

**TOURISM AND
INFORMAL ENCOUNTERS
IN CUBA**

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Volume 38 *Tourism and Informal Encounters in Cuba*
Valerio Simoni

TOURISM AND INFORMAL ENCOUNTERS IN CUBA



Valerio Simoni



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To Lin

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FOREWORD



This work is a methodological tour de force in the ethnography of tourism, carried out over a total of thirteen months between 2005 and 2014. As I pointed out some time ago (Graburn 2002), the ethnographic study of tourism faces challenges common to many other contemporary ethnographic fields: challenges of mobility and temporariness, altered states of consciousness, personal privacy in closed-door societies and political asymmetries, all of which are found in today's tourism in Cuba. In addition I noted the sensitive matters of racial, national and class identities that favoured anthropologists who shared these characteristics with their informant subjects. In Cuba, as Valerio Simoni makes clear, there are vast racial and ethnic gaps both within Cuba and between Cubans and the majority of tourists who, in this work, come predominantly from Europe. Yet here, Simoni has transcended most of these barriers by working with both men and women, and European visitors and multiracial Cuban hosts.

Within Cuban tourism, Simoni does not attempt to cover all types of international tourism. Indeed, as he shows us, his work complements, rather than duplicating, the considerable research already conducted on tourism in Cuba. He has chosen an important field he calls *informal encounters*, which is methodologically challenging, often marginal (or even illegal) to official structures and well-worn paths. These encounters, usually between younger unmarried (or unattached) tourists and young Cubans on the make 'with no visible means of support' involve intense intersubjective ambiguity. Simoni makes a good point: we are dealing with what could be 'friend-like' relationships, a field almost neglected by mainstream social anthropology, which has found it easier to deal with set structures and roles, even if informal. Thus the work is a methodological exemplar for contemporary anthropology, which needs to deal with the more fluid, short-term, interethnic or intercultural, and marginal relationships increasingly found in the modern world, such as those of lifestyle migrants, refugees, economic aspirants, backpackers and gap year travelers, self-seeking exiles (Graburn 2012) and so on.

The Cuban case is more problematic than most because of issues of ambivalence and (lack of) trust. The young Cuban ‘entrepreneurs’ hope to find friendship, economic support or even long-term relationships leading to emigration with a foreign partner to his or her homeland. Their situation emerged in the ‘special period’ of the 1990s after Cuba lost the massive support of the USSR (which consisted mainly of buying sugar at above-world prices) and was plunged into an economic crisis that consequently moved international tourism to the center of its international trade (as an ‘export’ industry, tourism brings in foreign currency that helps pay for imported goods and services). This emphasis broadened tourism from its traditional orientations to solidarity, culture and staid tropical luxury. Combined with more permissive privatization, tourism opened up a field of entrepreneurship for individual Cubans and households. For instance, in the (informal) economy tourists were for the first time allowed to stay in private homes, and prostitution was said to have flourished as never before, providing much-needed income for the underemployed. Meanwhile tourist numbers increased tenfold, and a new breed of younger, more exploratory tourists came to take advantage of the opportunity for ‘authentic’ relationships with ordinary Cubans, avoiding the formal role of following paid guides and eating and staying in government-run establishments.

During this period there emerged the phenomenon of *jineterismo*, a name given to the activities of outgoing Cubans who tried to make contact with tourists in order to gain something from the encounter, be it money, gifts, rewarded sex, privileged companionship and entry to ‘tourist only’ places, or in their wildest dreams, invitations to go abroad for employment or partnership such as marriage (Tanaka 2010). The word comes from *jinete*, jockey, with the implication that the *jinetero/a* is ‘riding’, i.e. directing, the tourist for his or her own advantage. The police often see such behavior as hassling or hustling and may go so far as to arrest the offender (unless bribed). This open-ended role is central to Simoni’s ethnography, and he sensitively dissects the sequence of processes by which the tourist tries to avoid being ‘taken’ while finding friendship and intimacy and the *jinetero* tries to allay such suspicions by becoming a friend of the tourist in such a way as to also achieve his or her goals and desires. These private and secretive behaviors are revealed in a masterly ‘quadripartite’ ethnography that shows equally the viewpoints and strategies of men versus women and tourists versus Cubans; eventually, Simoni shows, male versus female gender roles take precedence over national differences.

The stories lay out the principles and guises of trust, friendship and market exchange in vignettes, also telling of both successes and failures by following individuals over time and consorting with many people on ‘both sides’. This approach is both remarkable and eminently readable; the author

shows how individuals keep a strong moral basis or at least a morally justifiable rationale while pursuing personal goals, all the while trying to maintain the appearance of moral behavior. For instance, a young Cuban woman is able to look down on taking money for sex by accepting twenty dollars in 'taxi money' after intimacy with a male tourist, rather than getting fifty dollars for patently 'transactional sex work' – even though she always walks or hitchhikes home. Unlike a few exceptional older and very experienced male tourists, visiting young men also refuse to 'pay for sex', even though they may pay for meals, drinks, taxis and so on to facilitate the consummation. Female tourists almost never pay a Cuban man, though they have the means to facilitate dance partnerships, friendship, intimacy or even permanent relationships to be continued back home in Europe. Cuban men, with the distant goal of marriage, may indulge the tourist's desires in order to be invited abroad; however, some men complained that they were just taken and used for sex, while others failed in their dream marriages and had to return home. This multi-sided ethnography only faltered, the author admits, in the examination of the behavior of *pingueros*, that is, Cuban male sex workers who have encounters with gay tourists. Some of these Cubans are straight men practising another variation of *jineterismo* in order to support their families.

Though the most flamboyant cases of *jineterismo* centre on sexual relationships, especially European males' desire for 'hot' black or *mulata* Cubans and European women's fantasies, the book's main concern is social processes and relationships. Indeed, the same kinds of games and negotiations, protestations and informal relationships involving mutual gain play out in rural Cuban tourism – sampling cigars, exchanging 'gifts', access to restaurants and so forth – where the same basic asymmetries of power and wealth hold. Not only do Cubans try to convince tourists of their honourable intentions and authentic friendship, but they are often rivals amongst themselves for tourists' attention and benefits, bad-mouthing other Cubans as untrustworthy or even handing them over to the police. The tourists, on the other hand, may eventually see that the Cubans have great economic needs that do not necessarily preclude genuineness in friendship; in fact, the two may well have to go together in touristic Cuba. Simoni stresses the relational idioms into which these encounters are seen to fit – idioms of friendship, romance and exceptionalism by which the partners eventually agree to a shared set of meanings that downplay the irregular details and facilitate their continuity. Immersed in situations where entertaining and cherishing relationships abide across differences and inequalities, readers can realize the debates, reflections and negotiations required in making their meanings as the actors construct their own worlds. This reopens the question of what kind of relationships can emerge from touristic encounters, which deserves to be put afresh at the forefront of anthropological research.

Foreword

This work is an exemplar for contemporary ethnographers studying open-ended encounters in any series of relationship processes, taking into account self-interest, moral necessity, gender and power asymmetries, and political uncertainties. At the same time, the author is very aware of the unique historical and political context, showing how *jineterismo* emerged as a public concern during the critical period of Cuban economic weakness, and how it swelled the informal economy that so many Cubans had to depend on while also threatening the structures of a proud but struggling society that has had numerous anti-colonial conflicts. The official censure and the police surveillance and arrests of young Cuban ‘entrepreneurs’ perhaps cover an unofficial permissiveness born of necessity, but any appearance of dependence on, or selling out to, wealthy foreigners must be constantly subdued. In this complex work, the anthropology of tourism reaches full maturity and offers valuable lessons for today’s social sciences.

Nelson Graburn

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The research on which this book is based started about ten years ago, in the summer of 2004. Since then, my investigation and writing have benefited from the help of many people and institutions, to which I would like to express my gratitude here.

It all began at the Centre for Tourism and Cultural Change (CTCC), at Sheffield Hallam University and then at Leeds Metropolitan University (UK), where my researches benefited above all from the invaluable encouragement, expertise and guidance of Mike Robinson and Scott McCabe. At the CTCC, I was part of a close-knit group of colleagues with whom I continuously exchanged ideas and insights, and I would like to thank here in particular Josef Ploner, Fabian Frenzel, Sean Kim, Tamás Regi, Desmond Wee, Sonja Buchberger, Donata Marletta, Claudia Müller, Birgit Braasch, Ploysri Porananond, Martin Bastide, Jakob Calice, Suleiman Farajat, Sunyoung Hong, Yi Fu, Hannah C. Wadle, Mathilde Verschaeve, and Daniela Carl. At the CTCC, I profited from stimulating conversations with the more senior scholars David Picard and Simone Abram, with whom I have continued exchanging and collaborating, as well as with Phil Long and colleagues and advisors working in related fields in Sheffield and Leeds, including Rodanthi Tzanelli, Jenny Blain, John McCauley, Dorothea Meyer, Lucy McCombes, and Ko Koens. In Leeds I also had my first encounter with Nelson Graburn, who throughout the years would continue to provide insightful feedback on my work.

At the outset of my research in February 2005, I went to Cuba for a first, exploratory fieldwork stay of one month. There I met many of the friends and acquaintances with whom I am still in touch to this day, and who have helped me greatly in my work. To protect their anonymity as research participants, I will not mention their names, but I nevertheless wish to express my immense gratefulness for their help and collaboration in my study. None of this would have been possible without their willingness to spend

time with me and tell me their stories. In Cuba I also established connections with anthropologists working on related themes, or at least interested in what I was doing, among whom were Pablo Rodríguez Ruiz, Avelino Couceiro Rodríguez, and Abel Sierra Madero. Year after year in my successive stays on the island, I visited and talked to them about the development of my research, and I am pleased to acknowledge the helpful insights of our conversations here.

While undertaking research in England, in 2006 and 2007 I also participated in a Swiss postgraduate programme in Ethnology/Anthropology that enabled me to come back regularly to Switzerland and continue my productive exchanges with Christian Ghasarian at the University of Neuchâtel. I am indebted to Ellen Hertz and Heinz Käufeler for directing and contributing to this postgraduate programme, which was a great platform for sharing the early findings of my investigation. Feedback from the participants in this programme improved the clarity and substance of my work, and here I wish to thank in particular Christian Giordano and Erhard Stölting (from the module on 'trust'), and Shalini Randeria and Jean and John Comaroff (who led the session on 'power'). Throughout these years within the Swiss academic community I benefited from stimulating exchanges with Géraldine Morel, Bastien Birchler, Séverine Rey, David Bozzini, Anne Lavanchy, Alain Mueller, Hervé Munz, Julie Perrin, Jérémie Forney, Anahy Gajardo, Aymon Kreil, and Alessandro Monsutti, among others.

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Besides the essays I delivered in the conferences and academic events referred to above, and often as a result of exchanges initiated there, some of the material presented in this book has appeared in earlier versions, as journal articles and book chapters. The comments of the editors of these publications certainly helped improve my texts and ideas, and I thank them all for this. Among the articles and chapters whose reworked bits and pieces can be found in this book, I should mention 'From Ethnographers to Tourists and Back Again: On Positioning Issues in the Anthropology of Tourism' (Simoni and McCabe 2008) and 'Revisiting Hosts and Guests: Ethnographic Insights on Touristic Encounters from Cuba' (Simoni 2014a), on which I elaborate in some sections of the introduction to this volume; 'L'interculturalité comme justification: Sexe "couleur locale" dans la Cuba touristique' (Simoni 2011) and 'Intimate Stereotypes: The Vicissitudes of Being *Caliente* in Touristic Cuba' (Simoni 2013), parts of which have been readapted in chapter 1; "'Riding" Diversity: Cubans'/*Jineteros*' Uses of "Nationality-Talks" in the Realm of their Informal Encounters with Tourists' (Simoni 2008a), which contains some of the examples and reflections presented in chapter 4; 'Scaling Cigars in Cuba's Tourism Economy' (Simoni 2009) and 'Tourism Materialities: Enacting Cigars in Touristic Cuba' (Simoni 2012a), most visible in chapter 5; 'The Morality of Friendship in Touristic Cuba'

(Simoni 2014b) and 'Introduction: Friendship, Morality, and Experience' (Simoni and Throop 2014a), on which I have drawn for chapter 6; 'Dancing Tourists: Tourism, Party and Seduction in Cuba' (Simoni 2012b), inspiring chapter 7; and 'Coping with Ambiguous Relationships: Sex, Tourism, and Transformation in Cuba' (Simoni 2014c), which also discussed some of the ethnographic examples employed in chapter 8.

Different research grants and fellowships have enabled me to carry out this ethnographic study, and the institutions that provided such funding deserve acknowledgement here. Sheffield Hallam University and Leeds Metropolitan University supported my investigations from 2005 until 2009. Between 2010 and 2014 a grant of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology sponsored my research at the CRIA-IUL in Lisbon (SFRH/BPD/66483/2009). Finally, in the final stages of the writing process I was able to count on a research fellowship provided by the Swiss National Science Foundation (*Ambizione* Program, PZ00P1_147946), which is financing my current position at the Graduate Institute in Geneva.

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I am aware that the list of people mentioned above is far from exhaustive, and I apologize to all those whom I have forgotten to mention here, but whose insights are nevertheless also reflected in this book. Any shortcomings in the text remain my sole responsibility, and I am very much looking forward to the comments and criticisms that may help improve my findings.

Introduction

RELATING THROUGH TOURISM



‘The problem here is that you never know why they are talking to you; if there is some hidden interest behind. Well, I guess they are always trying to gain something.’¹ This is what I retained from a conversation I had in a café in Havana with Sandra and Marta, two Swiss women in their late twenties who were travelling independently around Cuba in the summer of 2007. Their account of tourists’ first encounters with Cubans in the streets of the capital was rather typical, as were the questions these relationships raised: ‘Are these people sincere?’ ‘Can we trust them?’ ‘What do they want from us?’

Before my first visit to Cuba in 2005, as I thought about doing research on tourism in this country, I had several conversations with friends and acquaintances who had recently travelled there. Their encounters with Cuban men and women dominated much of our talk. What struck me most in this respect was the nuanced balancing of positive and negative aspects: ‘Many Cubans just want to cheat you, but I also developed nice relationships with them’, was the sort of reasoning I recalled from these early conversations. Setting off for this Caribbean island, my impression was that encounters between tourists and Cubans oscillated between two extremes. Put simply, on the one side were the positive promises of mutual understanding, hospitality and friendship, as well as romance; on the other was the daunting prospect of deceptive relationships where reciprocal manipulation and exploitation prevailed, as exemplified by notions of tourism hustling, sex tourism, and prostitution. How did tourists, in their engagements with Cuban people, discriminate between these two opposing scenarios, and what, if anything, lay in between them?

To a certain extent, these contrasting views were echoed in the writings of scholars and commentators who had attempted to evaluate the overarching nature of touristic encounters, which I had started to read. Whereas these encounters were said to be fraught with striking inequalities, highly

deceptive and constantly productive of misunderstanding (Krippendorf 1999 [1984]; van den Berghe 1980), they also appeared to hold the promise of cultural understanding and the establishment of positive connections between people from across the globe (Ki-Moon 2007). These contrastive narratives seemed to mirror and relationally constitute each other by way of opposition, outlining an either/or scenario not unusual in tourism literature at large, particularly when 'the big story of tourism' (Jack and Phipps 2005) is at stake.

In the conversations I had before leaving for Cuba, the contrasting tropes of mutual exchange and exploitation were hotly debated. A recurrent narrative saw people who had been warned of the potentially deceptive character of intimate relationships with Cuban men and women nonetheless being drawn into romance with locals in the course of their journey. Some had ended up marrying their Cuban partner; others looked forward to pursuing the relationship and returning to the island as soon as possible. How could expectations of cheating, deception and manipulation in relationships leave room for such gratifying and intense connections? The stories I gathered before my departure also significantly featured critiques of 'tourism apartheid', segregation between tourists and Cuban people, and an authoritarian communist regime that tried to monopolize tourists' expenditure and attention by obstructing and penalizing informal engagements between foreigners and ordinary (i.e. not employed in the tourism industry) Cubans. These critiques raised another question: how could encounters and relationships develop in spite of the alleged overwhelming control and institutionalization in the tourism industry?

In a wider sense, I was dealing here with what has been considered, for more than half a century now, a central paradox and dialectic informing the development of modern tourism, which Enzensberger (1996 [1958]: 129) phrased as 'the yearning for freedom from society' being 'harnessed by the very society it seeks to escape'. According to this interpretative model, the channelling of tourists into pre-established channels is in tensile relation with tourists' longing for freedom. To a certain extent, touristic encounters in Cuba seemed to echo this dialectic, or at least to be initially informed by it. However, these initial conversations also suggested that touristic encounters held the potential to break Enzensberger's 'vicious circle' of tourism's 'inner logic' and 'confinement' (1996 [1958]: 132), and that human relationships could not be reduced to any deterministic and ineluctable scenario. A closer look at recent anthropological debates on the matter, coupled with my ethnographic fieldwork in Cuba, progressively worked to support this view. This book shows that touristic encounters' potential to generate something new and to have effects that cannot be entirely predicted must not be underestimated and deserves all our attention. Writing about relationships

in tourism research, Strathern (2010: 82) recently argued that ‘you can’t actually read off from the characteristics – including race, gender, class – of any of the parties to a relationship just how that specific relationship is going to grow, unfold, develop a history, implicate others, expand, shrivel, die, and so forth, or what rules or expectations get put into place’. Reflecting more generally on ‘the inherent ambiguity of everything human beings say and do in the presence of one another’, Michael Jackson (2007: 148) observes that ‘something irreducibly new is born of every human encounter, and it is the possibility of this newness that explains the perennial hope that inheres in every human relationship’ (149). In the light of Jackson’s remarks, we could argue that much of the ethnographic material discussed in this book draws attention to ‘the energy devoted to reducing this intersubjective ambiguity and dealing with the fallout from never knowing exactly what others are feeling, thinking or intending’ (148).

But there is more to it. In touristic Cuba, ambiguity could act as a key challenge to the establishment of encounters and relationships, but it was also what enabled such relationships to move forward. Jackson’s (1998: 14) insight that ‘intersubjectivity is inescapably ambiguous’ finds echoes in Henrietta Moore’s (2011: 17) consideration of ‘the general underdetermination of cultural meaning, its ambiguity and indeterminacy’, which ‘provide the core conditions ... for self-other relations, the making of connections, cultural sharing and, ultimately, social transformation’ (17). For Moore, subjectification would be impossible without ambiguity, given that ‘human beings would be too overdetermined to become human subjects’ (17). As I show in this book, the protagonists of touristic encounters in Cuba struggled with the potential overdetermination of their identifications as (gullible) tourists on the one hand, and as (deceitful) hustlers on the other. Highlighting asymmetries in knowledge and economic resources, these dyadic identifications called forth notions of trickery and exploitation, and were not a promising start for touristic encounters. They threatened the range of relationships and subjectivities aspired to by the tourists and Cuban men and women I engaged with, making it hard for them to establish gratifying connections. Part One of the book illustrates how these preconceptions gained shape and salience, and highlights what it took for people to meet, initiate interaction and eventually overcome such reductive framings. Following on from there, Part Two considers the different kinds of relationships that people tried to establish. Thus confronted with notions of market exchange, hospitality, friendship, festivity and sexual relations, we will follow closely how these relational idioms, about which both tourists and Cubans held *a priori* assumptions, acted as framing devices to qualify what was at stake in their interactions and to (re)define the agencies, subjectivities and moralities that informed them.

But while relational idioms could help people cope with intersubjective ambiguities, they could also generate new ones. It was one thing for visitors and Cubans to share some common understanding of notions of market exchange, hospitality, friendship, or festive and sexual relations; and quite another for them to enact these relationships in ways that fulfilled each other's expectations. If these forms of relationality could help soothe fears of trickery and exploitation by opening up possibilities, they also introduced their own demands and closures, calling for specific actions and behaviours. As such, they also channelled and delimited the scope of touristic encounters in certain directions, constraining their open-endedness and entailing choices and commitments that people were not always ready to make.

Investigating the formation of relationships in a tourism context, the book may be read as a journey into a real-life laboratory of human encounters, one in which relational norms and ideals were explicitly discussed, enacted, and put to test. We could argue, following Moore (2011: 15–16), that my wider interest is in 'comprehending the forms of complex relationality that characterize' 'the world we share with others'. Indeed, I wish to draw attention to the 'forms and means ... through which individuals imagine relationships ... to others' (16), uncovering how and how much any 'sharing with others' took place in an ethnographic context – that of tourism in Cuba – characterized by striking differences and inequalities. As Moore puts it, 'the recognition of diversity and difference produce particular kinds of self-other relations' (12). One of the aims of this book is precisely to specify what these forms and kinds look like, tracking their emergence, negotiation and constitution in touristic encounters in Cuba. The hope, as it were, is also to make some headway in grasping the implications of what Strathern sees as the 'Euro-Americans' need for 'fresh ways of telling themselves about the complexities and ambiguities of relationships' (Strathern 2005: 27). This need, which contrasts with the 'huge investment ... in the language and imagery of individuals or groups' (27), hovered over the encounters addressed here, in which people strove to make sense of a multiplicity of engagements with a limited relational language, and struggled to actualize and reinvent their ways of talking about relationships.

The encounters that are the focus of this book confronted people with a range of specific, tourism-related situations that activated a set of assumptions, dispositions and expectations about roles, identities and agendas, and about the kind of relationships that could ensue. Uncovering these assumptions, dispositions and expectations is integral to my approach, which backs away from holistic views of 'the tourist' and 'the local' to focus instead on situated identifications and modes of engagement. In this sense, my goal is to shift the focus of analysis from 'tourists' and/or 'locals' to what happens between them – the practices, discourses, materialities, affects and

representations circulating in moments of encounter – and illustrate the insights that can be gained by reorienting research from a prevailing focus on (id-)entities towards a study of the relational processes from which (id-)entifications emerge.

Accordingly, the notions of ‘tourist’ and ‘Cuban’ employed throughout the text refer to emergent and relationally constituted identifications that take shape in precise moments of encounter, rather than analytical starting points implying the existence of two homogeneous groups of actors with clearly defined characteristics.² In this respect, it appears that the context of contemporary tourism in Cuba was less conducive to subsuming distinctions between insiders and outsiders, or residents and visitors, than may be the case in other tourism destinations.³ Instead, the tourist/Cuban divide constituted the prevalent ‘grammar of distinction’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 25), an overarching and pervasive frame that could easily encompass other distinctions and identifications, and that allotted a key discriminating role to the asymmetry of resources between tourists and Cuban people. As I show in this book, the possibility of challenging this staunch divide by achieving other subject positions was one of the main promises of touristic encounters, fraught as they were with potentialities for redrawing lines of belonging and exclusion.

Over three decades ago Malcolm Crick (1989: 330) warned that ‘the question of what sort of social relationships grow up in tourism encounters can only be answered by detailed and descriptive studies’. My aim is to provide some answers to this question, focusing on what has come to be known as the ‘tourist/local’ or ‘host/guest’ encounter. In the course of fieldwork in Cuba, when talking to tourists about their encounters with Cuban people, and vice versa, this key theme sprang immediately to the fore. How do these encounters emerge, and what are their salient qualities and features? In many ways, this text invites the reader to follow the responses that tourists and Cubans brought to these questions, as they enacted and made sense of a variety of engagements. Their common-sense understanding of touristic encounters frames the subject of my research, whose starting point was to take such understandings seriously, following how people came into contact, developed relationships, and conceptualized them.

Since Crick’s (1989) review of social sciences literature on international tourism, other scholars have taken up the challenge of uncovering, via detailed ethnographic research, the kind of relationships that can emerge through tourism. Moving beyond polarizing assessments and evaluative generalizations, scholars have started to show touristic encounters’ potential to regenerate the forms of relationality on which tourism relies. Thus authors have shown, for instance, how notions of friendship (Cohen 1971), reciprocity and hospitality (Adams 1992; Tucker 2003), love and partnership

(Brennan 2004; Kummels 2005), and market and commerce (Forshee 1999) are renegotiated and reshaped from within encounters. My work builds on these insights, integrating approaches that advocate for empirically informed studies to illuminate more thoroughly the complexities, ambiguities and transformative possibilities of touristic encounters and relationships.⁴

Of course, scholarly interest in contemporary forms and conceptualizations of relationships is by no means limited to research on tourism. Insightful parallels to my approach can be drawn, for instance, with recent anthropological research on love, sexuality and erotics uncovering transformations in notions and experiences of intimacy, notably in response to increased transnational connections – including tourism and migration – and changing economic conditions.⁵ Current anthropological scholarship on friendship has also drawn attention to a range of different conceptions of this relational idiom in a variety of ethnographic locales,⁶ encouraging anthropologists ‘to be ready to observe the construction of new types of sociality in a globalizing but complex and contradictory world whose cultural and social boundaries are constantly being transformed’ (Bell and Coleman 1999b: 16). My research in Cuba heeds Bell and Coleman’s call, in that it tries to assess touristic encounters’ potential to bring about new types of sociality and redraw lines of belonging across the North/South divide. This potential is also what explains why touristic encounters can become so absorbing for the protagonists involved. In other words, a lot may be at stake in them, given that the ways relationships take shape and develop can have profound and lasting effects on people’s lives and livelihoods.

The works of Cohen (1996) in Thailand, Tucker (1997, 2001, 2003) in Turkey, and Fosado (2005) in Cuba have successfully shown how, in certain tourism contexts at least, the characterization of relationships becomes an emblematic issue constantly ‘pulled into the intercourse’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 29) between tourists and members of the visited population. Drawing on Comaroff and Comaroff’s approach to the dialectics of the colonial encounter to illuminate touristic ones, I suggest that in such encounters too, certain discourses and practices become more central than others – including discourses and practices that inform the definition of relationships, their centrality exemplified by the fact that they are often contested and ‘worked over as the dialectic unfold[s]’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 29).

Once we recognize its centrality and contentious character, the characterization of relationships in tourism may be fruitfully apprehended as a ‘hot’ situation (Callon 1998a; Strathern 2002), in which everything (e.g. agencies, goals, motivations) is susceptible to controversy, like the ‘conditions ... one might find in crises or dilemmas that seem to have many ramifications’ (Strathern 2002: 54). According to Callon (1998a: 260), these controversial situations ‘indicate the absence of a stabilized knowledge base’, a gap that

is likely in touristic encounters that bring together people from across the world. In hot situations, actors find it very hard to ‘arrive at a consensus on how the situation should be described and how it is likely to develop’ (Callon 1998: 263). Furthermore, the usual remedy for ‘cooling down’ these controversial conditions – namely, to make ‘more and more elements of the situation explicit’ (Strathern 2002: 254) – risks increasing the array of potentially contentious issues and can make it even harder to close the debate once and for all.

Viewed as a potentially hot situation, the definition of relationships in tourism should no longer be treated as a predictable (i.e. cold) and clear-cut issue, for such a view has often led to the dismissal of touristic encounters as superficial, commoditized versions of other, ‘more real’ human relationships (Krippendorff 1999 [1984]). Though tourists and members of the visited population may themselves reach these conclusions and portray their relationships as predictable, superficial and commoditized, my research suggests that this is far from being always the case. Instead, I argue, only by closely scrutinizing people’s engagements can we achieve a clearer picture of the relationships that develop through tourism, of their possibilities and ramifications. It is precisely these possibilities that this book wishes to explore. By relying on ‘the peculiar mileage afforded by the ethnographic method itself’ (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007: 2), my approach here calls on empirical evidence to dictate the terms of its own analysis, so as to unsettle taken-for-granted assumptions and generate new analytical progress. By the same token, I hope to show the usefulness of reopening a field of inquiry whose anthropological interest – three decades after the publication of *Hosts and Guests* (Smith 1978 [1977]) – is far from exhausted.

The Anthropology of Touristic Encounters and Relationships

Social Distance, Instrumentality and the Commoditization of Relationships

The study of encounters and relationships in tourism between ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’, ‘tourists’ and ‘locals’, has been capturing the anthropological imagination at least since Valene Smith’s edited book *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* was first published in 1977. In the conclusion to this path-breaking publication that helped establish the anthropology of tourism as a legitimate field of inquiry within the discipline, Theron Nuñez asked: ‘What is the nature of the interaction between hosts and tourists?’ Answering his own question, Nuñez (1978 [1977]: 212) maintained that such a relationship ‘is almost always an instrumental one, rarely coloured by affective ties, and almost always marked by degrees of social distance and stereotyping

that would not exist amongst neighbours, peers, or fellow countrymen'. Instrumentality, social distance, stereotyping: the anthropological literature has repeatedly highlighted all these features, as attested by the works of Pierre van den Berghe (1980, 1994, 1996), Dennison Nash (1978 [1977], 1981, 1996), Erik Cohen (1984) and Malcolm Crick (1989), which have explicitly addressed the issue of tourist-host encounters, summarizing the state of the research on the subject. In this scholarship, the nature of relationships between tourists and locals is alternately characterized as transient, manipulative and exploitative (van den Berghe 1980), impersonal (Pi-Sunyer 1978 [1977]; Nash 1978 [1977], 1981), dehumanized (Crick 1989) or 'staged as personalized' following a linear evolution towards the commoditization of hospitality (Cohen 1984).

In counterpoint to these generalizing assessments, more empirically grounded researches have shown that the type of relationships that can emerge through tourism cannot be reduced to a necessarily transient, impersonal, and commoditized affair. Studying Nepalese Sherpas' involvement in mountaineering and trekking tourism, for instance, Vicanne Adams (1992: 547–550) demonstrates how traditional patterns of wage labour are reconstituted via the 'idiom of reciprocity' and the skilful activation of strategies to create social obligations, enabling the establishment of 'long term bonds between hosts and guests' (549). Adams' insights into reconstructions of reciprocity, hospitality and friendship in tourism counter the hasty claim made by Aramberri (2001: 738) that 'the host should get lost' from the field of tourism research. Of course, we should neither idealize all touristic relationships as interactions between hosts and guests, nor consider a priori hospitality the preferred lens to illuminate them. Certainly we must examine processes of commoditization and take them into account. In doing so, however, we would benefit greatly from approaches akin to that of Adams, for as much as we strive to relocate and understand how hospitality and reciprocity regimes are brought about and re-created (see also Tucker 2003 and Sant Cassia 1999), so we should do with processes of commoditization. Under what conditions do these notions emerge? Who is using them in which situation? What do they conjure and achieve?

By refraining from categorizing a priori the types of relationships that can emerge through tourism, Amalia Cabezas (2006) has been able to show how even in the most enclavic and mass-oriented tourist environments, such as all-inclusive resorts in the Varadero Peninsula (a coastal area frequently dubbed Cuba's quintessential 'tourist bubble'), the interpretative moulds of 'staged personalized service' and 'commoditization' (Cohen 1984: 380) may obstruct subtler realities and understandings. Accordingly, Cabezas (2006: 515) shows how Cuban resort workers employed in hospitality organizations that encourage 'friendliness, subservience, and flirting' with tourist

clients blur the line between the behaviour suggested by hotel management and pursuit of their own agendas. Workers seek out opportunities to cultivate various forms of relationships and intimacy with hotel guests. In this context, 'relationships that create long term obligations and commitment are, for many resort workers, more beneficial than commercialized sexuality' (516). The potential for romance and marriage with tourists, loaded with opportunities to leave the country, can thus become the most attractive prospect of employment in all-inclusive resorts. And as Cabezas shows, intimate relationships are indeed forged between Cuban employees and foreign tourists. The alleged staged personalization of service shifts into another realm that breaks down the client/worker divide, opening up other relational possibilities for the protagonists involved.

Brought together, the works of Cohen (1971), Adams (1992), Tucker (1997, 2001, 2003) and Cabezas (2006) constitute a compelling reminder of how slippery the terrain of generalizations on the nature of tourist-local relationships can be. To shed light on the very diverse scenarios that can emerge through tourism, detailed ethnography and processual, dynamic approaches to relationships like the one I advocate in this book appear to be key. Having cleared the path for the recognition of such diversity, we may now consider a realm of encounters in which issues of professionalization and commoditization are likely to become even more controversial. This realm can be fruitfully apprehended with the exploratory notion of 'informal encounter'.

From the Informal Economy to Informal Encounters in Tourism

Since Keith Hart's publication of 'Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana' (1973), the concepts of the 'informal economy' and 'informal sector' have led to a number of refinements and conceptual clarifications across different disciplines. Anthropologists have been instrumental in highlighting the heterogeneity of practices that can be subsumed under these conceptual labels, and have explored the peculiar ways in which the notion of informal economy translates into different sociocultural contexts – as testified by the books edited by Clark (1988) and Smith (1990), and more recently the works of Stoller (2002) and Browne (2004), among others. In the following chapters I will also consider how in Cuba the notion of *jineterismo* – a neologism, provisionally translated as tourism 'riding', that tended to evoke tourism hustling and prostitution – pointed to a range of intersections between international tourism and the informal economy (see Cabezas 2004; Palmié 2004; Kummels 2005).

For Hart (2005: 8), the “formal sector” consisted of regulated economic activities and the “informal sector” of all those lying beyond the scope of regulation, both legal and illegal’. Following a similar conceptualization, Crick (1992) wrote about the ‘informal’ tourist sector as being ‘that arena beyond the effective control of the tourism authorities – street corners, unlicensed guesthouses, cheap cafes, and so on’ (136), and noted that ‘through the Third World, where a tourism industry has developed, a similar “informal” sphere has grown up around its margins’ (137). This sphere, in which people deploy strategies to direct any ‘free floating’ resource that may be available (139), has been largely neglected in tourism research, according to Timothy and Wall (1997: 336). More recently, anthropologists have devoted increased attention to the informal tourist sector, as for instance Dahles and Bras’ (1999a) edited volume *Tourism and Small Entrepreneurs* testifies. These authors focus on entrepreneurship as they unpack the characteristics of tourism-oriented occupations that operate on the fringes of, but also in close connection to, the formal tourism sector.

By introducing the notion of the ‘informal encounter’, I aim to shift the focus from entrepreneurship and economic occupation to the qualities of encounters and relationships. The pertinence and methodological advantages of this notion become apparent once we consider that in many tourism destinations across the world, the policies being developed and implemented erect divides between formal and informal, legal and illegal interactions between tourists and members of the visited population. As I elaborate in chapters 1 and 2, this is the case in Cuba, where the authorities can selectively hinder, obstruct, and penalize informal contacts between foreigners and Cuban people. Under these conditions, the notion of ‘informal’ is applicable not only to economic activities and occupations, but also to interpersonal relations whose economic character remains controversial.

The existence of policies akin to those in place in Cuba has been documented in various tourist destinations and illustrates the suitability of the notion of informal encounter to address engagements that challenge what is officially prescribed and regulated, and leave the economic in a contentious place. Cohen’s 1971 article on the relationships between ‘Arab boys and tourist girls’ in Akko, a ‘mixed Jewish Arab community’ in Israel, provides a good illustration of this scenario. In that case, the local police occasionally interfered in these encounters, harassing and even arresting local youths under the accusation that they were molesting tourists (Cohen 1971: 230–231). More recently, in the tourism context of Jamaica, Mullings (1999: 78) has pointed out how ‘tourism policies that seek to regulate the presence of the local population on certain public beaches ... have the potential to label encounters between local community members and tourists as punishable forms of harassment’ (see also Getfield 2005).

To unpack how notions of harassment take shape in the tourism scenarios considered by Cohen (1971) and Mullings (1999), as well as in the Cuban case, I believe that the notion of the informal encounter is a more fruitful starting point than is the informal economy. As these authors show, tourism harassment is a term that can be abused in framing encounters between tourists and members of the visited population. Straight away, this notion emphasizes deception, predatory attitudes and economic instrumentality, though these are not necessarily characteristics the protagonists of such interactions would attribute to their relationships. The ease with which associations are made between the 'informal economy' and 'tourism harassment' in some tourism contexts, whereby the former can be unproblematically conflated with the latter, can become fertile ground for patronizing judgements that target 'deviant' behaviours and sustain discriminatory policies and policing of the tourism realm.

By contrast, the notion of informal encounter provides an analytical standpoint that refracts moralizing judgements that take economic agencies and instrumental rationalities for granted. This notion should at least prevent the convergence of our analytical approaches with the definition and targeting of tourism harassment, encouraging more sensitivity as to how these morally tainted constructs emerge. In this sense, the concept of informal encounter enables us to decentre and take a step back (or above, in terms of abstraction) from research on the informal tourist sector. Analytically, the step back consists in neither taking for granted nor restricting a priori the focus of investigations to the economic aspects of these touristic encounters and relationships. As our attention shifts from economic rationales to the ways people are brought together, in which economic issues may be included but also, sometimes, explicitly refuted, these issues cease to be the defining features of the process under scrutiny. By the same token, what comes to count as 'economic' in a given context becomes itself a matter for investigation, as the focus changes to how processes of 'economization' operate (Çalışkan and Callon 2009, 2010; also see chapter 5).⁷

Methodologically, however, the analytic use of this notion should not obfuscate the local conceptualizations that our ethnographies may reveal, like *jinetismo* in Cuba. In this sense, the concept of informal encounter is nothing more than an exploratory and heuristic device, geared essentially to comparative purposes. Here I follow Latour (2005: 49), who argues that 'analysts are allowed to possess only some *infra*-language whose role is simply to help them become attentive to the actors' own fully developed meta-language, a reflexive account of what they are saying'. As employed in this book, the term informal encounter – much like the terms encounter, relationship, or relational idiom (see below), for that matter – is a case of what Latour calls *infra*-language. Precisely because it is particularly under-determined and

'empty' (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007: 20), such a notion can facilitate grasping the full extent and implications of our research participants' own conceptualizations.

The appeal of the notion and perspective outlined here becomes all the more clear once we consider the growing field of research on intimate and sexual encounters in tourism. In his review article 'The Role of Relationships in the Tourist Experience', Philip Pearce (2005: 116) sees the realm of sexual encounters as 'one marked exception to the lack of research on relationships in tourist-local encounters'. Indeed, following, among others, the path-breaking work of Cohen (1996) in Thailand,⁸ publications on the subject have flourished in the last decade.⁹ Anthropologists researching the complex interface between sexual relations and compensation had long shown the pitfalls of hasty generalizations about what qualifies as 'prostitution', a term that tends to acquire negative and stigmatizing moral connotations and is often employed as a self-evident and unchanged notion (i.e. 'the oldest job in the world') (Tabet 1987: 1). In relation to tourism contexts, the works of Brennan (2004), Cabezas (2004, 2006), Fosado (2005), and Frohlick (2007) clearly show that avoiding any such aprioristic categorizations is both more respectful towards our research participants and analytically fruitful. It is worth considering Cabezas' (2004, 2009) remarks about sex and tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic:

'Prostitute,' or 'sex worker', is an identity assigned in specific situations, contingent on the social location and perceived characteristics of the participants, and lacking ambiguity in performance. In most situations, the permeable boundaries between leisure and labor, paid work and unpaid work, and private and public are difficult to discern, thus making it possible to resist the category of 'worker'. The category of 'sex worker', therefore, comes with its own disciplinary functions and ... presents an either/or view of relationships and sexual practices. (Cabezas 2004: 1001–1002)

The notions of prostitute and sex worker, which presuppose fixed and stable identities (Cabezas 2004: 1002), become all the more problematic in conditions where sexual encounters between tourists and locals are not formalized and happen outside the control of institutions (e.g. brothels). Whereas in the latter case the term sex worker can become an empowering tool, leading for instance to the recognition of workers' rights, in less constrained situations the same term may seem too reductive or stigmatizing, and be rejected by the protagonists involved. Accordingly, Cabezas (2004: 1002) calls for more complex analytical frameworks that can enable us to grasp and make sense also of those situations in which 'the meanings that people attribute to actions cannot be specified in advance'.

This tends to be the case in informal touristic encounters in Cuba, as already indicated by Cabezas' (2004: 1010) remarks on the connections between 'greater economic informality' and the increasing difficulty of defining 'new social and economic ventures as labor'.¹⁰ Building on these insights, the notion of informal encounter may help us draw attention to shifting boundaries between 'work' and 'leisure', and between what is qualified as 'social' or as 'economic'. This conceptualization can thus ensure that people's own understandings and definitions of encounters and relationships, including those interpretations which explicitly refute economic considerations, take precedence over the researcher's assumptions. As such, the notion of informal encounter is productive in highlighting the normative and potentially repressive dimensions of notions like 'tourism harassment', 'prostitution' and even 'sex work', foregrounding the processes that lead to their emergence, contestation and eventual crystallization.

The assumption that tourists are at leisure while locals work, and that this informs the nature of their relationships, has been reiterated by several leading scholars of tourism, from Nash (1978 [1977], 1981), to Krippendorff (1999), to Crick (1989). LaFlamme (1981: 473) had hinted at the possibility of interactions between tourists and locals 'in the context of mutual leisure', citing among his examples 'noneconomically motivated sexual encounters' (473), but the case made by Cabezas is an even more compelling reminder of the importance of moving beyond notions of work in certain tourism contexts, where being labelled a 'prostitute' or 'sex worker' can have very dramatic consequences for people who engage in sex with tourists, leading for instance to legal sanctions and even imprisonment.

I should make clear here that I am not suggesting downplaying or obliterating any distinction between 'tourists' and 'locals'. On the contrary, a range of key differences is likely to exist, and it is certainly our task to uncover them. The lesson we should learn is a methodological one: to be aware of the potentially contentious character of such aprioristic distinctions and categorizations. Even the seemingly unquestionable binary tourist-leisure/locals-work can, in certain situations, become a reductive, repressive framework that obstructs recognition of the whole spectrum of engagements and identifications that can emerge through tourism. By contrast, our task should be to illuminate how such divides and categorizations emerge, what controversies and struggles they give rise to, who is engaged in them, and what can they achieve.

These reflections may also help us to re-discuss recent literature emphasizing the role of 'mediators' in tourism, notably where encounters between tourists and locals are concerned (see in particular Chambers 1997, 2000; Cheong and Miller 2000; Werner 2003; and Zorn and Farthing 2007). Erve Chambers (1997: 6) points to the increasingly 'mediated' character of