# Summary


**Intimate Strangers**
Tourism and Overcoming Subalternity
in Postcolonial India

Tourism to the Global South has often been perceived as a form of imperialism (Nash 1977), cannibalism of difference and mirror image of racism (MacCannell 1992). It has been accused of commodification and asymmetric cultural change, the instrumentalisation of human relations, and the deepening of global economic inequalities. This tradition of critical interpretation of tourism by employing a center/periphery and domination/subordination oppositional binary is valid to some extent. It has, however, some fundamental weakness: it discursively victimises the host communities, making them passive victims of somebody else's imaginations and practices. At the same time it reduces tourists to arrogant hedonists who exploit the "peripheries of pleasure" (Turner & Ash 1975). The only form of interaction here is domination *versus* resistance. This in turn makes the field of conceptualization closed-ended. In doing so, it denies alternative uses and understandings of tourism.

This book proposes a different perspective. It reveals the emancipatory potential of tourism by telling the stories of informal, interpersonal encounters which take place *through* tourism, and of the possibilities which they bear. These are the encounters "across difference" (Tsing 2005) between strangers who come from remote worlds in terms of socio-economic status and cultural capital. Crucially, they are also encounters that would have never happened were it not for the space created by international tourism. This especially refers to the informal tourism sector, which offers local residents, migrants and refugees a relatively inclusive access to tourists and interactions that go beyond the client – service provider relationship. In the book, I ask whether these encounters have the potential to create meaningful relationships beyond difference, using such categories as intimacy, reciprocity, and responsibility. I look at how "they" see "us" – tourists, or what the world map looks like from the perspective of the "peripheries". I also analyse ways in which self-representations are constructed and relations are built in touristic encounters.

The material for this book was collected during several months of shuttle and mobile ethnographic research carried out in two popular tourist destinations in India: Hampi and Dharamsala. These two sites are similar not only because they attract tourists, but also by the fact that their communities are in a subaltern position: the village of Hampi, located in an area

inscribed on the UNESCO list, is undergoing forced displacement of its residents in the name of protecting material cultural heritage, while Dharamsala is a Tibetan refugee settlement which has only latterly become a tourist destination. In the book I analyse whether, and in which circumstances, tourism can be a platform for "recovering subaltern voices", referring to the question raised by the post-colonial critic Gayatri Ch. Spivak (1988). Can the local communities, though entangled in global power relations, construct their self-representations and pursue their goals, including the political ones, through tourism? I demonstrate a number of ways how tourists are politically engaged as (willing) allies in these communities' struggles for their rights: to self-determination, heritage, housing, and the benefits from tourism. I show how tourists become recipients and conveyors of political postulates of the communities which are struggling with the lack of recognised representation. I also reflect on whether volunteer tourism – oft-criticised as a continuation of the civilising mission – brings benefits not only to tourists themselves, but also to the communities in which they operate.

The final chapter asks questions as to whether tourism can bring possibilities to the individuals who belong to these communities? Can it be a platform for exercising agency and (re)constructing subjectivity? Can it be a source of empowerment and thus result in a real change in the quality of life – such as social mobility and an improvement of the economic status – especially in reference to those individuals who take the lowest positions in the social hierarchy? In doing so, I tell the stories of sponsorship, which allows people to break out of structural poverty, and of financial, know-how, and emotional support offered by tourists for the development of local entrepreneurship in the tourism sector. I recall stories of how contacts developed with tourists can contribute to the emancipation of women, as well as stories of love in times and sites of tourism that explore the relationship between tourism, gender and race.

Theoretically the book is grounded not only in social and cultural anthropology – including the anthropology of tourism – but also in creative use of the analytical tools developed by postcolonial theory, which is "a catachrestic combination of (...) Gramsci and Foucault" (Prakash 1994). Post-colonialism – often mistakenly confused with anti-colonialism – reads the contact caused by even asymmetrical power relations in terms of interaction and mutual influence. Following Sherry Ortner's postulate (2016), I attempt to overcome the "dark tendencies" in anthropology to focus exclusively on oppression, exploitation, and suffering. In doing so, I also speak to Arjun Appadurai's claim that instead of concentrating on constraints we should be more open to researching aspirations and possibilities, while not ignoring the broader contexts of power and various inequalities (2013). To this end, I speak to and engage with such concepts as hopeful tourism (Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic 2011), justice through tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles 2010), pro-poor tourism (Ashley, Roe & Goodwin 2001) and, more broadly, the anthropology of the good (Robbins 2013).