

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.

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