Prologue

In the distance, the silhouette of a white stone tower stands out against the dark night sky of Havana. It rises higher and higher as we approach, until its top can no longer be seen through the window of the taxi. Instead, suddenly, the empty expanse of the Plaza de la Revolución passes by. In front of the tower, a giant marble statue of a man kneels and overlooks the plaza. Additionally, on the buildings opposite, larger-than-life portraits of two men are illuminated. One of them is Che Guevara; of course, I know that, because this portrayal is world-famous. The other man is depicted with a broad-brimmed hat and a long beard, and he spontaneously reminds me of the Saviour – the hat looks like a halo.

"What is this place?" I ask Javier, who drives the taxi. Javier straightens up in his seat but keeps his eyes on the road; he has seen this place a thousand times before. "This is Plaza de la Revolución," he explains, "one of the most important places in Cuba. Camilo Cienfuegos and Che, whose portraits are mounted on the buildings there, and Jose Marti, whose statue watches over the square, are some of Cuba's greatest heroes. Every child knows them." Javier, who was previously so gleeful, almost frolicsome, suddenly seems very serious and a bit solemn.

Later that first night in Cuba, I think about the triptych on Plaza de la Revolución. What had Javier said about the three men, with reverence in his voice? "One formulated the idea of Cuban independence, the other two finally established it. They have made us what we are today." Javier seemed to be very proud of them.

The next morning, I wander the streets of Habana Vieja, the historic district of Havana. The likenesses of the three men from the previous evening appear to me again that day, but in completely different forms. José Martí watches as a bust in front of every school and many public institutions. Camilo Cienfuegos smiles at me from the just exchanged CUP20 banknotes, but otherwise he remains inconspicuous. Actually, I see the image of Che on almost every street corner: The *Guerrillero Heroico* is flaunted on t-shirts, posters, cigar boxes, leather bags, refrigerator magnets, baseball bats and myriad other souvenirs. But he can also be seen from time to time in propaganda graffiti, faded tattoos and framed pictures above door frames in decaying colonial palaces.

The image of the revolutionaries of the previous night, marked by Javier's awe, is thus becoming increasingly complex and complicated. On the one hand, there is the quasi-religious reverence of the revolutionaries and the Cuban Revolution and the frequent reaffirmation of how important it is for Cuba, while on the other hand, the utilisation of this very Revolution in tourism is omnipresent. How do these contradictions fit together? How can deference for the Revolution and its simultaneous touristic utilisation be explained? What does it mean for Cuban society and its self-image, and what does it mean for the Cubans and their identity, which, according to their own assessments, is so strongly influenced by the Revolution? The contradictions revealed herein constitute the starting point for the research and reflections that are laid out in the following.

1. Identity, Revolution and Tourist Commodification

> I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it?
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> Michel Foucault on identity (1988:9)

In the 21st century, the identities of many people are affected by rapidly accelerating social, economic and ecological shifts. Individuals and collectives alike are required to adapt to these changes, which are occurring on different spatial scales – from global to local – and affecting a wide range of aspects of human life. The contemporary social world is becoming progressively unsteady, with key elements of identities (e. g. community, family, political ideologies) becoming more diverse, complex and fragmented.

Identities are a powerful expression of how individuals and collectives ascribe meaning to themselves and their lives and how they place themselves in the social world around them. Since identities are always based on social relationships (Goffman 1959, 1963; Luhmann 1995; Mead 1970), transformations and shifts in these social relationships inevitably require a relentless reassessment of individual and collective identities. In this regard, society and identity form a mutually constituting and structuring interdependent relationship, which is both expressed and simultaneously influenced by culture and other resources for identities (Jullien 2017). As the discourses, practices and social and spatial arrangements through which identities are lived and formed are versatile, dynamic and power-sensitive (Foucault et al. 2003), identities need to be alterable and, to a certain extent, flexible.

This research rests upon the hypothesis that the increasingly fluid conditions for identity formation are seizing ever more societies and social strata, for instance via emerging capitalist practices, transforming value systems and growing socioeconomic disparities.

Thus, it is assumed that on the regional, national and global scales, the jumbling of socioeconomic conditions of prior social and political orders dissolves former certainties. As a result, postmodernity[1] is accompanied by entrenched social arrangements and corresponding identities of class, nationality, gender, ethnicity, religious belief and so on fragmenting – sometimes perishing in insignificance, sometimes rearranging (Beck 2009; Reckwitz 2019, 2020) – but all with consequences for individual and collective identities (Bauman 1992, 2002; Hall 1987, 2003; Sennett 1998). Hence, the formation of identities is becoming increasingly complex, difficult and sometimes unsettling under postmodern conditions (Bauman 1996, 1997; Giddens 1991a; Keupp et al. 2006).

To reconcile their self-images socially and psychologically with a transformed external sphere, individuals and collectives require new perspectives on their selves, new kinds of explanatory systems and structuring references. In other words, to prevent individuals from despairing and failing at embedding and integrating their selves in a meaningful way in the changing world around them, a re-interpretation of their own position in the social world – of their own identity – is necessary (Keupp et al. 2006:55). While succeeding in this pursuit of meaningfulness can translate into experiences of self-consciousness and of belonging, the aforementioned failures may result in the development of psycho-pathological symptoms. The underlying fundamental changes and distortions leading to identity change, as briefly outlined above, can be observed in various forms and in many places throughout the world.

Socialist Cuba has been undergoing far-reaching and deep transformations for about the past 30 years, following "revolutionary Cuba's golden age" (Ritter 2010:229) of relative socioeconomic stability during the 1970s and 1980s. Recent years have brought significant and profound changes to the nation's social and economic structures, whose long-term consequences for individual and collective identities are most uncertain. With the dawn of the post-Castro era, Cuba's political system is subject to transformation as well, albeit in a much weaker form. In this inquiry, transformations are conceived as comprehensive, radical and path-dependent changes in socioeconomic and political systems (Altvater 1998:593–594), which can be described as 'systemic' (Geels 2005; Schneidewind 2013), i. e. shifts in which social, cultural, institutional and technological aspects are intricately interwoven and steadily interact with each other. Among the most notable transformative changes Cuba has experienced over the past three decades are fundamental uncertainties in the wake of the socioeconomic crisis during the *Período Especial* (1990–2005), the death of long-time *Comandante en Jefe* Fidel Castro in 2016, the new constitution of 2019 and the rollercoaster of relations with the United States. In addition, increasing international tourism in Cuba is one of the principal causes of multi-layered socioeconomic transformations (Hingtgen et al. 2015:184;

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1 The concept of postmodernity, and to what extent postmodern societies exist, is discussed extensively in Chapter 2.2.3.

Simoni 2017; Taylor & McGlynn 2009:410); thus, it can be considered accountable for Cuban identities in flux, among several other factors. The Cuban tourism industry, once designated as a coping strategy to overcome the economic crisis following the disintegration of the USSR (Jatar-Hausmann 1999:49; Salinas et al. 2018:222), saw the number of international tourists increase by a factor of 10.1 from 1991 to 2019[2] and revenue grow by a factor of 6.6 in the same period[3]. Considering the major socioeconomic and cultural shifts in Cuba addressed previously, the increasing importance of international tourism is both the consequence and the driver of these transformations.

Tourism itself is an arena of struggle for space, power[4] and identity (Devine 2017:634–635), wherein different actors compete for profound socio-spatial agendas and politics, hence profoundly affecting socioeconomic and cultural relations and, ultimately, identities. Marxist authors particularly trace this influencing effect of tourism back to its almost exclusively capitalist and sometimes neoliberal stance (Fletcher 2011; González Velarde 2020; Harvey 2005; Schilcher 2007) – and the multiple violent practices it entails (Büscher & Fletcher 2017; Devine 2017; Devine & Ojeda 2017). The most basic element of capitalism, in turn, is the commodity (Marx 1990 [1867]:163), which also occupies a crucial role in tourism. Practices and processes of commodification are inseparable from capitalism – and thus from capitalist tourism. In recent years, the commodifying character of tourism and the tourist commodification of the environment, of societies and of culture have been increasingly addressed by scholars in various fields (e.g. Büscher & Fletcher 2017; Hillmer-Pegram 2016; Mostafanezhad 2020; Young & Markham 2020; seminal contributions include those of Cohen 1988; Greenwood 1978 and Nuñez & Lett 1989).

As Foucault (2009:92) notes, commodification processes produce specific social relations and spatial manifestations, and they affect the behaviours and mindsets of individuals and collectives. Thus, commodification ultimately alters identities, for example through commodification, that are firmly anchored in changing social interactions with social and cultural "resources" (Jullien 2017). These "resources" are objects and entities of all kinds that individuals and collectives employ to construct identities – in other words, through which they identify themselves. Among others, these resources may include social, cultural, spiritual or political resources. Some studies hint at a disintegrating effect of tourist commodification for identities (Devine & Ojeda 2017; Greenwood 1978; Halewood & Hannam 2001; Lanfant 1995a; Nagy-Zekmi 2019; Salazar 2012). Hence, Salazar (2012) points out that commodification in tourism often produces essentialist and folkloristic – sometimes stereotypical – representations and imaginaries

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2 Based on the author's own calculations with data from ONEI (2020:334) and ONEI (2021:table 15.2 – Visitantes por meses).

3 Based on the author's own calculations with data from ONEI (2017a:331), ONEI (2020:342) and ONEI (2021:table 15.12 – Ingresos asociados al turismo internacional).

4 According to Foucault (1978:94), power is not a property of persons or groups of persons. Instead, it lies within all relations (be they of economic, romantic or amicable nature) between two or more persons, so-called 'power relations'.

of places, people and identities, which are presented, performed and sold in various marketable forms. These places, people and identities are thereby objectified and deprived of their identity-forming features. To put it simply, tourism often does not sell diverse, complex identities but rather smoothed abstractions that materialise in purchasable objects (e. g. souvenirs, postcards), performances (e. g. guided tours, shows) or marketing plugs, thereby degrading them and subverting the foundation of their production (Young & Markham 2020:291). Nonetheless, a few others have highlighted the positive effects of tourist commodification on local identities (e. g. Cole 2007).

However, although some studies on cultural commodification in tourism thoroughly take into account questions of identity (Edensor 1997; Lanfant et al. 1995; Urry 1995), most do so incidentally. While some investigations into commodification in tourism and the effects on individual and collective identities in the Global North do indeed exist (Cloke & Perkins 2002; Cottrell & Neuberg 2005), societies and individuals in the Global South, as well as their identities, currently seem to lack scientific attention – especially when it comes to non-capitalist societies.[5] Some of the few exceptions are the investigations presented by Roland (2010) on Cuba, Devine (2017) on Guatemala, Applis (2019) on Caucasian Georgia and González Velarde (2020) on Peru.

This reveals a research gap regarding the consequences of commodification and commercialisation for the Self – for the identity of individuals – via tourism, especially in the Global South. This research seeks to contribute to closing this gap, hence pleading for multidimensional, comprehensive analyses that transcend disciplinary boundaries to contribute to a thorough understanding of tourist commodification and its transformative effects on individuals and societies in the Global South.[6]

The case of the tourist commodification of the Cuban Revolution appears to be well suited for this purpose for chiefly three reasons: 1) International tourism has been affecting Cuban society for barely three decades, and thus for a relatively short time. It can therefore be assumed that tourism and commodification have not (yet) become commonplace; 2) the deeply socialist Cuban Revolution, in its fundamental understanding, represents an ideological antithesis that is essentially irreconcilable with capitalist commodification, as it stands for an ideology that at its heart opposes commodification for the profit of individuals. Therefore, the Cuban Revolution, through its commodification, is haunted by the very process it demonises and 3) the Revolution was – and is – identity-defining for many Cubans (González Rey & Pavón-Cuéllar 2019:11; Pupo Pupo 2005:44–46; Rojas 1995), but by no means for all (Smith 2016).

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5 Following Dados and Connell (2012:13), the term "Global South" does not merely describe a diffuse 'underdeveloped' space; rather, it attempts to productively incorporate historical experiences of colonisation and imperialism, as well as social and economic dependencies and inequalities, into the notion.

6 Hence, the commodification of identity as a sociocultural phenomenon is of primary concern in this study. The mostly problematic commodification of nature in tourism (Fletcher 2014:10) is unconditionally acknowledged, nonetheless.