the Family Islands.” However, this tourism product development strategy designed around multiple “anchor” resort enclaves has long shown signs of strain, with resorts folding, undergoing perpetual new ownership, or failing to open at all. These complications with the island anchor resort brand have proven true in The Bahamas as well as in the wider Caribbean, and the sector is now scrambling for alternatives and new brand strategies. Enter the sustainable tourism trend as a strategy of distinction in an anthropogenic age.

Members of the tourism industry have argued that recognition of global environmental change is now “at the forefront of global culture”, and the tourism industry is responding to this assessment of consumer awareness (Seba 2012: i). In the contemporary Anthropocene moment, sustainable tourism is touted as a paradigm shift that retreats from foreign owned, enclave resort models towards promoting community inclusive destinations designed around minimal resource use and local economic growth (Butler 1993; Jayawardena et al. 2008). I see this as distinct from standard understandings of ecotourism in that the goal of sustainable tourism is not necessarily to travel to undisturbed natural areas, to commune with nature, or to participate explicitly in environmental education (Waite and Cook 2007; Weaver 2001). For example, one industry strategy has been to reconsider tourist destinations and developments as living, socio-natural urban spaces, and this has meant adapting design trends from so-called sustainable urban development and infrastructure for tourist consumption (see next section). However, according to market research studies, consumers (aka EuroAmerican tourists) are more likely to seek out sustainable tourism products only when these products align with existing social norms for travel and when they clearly understand the infrastructural and resource linkages between tourism and the environment (Becken 2007; Miller 2010). This means that discursive Anthropocene arguments about responsible travel practices and destination design are less likely to center on protecting pristine nature and more likely to revolve around devising “innovative” means of managing socio-natural relations in ways that are familiar and attractive to tourists and that confirm their understandings of global change. Ecotourism has long been identified as a product

that reflects the cultural and environmental worldviews of EuroAmerican consumers (Munt 1994; West and Carrier 2004). More recent sustainable tourism of the type described here certainly promotes the consumption of a particular environmental aesthetic, but the aesthetic now involves the explicit manipulation of landscapes and infrastructures beyond the scope of ecotourism.

Within this milieu of declining tourist product “sales” in markets of and for difference and distinction, the notion of sustainable tourism has become one emergent branding strategy for the salvation of the regional industry. Sustainability, a key buzzword for the Anthropocene, has been identified as lacking from island economies and tourist development plans, and Caribbean tourism, the “vector and victim” of cultural and environmental degradation, is considered ripe for a sustainable overhaul. Robinson and Picard explain that “in recognizing the fact that international tourism continues to expand, we also need to recognize that it is continually changing the ways in which it operates ... it is far more willing to engage in the sustainable development agenda and this relates to its increasing ability to segment the market” (2006: 12). Whatever else it might be, sustainable tourism is certainly a brand strategy for the Anthropocene, and the industry hopes that those destinations that promote themselves with this distinctive framework will have an edge over the rest of the sector—until the trend becomes as ubiquitous as sun, sand, and sea.

In some ways The Bahamas has been a triumph of branding and the perfect place to study these developments—partly because of the popularity of the anchor resort model and partly because, as mentioned above, Anthropocene arguments about the unsustainability of small island economies and environments call for the redesign of that model (Harrison et al. 2003; Robison and Picard 2006). The Bahamas is also fascinating because of ongoing public debates about its culture of tourism. This is a country in which it is possible for the Minister of Culture to say (in 2011), “be yourself is the biggest lie. You might be in a bad mood and that inhibits performing a service (for the tourist). Service exalts the server.” This opinion is countered by Bahamian intellectuals who argue that this view unnecessarily makes citizens “a wax paper people,” and that what matters is design, creating a national iconography and standards for citizens and visitors alike.¹ These are debates about culture, about place-making, and about subjectification. What I am arguing is that emergent forms of sustainable tourism rearticulate these concerns,

creating rebranded islands of difference within the milieu of tourism products for the Anthropocene.

Redesigning and Rebranding Tourist Urbanisms for the Anthropocene

Anthropologists have long known that aesthetics are key to design, and that designers have select styles, tools, and materials they make use of for contingent social and historical reasons (Levi-Strauss 1962). Designed objects are meaningful things—signs—affective embodiments of thought and ideology. Design is, therefore, “a reflective conversation with the situation at hand” (Louridas 1999: 530).

Design is a key component of the tourist industry and international tourism has relied as much on land development and infrastructure as on marketing. Tourist experiences are made possible by landscape design and, for regions like the Caribbean, seascape design. Design results, in large part, from the decisions made by building and landscape architects, engineers, sculptors, and interior designers but also by philosophers, political scientists, economists, planners, horticulturalists, and painters (Gunn 1988). Gunn, a member of the tourist industry, stresses a tourism product development focus on design because design emphasizes the aesthetic manipulation of landscapes in order to improve tourism. Therefore, everything the traveler experiences, aesthetically and sensorially, is the supposed responsibility of designers, who also need to become more central to the regional study of tourism.

I have described briefly how sustainable tourism reflects the goals of Anthropocene discourse by drawing explicit attention to the design of socio-natural environments and innovative infrastructures for tourist development. One response among many possible responses to these design concerns is New Urbanism. Developed in the 1970s and 80s, New Urbanism is a design philosophy and brand platform that has gained recent popularity in the tourist industry of the Caribbean and elsewhere (Anonymous 2010). Created as a reaction to urban sprawl, New Urbanist design is characterized by an attention to density and walkability, mixed-use buildings and zoning, longevity and durability of buildings and materials, “vernacular” or traditional aesthetics, utilization of energy efficient designs and materials, and the promotion of public space, among other attributes (Trudeau and Malloy 2011). In other words, the organization of New Urbanist space is linked to particular sustainable ideals and ideas about the appropriate

form of community (Grabill 2003). Two towns in Florida, Seaside and Celebration, are well-known examples of New Urbanism, but there are hundreds of New Urbanist communities in the United States from Mississippi to Colorado, and many more New Urbanist neighborhoods and developments in Europe, Canada, Latin America, and South Africa. Proponents of New Urbanism have stated that it offers “a powerful and enduring set of principles for creating more sustainable neighborhoods, buildings and regions ... [providing] guidance to policy makers, planners, urban designers and citizens seeking to address the impact of towns and cities on the natural and human environment”; it achieves change “by simultaneously engaging urbanism, infrastructure, architecture, construction practice and conservation in the creation of humane and engaging places that can serve as models” (Congress for the New Urbanism 2011: 1).

As the form has spread there have been several critiques of New Urbanist residential developments in the United States and elsewhere that hinge on the ironic observation that these developments are still a form of unsustainable sprawl in that they are often built on “greenfield sites” (undeveloped land), and that they are still upper-class enclaves because homes in these communities are not affordable for low income buyers. Some have referred to New Urbanist residential developments as artificial and elitist (Grabill 2003), while others prefer the satirical label “New Suburbanism” (Marshall 1996). In addition, New Urbanist neighborhood design has been identified as paradoxically celebrating and neutralizing local class and cultural distinctions.² Therefore, we should be keenly aware that New Urbanist design is about reimagining socio-natural relations but not inherently about equity or ameliorating chronic forms of social difference.

As a framework for tourism development, New Urbanism is often utilized as an ownership model, where tourist visitation is promoted through second-home buying in New Urbanist villages as opposed to hotel stays, although boutique hotels are often incorporated in these developments. In short, New Urbanism has been selected by destination designers as one optimal “science of form” for mediating the production of tourist space and place in the Anthropocene (Gonzalez and Lejano 2009). The Caribbean is not generally considered a center for New Urbanist design, but there are a number of relatively new developments in the region that reflect these principles. I contend that New Urbanist villages in the Caribbean (such as Orchid Bay in Belize and the Development in The Bahamas, described below, represent a

sustainability brand and an updated “fantasy of mobility, accessibility, and island paradise” (Sheller 2009: 1386).

Building on the notion of design as integral to urban planning and Anthropocene discourse, I argue (following Latour 2008) that design renders objects formerly considered matters of fact into matters of concern. Design can be interpreted as assemblies of concerns that have been “drawn together,” turning materiality and matter into meaning. Therefore, contemporary design has morality, ethics, and politics in its gatherings and collaborations, and facts can no longer stand for themselves. As Latour puts it, objects become projects. In this frame, sustainable design is a matter of rematerializing design without adherence to the dichotomy between the “Natural” the “Human”. So-called sustainable urbanisms are now cleverly designed and carefully maintained as both nature and humans are consciously designed for the discerning consumer. For Latour, artificiality and redesign are our destiny for the Anthropocene and “the whole fabric of our earthly existence has to be redesigned in excruciating details” (2008: 11). Thus, analytically opening up sustainable design as the drawing together of Anthropocene matters of concern expands our critical attention to the regional politics of design.

Finally, I would like to consider the term “worlding” as a concept that explains the mobile design crucible of development, transnational travel, and neoliberal thought and practice that shape today’s urban spaces (Roy 2011). Roy explains that worlding strategies can be seen in elite models for normative investment, development, and growth and in the unruly movements of working-class people according to the vicissitudes of labor and migration (see also Lees 2012). In other words, the production of urban space is coordinated, in part, through multiple, circulating urban design models and referents.³ Worlding references circulate through the state, through NGOs and middle-class practices, and through tourist development. The point is that urbanisms and worlding processes are material and tied to the specific struggles and territorializations that constitute particular locations (Morenas 2013).

An exploration of the politics of design and worlding highlights the specific infrastructures of sustainable tourism projects as part of transnationally circulating conversations about design in the Anthropocene, in which built environments and landscapes become projects for reimagining the living world. I see New Urbanist sustainable tourism as one form of affective urbanism for the Anthropocene, marshaling hope and nostalgia as a brand component (Anderson and Holden 2008). Urban design concepts are not commonly adapted for critical studies of the

Caribbean, but in this context they allow for an engagement with the material results of Anthropocene discourse as it affects the development of destination design, branding, and island infrastructure.

Caribbean destination design is shaped by worlding desires for stable economic growth, the accumulation of transnational capital, and postcolonial sovereignty. It is simultaneously co-constituted by desires for sustainable socio-natural earthly relations and a growing recognition that existing host/guest encounters are exploitative in island locales, exacerbate over-consumptive inequality, and perpetuate multiple forms of anthropogenic planetary change. As part of sustainable tourism design strategies for the Anthropocene, New Urbanist projects such as the Development (described below) represent new travel brands for international and regional distinction, as well as attempts to create model forms of island belonging and being in the world. In summary, the assemblies of concerns drawn together in model villages for tourist consumption turn abstract ideas like planetary change and the cultural impacts of enclave development into material realities and built environments in which new brand distinctions can be fostered through rearticulated spatial engagements.

The Development

In The Bahamas, the congested and economically polarized capital city of Nassau has been undergoing redevelopment, undertaking infrastructural improvements with Chinese funding and instigating coordinated planning via the Downtown Nassau Partnership, a quasi-urban development company and public/private partnership (Dodman 2008). By contrast, the Development is another mode of building entirely, funded by a private company incorporated in The Bahamas, creating a New Urbanist village from the ground up on a sparsely populated rural island in the north/central sector of the archipelago.

As an anthropologist researching linkages between environmental change and tourism in the Bahamian archipelago, I have visited the Development several times during the past three years, observing its initial phase of building, participating in site tours and publicity events, and conducting interviews with the lead developers and staff. The project is situated on one of the northern Bahamian islands in an area undergoing an economic depression of sorts due to the downturn in international travel and the lack-luster performance of nearby gated resorts. Some of

these resorts have closed, but some are still hanging on, importing almost everything and leaking very little capital into the local island economy (Cabezas 2009).

On dusty tour van drives around the construction site, the project's public relations officer enthusiastically narrated the story of the Development to all visitors—prospective buyers, members of local government, and island residents. In the oft-repeated tour story it was explained that the Development is designed to stand out from expensive luxury resorts, instead branding itself as an accessible, sustainable second-home community incorporating the most tried and true methods of “small town island living”. Pulling up to the tour show house, a two-story, yellow building with a large porch and wide upper balcony situated to catch the breezes coming off the ocean, the officer reiterated that they want to replicate the look, feel, and functionality of colonial Bahamian harbor settlement. Thus, there are strict design guidelines within the Development, with all homes conforming to select “Bahamian vernacular” architectural components and energy requirements, and lots situated to utilize the wind as a cooling force, avoiding overreliance on costly air conditioning. Further along the tour, visitors enter the old-growth coppice set aside as community parkland to walk along trails through the dense thicket of tropical trees, experiencing the stark drop in temperature within the forest shade. The officer pointed out that they plan to harvest the seed from this coppice to start native plants in the nursery for site landscaping. On the tour it is also made clear that in addition to plants, the Development will provide its own utilities including water, phones, and power, and they will have their own health facilities. The officer stipulated that self-sufficiency is the first step in sustainable island design.

Reaching the head developer was more complicated, but on the phone, or on rare overlapping site visits after he flew in by chartered plane, this affluent older man described his quest to create a 40-acre New Urbanist village designed around a safe harbor. His team searched for a long time and finally selected the only viable location they could find, according to him, to build a harbor village from the ground up. It was repeatedly explained to me that the Development would not work without a harbor to anchor the design and layout of the streets and buildings because “traditional Bahamian life” is rooted in harbor villages with access to waterfront communal space, boats, and sea breezes. Failing to find a usable pre-existing harbor, the Development decided to build their own, selecting a site with a natural beach and carving a

rounded cove into the shoreline. The cove, a neat feat of engineering, now contains the harbor marina and a small man-made island with additional building lots.

In the cramped office of the lead engineer, filled with shelves containing sustainable asphalts and other experimental infrastructural components, I was instructed in the design principles of the Development. These principles include maintaining the beach dunes along the coast of the property, restoring native plants, and monitoring and removing non-native species to retain dune protection from storms. The engineer's view was that the Development must balance their needs with what they have on the island and reduce unnecessary impact. They must utilize the island assets of sand, plants, breeze, and local labor, and devise more efficient means of construction. The engineer predicted that as a result of these choices, the Development would use fifty percent less energy overall than "standard" island resorts and it would retain almost every employable person from the immediate surroundings in the initial phases of construction.⁴

Within its glossy promotional materials, handed out to prospective buyers, the Development touts itself as the first "new traditional village" on the island. This means the developers and designers selected an aesthetic of anti-modernist architecture, what they call a British/Bahamian style, evocative of colonial settlement. In addition to efficient infrastructure, they see aesthetics as a large component of sustainable design because certain aesthetic choices can signify "a return of human values to architecture, the building arts, urban design, and regeneration." Instead of the Development becoming a resort designed to look like a historical settlement, the New Urbanist designers say, "the settlement is the resort." In other words, the Development has branded itself as a town and community: they explain that they are not looking for tourists—they want residents—and they market themselves to Europeans, Canadians, and Americans as well as to Bahamian buyers. The engineer stressed that in five years they expect that critical mass will be 60–70 families living full to part time in the Development: a small town. In ten years, they hope to have 1000–1200 people: a community. The public relations officer excitedly described the future grocery, farm, local restaurants, fly fishing lodge, gas station, and other local businesses they plan to incubate through microloans to island entrepreneurs. The development team argues that this form of social sustainability is vital to a small island travel economy tied to a vision of distinctive Bahamian harbor identity because permanent community is constitutive of that identity. It is also worth noting that ownership

models generate steady streams of revenue and provide a buffer against volatile regional travel trends.

The developers have selected model communities and settlement designs from existing Bahamian towns, including Dunmore Town of Harbour Island and Hope Town of Abaco. These towns were built during the era of the evacuation of British Loyalists from America in the late eighteenth century, and when visiting these settlements I have been struck by the dense proximity of the colonial style wooden houses (often described in tourist promotional materials as “quaint”), their age and impeccable preservation, and the expense of the real estate market in which many properties are now sold as vacation homes to foreign buyers. Everyone I spoke to on the team fervently believes that this form of Bahamian colonial harbor settlement is the ideal model for new Bahamian village design, and they lament that expanding the design and aesthetic of functional harbor settlement (what the Development promotional materials refer to as “learning heritage”) has not been the dominant framework for the Bahamian tourist economy as a whole. The lead developer eloquently conjured up the image of a large gulf between tourism and settlement in The Bahamas, with tourists portrayed as not actually visiting The Bahamas when they arrive at large resorts, instead visiting “pseudo-places” designed to evoke any tropical island anywhere. He claimed that the island they have selected is in “a unique position to guide its economy towards a different model” from the unsustainable resort enclave, and he described the Development as “the first new Bahamian settlement planned according to the principles of the nation’s historic settlement tradition.”

In addition to consciously emulating the aesthetics and feel of particular Bahamian places they call “typical Family Island settlements”, the Development follows a model that exists in other New Urbanist communities in the United States. In the comfortable site real estate office, the project realtor explained that they heavily promote New Urbanist construction as a brand and market a specific form of nostalgia along with the sustainable infrastructure. This nostalgia is intended to appeal to middle-aged, affluent second homebuyers who yearn for a simpler life without the pollution, danger, congestion, and hectic pace of contemporary urban life. The realtor explained that people who buy in to the Development have to be able to afford a second home and almost none of them thus far already live on the island or have many ties there. The buyers are professional, college educated, and can take the risk of investing in a new development. The project wants to foster a 50/50 Bahamian to foreign residential split and

encourage racial diversity, because they think this will help make the community permanent, contribute to its identity as a Bahamian place, and because there is a growing market for homes in the Family Islands for those who think Nassau is “falling apart”, becoming too crowded and dangerous. And besides, the realtor said, the old colonial aesthetic is attractive to Bahamians of a certain age. It makes them feel at home. In summary, it is important to see this model as a brand composed of an interplay between sustainability and nostalgia.

It is important to follow the self-representations of projects like the Development because they demonstrate the reach of the problem space of the Anthropocene and its attendant discourses into realms beyond nature preservation and ecotourism, opening up emergent articulations of value, development, and living materiality. However, these events are not unfolding without complications. During my last visit to the Development I was informed that the team has pledged to assist The Bahamas’ government in adopting New Urbanist design principles into legislation and building code so that this settlement model can be replicated throughout the islands as a sustainable alternative to enclave resort and sprawl style planning, but this has proved challenging. I was told that at the Development’s first presentation to the island’s chamber of commerce, someone said, “you are taking us back 200 years.” The developers interpreted this as a sign that sustainable design itself is not yet important to Bahamians, and that some people see weeds when they look at natural areas. Their strategy has been to sell the safety and community aspects to prospective Bahamian purchasers, saving talk of efficient design characteristics for the foreign buyers. In other words, the fear from some local Bahamians is that this kind of nostalgic development design will not attract affluent foreigners who are looking for luxury. It is also becoming clear that the innovations of island-based, efficient infrastructure and design, and the engineering feature of the man-made cove and island, are paradoxically invisible to those who do not operate within the transnational discursive framing of anthropogenic global change.

The self-representations of the developers are also interesting because of what is not said on the site tours, in the promotional materials, and in the real estate office. I see this interplay of sustainability and nostalgia as a re-visioning of the interplay between paradise and plantation that has composed much of the region’s tourism imaginaries throughout the twentieth century (Strachan 2002), in which the central fact of the colonial appropriation of land and labor is conveniently absent, as is the presence of non-consumerist Bahamian lives in the landscape.

Sustainability and nostalgia, in this case, reflect the productive tensions of the Anthropocene in which drastic environmental reinvention (the creation of the cove and island as anthropogenic objects) is naturalized as the amelioration of unsustainable development practice, while an upper middle-class vision of appropriate island life is sold as cutting-edge neo-colonialism.

I have included the self-representations of the developers as evidence of a style of Anthropocene discourse that makes room for the production of new infrastructures, design imaginaries, and material processes. The Development is selling a sustainably designed, family-oriented vacation community to international and domestic travelers. The developers engage in travel branding and marketing, selling the island and its natural amenities along with the amenities the Development will provide within markets for islands of difference: they are creating a model for a rearticulated tourism product for the Anthropocene. Despite the aforementioned tensions that some might classify as oxymoronic contradictions, this product takes the most lucrative aspects of the region's travel industry (foreign visitation and investment in an island experience) and combines that with what they see as the most environmentally and socially sustainable aspects of historical island living.

Thus, we now have the contradictions of sustainable development—the critique (see Peet and Watts 1996; Yanarella and Levine 1992) that new “green” development involves the use of more land, resources, commercialism, and consumption—existing alongside the potential of the idea of the Anthropocene to act as a fulcrum for a redesigned conception of the human relationship with planetary systems. On the one hand there is the argument that we need to redesign the way we conceive of human economies and socialities—the processes of connection that produce socio-natural assemblages. That is, for an increasing number of people in the tourism industry, sustainable tourism in these islands will look less and less like the generic mass tourism of the late twentieth century and increasingly like ownership in specific “living communities”. On the other hand, we must not forget that this still means reimagining, branding, selling, and consuming specific places as recognizably sustainable within this emergent problem space and travel market. The tensions of the Development—sustainability and nostalgia, hope and hypocrisy—embody the play of islands of difference in the Anthropocene Caribbean.

Conclusion: Living With Anthropocene Tensions

This research has explored the way in which the Anthropocene idea has inspired a reconceptualization of destination design and an attendant discourse of global change within the international tourism industry of the Caribbean.⁵ As outlined in the epigraph quotation from Sheller (2009), visions of islands as forms of unspoiled paradise are giving way to visions of sustainable redesign and innovative redevelopment. Following these emergent developments as they unfold on various islands in various countries should become a twenty-first-century goal for scholars of the region, and this article has been an attempt to begin a conversation about such trends.

In The Bahamas, new sustainable tourist developments enter into ongoing public debates about the role of hosts and guests in tourist dependent economies, into pre-existing forms of tourist consumption, and the play of islands of difference in travel markets. And yet I see sustainable destination development for the Anthropocene as more than just a direct extension of these practices. We must recognize the cultural continuities embedded within evolving tourist products, but we must also recognize the emergent practices and processes that come packaged with the branding of new “tourist products”.

I have approached the Anthropocene as a contemporary idea stemming from the Earth sciences that has jumped multiple disciplinary divides, inspiring the reconceptualization of tourist products and tourist natures, leading to new development projects and a rearticulation of sustainable development discourse in the name of synergistic anthropogenic global change. This Anthropocene discourse allows for (or even requires) the transformation of landscapes and social relations in the name of socio-natural reinvention, producing any number of tensions and even contradictions with conventional understandings of ecotourism and environmental protection. In this article, the Development stands as a regional case representing the constitutive ironies of the age.

One lesson to be learned is that the Anthropocene idea is a position from which to launch a radical critique of overconsumptive anthropogenesis and *simultaneously* a call to reconstruct socio-natural infrastructures and design innovative sites for yet more (ostensibly sustainable) consumption. In this article, I have used the Development tour and other forms of the project’s self-representation to highlight this tension as one aspect of the worlding processes of tourist urbanism in the Anthropocene. It is through asymmetrical worlding processes that island-

oriented New Urbanist aesthetics and pragmatic design principles become imaginable as an “ideal” model for Caribbean island development.

One result of these developments could be the normalization and naturalization of the oxymoronic tensions of Anthropocene islands of difference as the appropriate model for Caribbean tourism. For the time being, this possibility must sit alongside the observation that the Development reflects a number of explicit and implicit concerns drawn together in its design. These include anxieties about socio-natural island environments in crisis, neoliberal shifts in the travel industry that promote market segmentation and the multiplication of choice, upper-class flight from segregated and dangerous urban spaces, middle-aged nostalgia for the aesthetics of small-scale colonial built environments, and the perceived need for rural island modernization and infrastructural change. In this case, New Urbanist design and branding creates certain kinds of spaces and excludes other formulations of space and place in what has been referred to as “the tournament of urban entrepreneurialism” (Bell and Binnie 2004).

In order to take these observations further, we must examine several prevalent themes. First, we must follow the consumers of these new properties. Who is buying sustainable tourism products as actual or metaphorical islands of difference? Second, we must watch the growth of this model for development. In five to ten to twenty years, will places like the Development become design icons for planned communities in the Caribbean? Third, we must understand how such developments have an impact on life on small islands. How do residents living in nearby settlements relate to these properties and do they feel welcome as more than just employees in these communities? Fourth, we must discern whether these kinds of holistic sustainable designs become models championed by regional governments. Will these standards become part of the building code of Caribbean island countries?

It seems clear that the principles of sustainability are becoming a destination brand and tailored product for targeted, white-collar consumers in the Anthropocene (Jayawardena et al. 2008). This product must compete in a varied field with multiple divergent products and brands (Skoczen 2008), and we must not be blind to the particular kind of work branding can do to rearticulate tourism products, the forms of cosmopolitan places, and the international and domestic significance of location design. Our general interest in these events should necessitate examination of the concerns drawn together in these islands of difference: that sustainable tourism is not only about a contradictory and narrow vision of sustainability, but also about

transnational movements of populations and capital, imaginations of social equity, and objectifications of places, histories, socio-natural relations, and cultures.

To conclude, I would like to present some final thoughts on design sensitivity for the Anthropocene Caribbean and the emergent norms and forms of sustainable tourism (Rabinow 1989). If, as Latour insists, we are in a time of reconceiving and refashioning our collective human life on earth without the modernist drive towards the fundamental, then we have to exercise care in our socio-natural reproductions (Latour 2008). Thus, an attention to contemporary design is crucial in terms of examining how designs travel and how they work, for whom, when, and why within new problem spaces (Graffam 2010). To this end, one of our goals should be the investigation of the contemporary builders of Caribbean space. Sheller (2009: 1399) notes, “Caribbean space is being socially and politically produced under new conditions of commercialized sovereignty, virtual cyberproperty, and fictional residency. Software-supported logistics, data processing, property development, building design, marketing, banking, travel, and surveillance together enable this disembedding of island space from structures of local governance and territoriality”. These trends entangle with the Anthropocene concerns and commitments of scientists, environmentalists, and governments, necessitating new spatial products and brands, as well as the designers who must draw all this together.

The Development is but one of several new tourist projects designed to navigate the tensions and hypocrisies of the Anthropocene in the region, but it is not the only model out there. I believe that it is possible for traveling aesthetic and infrastructural models to be rejected and debated, especially where communities have distinctive ideas about what differentiates their space from others or their present and future from their past. These design negotiations are happening now in tourist developments throughout the region, and they will continue to spread as islands of difference become models themselves within the worlding processes of the Anthropocene.

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Notes

¹ All quotes, unless otherwise specified, are from my field notes; my parentheses.

² For discussion of a case in Mexico, see Gonzales and Lejano 2009.

³ These models are not exclusively Western and Euro-American—there are also Southern referents and models that are designed to consolidate postcolonial sovereignty and pride.

⁴ The next phase of my own study of the Development will involve living with informants in the nearby settlement.

⁵ This is also an example of the interpretive and critical theory-based trend in tourism research (Xiao and Smith 2006)—the analytic arena most capable of diagnosing the discursive and cultural implications of current events in tourism as they unfold in real time.