

# 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.’<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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,<sup>6</sup> 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 (Krippendorf 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 *jineteterismo* – 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).<sup>7</sup>

Methodologically, however, the analytic use of this notion should not obfuscate the local conceptualizations that our ethnographies may reveal, like *jineterismo* 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,<sup>8</sup> publications on the subject have flourished in the last decade.<sup>9</sup> 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'.<sup>10</sup> 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

tourism, which means it is now 'dependent on the intervention of others who serve as neither hosts nor guests in any conventional manner'. As he puts it: 'Thinking of tourism as being predominantly a relationship between 'real' (i.e., residential) hosts and their guests has become problematic in several respects' (6). I agree that such assumptions may well be problematic and should not be taken as analytical starting points, but this should not lead us to shift from one extreme to the other and assume that no 'immediacy' can be achieved in touristic encounters.

This book reveals the efforts that both tourists and members of the visited population devoted to enact such immediacy, showing the risk of seeing immediacy simply as a lack or void of something (i.e. mediators), located at the bottom end of a linear evolution leading to increasing complexity and mediations. Instead, immediacy is approached processually as a situated achievement, as a construct that may require much investment to come about and be upheld. As Adams (1992) and Tucker (2003) have shown, 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. The chapters in this book support this view, showing that the question of determining whether tourists are dealing with 'professional tourism brokers', 'experienced tourism entrepreneurs', 'hustlers', 'prostitutes', 'ordinary Cubans', 'friends' or 'partners' is one that occupies and informs much of their engagement with members of the Cuban population, and also informs what counts for them as a genuine encounter or relationship and in what way.

### *Relational Idioms and Insightful Controversies*

From 'hospitality' to 'commoditized relationships', 'tourism hustling', 'friendship', 'sex tourism', 'prostitution', 'love' and 'romance', the academic literature on tourism has alternatively dealt with these notions in more or less reified or processual ways. Scholars like Adams (1992), Cabezas (2004, 2006, 2009) and Tucker (2003) have shown the interest of empirical study to uncover the punctual, variegated and often contested enactments of these relational idioms in different tourism contexts. In her fascinating book on transnational desire and sexual touristic encounters in the Dominican Republic, Denise Brennan (2004: 22) also considers how 'Dominican sex workers and foreign sex tourists forge new practices and meanings of "love" that grow out of the tourist and sex-tourist trades'. Investigating local meanings of prostitution, marriage and womanhood in Cuba, Ingrid Kummels (2005: 10) argues on her end that 'in the transcultural relations between sex tourists and locals, models of womanhood, partnership and love are not merely "given" by the social structure in the context of a globalized modernity.

Instead they are to a large extent actively produced via agency or are renegotiated'. Working in the very different tourism context of Yogyakarta in Java (Indonesia), Jill Forshee (1999: 294) highlights how tourism in this city gives rise 'to new forms of social interaction', including a range of perpetually evolving market idioms and approaches to commerce (296–298), which the anthropologist then sets out to uncover.

The following chapters, and more particularly Part Two of the book, show how encounters that happen through tourism can constitute a privileged ethnographic case shedding light on people's investment and absorption in the conceptualization of relationships, or what may be phrased as the explicitation and (re)qualification of relational idioms. I use the notion of the 'relational idiom' to refer to various types of relationships as defined and qualified by the subjects of my investigation. This heuristic concept draws attention to the way tourists and members of the visited population conceptualize and frame their relationships, be it, to cite some possibilities, in terms of 'hospitality', 'friendship', 'commerce', or 'romance'. Working on notions of friendship in Chinese societies, Alan Smart (1999: 120; see also Bell and Coleman 1999b: 15) has shown the usefulness of considering 'friendship as an idiom of interaction: a way of talking about relationships, rather than a set of criteria which can define the term'. According to Smart, 'friendship must be seen in the context of other idioms of interaction' (120; see also Killick and Desai 2010). The notion that different relational idioms inform each other, and therefore that considering and understanding them in conjunction may be useful, can certainly illuminate the workings of relationships in other contexts and in fact guided my own investigation in touristic Cuba.

Building on these insights, I wish to show how different relational idioms mirror and acquire their meanings in relation to one another, notably by way of convergences, contrasts and opposition. I am interested in the way people formulate criteria to define and qualify what relational idioms are about, using one to criticize another, outlining continuities but also drawing boundaries and incommensurabilities between them. Indeed, I also focus on how shifts and transitions from one relational idiom to the other operate, that is, on the mechanisms of their convergence/divergence and overlapping/separation. Furthermore, my understanding of relational idioms is not limited to the way people talk about relationships but also includes the normative expectations, dispositions and moral ways of being that these idioms conjure. Expectations and dispositions towards different types of relationships shape people's discourses, behaviours and ways of engaging with each other, and are in turn challenged and reshaped by them. The importance of moving beyond discursive rationalizations in understanding relational idioms and their transformations becomes all the more clear once

we consider ‘that thought alone is not enough to bring about change’ and that ‘we need to take account of the way in which thought is bound up with fantasy, affect, emotion, symbols, and the distortions of space and time’ (Moore 2011: 18).

Touristic encounters are likely to involve discrepancies in terms of people’s expectations and dispositions towards engaging with each other, fostering the emergence of controversies about the relational idioms at play. The importance of such ambiguities and controversies is clearly revealed in the works of Cohen (1996) in Thailand, Tucker (1997, 2001, 2003) in Turkey and Fosado (2005) in Cuba, which show how deeply the issue of qualifying relationships can absorb tourists and members of the visited population. In her research on gay sex tourism, ambiguity and transnational love in Havana, Fosado (2005: 75) maintains that ethnographic work must preserve and account for the ambiguous character of these relationships, highlighting ‘the need for a new theoretical framework that allows for uncertainty and ambiguity as defining factors in relationships’. In these ethnographies we find tourists and locals who, puzzled about their relationships, scrutinize each other’s actions for 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 we shall now see, the question of the kind of relational idioms that could be at play in touristic Cuba was also one that affected my fieldwork trajectories and possibilities.

## **The Ethnography: Locations, Positionings and Relationships**

### *Fieldwork Locations*

In February 2005 I went to Cuba for the first time to carry out an initial month of exploratory fieldwork and assess the feasibility of my research project. I spent most of my time in the capital, Havana, which was to remain the key location of my subsequent stays: two months in 2005 (July–September), four months in 2006–2007 (November–March), two months in 2010–2011 (December–January), two months in 2011–2012 (December–January), one month in 2013 (April–May), and one month in 2014 (July). Of the total thirteen months, about eight were spent in the city of Havana, with the remaining five divided between the beach resort of Playas del Este (a half-hour drive east from the capital) and the rural town of Viñales (about 200 km west of Havana). Most tourists visiting Cuba arrive in Havana, which proved an ideal location to carry out fieldwork on informal touristic encounters. Just strolling around tourism areas in the city quickly made clear that such encounters abounded and were highly varied in kind. Tourists



travelling in groups or independently, young and old, from different countries and with different interests and agendas, mingled on the streets of the capital. This diversity of tourists and tourism practices was matched by an equally diversified array of informal tourism-oriented activities of Cuban people: befriending visitors; offering their services as guides or companions; selling cigars; proposing sexual services, private ‘illegal’ taxis, accommodations, food, and so on.

In Havana, I spent much time at the tourism hot spot of Old Havana (La Habana Vieja) within the circumscribed area declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982, which featured restored squares, streets and buildings dating back to Spanish colonial times. The site features the city’s highest density of must-see tourist attractions. Even the shortest guided tours of the capital, lasting only a few hours, passed through the four main squares (*plazas*) of San Francisco, Armas, Catedral and Vieja (see Figures 0.1 and 0.2), giving to this area of the city the allure of an open-air museum, an ‘enclavic tourist space’ (Edensor 1998) visited daily by thousands of tourists<sup>11</sup>.

Besides spending time meeting and engaging with tourists and Cubans in the touristic core of Old Havana, I frequented other, more ‘heterogeneous tourist spaces’ (Edensor 1998) in the capital, where informal encounters thrived. Such were the areas around the Capitolio Nacional, the Paseo del



**FIGURE 0.1** • *Plaza de la Catedral, Havana*



**FIGURE 0.2 • Plaza de San Francisco, Havana**

Prado, the Malecón and the Barrio Chino (Chinatown, situated behind the Capitolio) (see Figures 0.3 and 0.4). Here the streets tended to be more chaotic, and few roads and buildings were restored like those in the museum-like circuit of Old Havana. Regulation and surveillance by police and CCTV cameras were also less intense, and this loosening of the control apparatus – notwithstanding the lesser density of tourists – allowed for greater scope in informal contacts (Simoni 2005a).

From the evening onwards, often until the early hours of the morning, my fieldwork locations shifted as bars and nightclubs became the foci of touristic encounters. Newer areas of the capital, particularly the area of Vedado around the Calle 23 (popularly known as La Rampa), bustled with nightlife activity as tourist and Cuban men and women gathered in and around lively bars and clubs. At night these bars and clubs, as well as those located in the more upper-class neighbourhood of Miramar, attracted many of the tourists who had spent their day relaxing at the beach in Playas del Este. My desire to know more about such ‘beach tourism’ – *turismo de playa*, as several of my Cuban informants put it – and the kind of encounters it fostered, prompted me to move from Havana to Playas del Este.

Stretching along several kilometres of coast east of Havana, Playas del Este has long been a leisure destination favoured by residents of the capital. Cubans flocked to these beaches during my fieldwork, especially during



**FIGURE 0.3** • *View from the Capitolio Nacional, Havana*



**FIGURE 0.4** • *The Malecón, Havana*

weekends in the summer season. By contrast, Playas del Este drew tourists all year long, since even (if not especially) in winter the Caribbean beach exerted its fascination on visitors who had left cold Europe and North America for a hot place in the sun. Playas del Este was a hot spot of international tourism throughout the 1990s, when the town of Guanabo gained a reputation for parties and ‘easy’ Cuban women, attracting crowds of single male tourists in search of fun and sexual adventures. By the time of my fieldwork, following several crackdowns by the Cuban authorities (see chapters 1 and 2), international tourism in Guanabo had dwindled, and the presence of foreigners was most visible on the beach of Santa Maria, a few kilometres west.

On this hundred-metre strip of sand in front of the Hotel Tropicoco (Figures 0.5, 0.6 and 0.7), tourists gathered to enjoy beach life, alternating between their deckchairs, the bar and restaurant, and a swim in the sea. The possibility of meeting these largely male tourists also lured many young Cuban women to frequent the beach. As both tourists and Cubans told me, Santa Maria was an ideal place to encounter people interested in relationships of a sexual and intimate kind, which made it an important venue for flirting and seduction, a place where couples were created and meetings arranged to continue relationships later at night in the clubs and discos of Havana.



**FIGURE 0.5** • *Santa Maria Beach, Playas del Este*





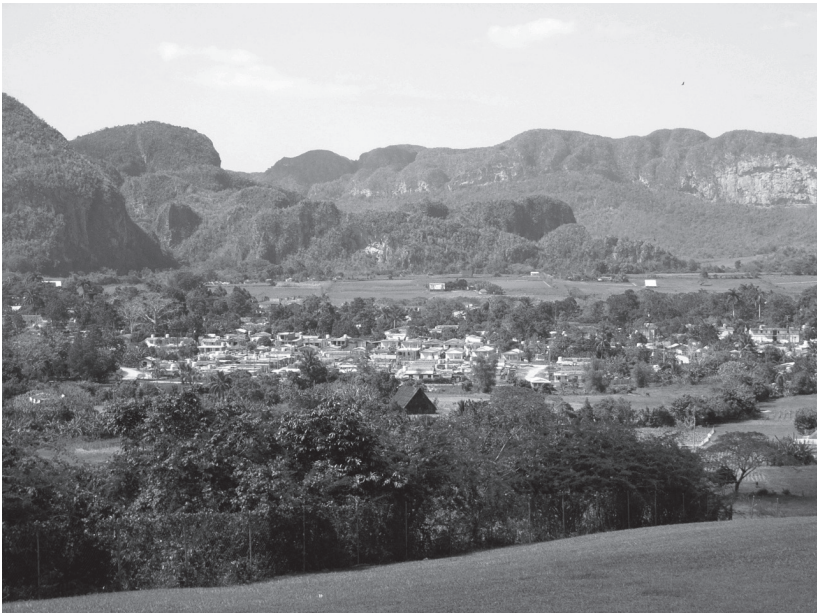
**FIGURE 0.6** • *Santa Maria Beach on a Summer Weekend, Playas del Este*



**FIGURE 0.7** • *Tourists and Cubans at Santa Maria Beach, Playas del Este*

Besides Havana and Playas del Este, the other major tourism destination in which I conducted fieldwork was the town of Viñales, located in the western province of Pinar del Rio, a three-hour bus ride from Havana. In my first month in Cuba, I went to Viñales on the recommendation of other tourists, who had many good things to say about this countryside town and its people. One such endorsement came from my mother, who had travelled there a few years earlier and given me some gifts to bring to the family that had hosted her. Once in Viñales, I was immediately fascinated by the rural atmosphere of the town and its surroundings (Figures 0.8 and 5.4–5.8), which I found particularly refreshing after several weeks roaming the streets of the capital. More important for my research, starting on my first stay in town I managed to make a number of excellent contacts with young men – Viñaleros – and forge relationships that proved very rewarding throughout my fieldwork and kept drawing me back there. Viñales' small size facilitated daily encounters with the same people and consequently fostered the cultivation of strong ties with some of them in a way that I found more difficult to achieve in Havana due to the more dispersive nature of my fieldwork trajectories there.

The main tourism destination west of Havana, Viñales and its valley were often praised for their stunning landscapes (especially the peculiar hills called



**FIGURE 0.8** • *Viñales and Its Surroundings, Viñales*

*mogotes*), their tobacco fields and farms, the possibility of excursions and other 'nature tourism' pursuits – the whole experience possibly enhanced by the 'friendly and hospitable' character of 'rural folks' and a familiar stay in one of Viñales' *casas particulares* (literally 'private houses', guesthouse-type accommodations that rent rooms to foreigners). Since 1999 the valley's World Heritage status has added to its popularity, and the area has attracted an increasing number of visitors, mostly independent travellers, prompting a boom in *casas particulares* and other tourism-related businesses. Provided both formally and informally, the latter included guide services for walks in the countryside, bicycle rentals, horseback riding, and visits to tobacco farms. While Viñales, in this book, appears mainly in relation to these farm visits (chapter 5), the close connections and conversations I had with several young Viñaleros proved fundamental to my overall understanding of touristic encounters.

### *Positioning the Tourist/Ethnographer*

Anthropological debates on reflexivity and the positioning of the researcher have highlighted the challenges that can arise during fieldwork, in terms of interpretations of the researcher by the researched, competing obligations towards informants, and the various problematic negotiations involved in trying to shift perspectives and subjectivities (Hume and Mulcock 2004; Narayan 1993; Parkin 2000). In this respect, Crick (1995) and Michel (1998a) have pointed out how encompassing and resilient the identification of any foreigner as tourist can become in some tourism destinations, making it very hard to overcome such a framing (Simoni and McCabe 2008). When I first went to Cuba, I was aware of the likelihood that Cuban people would consider me first and foremost a foreigner, one of the tourists and thus also potential 'prey' for *jineteros* and *jineteras* – the 'tourist riders' whose reputation preceded my initial experience of the country. As I soon realized in the first days I spent walking around tourism areas of Havana, the locals I encountered indeed saw me mainly as a tourist.

This initial framing as tourist both enabled and restricted the scope of my research, informing the kind of access I had to Cuban people on the one hand, and to foreign visitors on the other. Being perceived as a tourist granted me plenty of opportunities to interact with Cuban men and women, notably those who actively sought to meet foreigners. Whether they were offering cigars, guide services, companionship or sex, or just hoping to exchange a few words, little effort was required from me to engage with them. These interactions provided a wealth of auto-ethnographic data on the possible functioning of touristic encounters in Cuba, and more particularly their

opening moments (chapter 4). That said, I am aware of the risks of loosely employing this material to make sense of the experiences of other tourists, a pitfall recently discussed by Graburn (2002). Reflecting on the embodied nature of our fieldwork experiences in tourism ethnography, Frohlick and Harrison (2008b: 12) remark:

The question of why particular individuals talk to us is related in part to how we inhabit these places through our bodies – whether we are young or old, female or male, how we look, what we wear, whether we go to the beach, if we go dancing, bring our children or partners with us, take our camera, and so forth.

The most obvious illustration of how my embodied self shaped fieldwork in touristic Cuba related to gender and sex. In their work on sex tourism in Amsterdam and Havana, Nancy Wonders and Raymond Michalowsky (2001: 547) noted that: ‘As gendered researchers ... our access to information was also gendered. Ray could more easily fall into conversation with male sex tourists, and could enter into conversations with sex workers and pimps as a result of their initial interest in him as a possible customer’. During fieldwork I was frequently approached as a possible consumer of sex, which made it harder to establish close rapport devoid of sexual connotations with Cuban women. That was not the case with Cuban men, with whom I also had more chances to participate in moments of peer sociability.

To the wider challenge of being perceived as a foreigner, a *yuma* (a derogatory term for foreigners) and therefore also a potential source of gain, I responded with attempts to negotiate and shift my position, singularizing my persona and distinguishing myself from tourists. My position tended to change, or at least assume other shades, after an initial exchange and explanation of my research and the purpose of my stay, but for many of my Cuban research participants I think I remained essentially a rather peculiar foreign visitor spending more than the average time in their country. But here generalizations must also be tempered. Indeed, as I maintain more generally in this book, encounters with Cuban people also offered a platform for negotiating new subjectivities and achieving new relational positions (see Simoni 2014d).

Meanwhile, my access to foreign visitors presented other challenges and opportunities. Graburn (2002) and Frohlick and Harrison (2008b) show that a key difficulty of ethnography in tourism settings relates to the transitory nature of tourism and the fleeting presence of visitors in destinations. Furthermore, tourists are likely to be absorbed in pleasure-seeking leisure pursuits, which may unfavourably deflect their predisposition to ‘serious talk’ with researchers (Graburn 2002: 20; Frohlick and Harrison 2008b: 6). During fieldwork, I soon realized that whereas Cuban people approached



me as a tourist, things were rather different with tourists: I had to make an effort to create a first connection. Knowledge of the tourists' language proved instrumental in establishing a first bond and striking up a conversation, which explains the over-representation of Italian-, French-, English- and Spanish-speaking foreigners among my research participants. Gender, age, and appearance also informed my ability to meet and establish close connections with certain kinds of tourists more than others. The tourism places I frequented are another important element to consider: from a beach patronized mainly by single male tourists relaxing and flirting with Cuban women to a folkloric show of Afro-Cuban music and performance, any such place had its own atmosphere, to which I tried to adapt, with various degrees of success, in order to establish meaningful connections with tourists on the scene.<sup>12</sup>

### *Developing Relationships*

Tourists' willingness to spend time with me tended to intensify once they understood I was doing research in Cuba, had spent significant time there, and was therefore 'something more' than a 'mere tourist' having his first experience of the island. Many were eager to know about my experiences and knowledge of Cuba and Cuban people, as well as my research findings, and when asked about their own experiences were generally keen on sharing their stories. On several occasions, I became a sort of confidant for people who felt intense, contradictory emotions towards their Cuban friends and partners – especially tourists involved in sexual and romantic relationships with locals.<sup>13</sup> In such cases, tourists seemed to appreciate having someone to listen empathetically to their stories, to whom they could unburden their awkward feelings, and who could help them make sense of what was going on in these relationships. Interactions with Cuban research participants also resulted in such intimate moments of self-disclosure, which became the most rewarding instances of my fieldwork and may be seen as islands of intimacy in what was otherwise an emotionally draining realm of ambiguous and potentially deceptive relationships that kept reminding me of my otherness, foreignness, and privileged position.

The question of ascertaining what kind of relationship I had with Cuban people absorbed me throughout the fieldwork. How much was their interest in my company due to my privileged economic position, and how much did it depend on my 'personality' and 'human qualities'? Was it really useful to separate the two? These kinds of questions also puzzled many tourists I met. Establishing a relationship with the sort of tourist-ethnographer I was could appeal to people for reasons besides immediate economic considerations.

For instance, on several occasions I became a means of access to other visitors as ‘the very good friend’ that the Cuban at stake had known ‘for ages’, and who could reassure sceptical tourists about the Cuban’s good reputation and intentions (see chapter 6).<sup>14</sup> Another means of reciprocity towards my Cuban research participants was to become more actively involved in their activities, acting explicitly as a collaborator, someone who could direct tourists towards them and even arrange some deals on their behalf. Here I faced the question of how far I should involve myself in my Cuban and tourist research participants’ agendas, especially when these seemed incompatible.

### *Competing Obligations*

One challenge in my collaboration with Cubans was to avoid being perceived as a *jinetero* and hustler myself. My aim was not, of course, to make money by taking advantage of tourists, nor did I want to enter into any competition for tourists with Cubans. Interestingly, numerous examples circulated of long-term tourists who had ended up playing *jineteros* themselves, bringing tourists around and doing their own informal business with them. Given my willingness to get to know foreign visitors, I could easily be identified as one such *jinetero*, and on several occasions, after telling my Cuban friends how I would frequent tourist areas trying to meet foreigners – that is, do fieldwork – I was indeed teased for being a *jinetero*. The reasoning here was that anyone who actively tried to meet tourists had to be a *jinetero*. More subtly, a friend once told me I was doing *jineterismo informacional*, that is, doing *jineterismo* to gather information. This reveals the strength of *jineterismo* as a lens through which Cuban people viewed relationships with tourists,<sup>15</sup> raising questions about the practice of ethnography itself and its instrumental dimensions.

Whenever I wished to help Cubans engage with tourists, I also had to decide whom to help, which could become a sensitive matter given the strong sense of competitiveness and the factionalism inherent in the struggle to ‘get’ foreigners and establish exclusive relationships with them. In a few instances, I became myself an object of contention as people fought over their entitlement to stay with me. Disputes over tourists as ‘property’ could become rather serious and put me in the awkward position of trying to re-define and clarify my relationships. There was then also the issue of the obligation I felt towards tourists. How should I react, for instance, if I thought that the cigar deal offered to the tourists I was hanging around with was not good? Whose side was I to take? My decisions were generally made on the spot, as I struggled between the responsibility I felt towards tourists on the one hand and my relationship with Cuban people on the other.

*A Multiplicity of Perspectives*

During fieldwork, my most obvious source of data was auto-ethnography, which derived essentially from 'what happened to me-as-a-tourist'. Alternatively, I could observe and participate in touristic encounters by accompanying tourists who then met Cuban people, or by hanging around with Cubans who encountered foreign tourists. Both these situations opened a window onto how touristic encounters emerged, and relationships developed. As I was not the main protagonist in these meetings and relations, I was able to observe and participate in encounters from within without taking a leading role. Frohlick and Harrison (2008b) discuss the anxiety that can derive from the assumption that, as ethnographers of mobile subjects, we do not spend enough time with the same people. Accordingly, it became imperative for me to be 'hyper-attuned' and 'open to the unexpected' so as not 'to miss a single opportunity' (2008b: 14) to engage for as long as possible with research participants. This meant very late nights in the company of partygoers, early mornings showing up for planned excursions, and more generally the cultivation of a flexible self that could adapt to other people's agendas. Complementing the data generated from within touristic encounters was information derived from more external vantage points, as when I observed the behaviours of tourists and Cubans interacting in proximity to me in public places, without them knowing about my research agenda. While this provided me with plenty of potentially useful data, it also made me feel uncomfortably like a voyeur, which is why I much preferred situations in which I was more overtly part of the interaction.

Finally, other important sources were the numerous occasions on which I listened to and talked with foreign tourists and Cuban people, beyond the moments when they were interacting with each other. These conversations were very diverse in register, spanning from public gossiping to more personal, intimate exchanges. As already mentioned, among Cubans I was more easily involved in situations of male sociability, for example when Cuban men conversed among peers about their encounters with foreign tourists. Similar to what Malcolm Crick (1992: 141) remarks regarding the Sri Lankan street guides he worked with, on these occasions 'myth making, exaggeration and bravado' abounded, as Cuban men boasted of their – notably sexual – exploits with foreign women.<sup>16</sup> In such conversations, people tended to objectify tourists, following the semantic registers of *jineterismo* and becoming 'tourist-riders' conquering foreign targets for essentially instrumental purposes.

Other, contrasting types of discourses emerged when I had the chance for more intimate discussion with my research participants. Here, other views of relationships with tourists could take shape, and emotional attachments

and more vulnerable selves entered the picture. On these occasions I became a sort of confidant – a relatively neutral and complicit outsider with whom people felt comfortable discussing their more intimate feelings, doubts and anxieties about their connections with foreign tourists, without having to fear their Cuban peers' cynical remarks about being 'too soft' or sentimental. This is something that also happened with tourists, particularly men, with whom, as mentioned above, I occasionally assumed a similar role as confidant.

The variety of situations and registers of conversations in which I became involved – from the most transitory auto-ethnographic moments to the more prolonged and confidential relationships – ultimately gave me access to touristic encounters and relationships from a multitude of perspectives. Accordingly, the data I rely on in the following chapters reflects various degrees of ethnographic 'thickness', juxtaposing for instance fleeting conversations overheard in a bar with more intimate dialogues with research participants I have known for years. I would argue that this diversity of fieldwork engagements also enabled me to remain sensitive to, and understand, a wide range of enactments and interpretations of touristic encounters. As a result, I uncovered a variety of modes of being and of reflecting on these interactions that draw attention to heterogeneity within the lives of the subjects of my research and shed light on their multiple, often paradoxical, ways of experiencing touristic encounters. Understanding this variety, and drawing these different moments of interaction together without aprioristically ranking them as more or less significant or revealing of any single 'truth' of touristic encounters in Cuba, became important in my work, and I believe such an approach can offer new insights into the experience and implications of these relationships for the lives of the protagonists involved.

I should also state clearly that all in all, my research was not based on any supposedly representative sample of tourists and members of the visited population making contact in touristic Cuba. Most of my ethnographic material reflects the practices and views of young – mostly in their twenties and thirties – male, heterosexual members of the tourist and Cuban population. In the case of tourists, Italian-, French-, English- and Spanish-speaking people predominate, and visitors from Italy are clearly over-represented (particularly in chapter 8). As for Cubans, the examples discussed in the book come mainly from residents of Havana who were eager to meet and engage with foreign tourists (see chapter 2). Any related biases, however, should not detract from the overall argument, which has to do with how touristic encounters emerged and were qualified in Cuba, and aims to draw attention to common processes running across a wide range of situations of interaction. I decided to take into account an ample repertoire of encounters

precisely because they illuminate each other, enabling deeper insights into their transversal mechanisms and overarching features.

### **Organization of the Book**

The book is divided into two main parts and organized according to a rather linear narrative. Drawing on my observations, I describe how encounters between foreign tourists and members of the visited population in Cuba emerged (Part One), and how relationships were given shape and qualified (Part Two). Thus, the first part of the book mainly concerns what preceded and informed the occurrence of encounters, from the historical development of tourism in Cuba up to the first moments of contact. The second part focuses on a key range of relationships that developed from such initial contact, relationships that brought into play the idioms of commerce and hospitality, friendliness and friendship, festivity and seduction, and sexuality. Below I summarize briefly each of the chapters' main arguments.

Discussing the prevalent features of tourism development in Cuba from the turn of the nineteenth century to the present day, chapter 1 sets the stage for the remaining empirical chapters of the book. An overview of the emergence and evolution of *jineterismo*, a contentious term tending to evoke notions of 'tourism hustling' and 'prostitution' that was selectively employed to designate a range of informal engagements in the tourism realm, progressively paves the way for chapter 2, which focuses more thoroughly on this phenomenon, highlighting its heterogeneous character, elusive nature, and the moral controversies it generated. I therefore consider how, with the coming of age of international tourism and *jineterismo* in Cuba, tourists' and Cubans' awareness of each other's expectations also matured, raising questions about the compatibility of their agendas. Chapter 3 examines the resources, tactics and predispositions tourists and Cubans could rely on to deal with, and eventually overcome, the normative suggestions and control of the Cuban authorities, which tended to reinforce the tourist/Cuban divide. The consideration of such prerequisites to the establishment of informal encounters highlights all the 'background work' that made them possible. Chapter 4 addresses how tourists and Cubans got in touch and initiated interactions, a step that absorbed the protagonists of such encounters, who saw in it the possibility of a first assessment of each other's desires and agendas. Building on chapter 3, chapter 4 reinforces the idea that touristic encounters in Cuba activated a wide range of resources that constituted the protagonists involved as more or less competent actors in this peculiar realm of relationships.

The second part of the book explores how, from the initial moments of an encounter, various types of relationships were enacted, testing the tourists' and Cubans' proficiency in a range of relational idioms. Chapter 5 considers a realm of engagement that tended to epitomize the transient, manipulative, commoditized character of touristic encounters, as well as their most instrumental dimensions: cigar deals. Chapter 6 examines friendliness and friendship, a recurrent relational idiom informing touristic encounters in Cuba. Issues of trust take centre stage as the spotlight falls on the crucial tension between the asymmetric and instrumental character of relationships and ideals of friendship. The chapter also reveals how, in the light of their experiences and as a result of touristic encounters, the protagonists involved were led to (re)formulate what they meant by friendship, questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and voicing their hopes and aspirations on the matter. Chapter 7 is concerned with festive relationships and shows how partying brought about shifts in modes of engagement that encouraged people to follow their affective drives and desires and open up new relational possibilities. Building on these insights, chapter 8 considers in more detail a variety of narratives and justifications regarding sexual relationships between tourist men and Cuban women. The increased attention to personal stories highlights how important changes in peoples' attitudes and discourses resulted from their engagements, providing further insights on the generative potential of touristic encounters.

The conclusion reviews and elaborates on the main contributions of the book, and revisits the heuristic potential of the notions of informal encounter and relational idiom. Drawing together the insights developed in the different chapters, it outlines theoretical and methodological paths to stimulate further research on touristic encounters and, more broadly, the formation of relations across difference and inequality in the contemporary world.