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**Autor:** Simoni, Valerio

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# SHIFTING POWER

## THE (DE)STABILIZATION OF ASYMMETRIES IN THE REALM OF TOURISM IN CUBA

### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on different manifestations of power in the realm of informal encounters between foreign tourists and Cubans / *jineteros* («tourist-riders») in Cuba. The controversial notion of *jineterismo*, which evokes tourism-hustling and prostitution, is employed as an entry point in order to outline the main registers of power at stake in such encounters. I examine how the relational positions of *jinetero/-a* and tourist are constituted through discourses, texts, and other material objects such as money and passports, which contribute to the stabilization of asymmetric power relations and which thereby restrain/enable Cubans' and tourists' possibilities. The consideration of some deployments of power in the course of ambiguous encounters between tourists and Cubans / *jineteros* shows how people can shift and reframe their respective positions and power relations, unpack and dissect issues of domination and compliance, and transform the role and power of the tourism industry and of the Cuban authorities.

### VALERIO SIMONI

This article focuses on the manifestations and the shifting vectors of power in the realm of encounters between foreign tourists and members of the visited population in Cuba<sup>1</sup>. While «disagreements over «power», and about the different meanings and dimensions attributed to the term thrive among scholars (Lukes 2005: 61), here I am more concerned with ambiguities concerning power as these were deployed by the protagonists of my investigation. Rather than taking an abstract stance towards this notion, or elaborating on general theories of power, this article aims to show how power, and more precisely relations of power, are evoked, brought about, and contested by foreign tourists and Cubans / *jineteros* («tourist-riders»)<sup>2</sup> in the course of some of their interactions. Therefore, my concern is with how power is manifested – and relational positions of power achieved – through these interactions. This allows me to uncover different vehicles of power (economic resources, mobility, knowledge, etc.) that become relevant in the realm of encounters between tourists and Cubans / *jineteros*.

Tourism has been characterized as a form of neo-imperialism (Nash 1977), but more recently scholars have called for more subtle and nuanced understandings of the relation-

ships that can be generated through tourism, moving beyond reified distinctions between oppressors and victims and paying attention to the strategies of empowerment devised by host communities (Bowman 1996). In this article, I similarly refrain from viewing power as unilateral and from taking *a priori* for granted the prevalence of any given manifestation and expression of power and inequality. By considering how foreign tourists and Cubans / *jineteros* engage themselves with issues of power and (re)shape the (a)symmetries and (in)equalities of their relations, it becomes possible to unpack and flesh out, from their perspectives, some of the registers of power at stake in their interactions.

In the following section, I first show how «informal encounters» between foreign tourists and Cubans / *jineteros* have emerged from recent developments in tourism in Cuba. This leads me to consider more closely the notion of *jineterismo* (literally «horseback riding»), which helps outline some of the main registers of power at stake in such encounters. I then continue unpacking the possible entanglements of power found within the relational positions of tourist and *jinetero/-a*, drawing mainly on the work of Law (1991) and Lukes (2005) to show how asymmetric

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Swiss Post-Graduate Programme in Ethnology / Anthropology, «Power» Module, June 2007, University of Zurich, Switzerland. I would like to thank Jean and John Comaroff, Shalini Randeria, Heinz Käufeler, and the other participants in that module for their helpful comments and remarks. My gratitude also goes to the two anonymous reviewers of *Tsantsa* for their suggestions and to Séverine Rey for her support and encouragement. Of course, this paper would not have been possible without the help and collaboration of the many foreign tourists and Cubans / *jineteros* I met during my fieldwork.

<sup>2</sup> For readability purposes, when used in conjunction with «Cubans», only the masculine form will be included and should be read as Cubans / *jineteros/-as*.

power relations can be framed and stabilized through discourses, texts and other material objects. By considering some of the deployments of power in the course of informal encounters between tourists and Cubans/*jineteros*, it becomes apparent how the protagonists of these interactions attempt to (re)frame positions and power relations. Finally, I address the issues of «compliance to domination» and «internalization/naturalization», and show how the ambiguous and controversial character of the informal encounters considered here contributes to exposing the limited applicability of these notions.

## INVESTIGATING TOURISM AND INFORMAL ENCOUNTERS IN CUBA

To alleviate the crises that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cuban government fostered the development of tourism in the 1990s, as this was considered a sector capable of generating hard currency in a relatively short period of time (*Resolución Económica del V Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba*, 1997, quoted in Argyriadis 2005: 31). Following the massive arrival of people from abroad (the number of tourists rose from 340,000 in 1990 to more than 2 million in 2004), a wide range of tourism-related activities that avoids state regulation have flourished on the island, a place where any interaction with foreigners had the potential of being much more lucrative than any other professional activity. Indeed, in spite of a certain degree of «economic recovery» after the first years of the Special Period (1991-1995), characterized by dramatic shortages, the economic situation has continued to be difficult for many Cubans, especially for those who do not have direct access to hard currency through a job in the tourism industry or from remittances from relatives abroad (Argyriadis 2005: 32). Under these conditions, the asymmetries in terms of economic resources between most Cubans and tourists visiting the island have become particularly easy to pinpoint.

In Cuba the authorities can hinder, obstruct and penalize informal contacts between Cubans and foreigners<sup>3</sup>. The development and implementation of such policies, which tend to regulate and frame interactions between tourists and members of the local population drawing a formal/informal divide, has led me to elaborate the exploratory notion of «informal encounter», which refers to those encounters happening beyond the control of the authorities and susceptible to being repressed<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, in Cuba as in other tourist destinations<sup>5</sup>, informality seems to become a sphere – as relationally opposed to the formal, the official, the legal – which is not only related to the economic realm but to interpersonal relations. In spite of these governmental efforts to frame and control tourism, many Cubans keep avoiding governmental restrictions and keep trying to create opportunities to engage with tourists, offering their services as guides or companions, seeking foreign friendships, selling cigars, providing sex, illegal drugs, private taxis, accommodation or food, etc. Bypassing governmental policies and recommendations, many foreign tourists also seem to prefer doing tourism «their own way», seeking alternatives to what the industry provides and thereby questioning or ignoring its normative suggestions.

In my research I examine these informal encounters between foreign tourists and members of the local population in Cuba following the multiple ways in which they are conceptualized, contested and negotiated and exploring the heterogeneous exchanges that characterize them. My aim is to explore how these exchanges occur, the ambiguities, tensions and subsequent negotiations they generate, as well as their relevance for the diverse actors involved. Among the central issues addressed are: the ways in which these encounters are relationally framed by their protagonists (ranging from «disinterested friendship» to «tourist harassment»); the traffic of circulating entities (from «money» to «moralities»); the emergence of controversies and the multiple ways in which they are – or are not – settled; and the extent to which these encounters shape people's lives and experiences.

<sup>3</sup> The legal basis of this penalization seems to consist in a vagrancy law dating back to 1971 (Ley contra la vagancia, No. 1231) (Palmié 2004: 241) and Articles 72 and 73 of the Cuban Penal Code on «indices of dangerousness» (Trumbull 2001: 364; Cabezas 2004). During my fieldwork, several Cubans used the expression *asedio del turista* («siege»/hustling of tourist), referring to the accusations of the police towards Cubans engaging informally with tourists. The police employ a system of warnings (*carta de advertencia*, or *carta de avisos de molestia al turismo*, «warning of nuisance to tourism», according to Tiboni 2002: 41), combined with fines, to penalize Cubans accused of *asedio*: after three warnings people may face some years in a jail/rehabilitation centre (three years according to most of the Cubans I heard talking about it). Nevertheless, sanctions are sometimes negotiated between the police and the people accused, and I sometimes heard about the payment of bribes, or sexual favours given to officers in exchange for clemency (see also Cabezas 2004). Furthermore, certain people accumulate dozens of warnings but manage to avoid jail, thanks probably to bribes, good relational networks or collaboration with the police.

<sup>4</sup> This simplified formulation builds on Crick's notion of the «informal tourist sector» (1992, see also Simoni 2008).

<sup>5</sup> In Jamaica, for instance, Mullings argues that «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» (1999: 78).

In the following sections I rely on data acquired during seven months of ethnographic fieldwork in Cuba (between 2005 and 2007), and more precisely in the city of Havana, the beach resort Playas del Este and the rural town of Viñales. If «informal encounters» abound in Cuba, the tourists that engage in them are more likely to be young, independent tourists than people staying in all-inclusive resorts or going on package tours. The former constituted the bulk of my informants, together with those Cubans/*jineteros* (generally also in their twenties and thirties) who actively tried to engage with tourists in Havana, Viñales, and Playas del Este.

### THE CONTROVERSIAL PHENOMENON OF *JINETERISMO*

The importance of Cubans' informal engagements with tourists is epitomized by the widespread use of the terms *jinetero/-a* and *jineterismo* to evoke notions of tourism-hustling and prostitution. Several authors have outlined the porosity (Argyriadis 2005: 47), the ambiguities (Berg 2004; Cabezas 2004; Fernandez 1999; Palmié 2004), and the kaleidoscopic character (Kummels 2005: 24) of *jineterismo* and other related phenomena and categories in Cuba – sex work, prostitution and partnership for instance. Scholars have emphasized how *jineterismo* is a complex phenomenon, one which brings issues of morality, nation, race, class and gender into play (see in particular the work of Fernandez [1999] and Berg [2004]).

According to an occasional informal guide in the town of Viñales, a man in his thirties with whom I took several guided tours in Viñales' countryside and with whom I developed a close relationship, the term *jinetero* was used by the authorities (*las autoridades*), people who had power (*los que tienen el poder*), to talk in derogatory terms about people like him, to discriminate and marginalize them. For him it was a negative term that he would never use to describe himself. His «basic needs» (*las necesidades*) lead him to engage informally with tourists, as he didn't have the licence which authorized a few privileged persons to do this openly and officially.

In spite of what he told me the Cuban authorities were not the only ones employing these terms and I heard people who engaged informally with tourists also using the term *jinetero*. Nevertheless, most of the time this label was

attributed to someone else rather than claimed for oneself – whether it was to bother (*para joder*), jokingly, a friend, or to warn tourists of other untrustworthy Cubans' misbehaviour and convince them that they, ordinary Cubans, were, on the contrary, good and honest people. Occasionally, I also heard a few people describing themselves as *jineteros* (more seldom *jineteras*). Sitting at an open air bar just across the Parque Central, in the Boulevard de San Rafael (central Havana), which had the reputation of being frequented by many *jineteros/-as*, I once witnessed an argument between two young Cubans, a boy and a girl, which revolved essentially around their being or not being *jineteros* and the meaning they attributed to this term. In the course of the quarrel the young man insulted the girl calling her a *puta* (whore) after which she angrily pointed out to him that both of them were engaging in the same kind of activities. He then proudly responded by saying that he was actually a *jinetero*, thereby emphasizing the difference between the two attributions and denying her the same positive connotations. In this specific situation the self-professed *jinetero* was conflating *jinetera* with *puta*, refusing to equate his activity with the one of the girl in question. More generally, it appears that *jineteros* are less stigmatized than *jineteras* (Palmié 2004: 243). Whereas their activities are considered to pertain to a much more variegated and heterogeneous spectrum, broadly related to tourist-hustling, the activities of *jineteras* are more readily equated with prostitution and commercialized sex.

Given the controversial and contested nature of the terms *jinetero/-a*, it becomes important to consider how these different terms and categories were used by people situationally, according to what they accomplished through a given interaction and how they were often employed and manipulated in strategic and pragmatic ways. While researchers have generally focused their attention on the practices and discourses of Cuban women, less attention has been paid to the experiences of Cuban men/*jineteros* and to the moments of encounter between foreign tourists and Cubans/*jineteros*<sup>6</sup>. In this respect, the idiom of *jineterismo* can help us outline the main asymmetries and registers of power at stake in such encounters. Indeed, by examining the relational positioning of *jineteros/-as* and tourists we can fruitfully start to unpack the issues of power and inequality.

<sup>6</sup> To try to translate the ambiguities and controversies surrounding the term *jinetero/-a*, without straightforwardly imposing this label on people, I use the expression Cuban/*jinetero* – the sign «/» indicating both a potential identification and a disjuncture. While throughout this paper I sometimes employ the general and indefinite plurals «tourists» and «Cubans/*jineteros*», it should be clear to readers that these «discursive tropes» do not «represent an undifferentiated sociological or political reality» (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 24). In some ways similar to the «colonial encounters» referred to by Comaroff and Comaroff, in touristic encounters there may also be a tendency «to force even deeper conceptual wedges into ever more articulated, indivisible orders of relations» (1997: 26).

## JINETEROS V. TOURISTS: FRAMING POSITIONS, STABILIZING INEQUALITIES

*Jineterismo* evokes images of skilled hustlers taking advantage of innocent tourists, and points more widely to the centrality of economic inequalities and asymmetries between tourists and Cubans. It emphasizes and translates inequalities in economic terms but also in terms of knowledge and skills, whereby *jineteros/-as* can be portrayed as mobilizing their insiders' skills to squeeze money out of ignorant and naïve tourists<sup>7</sup>. Not only knowledge, but also *jineteros/-as* bodies and their tactical deployments of intimacy, love and affect can be seen through the lens of *jinetismo* as constituting potential vehicles of power in their relations with tourists. As Palmié puts it, «The underlying assumption is that the *jinetera se monta al extranjero* (literally mounts, but also possesses, the stranger), *le apasiona* (impassions him) or even *le castiga* (literally punishes, but also roughs him up) [...] to an extent where he becomes dependent upon her, turns into a patient of his own desire, and abandons control over his financial means» (2004: 244). As these images may suggest, in the presence of tourists, any serious framing of someone as *jinetero/-a* would potentially put the person described as such in an awkward position – that of the hustler, the prostitute, the money-sucker – a position which would be difficult to renegotiate and which would limit the range of possible interactions with the tourists in question.

This brings us to address the question of power in its relation with issues of position. According to Foucault – or at least the «first Foucault» (Lukes 2005), whose writings have inspired recent analysis of power in tourism (Cheong and Miller 2000) – power is not the property of someone, who can «have» it and use it as an instrument (Lukes 2005: 89). More precisely: «power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the «privilege», acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions» (Foucault 1979: 27<sup>8</sup>, quoted in Law 1991: 169). In spite of the popularity of Foucault's views in the academic

realm, both Lukes (2005) and Law (1991) have questioned the usefulness of his approach, as far as it makes it difficult to explain inequalities and uneven distributions of power. In this respect Lukes considers that the «final Foucault» reformulated his views by distinguishing «power as strategic game between liberties», and «states of domination, which are what we ordinarily call power» (Foucault 1987: 19<sup>9</sup>, quoted in Lukes 2005: 97). Thereby, «for Foucault domination now exists where «the relations of power are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and the margin of liberty is extremely limited» (Foucault 1987: 12, quoted in Lukes 2005: 98). John Law also draws attention to the processes through which (asymmetrical) power relations might be stabilized. While he recognises the pertinence of Foucault's work in emphasizing the techniques through which power is created – rather than assuming a stock of power *a priori* – this author suggests «that «power to» and «power over» may be stored and treated by social analysts as a potential or a set of conditions so long as we do not forget that they are also an effect, a product of a set of more or less precariously structured relation» (1991: 170). Furthermore, people's standings and positions, as relationally constituted, have their own power effects and should be taken into account (1991: 181).

How to make use of these reflections while examining the attributions of *jinetismo* in Cuba and their implications in terms of power? For instance, adopting a «first Foucault's» point of view (Lukes 2005), the framing of someone as *jinetero/-a* can be simultaneously seen as having a productive effect – it offers an identification, it helps produce a subject – and a repressive one – it sets some limits to action to those perceived in such a way. Underscoring the productive effect may be interesting in principle, but the risk is to portray power in a too pervasive and general way, dissolving differences and making it difficult to apprehend its specific deployments in a given situation (everything is produced by power – ok)<sup>10</sup>. Among the more precise questions that we may want to address while considering *jinetismo* and its implications in terms of power

<sup>7</sup> We rejoin here Van den Berghe's consideration of tourist-native interactions as being «characterized by countervailing asymmetries. Tourists almost always enjoy more leisure and discretionary income than most natives [...] Tourist wealth and higher status are often resented by natives, and put tourists in an advantageous position. On the other hand, natives can take advantage of tourists through their much greater knowledge of local conditions, prices, services and the like.» (1996: 552; see also Van den Berghe 1994: 18)

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault. 1979. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault. 1987. «The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on 20 January 1984», in: James BERNAUER and David RASMUSSEN (eds.), *The Final Foucault*, p. 1-20. Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press.

<sup>10</sup> Lukes argues that «One reason for this one-sidedness is doubtless that Foucault was, characteristically, not investigating actual disciplinary practices but their design.» (2005: 93)



relations are the following: who was mobilizing this framing; what could actors do once cast this way; did people «internalize» this characterization, coming to see it as a kind of «natural order of things» (see Bourdieu's notion of «naturalization» [Lukes 2005: 161, note 10])?

This brings me to address the question of who exercised the power of such characterization, and furthermore what did this mean in terms of the options available to people cast as *jineteros/-as* in the presence of tourists. In relation to the first question, most guidebooks on Cuba warned tourists against *jineteros/-as*, thereby translating this notion to a wide range of visitors coming to the island. The inclusion of *jineteros/-as* in tourist guidebooks, together with the negative values attributed to them, were certainly among the techniques through which relations and positions – «tourists v. *jineteros/-as*» – could be stabilized. Following Law's suggestion, it is important to focus on the techniques through which power is stored and the (unequal) relations between actors stabilized. In this respect, according to this author: «one of the best strategies for stabilizing relations and their downstream power effects is [...] precisely to embody them in durable materials: relations that tend, everything else being equal, to generate effects that last» (1991: 174)<sup>11</sup>. Besides these written texts on *jineteros/-as*, and in relation to them, there were also the tips and suggestions circulating among tourists regarding who was a *jinetero/-a* and who wasn't, how to recognise them and how to deal with them. This «grammar of distinction» (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 25), opposing tourists' interests and the *jineteros/-as*' ones, was mostly deployed to benefit the former and limit the actions of the latter, giving shape to asymmetric relations and constituting an unbalanced way of fixing their identities.

Any analysis of these discourses and texts, which contributes to explain the stabilization of the (op)positional divide between tourists and *jineteros/-as* and of the unequal power

relations between them, should be addressed together with an examination of other practices, technologies and materialities that pushed distributions of power in the same direction<sup>12</sup>. In this respect, we have seen how the idiom of *jinetismo* emphasizes economic inequalities and asymmetries between tourists and Cubans. Therefore, among the most obvious elements that could become salient while framing unequal positions and reaffirming the power of tourists, we may consider their ability to travel and cross borders, related to the possession of passports, visas and money, as well as other manifestations of an uneven distribution of material resources. These expressions of power evoke Lukes' «two-dimensional power», or «agenda control» – «the power to decide what is decided» (2005: 111), which limits the realm of possibilities and decision-making. Within Cuba, for instance, the newest cars in circulation tended to be the ones that tourists could rent, which had special licence plates. Tourists had a passport, a tourist visa and could enter freely into hotels. Most of them had considerable amounts of hard currency as well as international credit cards, photographic and video cameras, etc. All these elements could be brought to the fore and rendered significant to materialize and stabilize differences and inequalities, since most Cubans had none of these things. In the touristic areas of Havana – which possessed several features of the «enclavic tourist spaces» described by Edensor (1998) – surveillance cameras were in operation, and «tourist police» would patrol the area keeping at bay potential *jineteros/-as*. This implied first of all the production and framing of people as *jineteros/-as* and, subsequently, a limitation of their possible choices and «margin of liberty».

So far I have considered manifestations of power as expressed through the relational positioning of tourists and *jineteros/-as*. In the following section I want to address what happens to these and other configurations of power in the course of informal encounters between tourists and Cubans/*jineteros*.

<sup>11</sup> This view finds a parallel in Latour's reflections on power and its emphasis on the role of objects and non-human entities to stabilize power relations: «By putting aside the practical means, that is the mediators, through which inertia, durability, asymmetry, extension, domination is produced and by conflating all those different means with the powerless power of social inertia, sociologists, when they are not careful in their use of social explanations, are the ones who hide the real causes of social inequalities. If there is one point where confusing cause and effect makes a huge difference, it is at this juncture when an *explanation* should be provided for the vertiginous effects of domination.» (2005: 85)

<sup>12</sup> As argued by Comaroff and Comaroff for colonialism (and this might also apply to tourism): «in treating colonialism as a «cultural formation» (Dirks 1992: 3 [«Introduction: Colonialism and Culture», in: Nicholas B. Dirks (ed.), *Colonialism and Culture*, p. 1-25. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press]), a discursive field ([Patricia] Seed 1991 [«Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse», *Latin American Research Review* 26: 181-200]), or a Foucauldian regime of power/knowledge ([Timothy] Mitchell 1991 [Colonising Egypt. Berkeley: University of California Press]), it is easy enough to lose sight of material production: to pay it lip service as we focus on problems of consciousness, representation, subjectivity, textuality [...] – or worse, to relegate it to the background rumble of realist history» (1997: 19-20). This might also be one of the possible criticisms of the text by Cheong and Miller with their Foucauldian approach to power in tourism (2000).

## SHIFTING POWERS AND (DE)STABILIZING ASYMMETRIES IN THE COURSE OF INFORMAL ENCOUNTERS

### *Re-framing positions and power relations*

Starting with power and inequalities as expressed in the terms «tourist» and «*jinetero/-a*», I have already mentioned how Cubans/*jineteros* interacting informally with tourists tended to refute their identification as *jineteros/-as*. Being framed as a *jinetero/-a* could imply reducing the possible range of interactions with tourists, foregrounding the instrumental and exploitative character of relationships.

Furthermore, it often happened that these people contested the widespread assumption that the aim of security and surveillance was to protect tourists from «ill-intentioned» Cubans and *jineteros/-as*. «That's what they [the authorities] say», some argued, affirming that the actual aim of surveillance was to impede and obstruct tourists' relations with ordinary Cubans – whether because the authorities wanted tourists to spend their money in the official, state-owned, infrastructure, or because they didn't want ordinary Cubans to tell tourists the truth about life in the country. In this sense a potentially enabling form of power, the power of tourists to visit Cuba safely, was re-framed by Cubans/*jineteros* as a repressive power, a limiting power over tourists, which limited their possibilities to see and experience the «real» Cuba, as opposed to the «official», «mediatised» and «touristified» image of it. This kind of discourse would generally strike the right note and trigger sympathetic and consensual reactions from tourists, bringing to their attention the limitations of the tourist role, its normative dimensions (in terms, for instance, of following the routes and circuits provided and suggested by the industry) and the tautological connotations of a «tourist bubble». A common follow up to these discourses involved remarks and suggestions that opened up new fields of possibilities, foreshadowing, for instance, unforgettable and unique experiences «off the beaten track», thereby evoking complicity and fascination and a feeling of disobedience towards the monopolistic machinations of the state and the tourism industry (the task of making these two entities coincide being relatively easy in Cuba). At this stage Cubans/*jineteros* would try to take the lead in the relation, at least in terms of decision-making, by displaying their insider knowledge and encouraging tourists to follow them, to listen to their sincere stories about Cuba and see places other tourists would not see.

Cubans/*jineteros* could also deploy and emphasize the danger, for tourists, of exploring the «real» Cuba on their own, arguing that tourists would not know where to go, that they could get lost and be attacked by ill-intentioned Cubans. For instance, during the first days of my stay in Havana, I spent several afternoons and evenings with a young Cuban man who repeatedly told me to stick with him, arguing that, as I had just arrived in Cuba, I was «like a kid in the desert»: I did not know where to go, I could stumble into danger, get lost, be robbed... Through his expression of care and attention (sometimes too overtly paternalistic for me and therefore irritating), he capitalized on his insider knowledge, storing power in his «being local/Cuban» as he attempted to plan, direct and script a programme for the following days that we could have spent together. Somehow similar, in Viñales informal guides who offered their services to tourists willing to explore the countryside would emphasize the dangers of getting lost in the neighbouring mountains, telling stories of careless tourists who, dismissing the Viñaleros' advice, ventured out there on their own and had to be rescued after days of lone wanderings without any food or water.

But once decision-making and outlining itineraries were at stake, most tourists would not give in so easily. Young backpackers with flexible schedules, time to improvise and openness towards the unplanned, would often turn out to be the more ready to follow – whereas at the other extreme package tourists would find that much more difficult. Furthermore, and almost in all cases, the issue of who had the power to decide, and to «decide what to decide» (or «agenda control»), would become a controversial one. Cubans/*jineteros* tried, for instance, to tear down barriers and limitation, evoking feelings of temporal «fluidity» (contrasting with tourists' time constraints), of fecund «liminality» (repeatedly I would hear instigations to «let yourself go!», «come on, you are on holiday!»), and constantly making plans about what could be done next. On their side, many tourists seemed to reaffirm the need to keep control over the situation, emphasizing their limits in terms of time and money, reasserting the pre-eminence of their own agendas over the Cubans'/*jineteros'* ones, and thereby also their privileged position in terms of decision-making and power relations. In some extreme situations, I saw tourists explicitly displaying their money and thereby materializing the uneven distribution of power in their relation with Cubans/*jineteros*. For instance, a self-professed «Italian/*jinetero*», who was coming repeatedly to Cuba, once told two Cuban girls something like: «I'm the one

who has the money (hard currency), I tell you what you have to do» («yo soy el que tiene los fulas, yo te digo lo que tienes que hacer») – translating his possession of hard currency into a stock of power<sup>13</sup>.

### *Unpacking domination and compliance*

Another dimension of power that is sometimes addressed in studies of tourism and that can be related to Lukes «three-dimensional power» and «compliance to domination» (2005), concerns the internalization and naturalization of tourism-related meanings, stereotypes and images, both by tourists and the visited population (see for instance the works of Hutchins 2007 and Maoz 2006).

In this respect, my impression is that even though stereotypes such as «all Cubans can dance», «Cubans are amazing at sex», «Italians are all a bit mafiosi», etc. were often reproduced in informal encounters, there was always the possibility – through irony and conflict for instance – to re-discuss these issues, question them and thus reach other conclusions (Simoni 2008). Depending on the situation, it was not always clear to me whether these mobilizations of stereotypes were reflexively playful and instrumental, or whether they were taken as serious and unquestionable allegations. Nevertheless, the ambiguous character of relations between Cubans/*jineteros* and tourists often favoured the emergence of doubts and controversies concerning such stereotypes, as well as people's intentions, interests, and (a)symmetric positioning – and thereby a reflexive engagement with issues of power and «compliance to domination» (Lukes 2005). The sceptical and oppositional stance towards a realm of «official tourism», of «simplified», «touristified» images of Cuba and Cubans, that Cubans/*jineteros* often managed to infuse in their informal encounters with tourists, creating a certain complicity with them on that issue, could prove a fruitful platform to deploy criticisms, to question taken-for-granted assumptions on what it meant to be a Cuban or a tourist, as well as to unpack, dissect and recompose different registers of power.

In this sense informal encounters might be seen as potentially constituting one of those «free spaces» within which to develop subversive thoughts with others», mentioned by Lukes (2005: 130) in his discussion of James Scott's book on *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*<sup>14</sup>. By raising doubts and ambiguities, by favouring the deployment of controversies and conflicts, and as a result of people's attempts to negotiate and settle them, informal encounters may function as transformative occasions which stimulate reflexivity, making the implicit become explicit and bringing forth the circulation of new knowledge, justifications, critiques and interpretative logics<sup>15</sup>. In this respect even the tenacious and multilayered boundaries erected between «tourists» and «Cubans/*jineteros*», together with their asymmetric positioning and power relations, could sometimes be blurred by novel and emerging identifications – such as the «Italian/*jinetero*» mentioned earlier, or Cubans/*jineteros* who managed to migrate and who then came back for occasional visits claiming the status of «tourist». These identifications would allow people to play with positional shifts and the various registers of power associated with them – the power of «Cubanness» and insiders' knowledge, the power of hard currency, the power to move freely and access tourists' installations, etc.

### CONCLUSION

In this article I have examined some manifestations of power in the realm of informal encounters between tourists and Cubans/*jineteros*. The controversial idiom of *jineterismo* reifies distinctions between tourists and Cubans and emphasizes inequalities and asymmetries between them. Economic resources and local skills and knowledge are among the main registers in which power is expressed and through which uneven positions are given shape. While the privileged position of tourists is constituted, stabilized and potentially reiterated through their economic possessions and their facility to move, Cubans/*jineteros* often have to rely on the more transient discursive affirmations of their skills and knowledge in order to achieve an advan-

<sup>13</sup> Like in the very different case examined by Law, money became here «a relationally derived store of power to act and (accordingly) power over certain others» (1991: 179).

<sup>14</sup> James C. Scott. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Therefore, we could also understand such informal encounters as situations which contribute to breaking and disrupting Bourdieu's «habitus», «the embodied dispositions which yield «practical sense» and organize actors' visions of the world below the level of consciousness in a way that is resistant to articulation, critical reflection and conscious manipulation» (Lukes 2005: 140). In the realm of encounters between tourists and Cubans/*jineteros*, a lot of what happens seems to be about being able to articulate opinions and perspectives, critically reflecting on a wide range of issues – including power and inequality, as well as consciously manipulating them.



tageous position. The official tourism industry and the Cuban authorities contribute to shape tourists as the privileged side of this relationally constituted divide, notably by implementing policies which are said to protect them, grant them security and freedom of movement and by warning them about Cubans-as-*jineteros* / hustlers / prostitutes. But the informal encounters that tourists have with Cubans have the potential of unsettling and changing the nature of these asymmetric positions, as well as the position and the power of the authorities and the tourism industry. Therefore, the enabling protection of tourists by the

Cuban authorities may become a restraining limitation of their possibilities. Supposed hustlers and prostitutes may become the genuine local experts by means of which tourists can discover the «real» Cuba, without incurring major risks or dangers. As configurations of power shift through interactions, it becomes difficult to clearly pinpoint stabilized asymmetries. Rather than rely on the somehow simplifying dyad of domination and resistance, we may more pertinently refer here to differing vectors of power which are activated in different situations and through which privileged positions may be temporarily achieved.

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## AUTHOR

Valerio Simoni graduated in Social Anthropology at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Since 2005 he has been a PhD researcher at the Centre for Tourism and Cultural Change, Leeds Metropolitan University, UK. His research deals with informal encounters between foreign tourists and members of the visited population in Cuba, and focuses on the ambiguous and controversial relationships that emerge from such encounters. He thus addresses notions of «tourist harassment», «friendship», «sex», «romance», and «commodification» from the perspectives of the various protagonists involved and considers the role of informal encounters in (re)shaping these relational frames. His interests relate to the anthropology of tourism and economic anthropology.

v.simoni@leedsmet.ac.uk