

THE MORALITY OF FRIENDSHIP IN TOURISTIC CUBA

• VALERIO SIMONI •

ABSTRACT

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This article focuses on friendship and its controversial enactments in touristic Cuba, paying particular attention to its moral implications. It starts by considering how the issues of authenticity, transience and inequality played out and informed the possibilities for friendship between foreign tourists and members of the Cuban population, leading the protagonists involved to formulate their moral assumptions about friendship, outline its main challenges in the tourism context, and envisage possible solutions to those challenges. The second part of the article examines how notions and experiences of friendship were worked over in response to such difficulties, most notably the tension between ‘interest’ and ‘affection’, alternatively leading to the formation of ‘hybrid’ or ‘purified’ versions of friendship. By drawing attention to the moral, idealistic and aspirational qualities of friendship in touristic Cuba, the article contributes to the current anthropological literature on friendship, showing some of its limits as well as possible analytical pathways for the future research.

Keywords: anthropology of friendship, morality, interest, sentiment, aspirations, tourism, Cuba

Introduction

‘Make some Cuban friends and you’ll understand why many travellers can’t stay away’ (Gorry 2004: 3). When I first travelled to Cuba for fieldwork in 2005, I read this sentence in the opening lines of the Lonely Planet guidebook that—like many other travellers—I was carrying with me. I was curious and filled with expectations about the kind of relationships and experiences that awaited me. The possibility of making friends with Cuban people was here portrayed, a priori, as a valuable experience for travellers to this Caribbean island. In such a tourism context, ‘friendship with the locals’ was easily seen as a way to gain access to people’s everyday life, as an opportunity to move beyond the stereotypical clichés and polarized political discourses that surrounded this last ‘communist bastion’ in the tropics, and reach towards the ‘authentic’ Cuba. Besides the ubiquitous narratives of genuine intimacy and first-hand discovery, however, like most other foreigners travelling to Cuba I was also ready to be confronted with a less idyllic scenario, a rather contradictory picture that seemed to point in an opposite direction. This was the prospect of ‘tourism hustling’ and ‘prostitution’, or what was often referred in Cuba as *jineterismo*. A neologism derived from the Spanish for ‘rider’ (*jinete*), *jineterismo* evoked the ‘riding of foreigners’ for instrumental purposes, highlighting a radical asymmetry

of resources: on the one hand, it confronted tourists with their advantageous economic position, reiterating their status of privileged outsiders, on the other, it also stressed their lack of knowledge of local conditions, and the possibility of being duped and deceived by *jineteros* and *jineteras*.

Besides the promises of friendship outlined in travel-related media like the very popular Lonely Planet, in the last decade narratives of *jinetismo* also started to circulate globally via novels, guidebooks, travelogues and internet forums, informing tourists' expectations and predispositions towards the prospect of meeting Cuban people, and raising serious doubts about the compatibility of each other's desires and agendas.¹ *Jinetismo* magnified the divide between visitors and residents, and made of the Cuban/tourist 'grammar of distinction' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997) an overarching frame of identification that haunted a wide range of touristic encounters in Cuba, threatening the possibility of developing relationships such as friendship. How did tourists and Cubans deal with, and eventually move beyond, the threats of deception and reciprocal exploitation? How could relationships qualified as friendship emerge and develop? Underlining the sensitivity of this issue, some of my Cuban research participants viewed *jinetismo* itself as a skilful art (*un arte*): an art of communicating and dealing with sceptical tourists, of enticing interest and developing relationships with them. It was precisely this competence in relationality, in bringing about and enacting a range of relationships—in particular friendships as well as sexual and romantic liaisons (see Simoni 2013)—which captured my attention.

In this article, I focus on the case of friendship and its controversial enactments, paying particular attention to its moral implications. Transience, inequality, and the resulting mutual suspicion challenged the establishment of friendship in touristic Cuba. As I show, such challenges unsettled people's taken for granted assumptions about the morality of friendship, leading them to work over their relationships and to act upon the moral difficulties and specific demands of becoming friends in this particular context of interaction. In the first part, I consider how issues of transience, authenticity, and inequality played out and informed the possibilities of friendship, leading the protagonists involved to formulate their moral expectations about it, outline its main difficulties, and envisage possible solutions. The second part of the article examines how notions and experiences of friendship were worked over in response to such difficulties, leading to the formation of 'hybrid' or 'purified' versions of friendship. This, in turn, leads me to discuss some of the current anthropological literature on friendship, and to indicate some of its limitations when considering the moral, idealistic and aspirational qualities of friendship in touristic Cuba. The empirical material on which I draw results from twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork (mainly participant observation) carried out in Cuba between 2005 and 2013 in the tourism locations of Havana, the town of Viñales (about 200 kilometres west of the capital), and the beach resort of Santa Maria (in Playas del Este, a thirty minutes' drive east of Havana) for my doctoral and postdoctoral research. In these tourism settings, I observed and participated in interactions between tourists and Cuban people,² and discussed with them the encounters and relationships they developed with each other.³

Challenging friendship

Immediate friendliness, suspicious friendship: 'Is it genuine?'

Writing about Sri Lankan street guides, Malcolm Crick (1992: 139) remarked that '[t]ourists wary of being cheated in a foreign country may react gratefully to "Hello friend"; a frequent conversational opening by the street guides. In Cuba too, *Hola amigo*' (hello friend)⁴ was a common way to address tourists in the street. However, visitors tended quickly to become suspicious of such openings. Indeed, immediate expressions of friendliness also contributed to raising doubts about the motives of this diffuse cordiality.⁵ Particularly in the touristic areas of Havana, visitors grew easily tired of Cubans' 'over-friendly' approaches.

In my discussions with tourists about their first experiences of encounters with local people, I realized that a recurrent narrative saw them arriving in Havana the first day of their journey and meeting 'by chance' a 'friendly' Cuban, often a young man.⁶ The tourists would spend the day together with their newfound companion, who would treat them as *amigos* and encourage them to reciprocate; such a friendly attitude called for an equally friendly response. Given also the positive connotations of friendship, and the aprioristic valorisations of 'meeting the locals' in tourism, it was not surprising to see tourists drawn into such relationships. Capitalizing on these moral expectations and dispositions, Cubans could remind their foreign companions that travellers (i.e. 'good travellers') came to Cuba to experience their country, and in order to do so 'had to' make friends with the locals.

Leading tourists around Havana, these informal guides-cum-friends would grant them access to the places 'other tourists would not see': the 'true', 'authentic', 'off the beaten track' Cuba that you could not find in glossy tourist brochures or in the government's propaganda. And the tourists I spoke to were generally seduced by such narratives, and positively surprised by the immediate friendliness and helpfulness of the Cubans they met. Was this a local typicality? As two French women told me, on their first approach Cuban people seemed indeed to be extremely kind and welcoming, and it was impressive how you could get very quickly deeply into incredibly intense and intimate relationships—*ça va très vite très profond!*

Fieldwork observations and the numerous conversations I had with research participants on these matters supported the notion that Cubans strived to gain the amity, complicity and trust of tourists by, for instance, advising them on where to shop, eat and drink if they wanted to save money, by inviting them to have food in their homes or some 'hidden' restaurant that was not on any official tourist map, or by sharing confidences about the shortfalls of the communist system and the hardships of everyday life on the island. The Cuban partner's emotional expressiveness and easy-going physical manifestations of affection (as exemplified by the ubiquitous hugging and shaking of hands), their focus and absorption in any matters that could concern their tourist companions, their enthusiasm for communal sharing of food and drinks, could all concur to embody and materialize an immediate sense of closeness, intimacy and intensity in the relationships.

Anticipating the tourists' suspicion of (over-)friendly attitudes, the self-professed Cuban friends could themselves refer to the difficulty of finding trustworthy locals,

emphasizing for instance the prevalence of *jineteros*, ‘fake friends’, and relationships governed by (economic) interests, while portraying themselves as the exception, the ‘real friends’ (*un amigo de verdad*) whom tourists could fully rely on and trust in. ‘As a foreigner to this place, you would not know where to go (...) As long as you hang around with me, you are safe (...) You were so lucky to find me, and not some *jinetero* (...) A real friend (...) A sincere friendship’. These are some sentences I recall from conversations with Pepe,⁷ one of the first Cubans I met as I strolled around touristic areas of Havana on my initial visit. Pepe was trying to reassure me about the genuineness of his friendship, and the advantages this could have for me. I soon realized that such discourses were echoed by many other young men who, like him, wished to establish a relationship with tourists. ‘Be careful, not all Cubans are the same...’ was another typical refrain, which relied again on what Torresan (2011) calls an ‘idiom of exception’.⁸ Growing tired of such widespread warnings not to trust ‘other Cubans’, and becoming increasingly sceptical of the ‘how lucky you are to have found me’ discourse, people like Gilberto and Dario, two young independent travellers from Italy I met in Viñales, came to the conclusion that it was precisely these self-proclaimed ‘exceptions’ who were, at the end of the day, the most likely to deceive and take advantage of you.

Reflecting on these immediate expressions of friendliness and intimacy, many tourists I met were left wondering: ‘Is this genuine?’ The widespread sceptical answer was that behind Cubans’ ‘inauthentic front’—behind what many considered as superficial ‘shows’ of friendliness—often lay the ‘real backstage’ of instrumental agendas and calculated endeavours to ‘squeeze’ as much as possible out of the wealthy foreigners. This line of reasoning relied on a ‘front/back’ opposition akin to that theorized by Goffman (1959) and further elaborated in MacCannell’s notion of ‘staged authenticity’ in relation to tourist settings (1973, 1976), a view that has often been reiterated in the anthropological literature dealing with ‘tourist-local’/‘host-guest’ relationships (see Simoni 2013, 2014).

Friendship and its moral inscription in time

Even when deceptive behaviours were not an immediate concern, several tourists I spoke to still raised the question: ‘How can they pretend that we are friends if we just met a few hours ago?’ Temporal considerations challenged the moral grounds of the friendship at stake, and gave it a rather superficial and deceptive quality. This is how Lukas, a Norwegian man in his fifties put it: ‘Friendship needs time. And it’s not only something that you make, but something that you keep.’ Elaborating further on the temporal dimension of friendship, he added, ‘I stay here only three weeks, and then I am leaving, and won’t see these people again. And here they don’t have Internet, they don’t have Facebook. It will be difficult to have any friendship at all.’ In Lukas’ words, the legacies of a relationship were key elements informing its possibility of becoming friendship: its moral inscription in time was clearly at stake here.

Aware of possible tensions between time and the morality of friendship, Cubans engaging with tourists could address the issues upfront, emphasizing, for instance, that it was the subjective perception of time, its quality and intensity that mattered most, as

opposed to any objective calculation. Take the example of a conversation I shared with Alejandro, a Mexican man, and his Cuban ‘friend’ Gerardo, who had been guiding him around Havana for the past few days. I was sitting at the counter of the *Bodeguita del Medio*, a very popular tourism spot in Old Havana’s main circuit, when I made their acquaintance; both were drinking round after round of *mojitos* (a popular Cuban cocktail), which Alejandro was willing to sponsor, when we started chatting. Alejandro kept talking to me about Gerardo, and about his relation to him, and Gerardo did the same with regards Alejandro. In a way, via their conversation with me, they were assessing the nature of their ties, and made me feel like a witness, a ‘testifying audience’, in a sort of ‘trial’ of their relationship. Here is one of Gerardo’s attempts to ‘flesh out’ his friendship claims.

He [Alejandro] is my brother already. A friend of mine. (...) It’s four days we know each other, but it seems it has been like one year. I’m like this; for me the important thing is his friendship. The brother-ness (*hermanidad*, sic). So when he comes back in April he just calls me. We meet up again (...) He is a friend. He comes to eat at my home. Do you remember? You are a friend aren’t you? I offered you (*te brindé*) my home. I’m poor, but still [I invited you]...

The temporality of this relationship, which like many others had started on the streets of Havana a few days earlier, was here explicitly reworked as Gerardo amplified its moral traces and potential legacies. Through what Mattingly (2010) has called ‘narrative emplotment’, ‘memorable experiences’ that ‘demarcated a “before” and an “after”’ were created and acted upon to invoke ‘common ground’ (2010: 51) between the Cuban man and his tourist friend. While we may cynically dismiss this friendship claim as a rather superficial and self-interested endeavour, Gerardo’s discourse may also be seen as a plea to be recognised as worthy of friendship, as an aspiration to relate in spite of striking differences and inequalities, a line of interpretation to which I shall return below.

Inequality, generosity and friendship

Already apparent in Gerardo and Alejandro’s example, the Cubans’ generosity—as manifested, for instance, in sharing with tourists the meagre resources one had—could be cast as an important proof of genuine friendship. The fact that Cubans, the more economically disadvantaged in the encounter, were first to display generosity, was to exemplify a lack of economic interest in the relationship, and to project it instead within the moral frames of friendship, beyond the sphere of calculation that was typically associated with *jinetismo*. We are here confronted with situations in which, in the words of Zelizer, ‘relational work’ (2000, 2005) took place to mark boundaries between different types of relationships via the qualification of appropriate forms of transaction (e.g. money as a gift rather than a payment). In the light of Zelizer’s insight, the way transactions occur and are interpreted becomes a means to contrast different types of relationships, in this case a friendship with an interested economic one. In touristic encounters in Cuba, the potential uni-directionality of material exchanges, and the notion that money was constantly flowing from tourists to Cubans, magnified the inequalities between the two, and could easily lead to accusations of ‘false friendship’ (see also Mains 2013) and

jineterismo. In this context, the Cubans' expressions of generosity strived to re-qualify all transactions that took place and cast them under the light of friendship, downplaying the importance of inequality and calculation as drivers of a relationship.

Among the people who were particularly keen to deploy and display generosity in their dealings with tourists were members of the loose Rasta circle that regularly hung around the Malecón (Havana's famous seaside promenade) and Parque Central.⁹ They were used to the company of young travellers and backpackers, who tended to have open-ended travel plans and looked forward to the possibility of engaging with locals and getting closer to their everyday lives. The Rasta I engaged with willingly emphasized the value of a simple lifestyle, pointing out their aversion for touristy places in Old Havana. They would criticize the commercialism of tourism installations, as epitomized, for instance, by those establishments whose business was based on 'prostitution' and the selling of expensive and price inflated *mojitos*.

As an alternative to this, they might suggest collecting money to buy a bottle of rum for everyone, something to 'share, the Cuban way!' (*¡Compartir, a lo cubano!*). When accompanying tourists around, the emphasis would be in going to 'the places [e.g., bars, restaurants and other public establishments] of the Cubans', so that visitors could save money, avoiding expensive 'tourist-only' locations. Again, these instances could be portrayed as compelling proofs of a sincere, disinterested friendship, and contrasted with the behaviour of 'other' ill-intentioned Cubans, who brought tourists to expensive tourist bars and restaurants where they could get the highest commissions. In this sort of relationship, the handling of money would in itself be downplayed, and become entangled in specific moralities of exchange (Bloch and Parry 1989) that avoided any hint of a calculative endeavour. Ideals of reciprocity were materialized by the sharing of drinks with friends, extending relationships in time via the assumption that favours would be reciprocated in the future.

Partaking in these moments of sociability with their Rasta companions, tourists could easily accept the professed friendship—a friendship supported by concrete expressions of generosity, disinterestedness in monetary gain, and mutual sharing. Accordingly, visitors and Cubans seemed to converge on their ideals of what a friendship ought to be about, on the expectations, dispositions and normativities that informed such relational idiom. Such ideals called for asymmetries between the parties to be downplayed, and strived to place tourists and Cubans 'as friends' on a more egalitarian footing, one made of communal sharing and the projection of sociabilities into the long term. This way, the spectre of *jineterismo* and its radical emphasis on inequality was to be kept at bay. 'For me you are not a tourist. You are a person, a human being!' (*Tu para mí no eres un turista. ¡Tu eres una persona, un ser humano!*)—was the statement I repeatedly heard in the Rasta milieu. The accent was on grounding relationships in the fundamental commonality of the people involved: rather than being catalogued, discriminated against and targeted in dichotomous ways on the base of their assumed (privileged) status and the asymmetry of their resources, tourists deserved to be recognized, understood and treated for what they were as persons and human beings, with all their peculiarities, idiosyncrasies and unique circumstances and ways of being (see Simoni 2014/forthcoming).

Reformulating friendship

Sentiment and interest: 'de-purifying' friendship

The examples presented above are indicative of the widespread diffusion, in the Cuban tourism context, of interpretative approaches that recognized a tension between 'interest' and 'affection', or what Zelizer (2000, 2005) phrased as a 'Hostile Worlds rhetoric' that sees 'intimacy' and 'economy' as 'separate spheres'. The widespread diffusion of these normative ideals has been noted in other tourism contexts; Tucker (1997: 121) considers, for example, how visitors to the Turkish village of Göreme construe a dichotomy between friendship and money, between 'instrumental economic relationships' and 'friendship'. We are confronted here with a subject of contention that has absorbed much anthropological research on friendship, at least since Paine's (1969) ground-breaking article on the topic (see Killick and Desai 2010).

In an article on friendship among young men in urban Ethiopia, Mains (2013) has recently provided a useful overview and ethnographically informed discussion of the tensions that can arise between self-interest and affection among friends. This author is thus able to show that while material help and affection can often converge and be co-constitutive of friendship, 'when a friend was being too instrumental and valuing material gain over the maintenance of affection, conflicts and tensions were created, (Mains 2013: 340), prompting desires 'to separate business and friends' (ibid.: 341). Contrary to what can be found in recent literature on love and transactional sex in Africa, where globalizing ideals of 'pure love' have been uncovered (see for instance Cole 2009), Mains' ethnography did not reveal any discourses referring to a 'pure friendship' (ibid.: 343). I shall return to this point below, when addressing my Cuban participants' drive to 'purify' their relationships with tourists of any hint of economic interest in ways that depart from Mains' findings. In this section, I consider instead those interpretations and reformulations of friendship that opened the door to a possible 'mix' of friendship and interest, thus 'making friendship impure'—to draw on the title of Coleman's (2010) recent reflection on the anthropology of friendship.

When I first met Julien, a Canadian teenager, he had only a few days left before returning to Canada from his one month holiday in Cuba, and was eager to talk to me about his experiences on the island, particularly his relationships with Cuban people. Among the first things he told me was how he had mismanaged his holiday's budget, and after a couple of weeks of excessive spending, had had to rely, to get by, on the generosity of those Cuban people and friends who recognised his predicament: his 'being like them', as he put it, 'having nothing'. Among the many Cubans he had known, and there were several in the Rasta circle I also knew, it was those who had been generous to him—occasionally offering a drink, some food—and had not treated him as a privileged tourist, whom he considered his friends. Such acts of generosity had 'warmed his hearth' (*chauffé le cœur*), and made him want to give back and reciprocate.

After several disappointing encounters with 'cheaters' and *jineteros* earlier in his journey, Julien had managed to discover 'more authentic relationships' and what he called 'intimacy': the fact of 'feeling good with a person' (*être bien avec une personne*). This, he argued, is what created friendship: affinities certainly played a role, but intimacy too,

the fact of being together, of feeling ‘just good’ (*d’être juste bien, d’être bien dans sa peau*). Julien’s view hinted at all the affective, pre-conceptual, and therefore difficult to rationalize dimensions of feeling in relations with others. Such intensities of affect, hardly verbalized, certainly played a key role in the emergence of friendships between tourists and Cubans, and several visitors I met, for instance, told me how they relied on their intuition, their feelings, and their ‘sense’ of a person when deciphering the other’s intentions. This would in turn inform their judgment of whether it was worth getting along with them, spending time together, and giving credit to the Cubans’ professions of friendship.

As we continued discussing his friendships with Cuban people, Julien also recognised that however good and gratifying these had been, they were not like those he had back home, which were of a more ‘intimate-intimate’ kind. In Cuba they were slightly special friendships (*une amitié un peu spéciale*). We may recall here Santos-Granero’s (2007: 10) remark that ‘friendships emerge in particular circumstances or social situations’, which inform their qualities. In Julien’s formulation, it was precisely these (long neglected) ‘situational elements of friendship’ (Suttles 1970, quoted in Santos Granero 2007: 10) that had salience. For the young Canadian, the relationships he had managed to establish with Cuban people could hardly be completely disinterested, given that even when people did appreciate you—as opposed to just being interested in your cash—they still ‘had nothing’ (*ils n’ont rien*), and so you were expected to pay for them.

Working over his experiences and notions of friendship, and being encouraged to reflect on them in the course of our conversation, Julien progressively managed to soften the overarching tension between ‘interest’ and ‘affection’, between ‘instrumental economic relationships’ and ‘friendship’ that traversed so many of the relationships tourists had with Cuban people. In-depth discussions like the one I had with Julien made it clear that far from being fixed and impermeable, notions of friendship could also be reformulated in direct response to the specific features of touristic encounters, and more particularly their asymmetric character. Accordingly, even short-term interest and economic instrumentality could be internalized into renewed views of friendship, reconciling in a broader way the ‘hostile worlds’ of intimacy and economy.

Reflecting on the encounters that he and his brother had with Cuban people, and on the role that money played in them, this is how Mark, a British independent traveller in his thirties, put it:

Eventually we understood that, it wasn’t incompatible that someone could be trying to use you, to get money from you but also, really, genuinely were interested in trying to meet you. But by necessity they have to do both, you know... After the initial disappointment finding that out [referring to the instrumental aspect of relationships], we began to understand that it wasn’t incompatible with also wanting to be our friends.

Cubans’ desires to improve their economic conditions and their willingness to befriend tourists were integrated here into a single dynamic. Instead of relying on a ‘(false) friendly front’/‘(real) instrumental back’ approach, Mark was here dissolving the dichotomy, opening up and reworking his notion of friendship. Possible overlaps between an idiom of economic instrumentality and that of friendship were thus taken into consideration. This may be apprehended as a way, for Mark, of preserving the impression of having built meaningful, intimate and friendly relations with Cuban people—people who had

nevertheless also showed an interest in his economic resources—therefore, as a way for him to keep the positive promises of touristic encounters in Cuba alive. While this may well be the case, I think that Mark's insights on his relationships with Cubans should not be reduced to this interpretation alone. To do this would be to dismiss his reasoning as simple self-delusion with regards what his relationship with Cuban people was 'really' about. Such univocal and somehow cynical reading neglects the possibility that new relational formations and notions of friendship emerge out of the touristic encounter, discrediting more generally their generative potential and transformative effects.¹⁰

In Mark's view, the fundamental asymmetry of economic resources between him and his brother on the one hand, and their Cuban friends on the other, normalized relationships where interests and instrumentality went hand in hand with emotional involvement and even friendship. A degree of instrumentality was therefore included, as a legitimate possibility, within a contextualized notion of friendship that took into account the asymmetric status of the partners involved and their different socio-economic positioning in an unequal world. These nuanced takes on friendship, which accounted for its peculiar expressions in Cuba's tourism realm, resonate well with several recent anthropological writings advocating the need to move beyond purified and idealized approaches to friendship in order to uncover its variegated expressions in different ethnographic locales (see for instance most chapters in Bell & Coleman [eds] 1999 and Desai & Killick [eds] 2010 and the articles of Dyson 2010; Mains 2013; Nisbett 2007; Santos Granero 2007; Torresan 2011). In touristic Cuba, one may argue that what was emerging between tourists and Cubans was of a kind of hybrid version of the allegedly Western, purified model of friendship as a voluntary and disinterested affective engagement between autonomous individuals (Carrier 1999), a version in which economic interest, intimacy and emotional attachment could easily intermingle.

Resistances, aspirations and calls for recognition: '(re)-purifying' friendship

However seductive, these moves to 'de-purify' friendship failed to explain the resistance of several self-professed Cuban friends to subscribe to any hybrid 'compromise' (Nachi 2004a, 2004b; Boltanski & Thévenot 2006 [1991]) of the sort, as some of my ethnographic material clearly illustrates. Consider for instance the offended reaction of Pablo, one such self-professed friend with whom I spent a couple of afternoons in Havana, as I provocatively hinted at the commission he was likely to gain on the drinks I had just bought for us. Aware of the sensitivity of this issue, and of the awkwardness of discussing with him tricks that foreigners were not supposed to know about, I quickly added that I did not really care if commissions were also part of his agenda, that this would not jeopardize our friendship, trying to show comprehension, and even admiration, for his tactics to gain some hard currency from foreigners like me. Getting quite outraged and emotional in his denial, Pablo retorted that he valued friendship and *el corazón* (the heart) well above money, that by so doing he had now friends all around the world, and that he wouldn't risk to ruin our friendship just for a commission of one or two pesos.

'You don't understand Cuban people!' (*Tu no entiendes a los cubanos!*)—was another current reply to tourists' insinuations of hidden instrumental behaviour and multipurpose

friendships. Tourists could see this complaint as yet another deceptive, *jinetero*-style manoeuvre of self-victimization to entice guilt, compassion, and help from the foreigner. However, I would argue that such dejected claims of a lack of empathy call for a more emphatic understanding of their emotional and moral foundations (see Hollan and Throop 2008). We may fruitfully draw here on Throop's (2010) recent reflections on empathy, according to which 'it is possible to see that, in some cases, it is precisely experiences of misunderstanding that potentiate possibilities for new horizons of mutual understanding to arise, even if fleetingly so' (ibid.: 722). It was precisely these possibilities for new understanding that foreigners in Cuba, including myself, were encouraged to explore following Cuban people's resistance to our interpretations.

What I was led to recognise was that to imply an inevitable horizon of self-interestedness in Cubans' professed friendship, and to force this interpretation on them, was to deny them the possibility, or at least the aspiration, of becoming the free and autonomous moral subjects of a fully-fledged 'pure' friendship, one characterized by 'spontaneous and unconstrained sentiment' (Coleman 2010: 200):¹¹ a friendship that several of my research participants assumed would hold sway under the 'normal conditions of existence' to which they aspired—as opposed to the context of exceptionalism, enduring crisis, scarcity, and isolation they associated with Cuba, and which many wished to overcome.¹² This was the assumption voiced by Ernesto, a Cuban man in his late twenties I spent many evenings with, as he reflected on the difference between friendship in touristic Cuba and friendship 'over there' (*allá*), in the tourists' countries of residence.

It would be great if things here could be like over there, with higher salaries, and one could just go out simply to get to know people, to enjoy oneself, to make some friends just for fun and not for money, out of necessity... if one did not need to go and look for friendship (*que uno no tuviera que ir a buscar una amistad*), that it would be just like over there, normal.

Ernesto went on to explain how he aspired to achieve such normality in his relationships with tourists, and how he strived to engage with them on the basis of sentiment rather than interest. He found this to be more gratifying and rewarding, and argued that all the 'true friendships' he was developing with tourists, people that appreciated the genuineness of his engagement, ensured he would never be left alone in need. As the saying went: '*quien tiene un amigo tiene un tesoro*' (he who has a friend has a treasure).

During fieldwork, I came across many other instances in which explicit references to the normality of a friendship were made. Thus, when I met again with Marcos (a Rasta in his forties) one year after our first encounter in 2010, he was quick to reassure Ernesto (with whom I was hanging out at the time) that we were good friends and there was nothing to worry about: 'He is a friend of mine, normal (*Él es amigo mio, normal*). I am not looking for money, nor is it for interest or anything like that. I'm not in any trouble of the sort (*no estoy metido en líos*). Just friend, normal!' Marcos then went on to exemplify the normality of our friendship by inviting me to drink from a good bottle of rum he had just bought. 'When I have it, I give it to you. If I need something, I just ask you. With no trouble, no complications (*sin lío, sin cráneo*).' Marcos was highlighting how there was total transparency and a generalized kind of reciprocity in our relationship, nothing was hidden or suspicious: this was just how it was supposed to function, normally, between friends.

Cubans who were unable to invite tourists the way Marcos had done with me, could feel uncomfortable about having visitors always paying for them. Such was the case of Carlos, a man from Viñales in his late twenties, who poignantly told me of his shame, sorrow and frustration (*me da pena*), for not being able to reciprocate the tourists' invitations for drinks, food or entering a club. The awkward feeling of being perceived as a burden, of being reduced to one among the *jineteros*, occasionally led him to retreat into his house and avoid going out altogether. Carlos also contrasted the righteousness of his attitude with that of 'other' Cuban people who 'just wanted the tourists' money' and were only looking for 'interested friendships' (*amistad por interés*), who did not care about nobler feelings or long-lasting relationships. This way, he articulated a very widespread critique in contemporary Cuba of the generalization and increasing predominance of *relaciones de interés* ('relations of interest', i.e. instrumentally motivated)—as opposed to normal, 'real' relationships (Fosado 2005) and 'true love' (Lundgren 2011).

By insisting on their commitment, or at least their human potential and aspiration to engage in a disinterested, sentiment-based friendship, Cubans like Pablo, Ernesto, Carlos, and Marcos were striving to align their moral selves to those of their tourist friends, and thus lay claim to the possibility of being together in a shared social world.¹³ But such a common world was not only a sought after ideal at a moral level; it was a more concrete aspiration too, and one that such friendships could also help bring a little closer. Indeed, the ideals of pure friendship that my Cuban research participants articulated could also help them reach out towards the 'normality' they associated with life abroad; in their attempts to cement intense and strong bonds with visitors, they were also entangling them in the moral imperatives that came with a fully-fledged and uncompromising friendship. Itself an 'ethical demand' (Zigon 2009, 2010), friendship—much like love (Zigon 2013)—called for a certain commitment and continuity in relationships. With it, in other words, a range of responsibilities were brought about, which demanded adequate fulfilment by the partners involved. The responsibilities tourists felt towards their Cuban friends could ultimately help the latter realize other socio-economic aspirations too: never again having to worry about being left in need with no one to turn to, perhaps even being able to travel abroad thanks to a foreign friend. Tourists could help Cubans in this, thereby leading to a more tangible narrowing of inequalities. In any case, what seemed extremely important, in order to preserve the moral configuration on which such relationships were grounded, was for these obligations and responsibilities to be formulated and experienced not as friendship's defining motive, but rather as a simply 'normal', sentiment-driven outcome of it. In other words, the ideal of friendship at play here demanded things to be simply shared among friends, with all material exchanges escaping, and standing in opposition to, any notion of interest and calculation.

Conclusion

A recurrent feature traversing the diverse enactments of friendship that I have considered in this article was the tension between friendship and economic instrumentality. Friendship was often evoked and exemplified in opposition to conceptions of interest, and contrasted to the 'cash-mediated forms of sociality' (Palmié 2004: 243) typical of *jineterismo*. In this

sense, professions of friendliness and friendship, and the related efforts to flesh out these forms of engagement, could enable Cuban people to distance themselves from the spectre of 'tourism hustling' and *jineterismo*. Friendliness and friendship were quickly evoked once people tried to keep at bay such negatively connoted notions. The opposition between 'friends' and 'hustlers' could lead to the emergence of rather loose and 'thin' enactments of friendship, exemplifying the 'interstitiality, flexibility, adaptiveness' of this relational idiom and its ability 'to form ties where either no or radically different relations may be expected' (Coleman 2010: 202). Differences among tourists also appeared in terms of how far one was ready to go to adapt and transform one's assumptions and moral expectations on friendship. Much like the Brazilian immigrants Torresan worked with in Portugal, several tourists I met had learnt that 'as a foreigner' one 'had to be more flexible' when assessing what 'constituted friendship' (2011: 246), and that there could be different 'strengths' and 'levels' of it (*ibid.*). This is what Julien's remarks on his 'special' and 'less intimate' friendship with Cuban people clearly indicated.

In the light of the striking inequalities that animated touristic encounters in Cuba, the ethical demands of friendship also had the potential of encouraging people to engage in relations of mutual and reciprocal help that could ultimately benefit all the partners involved. Friendship called for intensity, commitment and continuity in a relationship, projecting it into the long term and opening up further opportunities to realize one's aspirations, as hinted at in Gerardo's hopes that one day he might be able to visit his friend Alejandro in Mexico. 'Thin' and sketchy enactments of friendship in touristic Cuba could remain rather ambiguous but still suffice, functioning as vague relational frames that satisfied both parties and did not call for further elaborations on what friendship really meant and ought to be about. But a superficial adherence to friendship could hamper the kind of deeper moral commitment to a relationship that so many of my Cuban research participants hoped for in their engagements with tourists. Moreover, while some tourists went along light-heartedly with Cubans' affirmations of friendship, without feeling any need to explicitly subscribe to such qualification of their relationships, others cherished in more profound ways the idea of making friends with the locals, and were drawn towards more intense relationships with them.

In such cases, enactments of friendship took on a more serious and demanding quality. Still, they had to confront the challenges of transience and inequality, critical features of touristic encounters in Cuba, which threatened to draw people back to the reductive typifications of 'tourist' and '*jinetero/a*' and the spectre of deceptive, instrumental and exploitative relationships. Working against the short duration of relationships, tourists and Cubans resorted to the narrative amplification of 'memorable experiences' (Mattingly 2010), such as Cubans' invitations to visit their private homes and share their domestic intimacy, or their revelations of 'secrets' about everyday life on the island. Generosity was another essential element that both addressed and downplayed the importance of inequality, foregrounding instead notions of mutual and uncalculated help among friends. Confronting the issue of inequality is also what led people to reflexively unpack ideals of friendship, and scrutinize more closely each other's assumptions about the matter.

Taking on this question, in the second part of the article I have highlighted how tourists and Cubans could transform and (re)formulate their views of friendship in the light of their concrete experiences. Normative ideals of friendship could thus be worked over and

adapted in order to account for the striking economic asymmetries that characterized such encounters. Accordingly, even a degree of interestedness and calculation could be internalized within situated, particularized and ‘impure’ (Coleman 2010) notions of friendship. In the light of these findings, it is tempting to argue that, more generally, in such touristic encounters interest and affect were always somehow mixed, and that such supposedly ‘hostile words’ (ibid.) could ‘in reality’ never be separated, no matter how much people affirmed and pretended to do so. But to subscribe too quickly to this line of thought, however, is to lose sight of our informants’ resistance in adhering to such blurring and overlaps—liable to weaken their claims—and their intense ‘relational work’ (Zelizer 2000, 2005) to uphold boundaries, to ‘purify’ and ‘normalize’ relationships. Indeed, in the last section of the article I have drawn attention to the—equally transformative—endeavours towards ‘purification’ and ‘normalization’ in which people like Pablo, Ernesto, Carlos and Marcos engaged when reflecting on their friendships with tourists, outlining their moral dispositions and aspirations on the matter. The importance of these calls for recognition comes to the fore once we pay attention to ‘the aspirational character of our relations to others’ (Moore 2011: 10), and start focusing on our research participants’ interest ‘in creating new connections, new meanings, novel forms of relation’ (ibid.: 9). Such an interest was clearly manifest among those Cuban men and women who saw in tourism a way to fulfil their hopes and desires to reach beyond the island’s shores, be at one with the tourists, and overcome the feeling of being ‘left behind’. Ultimately, we may argue that what was at stake here were claims of moral and tangible membership to a more equal and shared world.

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NOTES

¹ *Jineterismo* acquired its salience with 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. 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. Particularly among the younger generations, the increasing number of foreigners visiting the country became a privileged way to access hard currency and fulfil other needs, desires, and aspirations. For more on *jineterismo*, see in particular the works of Berg (2004) Cabezas (2009), Fernandez (1999), Roland (2011) and Simoni (2008).

² My use of the categories of 'tourists' and 'Cubans' in this article does not imply to the existence of two homogenous groups of actors with clearly defined characteristics, and is informed by recent scholarship on the relational (Abram & Waldren 1997) purposeful (McCabe 2005), and locally situated (Frohlick & Harrison 2008) nature of tourism-related identifications. As such, 'tourists' and 'Cuban' are here apprehended as emic, emergent and relational categories, as a 'grammar of distinction' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997: 25) that appeared particularly salient in the context of international tourism in Cuba, where binary divisions between 'tourists' and 'Cubans' were often magnified and played a very important role. The various examples and situations I consider in this paper were among the grounds of articulation, negotiation and contestation of such 'grammar of distinction', fraught with possibilities to challenge it and to redraw lines of belonging and exclusion.

³ My conversations with research participants varied greatly in their duration and scope, ranging from a few minutes chat to hours of animated and detailed discussion. With some people, most notably young Cuban men, I developed close bonds that were strengthened with time, and these often proved to be the most personally gratifying and methodologically fruitful relationships. For more on the issue of my access to, and relationships with, tourist and Cuban research participants, and on the challenges and opportunities that arise when doing research, as a foreigner, in a tourism context in Cuba, see Simoni and McCabe (2008).

⁴ When not already in English, all the quotes from research participants that appear in the article have been translated into English by the author, and are based on recollections after the events took place.

⁵ In the Turkish village of Göreme in which Tucker carried out her research, tourists similarly became 'suspicious of the perceived over-friendliness of salesmen and waiters' (2001: 880). For Tucker, such skepticism about 'the behavior and motives' of local men, placed them 'on something of a knife-edge, caught between being too friendly and being not friendly and helpful enough and between the positions of host and tourism entrepreneur' (ibid.). During fieldwork, I repeatedly sensed that similar dilemmas informed Cubans' efforts to address tourists.

⁶ Several authors working on *jineterismo* in Cuba have considered how and why the activities of *jineteros* tend to pertain to a much more variegated and heterogeneous spectrum than those of their female counterparts (Allen 2007; Alcázar Campos 2010, Berg 2004; Cabezas 2004; Palmié 2004; Simoni 2008; 2013). As a result, whereas the former can easily include sex, romance, selling cigars, acting as guides, and the cultivation of friendship, the activities of *jineteras* are more often limited to sexual/romantic engagements. Helping to explain the prevalence of examples involving Cuban men in the article is also the fact that as a foreign male researcher I found it easier to access other men's discourses on friendship, starting from narratives about our own relationship.

⁷ All personal names of research participants appearing in the article are fictional.

⁸ In her article on Brazilian immigrants negotiating friendship in Lisbon (Portugal), Torresan considers that 'friendship between Brazilians and Portuguese created a bridge that crossed over cultural patterns which were then subsequently strengthened by the idea that friendship was only possible because someone in the relationship was an exception to the rule' (2011: 245).

⁹ The people I got to know as Rasta in tourism milieus in Havana were mainly Afro-Cuban men adopting a subculture style that may be summarily characterized as valorising blackness and Afro-related

cultural expressions, sporting dreadlocks and Rastafari-inspired accessories and clothing, and privileging a laid-back approach to tourists. These men generally self-identified, and were seen by others, as Rasta. For a more comprehensive overview of the Rastafari movement in Cuba, including some of its nuances and internal lines of distinction, see Hansing (2006).

¹⁰ Social science research on tourism has been able to show 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 touristic encounters (see Simoni 2014).

¹¹ Building on Carrier's (1999) work, Coleman locates the roots of such a purist stance in 'Aristotle's notion of perfect friendship as justified in and for its own sake' (2010: 200), and goes on to argue that the 'altruistic giver and morally autonomous friend are products of the same ideological perspective, according to which purity of purpose and spontaneity can be contrasted with assumptions of the marketplace' (ibid.). In emphasizing the aspirational dimension of these purified conceptions of friendship, my argument also draws here on recent anthropological literature on love and companionate marriage, which considers how the ability to engage in 'romantic', 'selfless', 'pure' love can become, in certain contexts, a marker of modernization, and of being an autonomous and self-determined subject (see for instance the chapters in Cole & Thomas [eds.] 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow [eds.] 2006; Padilla et al. [eds.] 2007; as well as the writing of Faier 2007; Fernandez 2013; Hunter 2010; Patico 2009; Povinelli 2006; Venkatesan et al. 2011).

¹² A fruitful parallel may be drawn with Patico's (2009) reflections on 'normalcy' when discussing how international matchmaking provides Russian women and American men with a way to seek normalcy in their personal lives. In relation to the Cuban context, in her research on *jineteras* and their discourses of love for foreign tourists de Sousa e Santos (2009: 422) similarly quotes one of her informants arguing that '[p]eople here want to have what is normal to have, simply what any person in the world can have [the world here representing Western countries]'.

¹³ My reflections here are inspired by Ferguson's (2002, 2006) work on mimicry and membership and by Piot's (2010) related insights on new cultural imaginaries taking shape in contemporary West Africa. Drawing on these authors, Cubans' claims of pure friendship may be read as a way for them to 'embrace the future, through acts of mimetic engagement with that which they desire' (Piot 2010: 10).

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VALERIO SIMONI, Ph.D.
ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
vals_sim@yahoo.com