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VS Research

Content

List of abbreviations	13
1 Introduction.....	15
1.1 Development of the research question.....	16
1.2 Structure of the thesis	18
2 The State of the arts and theoretical discussion	
2.1 A socioconstructivist, knowledge-sociological and biography theoretical perspective	21
2.2 Cuban research in a polarized discourse	25
2.3 A postsocialist view on the Cuban transformation	34
2.4 Approaches on transnational migration	39
2.5 A figurational-sociological perspective	58
3 Methodical Approach	
3.1 Methodological notes.....	61
3.2 Research question and –design	63
3.3 Ethnographic research	69
3.4 Family- and life historical approach	73
4 Access to the field of transnational families	
4.1 Access to the field of Cuban migrants in Germany	85
4.2 Access to the field in Cuba	90
5 The sociocultural context	
5.1 Migration in Cuba.....	99
5.2 The family in processes of social transformations	126

6	Case studies and typology	
6.1	Type <i>Exit of the Outsider</i>	153
6.2	Type <i>Delegation of upward mobility</i>	212
6.3	Type <i>Educational Exchange</i>	331
6.4	Further family case studies: Briones and Pérez	386
7	Empirical results: Transnational families and their impact on social change in Cuba	
7.1	Migration trajectories – between transnational orientation, escape and social upward mobility expectations	395
7.2	Motive of migration and transnational commitment	404
7.3	Social status in the country of settlement and transnational commitment	407
7.4	Ways and forms of transnational relationships in the context of Cuba’s isolation	410
7.5	Impacts of the transnational relationship on family members in Cuba ..	414
7.6	Types of transnational families and their impact on the Cuban society in the process of transformation	417
7.7	The impact of transnational families on Cuba’s social change.....	423
8	The case of transnational family networks between Cuba and Germany and its implications for the transnationalism scholarship	
8.1	Challenging transnationalism approaches.....	427
8.2	Plea for an empirical und figurational-sociological transnationalism research.....	433
	Annex	437
	Literature	447

Summary

In the scope of the globalization and the increase of international mobility migration becomes a central phenomenon and is at the heart of public and political debates. A glance at the German migration policies shows gradual steps towards a conceptualization of Germany as a country of immigration. Also the European Union looks for new strategies and concepts in dealing with immigration (European Commission 2007, 2009, 2013). Developing and emerging countries however fear on the one hand the outflow of human resources and hope on the other hand for emigrants’ investments and remittances. In the prevailing debate migration is still primarily seen as problem- and deficit-oriented and not as a potential of development. The influence of migrants and the importance of transnational family networks for the development of the countries of origin appear to be slowly receiving more attention and are insufficiently and merely quantitatively studied. This is where the present qualitative- interpretative study on the formation of transnational family networks and their impact on social change in Cuba comes in. Especially in such a isolated country as Cuba, in which migration and influences from abroad are restricted, the research on globalization processes is interesting. The study of the influence of the

diaspora and the transnational families on the developments of a late-socialist country is an approach, which offers theoretical findings on the role of transnational migration and traces actual socio-political transformations in Cuba.

The empirical findings of the present ethnographical and biographical study reveal, that besides economic and political “push- and pull”-factors family relations and delegations play a crucial role in the decision of migration. This finding shows the special and until recently seldom recognized importance of familial decision-making in migration trajectories. The empirical research results also show a connection between the migration trajectory, the maintenance of the transnational relationship and the way of living of the families of origin in Cuba. This connection does not only refer to the analyzed cases, but can in this structure also be found in other families and migration contexts and offers theoretical findings. Also a connection between a low social status in the country of settlement and intensified transnational ties (like the sending of remittances and the self-positioning) to the family of origin in Cuba can be observed.

Regarding the central research question on the role and influence of transnational families in the Cuban socio-political transformation the empirical results show, that Cubans, who have relatives abroad and receive remittances, profit from the socio-political and economic transformation and the dual currency system in Cuba. The current reforms under the presidency of Raúl Castro show a withdrawal of the state and hence make nongovernmental informal survival strategies necessary. Migrants’ remittances provide economic development assistance and fill the wholes of the reduced Cuban social welfare system. Nevertheless, the unequal access to convertible currency leads to an increasing inequality – and to a reversal of power hierarchies within the Cuban society. The remittances on the one hand enable Cuba’s economic survival and the legitimacy of the government; on the other hand they challenge the status quo. Thus, the social impacts of migration such as social inequality, the loss of socialist principles and brain drain undermine the system and trigger further social change.

The case studies show, that power is not only an integral part of intrafamilial relations but also of the relation between families with a relative abroad and Cubans, who do not have networks overseas. These relationships structured through power and Cuba’s national territorial discourse disprove the concept of transnational migrants as independent actors detached from structural restrictions, power structures and nation-state discourses (Bhabba 1994; Urry 2001). This demands a glance at power relations in the research on transnational migration. Also the findings challenge the assumption of transnational migration as a new phenomenon developed and sustained through global media flows, infrastructure and communication technologies. A glance at Cuba’s isolation, in which the state tries to minimize the influence from the outside and the access to the Internet is restricted, shows, that that the communication between Cuba and abroad is not as simultaneous.