REVISITING HOSTS AND GUESTS: ETHNOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS ON TOURISTIC ENCOUNTERS FROM CUBA

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Abstract: *Scholars and commentators trying to assess the nature of touristic encounters have often reached contrasting conclusions. While on the one hand, such encounters appear to be fraught by striking inequalities, highly deceptive, and a constant source of misunderstanding and reciprocal exploitation, on the other hand, they seem to hold the promise of reciprocal exchange and positive intercultural connections. How do these opposing evaluations take shape, and what informs them? Building on a selective review of anthropological literature on touristic encounters and ethnography of relationships between 'tourists' and 'locals' in Cuba, the article unpacks the moral underpinnings and interpretive frameworks on which these polarizing views are grounded. In touristic encounters in Cuba, contrasts and oppositions between sentiment and interest lead the different actors involved to blur and redraw boundaries between the intrinsic and the instrumental value of relationships. In explaining these different assessments of encounters the article draws attention to the competing agendas, aspirations, and moral demands that inform the way judgments are made, and provides analytical pathways to illuminate the uneasy coexistence of different interpretative frameworks in tourism.*

Keywords: *touristic encounters; ethnography; interpretation; morality; Cuba.*

Introduction

Carrying out a review of the literature on the nature and implications of encounters between tourists and members of the visited population, as a theoretical grounding for my research in Cuba, I could not help getting the impression that scholars and commentators dealing with the issue tended to reach contrasting conclusions. On the one hand, touristic encounters and relationships appeared to be fraught by striking inequalities, highly deceptive, and a constant source of misunderstanding and reciprocal exploitation. On the other hand, they seemed to hold the promise of mutual understanding, and the establishment of positive connections between people from around the globe, notably across the North-South divide. Touristic encounters were thus said to

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constitute a realm of 'mere illusion' and 'make believe association', a 'parody of human relationships' (Krippendorf, 1999 [1984], p. 58; van den Berghe, 1980, p.378) where deception and exploitation prevail. Alternatively, they were portrayed as the 'building block for global peace and cultural understanding … bringing ordinary men and women from around the world into contact with one another', and thus helping 'dispel the myths, stereotypes and caricatures that often hold sway from a distance' (Ki-Moon, 2007). A black and white pendulum, these meta-narratives seemed to mirror and relationally constitute each other by way of contrast and opposition. Today, they have become ubiquitous tropes proliferating hand in hand with the development of international tourism, highlighting its brighter and darker side, its positive and negative potential. As my research shows, however, these divergent assessments, which find echoes in touristic Cuba, are often predicated on aprioristic conceptions of agency and subjectivity, and tend to rely on implicit assumptions about what (good) touristic encounters should be about. As such, they call for a scrutiny of their moral underpinnings and epistemological foundations.

In this article, I would like to explore the formation and confrontation of different views on touristic encounters in the light of an ethnography of relationships between 'tourists' and 'locals' in Cuba. My findings suggests that the polarizing perspectives reiterated in tourism promotion material and academic research parallel to a large extent the initial expectations and predispositions of the protagonists interacting in tourism destination. In other words, these perspectives do not appear to enhance our understanding of how these encounters and relationships emerge and develop in situ. Instead, they run the risk of reiterating in a rather un-reflexive manner taken for granted idealizations (when a naïve stance predominates) and critiques (once cynicism prevails). The main problem is that such generalizations too often rely on deductive assumptions and clear-cut aprioristic judgments, without paying enough attention the understandings of research participants and their competing claims. In trying to counter simplistic assessments of touristic encounters, my work builds on Malcolm Crick's observation that '[t]he question of what sort of social relationships grow up in tourism encounters can only be answered by detailed and descriptive studies' (1989, p.30).

In touristic encounters in Cuba, contrasts and oppositions between sentiment and interest lead the different actors involved to blur and redraw boundaries between the intrinsic ('social') and the instrumental ('economic') value of these relationships. To explain how these different assessments take shape, are discriminated and hierarchized, I consider in this chapter how contrasting moral imperatives and pragmatic considerations lead people to outline conflicting approaches to relationships and the inequalities that traverse them. The view

advocated here thus draws attention to the competing agendas, aspirations, and moral demands that inform the way different judgments on touristic encounters are made. Accounting for this multiplicity and the controversies it generates, the article provides analytical pathways to illuminate the uneasy coexistence of different interpretative and judgemental perspectives on tourism.

Revisiting 'Hosts & Guests'

The study of encounters and relationships between 'hosts' and 'guests', between '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 1978. In the conclusion to this path breaking publication, which helped establish the anthropology of tourism as a legitimate field of inquiry within the discipline, Theron Nuñez asked the following question: 'What is the nature of the interaction between hosts and tourists?' (1978, p.212). More than two decades later, in her review of the anthropology of tourism, Amanda Stronza recognizes that 'tourism has captured the attention of anthropologists because it often involves face-to-face encounters between people with different cultural backgrounds' (Stronza 2001, p.264), before adding, however, that 'missing from many current analyses is an attempt to learn more about the dynamics of host-guest interactions by observing and talking with people on both sides of the encounter' (2001, p.272). This is what Nuñez had advocated three decades earlier, urging anthropologists to study 'the indigenous population' and 'the tourist population' 'in interaction' (1978, p.212).

Answering rather summarily his own question, Nuñez maintained that such 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' (1978, p.212). Instrumentality, social distance, stereotyping: all these features have been repeatedly highlighted in the anthropological literature, as testified by the works of Pierre van den Berghe (1980; 1994), Dennison Nash (1978; 1981; 1996), Erik Cohen (1984) and Malcolm Crick (1989), which have explicitly addressed the issue of tourist-host encounters and have attempted to summarize the state of the research on the subject. Thus, the nature of relationships between tourists and locals has been alternatively characterized as transient, manipulative and exploitative (van den Berghe, 1980), impersonal (Pi-Sunyer, 1978; Nash, 1978, 1981), de-humanized (Crick, 1989), or 'staged as personalized' following a linear evolution towards the commoditization of hospitality (Cohen, 1984). While they had the merit of drawing attention to tourist-local encounters and relationships, the initial generalizations made by social scientists ran the risk of reifying 'the' touristic encounter without paying enough empirical attention to its plurality, processual character, and generative potential. By way of contrast,

more ethnographically based researches, particularly from the 1990s onwards, have shown that the relationships that can emerge through tourism cannot be exclusively understood as transient, impersonal, and commoditized.

Writing about Nepalese Sherpas' involvement in mountaineering and trekking tourism, Adams (1992) demonstrates for instance how traditional patterns of wage labour are reconstituted from within tourism via the 'idiom of reciprocity' (1992, pp.547-550), and how the relevance of notions of reciprocity and hospitality to understand touristic encounters, therefore, cannot be obliterated by grand narratives of ineluctable 'capitalist uniformisation' and the global triumph of 'commoditized relationships'. Adams' insights into reconstructions of reciprocity, hospitality, and friendship in tourism counter the hasty claim made recently by Aramberri that 'the host should get lost' from the field of tourism research (2001). Of course, neither should we idealize all touristic relationships as interactions between hosts and guests, nor consider hospitality as the unquestionable paradigm that should illuminate them. Processes of commoditization certainly need to be examined and taken into account. But as much as we strive to relocate and understand how hospitality and reciprocity regimes are brought about and recreated, so we should do with processes of commoditization (Simoni, 2009a). Under which conditions do these notions emerge? Who is using them in which situation? What do they conjure and achieve? These are the questions on which I would like to direct attention, rather than rely on taken for granted conceptions.

In line with Adam's approach, the researches of Tucker in Turkey (1997, 2001, 2003) and of Sant Cassia in Malta (1999) similarly unveil and shed light on the situated emergences of 'hosts' and 'guests' in tourism. As Tucker pertinently argues:

> While objections have been raised regarding the use of 'hosts' and 'guests' for discussing tourism relations because of the sheer commercialism these terms disguise … the roles of 'host' and 'guest' themselves are used by the Göreme villagers in order to negotiate and determine their relationship with tourists. It will also become clear how these roles are used by tourists in Göreme in order to intersect and reach beyond the primary tourist gaze. (2003, p.118)

One may argue that to a certain extent the researches of Adams (1992), and Tucker (1997, 2001, 2003) deal with relationships between tourists and members of the visited population that develop in conditions of relatively small scale, 'alternative' tourism development. Could this suggest that in the case of more mass-oriented tourism development, impersonal and commoditized service relationships will inevitably emerge and prevail?

The work of Amalia Cabezas in all-inclusive resorts in the Varadero peninsula - a coastal area frequently dubbed as Cuba's quintessential 'tourist bubble' - shows how Cuban resort workers employed in hospitality organizations that encourage 'friendliness, subservience, and flirting' (2006, p.515) with tourist clients, blur the line between the hotel management suggested behaviour and the pursuit of their own agendas. Thus, workers strive to find opportunities to cultivate various forms of relationships and intimacy with hotel guests. 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 indeed, as Cabezas shows, intimate relationships are forged between Cuban employees and foreign tourists. The supposedly 'staged' personalization of service shifts into another realm, which breaks down the client/worker divide, opening up other relational possibilities for the protagonists involved. By refraining from categorizing a priori the types of relationships that can emerge in these touristic encounters, Cabezas is thus able to unpack taken for granted assumptions and to show how even in the most enclavic and mass-oriented tourist environments the interpretative moulds of 'staged personalization' and 'commoditization' can obstruct subtler realities and understandings. Brought together, the works of Adams (1992), Tucker (1997, 2001, 2003) and Cabezas (2006) constitute compelling reminders of how slippery the terrain of generalizations on 'the nature of tourist-local relationships' can be, and how an exclusive focus on economic rationalities and commoditization may obscure other important dimensions of interpersonal connections across the North-South divide.

In the last two decades, research on sexual and intimate touristic encounters has provided further insights on the potential complexity and multidimensional nature of the relationships that emerge through tourism. According to Pearce, focus on this subject constitutes 'one marked exception to the lack of research on relationships in tourist-local encounters' (2005, p.116). While notions of 'sex tourism' and 'prostitution' have been widely employed in academic scholarship on the topic, the controversies that surround these conceptualizations provide further insights on the different interpretative lenses and normative ideals characterizing research on touristic encounters. In their review of the literature on sex tourism, Herold, Garcia and DeMoya thus outline two main tendencies: "The theoretical conceptualizations have generally been guided by one of two competing perspectives of sexuality with one group of researchers typically viewing prostitutes as sexual victims and another as empowered sexual actors" (2001, p.979). While the researches of Julia O'Connell Davidson (1996) and Jaqueline Sánchez Taylor (2000) in Cuba are exemplary of the first of the two conceptualizations, a growing number of scholars adopt what I would qualify as a subtler and more ethnographically sound approach to the issue of sexual

tourist-local encounters. Following the schematic distinction outlined by Herold, Garcia and DeMoya (2001), we may include in this body of scholarship those research that question any analytical reification of binaries like client/prostitute or exploiter/victim, and which adopt a more dynamic and processual approach to power relations (Simoni, 2008).

Accordingly, authors like Cabezas (2004; 2006), Fosado (2005), and Frohlick (2007), show that it is both more respectful towards our research participants and analytically fruitful to avoid aprioristic categorization in terms of 'sex tourism' and 'prostitution'. As Cabezas puts it:

> '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. (2004, pp.1001-1002)

Presupposing fixed and stable identities, the terms of 'prostitute' and 'sex worker' risk freezing differences and impede the emergence of alternative identifications (Cabezas, 2004, p.1002). Such notions become all the more problematic in conditions where sexual encounters between tourists and locals are not formalized, and happen outside the control of institutions (such as brothels). Whereas in the latter case the term can become an empowering tool, leading for instance to the recognition of workers' rights, in less constrained situations the same term may appear too reductive, stigmatizing, and be rejected by the protagonists involved. Thus, Cabezas 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' (2004, p.1002). This tends to be the case in 'informal' touristic encounters in Cuba, encounters that happen beyond the control and regulation of the tourism authorities (see Simoni, 2009b). The connections between 'greater economic informality' and the increasing difficulty of defining 'new social and economic ventures as labor' in tourism has been underlined by Cabezas (2004, p.1010), and appears also in the work of Cohen in Thailand. Ensuring 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, the notion of 'informal encounter' (Simoni, 2009b) highlights the normative (and potentially repressive) dimensions of notions like 'tourism harassment', 'prostitution', and even 'sex

work', foregrounding instead the processes that lead to their emergence, contestation, and eventual crystallization.

In the light of these reflections, it appears that even the longstanding assumption that 'tourists' are at leisure while 'locals' work (Nash, 1978, 1981; Krippendorf, 1987; Crick, 1989) can become, in certain situations at least, a reductive and repressive framework, obstructing the recognition of the whole spectrum of engagements and identifications that can emerge through tourism. By contrast, our task should be to illuminate how such categorizations emerge, what are the controversies and struggles they give rise to, who is engaged in them, and what can they achieve. These considerations may also lead us to productively re-discuss recent literature that emphasizes the role of 'mediators' in tourism, notably as far as encounters between tourists and locals are concerned (see in particular the works of Chambers, 1997, 2000; Cheong & Miller, 2000; Werner, 2003; Zorn & Farthing, 2007). Erve Chambers points to the increasingly 'mediated' character of tourism, whereby this activity is now 'dependent on the intervention of others who serve as neither hosts nor guests in any conventional manner' (1997, p.6). As he puts it: 'Thinking of tourism as being predominantly a relationships between 'real' (i.e., residential) hosts and their guests has become problematic in several respects' (1997, p.6).

While such assumptions may indeed be problematic, and should not be taken as analytical starting points, this should not lead us to shift from one extreme to the other, and assume that no 'immediacy' can be achieved in touristic encounters. That is, at least, if we apprehend immediacy not as a 'lack' or 'void' of something (i.e. mediators). Instead, immediacy, as much as mediation, may be more productively approached in a processual manner as a situated achievement – as a construct that may require much investment to be brought about and upheld. As Adams (1992) and Tucker (2003) show, the identifications of 'tourist' and 'local', of 'host' and 'guest', are themselves the result of processes in which a range of actors and agencies intervene. My research in Cuba support this view, showing that the question of determining whether 'tourists' are dealing with 'professional tourism brokers', 'experienced tourism entrepreneurs', 'hustlers', 'prostitutes', or 'ordinary Cubans', 'friends' and 'partners' is one that occupies and informs much of their engagements with members of the visited population (Simoni, 2009b). This is what recent literature emphasizing the ubiquity of 'tourist mediators' seems to neglect, namely that the 'immediacy' of touristic encounters and relationships can be the results of negotiations as much as their 'mediation' is. In this view, immediacy is not some sort of 'natural' state of human relationships, but becomes an effect, particularly difficult to achieve in contexts where pre-conceived notions of 'tourism hustling' seems to prevail.

From 'hospitality' to 'commoditized relationships', 'tourism hustling', 'friendship', 'sex tourism', 'prostitution', 'love', 'romance', I have considered here how the academic literature on tourism has alternatively dealt with these notions in more or less reified or processual ways. Accordingly, scholars adopting a processual approach have been able to show the interest of uncovering, through empirical study, the punctual, variegated, and often contested enactments of these 'relational idioms' (Simoni, 2009b) in different tourism contexts. In the empirically grounded researches of Cohen (1996) in Thailand, Tucker (1997, 2001, 2003) in Turkey, or Fosado (2005) in Cuba, we find 'tourists' and 'locals' being puzzled about their relationships, scrutinizing each other's action so as to find any clues that can help them make up their mind and discriminate between various types of relational engagement (e.g., 'friendship', 'hospitality', 'hustling', 'prostitution', 'love'). As I highlight elsewhere (Simoni, 2009b) these controversies lead people to unpack and become explicit about their dispositions and expectations on the matter, granting us privileged access to a range of relational idioms, and to the interpretative frames and normative ideals that go with them. As such, it appears that touristic encounters can constitute a privileged ethnographic locale to investigate people's investment and absorption in the conceptualization of relationships.

The question of what kind of relationships emerge in touristic Cuba is also one that personally affects foreign ethnographers in the first place (see Simoni & McCabe, 2008), shaping their fieldwork trajectories and possibilities. Accordingly, when I first went to Cuba in February 2005, I was aware of the likelihood of being considered by Cuban people first and foremost as a foreigner, one among the tourists, and thus also a potential 'prey' of *jineteros* and *jineteras* – the male and female 'tourist riders' whose reputation had preceded my initial experience of the country. This was indeed what happened as I started strolling around tourism areas of Havana. With time, however, I managed to become involved in a far greater variety of situations and registers of conversations, which gave me access to touristic encounters and relationships from a multitude of perspectives. From moments of sociability among tourists, which saw them gossiping and exchanging stories and advice about encounters with Cubans; to the moments in which Cuban people talked with peers about their experiences with tourists; to specific moments of interaction between the two; to more intimate moments of disclosure in one to one conversations with informants - a variety of perspectives enriched my ethnography, and enabled me to uncover heterogeneity within the lives of the subjects of my research, shedding light on their multiple ways of being and experiencing touristic encounters.

The ethnographic material on which I draw in the following sections comes from 12 months of fieldwork carried out in Cuba between 2005 and 2013, in the

city of Havana, the rural town of Vinales (located 200 km west of the capital), and the beach resort of Santa Maria (in Playas del Este, a thirty minutes' drive east of Havana). In these tourism settings, I observed and participated in interactions between tourists and Cubans, and discussed with them the encounters and relationships they developed with each other. In spite of its diversity, the empirical material on which I base my reflections does not provide a comprehensive picture of the touristic encounters that took place in Cuba, and is markedly biased towards the practices and discourses of heterosexual men. This, however, should not detract from the wider arguments of the article, which is to highlight the multiple positionings and subjectivities that the subjects of my investigation inhabited as they responded to different moral demands and pragmatic concerns.

Tourism and *Jineterismo* in Cuba: Suspicion and the Univocal Framing of Touristic Encounters

From the beginning of the 20th century up to the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro in 1959, international tourism, essentially from North America, thrived on the island of Cuba, making it the main tourist hub of the Caribbean. By the end of the 1950s, Cuba had gained the reputation of 'tropical playground' for US citizens (Schwartz, 1997). The success of the revolutionary movement in 1959 marked the close of an era in Cuban history, and a turning point in its associations with international tourism. Towards the end of the 1980s, after about three decades of relative stagnation in terms of international tourist arrivals, a rapidly worsening economic crisis prompted the Cuban authorities to renew their efforts in developing tourism. The new impetus given to international tourism gained further momentum from the beginning of the Special Period in Time of Peace (*Período especial en tiempo de paz*) in 1990 - the time of austerity and economic hardship that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, which since the 1960s had entertained privileged relationships with Cuba. Following a spectacular rate of growth, more than 2 million tourists visited Cuba in 2004 (they were about 340,000 in 1990), bringing hard currency into the country. Nevertheless, in spite of governmental reforms and a certain degree of 'economic recovery' after the first years of the Special Period, the economic situation remained difficult for many people on the island, especially for those who did not have direct access to hard currency through a job in the tourism industry or remittances from relatives abroad. With Cuban people struggling to get by and to ameliorate their economic conditions, the Special Period saw the explosion of an ample range of informal economic activities on the island. Among these activities, tourism-oriented occupations played an increasingly salient role as privileged sources of hard currency and pathways to fulfil other needs, desires, and aspirations.

This realm of activity has come to be known as *jineterismo*, from the Spanish *jinete* (jockey, rider), and indicating the 'riding of tourists' for instrumental purposes. *Jineterismo* is a contentious term that tends to evoke notions of 'tourism hustling' and 'prostitution', which is selectively employed to designate and target a diversified range of informal engagements in the tourism realm, and which brings issues of morality, nation, race, class and gender into play (Berg, 2004; Cabezas, 2004; Fernandez, 1999; Simoni, 2008). Significantly, any major contemporary guidebook on Cuba is likely to have at least a small section devoted to the phenomenon of *jineterismo*, as it is the case in the very popular *Guide du Routard* (Gloaguen ed. 2007) and *Lonely Planet* (Gorry, 2004), nowadays translated in several languages. As the Lonely Planet guidebook puts it, 'if readers' letters and personal experience are an indication, *jineteros* are the number-one travel bummer in Cuba' (Gorry, 2004, p.359). This guide quotes an American traveller, who argues: 'Although I've had many relationships with Latinas, I'm reluctant to get involved with Cubans because of the socioeconomic dynamic involved'. (ibid.)

'Socioeconomic dynamics' come indeed to the fore once the relational idioms of *jineterismo* are at stake. *Jineterismo* speaks the language of inequalities. On one side, it confronts tourists with their advantageous economic position, reiterating their status of privileged outsiders and emphasizing differences between them and the Cuban population. On the other, it also highlights their lack of knowledge of local conditions, and the possibility of being duped and deceived by *jineteros* and *jineteras*. Besides the information provided by tourist guidebooks, it is also important to consider that with the booming of tourism in Cuba, and the increasing flows of people moving in and out of the country, similar warnings against *jineterismo* have started circulating in the tourists' countries of residence by way of word-of-mouth tips and suggestions. Among the tourists I met in Cuba many were those who – prior to their journey - had gathered a wealth of practical tips and suggestions from friends or relatives who had already been there. A recurrent warning was to be careful with people met on the street, particularly in Havana. 'These people' – alternatively referred to as 'hustlers' or '*jineteros*' - had gained the reputation of skilful cheaters and deceivers, whose main goal was to get hold of tourists' money. Other stories related to the trajectories of Cuban migrants played an important role in shaping tourists predispositions towards informal encounters in Cuba. They were the stories of the relationships that had enabled Cubans to migrate, in which examples of 'instrumental marriages' and 'deceitful relationships' featured heavily. For tourists ready to leave for Cuba, such stories of 'relational failures' would exemplify the diverging drives and agendas of foreign visitors and their Cuban partners. Accordingly, radical differences and incompatible agendas were bound to come up as relationships progressed. Thus, these narratives projected a

gloomy and un-auspicious shadow over the prospect of establishing long term relationships between tourists and a Cuban partner met during travel on the island.

Once in Cuba, the occasion to discuss and exchange further advice on the matter with fellow travellers multiplied. Among the tourists I met, the underlying logic of widespread tips and gossip regarding the world of *jineterismo* went as follows: 'more or less subtle tactics, similarly instrumental drives'. In the context of tourist-to-tourist advice, the suggestions of experienced travellers who came regularly to Cuba acquired a very important role in shaping the dispositions of the newly arrived ones. Such tips tended to emphasize the instrumental dimensions of tourists' encounters and relationships with Cubans, warning tourists about the Machiavellian plans and economically oriented agendas of most members of the Cuban population. 'They are all looking for ways to get hold of our [tourists] money!' 'We are like walking dollars to them!' These were the kind of bold statements I often heard. Repeated conversations with tourist men who had spent many years coming for holidays in Cuba, and engaging in intimate relationships with Cuban women, lead to the conclusion that no matter how long you stayed with a Cuban partner, and how strongly they professed love to you, you would always remain a foreigner to them, and they would never come to treat you as they did their fellow nationals. '*La loro famiglia é una sola!*' ('Their family is one and one only [i.e., the Cuban nation]'), 'You'll never be able to (fully) trust them!' No doubt the reiteration of these warnings constituted an important challenge for the emergence of other, more positive views on informal encounters and relationships between tourists and Cubans. Emphasis on economic instrumentality and deception did not favour, for instance, the emergence of narratives of friendship and romance.

To understand this situation and the kind of interpretive logic it relied on, I think it is important to relocate it in an increasingly globalizing field of tourism discourse and critique, and to take into account more, particularly tourism's drive to reach into the most intimate realms of the places and lives that come onto its path. Tellingly, Dean MacCannell (1973, 1976), one of the first theorists of modern tourism, made of such quest for the 'real' and 'authentic' Other the key tenet of his theorization. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) front versus back distinction, MacCannell maintained that modern tourists were longing to 'enter the back regions of the places they visited', regions 'associated with intimacy of relations and authenticity of experiences' (1973, p.589). For him, this quest was ultimately doomed to failure given that 'tourist settings are arranged to produce the impression that a back region has been entered even when this is not the case' (1973, p.589). Since his pioneering conceptualization of tourism first appeared, MacCannell's work has been much discussed and criticized, giving

way to more nuanced and constructivist approaches to authenticity (see in particular Cohen 1988, and Bruner 1994). However, the basic tenets of his theoretical proposal seem to have gained much popular recognition, and trickled down to inform the practices and interpretive frameworks of potential tourists, at least in some tourism circuits.

Indeed, what my ethnographic material suggests is that tourists themselves often adopted a MacCannell-ian approach to make sense of their experiences and interactions with Cuban people. Accordingly, most of them despised the idea of being cheated and deceived, and were constantly puzzled about the 'real' intentions and motivations of the Cubans interacting with them. Here is where narratives of *jineterismo* could act as a key interpretative resource to 'unmask' the 'secret' motivations of Cuban people. In terms of social scientists' approaches, I think that similar frames of legibility still retain much analytical purchase when assessing touristic encounters from a critical(-cum-cynical) perspective. Such interpretive grids may appear all the more compelling, operative, and theoretically limitless when combined with a strong focus on structural inequalities and local resistances to global forces, and with a conceptualization of the (liberal) individual that foregrounds economic agency. While in principle I have nothing against such critical endeavours, the risk I see in this case lies in adopting this framework a priori (Fassin, 2008), in 'romanticizing resistance' (Abu-Lughod, 1990) and with it the image of the cunning locals that in spite of their subaltern position are able to trick and deceive the structurally advantaged tourists – a category of people for which academics have traditionally displayed little sympathy (see Crick, 1995). Going a step further, I would argue that we may be easily tempted by the notion that the disadvantaged inhabitants of tourism destinations in the South are not only able to take advantage of tourists, but that they should legitimately do so, and that we - as critical researchers sensitive to domination and ways of resisting it, and eager to highlight their economic agencies and rationalities – like to see and expect them to do so.

These sorts of interpretations, which tended to portray every Cuban as a potentially strategizing and deceptive *homo economicus*, were, however, likely to be contested by Cuban people interacting informally with tourists, who often strived to highlight the intrinsic value of the relationship at stake. Let me now elaborate on this point and on the challenges it poses to univocal readings of touristic encounters.

Entangling Sentiment, Interest, and Morality: Multiplicity in Touristic Encounters

Let me begin here with a little vignette of a paradoxical situation encountered during fieldwork, which saw at least two types of interpretations and (e)valuations

related to touristic encounters come into play and contradict one another. Consider the narrative of a young Cuban man, eager to flee his country via the tourist connection, which chose to break his promising relationship with a tourist girlfriend after she provocatively hinted at his desire to migrate. In his late twenties, Manuel, a resident of the rural town of Viñales, had been in a relationship with Marina for a couple of years. During that time Marina, a few years younger than him and often described by Manuel and his close friends as a 'beauty' from a 'good' (wealthy) Spanish family had come to visit him repeatedly in Cuba, bringing her parents with on one occasion. When talking about their relationship, Manuel insisted on the seriousness of his engagement with Marina, his *novia* ('girlfriend'). The relationship was indeed for him a very gratifying and promising one, and one that raised hopes of a possible marriage and future in Spain together. These, however, were delicate issues to talk about, and Manuel had carefully avoided bringing them up in his conversations with Marina, since he did not want to give her the impression that this – i.e. migration to Spain - was what he was after. Significantly, in one the several tales he recounted me about his relationships with her and how it all ended, Manuel said that it was precisely when Marina started insinuating that he wanted marry in order to migrate from Cuba, that he had decided he could no longer stay with her.

Whether this was 'truly' the reason that prompted their separation (other stories circulated among his friends), is beside the point that interests me here. According to Manuel's narrative, it was, and this, I argue, gives us a good vantage point into his aspirations and moral way of being Marina's boyfriend. For Manuel, Marina's accusations implied the existence of instrumental agendas behind his professions of love. They brought to life the image of a cunning and deceptive *jinetero*, denying him the possibility of being 'simply' in love, to be capable of sentiments that had nothing to do with economic considerations and the structural inequalities that separated them. This, for Manuel, was a move fraught with important implications, and one you could not undertake lightly. By making that move, Laura had shown that she did not trust him, and that 'she had no heart' *(no tiene corazón)*. Manuel, in other words, was calling for their relationship to be recognized and valued first and foremost in its emotional and affective qualities, in what we may refer to as its intrinsic social value, in contrast to a more economicist assessment that foregrounded his interest in moving out of Cuba and in using the tourist connection as a ticket to a better life.

Interestingly, on other occasions, Manuel did however rely on economicist evaluations of his encounters with tourists, assuming the posture of the cunning *jinetero*, becoming a 'tourist-rider' who engaged with visitors to squeeze some hard currency from them – informally selling cigars, bringing them to private restaurants where he could gain commissions on inflated bills, and also cultivating

a network of foreign girlfriends and male friends that would occasionally send him presents and money transfers. This was the Manuel that I got to know in moments of sociability with other Cuban men, when he talked and gossiped with his peers, boosting about his exploits at the expenses of naïve foreigners. In these contexts of interaction, Manuel and his friends tended to objectify tourists, and avoided delving on the emotions they felt for their *pepas* (their foreign girlfriends). Rather than positing love, and assuming a stance that carried the risk of appearing foolish and naïve in the eyes of cynical peers, they would therefore align to the semantic registers and moral discourse of *jineterismo*, becoming *jineteros* who had conquered their foreign 'victims' for essentially instrumental purposes, to provide for their socio-economic needs and desires and those of their family.

On these occasions, as I tried to make sense of Manuel and his friends' stance, I could not but being seduced by the trope of the 'cunning' local, the economically 'poor' but resourceful and skilful resident of developing countries who is not deprived of agency, but is instead tactically resisting adverse global forces and struggling to get it its way against structural conditions of inequality. In this view, tourists can easily be reduced to a source of livelihood, an economic resource to be rightfully taken advantage of. For people like Manuel, this was indeed what the Cuban government was itself doing – 'squeezing' foreign visitors to bring in as much hard currency as possible. Within this regime of justification, *jineterismo* thus became a rightful way for people who operated at the margins of the formal tourism sector to get their share of the tourists' cash, part of a nation's cunning tactics to siphon capitalist wealth.

Reflecting now on this ambivalent state of affairs: what can the coexistence of two competing ways of talking about touristic encounters tell us? How are we to interpret the paradoxical evaluation of a touristic encounter, by the same person – Manuel in this case - for its affective and intrinsically social dimensions at one moment, and for its pragmatic and economic one at another? A possible answer, along the lines of MacCannell's staged authenticity model, could be to say that Manuel was simply feigning love for Marina, but was in reality moved by other interests – notably to migrate and to improve his economic conditions. This would lead us to conclude that the economicist regime informing his conversations with fellow Cubans was really the one that mattered, and the one we should consider when trying to assess 'once and for all' such relationship. This assessment could be easily supported by the ample body of tourism social sciences literature arguing that touristic encounters are essentially exploitative, highly deceptive, and a constant source of misunderstanding. To illustrate why I believe that this univocal assessment is not particularly insightful, and does not adequately account for the complex and multidimensional nature of such

encounters, let me consider another brief example, which provides further proof of how an exclusive emphasis on the instrumental dimension of touristic encounters risks silencing the alternative aspirations and moral ways of being in which tourism gets entangled.

In the beach of Santa Maria, a thirty minutes' drive east of Havana, sentences like 'You must be crazy to fall in love with a Cuban!' were common place among my tourist informants, who were mainly Italian men in search of sexual adventures with Cuban women. It was in this environment adverse to any sort of romanticism that I became familiar with the love story between Bruno and Yunila. Bruno had been travelling with a group of Italian friends to Cuba. For him, and unlike some of his more experienced travel companions, it was the first time on the island, and when they had arrived in the provincial town of Las Tunas – several hours East from Havana, he had fallen in love with Yunila, a Cuban girl in her twenties and about ten years younger than him. By inviting her back to Havana so that they could spend the rest of his holiday together, and by openly expressing the love he felt for her, Bruno had become a laughing stock and victim of scornful insinuations from his companions. Spending several days in their company, I was saddened by the constant remarks made by Bruno's fellows, who constantly joked about him being in love, and occasionally referred to Yunila as 'a bitch', a *jinetera* like all the others who had managed to deceive him, feigning love to get hold of his money, marry him, and eventually migrate to Italy. Repeatedly scolded as naïve and blind to evidence, Bruno was embarrassed and hurt by his friend's remarks. Yunila on her side, was even more disheartened by their accusations, and repeatedly complained about being treated as a prostitute. They were denying her any fidelity to the love she professing for Bruno, reducing her to a manipulative economic agent, and reifying a divide between Cuban's self-presentations to outsiders and their actual motivations and agendas, which were deemed ineluctably strategic.

What the stories of Manuel and Marina, of Bruno and Yunila, and many others similar narratives of relationships between tourists and Cuban people led me to recognise, was that to imply an inevitable horizon of self-interestedness in Cubans' professions of love – or friendship for that matter (see Simoni forthcoming 2014a), and to force this interpretation on them, was to negate my research participants an important venue to fulfil their desires and aspirations. By insisting on their commitment to a disinterested, sentiment based love, people like Manuel and Yunila were arguably trying to align their moral selves to those of their tourist partners, and thus lay claim to the possibility of being together in a shared social world, one that was not only dominated by material concerns, structural inequalities and economicist assessments. The aspiration at stake here was to be recognized capable of a 'love' they assumed would

hold sway under 'normal conditions of existence'– as opposed to the context of exceptionalism, enduring crisis, scarcity, and isolation they associated with Cuba, and which they wished to overcome.

Beyond these moral and emotional dimensions, what should also be taken into consideration here is what such professions of love could enable and achieve at a more pragmatic level. Being in itself a moral demand (Zigon, 2013), love called for a certain commitment and continuity in the relationships. With it, in other words, a range of responsibilities and felt obligations were brought about, which demanded adequate responses from the partners involved. For a Cuban partner, for instance, this could result in being sent a monthly allowance to face the hardships of life in the island when their foreign love was absent, or being able to marry and join them in their countries. What remained extremely important for people like Manuel and Yunila, to preserve the moral configuration on which their love was grounded, was for these obligations and responsibilities to be experienced not as love's defining motive, but rather as a sentiment-driven outcome of it. In other words, people first loved each other, in uncompromising and uncalculated ways, and subsequently, simply 'normally', helped each other out as much as they could. This way of reasoning also outlines a move to hierarchize spheres of value, giving primacy to the intrinsically social and affective value of relationships over their economic one, internalized and re-qualified here as epiphenomenon.

Conclusion

Moral imperatives and pragmatic considerations lead people to outline conflicting approaches to relationships and the inequalities that traverse them. Rather than trying to establish, unambiguously, what was at stake in touristic encounters, the view advocated here draws attention to the competing agendas, aspirations, and moral demands that inform the way judgments are made. Thus, it becomes possible to understand why touristic encounters are being assessed in contrasting, and often paradoxical, ways. Accounting for this multiplicity and the controversies it generates, I have provided analytical pathways to illuminate the uneasy coexistence of different interpretative frameworks and normative ideals on tourism.

As suggested by the ethnographic material discussed above, assessment of touristic encounters were informed by the agendas, aspirations, and moral demands of the protagonists involved. These could vary greatly depending on the subject positions that people inhabited in different realms of their life. This is how I understand that disinterested professions of love at one moment did not necessarily mean that partners could not deceive and instrumentally manipulate each other at another. The same relationships could thus mean and

become different things. Faced with the insinuation of instrumentalizing love, of inappropriately deploying sentiments within the rationales of economic calculation, Manuel, for instance, expressed outrage at being framed as a *jinetero*. But in other contexts of interaction, like when gossiping with his Cuban friends and peers, he was also able to brag about his *jinetero/a*-like feats at the expenses of his foreign partners.

When trying to make sense of the contradictions inherent in the co-existence of these different forms of engagement, which often seemed to negate each other, I think we should resist the impulse to find coherence at all cost. A well-established interpretation to resolve this kind of paradoxes would be to rank such engagements as more or less real or superficial, as it has often been done in tourism research, where notions like simulacra, simulation, and inauthentic sociality still thrive. These grids of legibility have become so effective and widely distributed that they seem to work as self-fulfilling prophecies, foreclosing other relational possibilities and leading people to dismiss them as naïve illusions. In the light of the material I presented, however, I think that a more fruitful path lies in an open-ended approach that is able to recognize – beyond condescension - the validity of the competing claims we encounter during fieldwork. In touristic Cuba, the productive and persistent ambiguity of informal encounters could itself facilitate, at all times, radical shifts between contrasting modes of engagement and moral dispositions.

The two meta-narratives that seem to prevail when assessing touristic encounters, as outlined in the introduction to this chapter, would benefit from a similar analytical treatment, one that can reflexively unpack the moral assumptions and agency constructs on which they are often grounded (Fassin, 2008). An aprioristic and all-encompassing focus on economic rationales and tactics deployed by people from the global South to get their share of the international tourism cake may perilously verge on a 'romance of resistance', and obscure other aspirational qualities of self-other relationships in the tourism realm. Ultimately, this may have undesirable and detrimental effects on the very same people whose lives we would like to improve. Functioning as a warning against aprioristic and un-reflexive deployments of such interpretive frameworks, my research in Cuba shows how the 'hypothesis' of 'duplicity and dissimulation' as the quintessential 'arms' 'of the dominated' (Callon and Rabeharisoa 2004:20) can become a reified conceptual prism (and prison) extremely hard to refute and disentangle, pointing to some limits of the domination/resistance paradigm to illuminate the multiple dynamics of touristic encounters.

I have highlighted in this article the risks of reducing our research participants to interested individuals engaged in a tactical game of economic maximization

and reciprocal exploitation. I have also argued that we should be wary of framing our interpretations of touristic encounters in the popular terms of 'frontstage/backstage', 'real/superficial' 'truthful/deceptive', given that these can seriously hamper our ability to recognize the possible co-existence of more than one reality. From the moment that our ethnographies take us in the variety of contexts and spheres of interaction that make up a person's life, the experiences of our research participants, their claims and actions, seem to counter univocal readings, and call instead for a plurality of interpretations. And it is precisely the recognition of this plurality that can enhance our ability to grasp the complex significance of touristic encounters. Thus re-opened, the question of 'host-guest', 'tourist-local' relationships might then appear far from exhausted, and find once again a place at the forefront of anthropological research on tourism.

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