

Cuba, mission work and travel policy: Including **instability** in travel itineraries

ERIN FLYNN MCKENNA * [mckenna8@illinois.edu]

Keywords | Instability, Mission Travel, Cuba, Travel Ban.

Objectives | This conceptual work explores moments of instability in tourism by looking at the unstable subjectivity of a particular group of travellers known as Cuba partners. The Cuba partners are members of a U.S. Presbyterian Church engaging in learning sessions about Cuba and /or in mission travel to Cuba in an effort to develop a relationship with a congregation there. This paper focuses specifically on those travelling to Cuba. This paper aims to use the experience of this group to theorize more broadly about the role of an unstable positionality in tourism and travel pursuits.

Methodology | This paper is the product of ongoing Ethnographic research that began in October 2010 with the Cuba partners group. Data has been collected during pre and post-trip interviews and photo and journal elicitation of the Cuba partner travellers. In addition, regular Cuba partner meetings and events as well as other church functions that incorporate activities regarding the Cuba mission have provided opportunities to collect data through participant observation. This paper is primarily based on data collected during the learning sessions and other activities preceding the second Cuba partners' trip to Cuba. This data includes both oral testimonies and written handouts provided during these meetings and events. Secondary sources provide the historical context that accompanies the Ethnographic data.

Main results and contributions | This paper demonstrates how changes in the concept of what it means to do mission work, as well as the constantly fluctuating U.S. Policy towards travel to Cuba situates the Cuba partner travellers in an unstable position. Although the unique relationship between the United States and Cuba is partially responsible for the particular subjectivity of the Cuba partner travellers, the situation the Cuba partners face also reflects broader trends in tourism and mission travel. The case of the Cuba partners allows us to see a convergence between current mission travel pursuits and tourism activities. Moreover, this case advances our understanding of the instability inherent to tourism.

Limitations | This study is limited by a lack of supplemental information regarding religion and the Presbyterian Church in Cuba. Few studies are published on this topic, and primary sources are difficult to access within or outside of Cuba. In addition, participant observation during the Cuba partners' trips would have provided additional insights that could contribute to this essay.

Conclusions | The unstable subjectivity of the Cuba partner travellers and their acceptance of this position suggests that some degree of instability can heighten tourist experiences. Thus, rather than assuming that tourism should aim to eliminate all instability and change, we should distinguish among grades of instability and uncover which unstable

* **Doctoral Student**, Department of Recreation, Sport & Tourism, University of Illinois.

conditions can augment tourism. Furthermore, incorporating a discourse that accepts instability in tourism will broaden the scope of acceptable travel experiences leading to greater tourist satisfaction and providing opportunities for certain destinations to develop tourism despite what may be perceived as a volatile environment. Ultimately this has the potential to make tourism more sustainable even in times of change.