Rationalities and Images Underlying Labour Migration from Bangladesh to Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Most studies of temporary labour migration use economic models or examine the economic rationales of migrants to explain why people are moving. Although in migration research new approaches and perspectives have been introduced lately, temporary labour migration, especially in the global South, is still defined primarily as purely economic in nature. This article concentrates on the migrants and their rationalities for migrating, their networks as well as their perceptions and interpretations of the situation they are confronted with abroad to argue that concentrating solely on economic aspects means to lose sight of the tremendous role images and myths about migration in general and receiving countries in particular do play. Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia, who have contributed to the remarkable economic success of the country during the last decades, are in the focus. The construction of the images and the role networks play within these processes will be analysed using data gathered from field research in both settings. Of special interest in this context is the construction of a Muslim brotherhood between the countries for an understanding of the migration flows. This article intends to broaden the current discussions on temporary labour migration by analysing not only the different motives and rationalities but relating them to the constructed images in the new spaces that temporary labour migration has constituted. This important link is missing so far in studies on this global phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades migration has become an important economic, political and social issue discussed – with considerable controversy – on various national and international political levels and in different academic scientific disciplines. This is not astonishing since more and more people are on the move worldwide and accordingly a growing body of literature deals with the different forms and patterns of migration, the cultural and social processes these movements initiate on different scales, and the constitution of new social spaces. New concepts such as transnational migration which show that migration can no longer be defined as a unidirectional movement from one place to another and one culture towards another are increasingly dominating discussions (see, Basch et al., 1997; Glick-Schiller et al., 1992;

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Vertovec, 1999; Pries, 1999, or Faist, 2000 and 2004). Thereby the political, social and economic ties and practices of diaspora or transnational migrant communities linking together host countries and countries of origin have been the focus, accompanied by controversies concerning the hegemony of nation states. Discussions on hybridity (see, Yuval-Davis, 1999, or Anthias, 2001) and metaphors like "flows", "borderland", "imaginations" and "journey" are furthermore used to highlight the fact that processes of globalization in general and migration in particular are changing the way people rationalize their experiences and give new meaning to them. These metaphors and new concepts indicate that the world can no longer be divided into fixed units of which each share a distinctive and exclusive culture or a definite approach to life (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 23). They are furthermore used to analyse the complexity of globalization processes, to discuss the reorganization and meaning of space and time and the notion of home, to criticize classical and mainstream concepts of integration or assimilation, and, most recently, to evaluate the possible development processes that could be initiated by migrants in their countries of origin, to name just a few fields.

Labour migrants who, especially in the global South are important new actors, but generally return after the fulfilment of their temporary work contracts abroad, are hardly ever included or looked at in the new approaches briefly summarized above. This can be explained by the theoretical orientation of these approaches towards how migrants move back and forth, rather than focussing on the motives for migration in the first place or negotiations and interactions with people at "home". Academics on the other hand who study such phenomena like temporary labour migration concentrate primarily on the motives and reasons for migration. Especially when South-South labour migration is dealt with, global economic restructuring is used as the broader framework to explain the movements; when economic rationales for migration are examined, government politics or programmes and actions to regulate migration flows are analysed or the impact of remittances, especially for economic development processes, is looked at. This is not to say that these aspects are not important in explaining the observed mobility worldwide or its possible outcomes. Nevertheless, the impression arises that temporary labour migrants are purely economic actors whose lived experiences, practices and activities can be explained without reference to developments and processes that are not exclusively economically determined. If the social and cultural transformations these movements initiate in the receiving countries or countries of origin are discussed they are often only looked at as a cause for conflicts and problems. New identity formations within this specific migration context are rarely analysed.

The aim of this paper is to shift the focus from structural aspects which still dominate the current literature on labour migration in the South to the migrants themselves and their perceptions and interpretations of the situations they are confronted with and are a part of. Therefore, a qualitative interpretive methodological and multisided approach was adopted based on grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The point of departure for the following argumentation and interpretation are in-depth narrative interviews with Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia, as well as returned migrant workers and their families in Bangladesh, used to understand their motives and rationales that led them to leave their country and to bring together everyday life experiences with global transformations (Burawoy, et al., 2000).[1] This will lead to the reconsideration of common stereotypes and the predominantly economic explanations about temporary labour migrants based on the everyday experiences that the temporary labour migrants, the new actors, have provided and articulated. The special focus of this paper is on the very complex motives of migrants and the networks and strategies they adopt. Thereby, the aim is not to combine the research perspectives I have briefly introduced above or to give an accurate representation of the situation of all Bangladeshi migrant worker in Malaysia or returned migrant worker, but instead to offer an impetus for new conceptualisations of labour migration in the current academic discussions discourses as well as on political levels. Thus, this

paper intends to offer starting points for a more comprehensive analysis of temporary labour migration in the South, a phenomena neglected in the current Western dominated academic discussions.

LABOUR MIGRATION IN ASIA: THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

In Asia, large-scale labour migration began in the 1970s. Whereas in the first phase migrants from India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines fulfilled the increased demand of labour in the countries of the Middle East, economic changes, the Gulf war in 1991, the increasing competition between labour sending countries as well as the uneven regional development in Asia resulted in a change of direction and differentiation of migration flows. In particular, the rapid economic developments in Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia were accompanied by a shortage of local workers due to demographic and educational changes in these countries. Migrant workers from less developed Asian countries responded, leading to an entrenchment of labour migration in most Asian economies and to new regional interdependences (Kim, 1995). In the receiving countries, migrant workers have contributed to a great extent to the economic success, though this is rarely mentioned when analysing the so-called "miracle economies" (Gonzalez, 1999: 143). During the last two decades countries such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines developed into labour sending countries, whereas others like Malaysia or Thailand are labour sending and receiving countries; only Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and Brunei can today be classified as purely labour receiving countries. In the literature, the correlation between economic development and international migration is generally highlighted to explain the changes of direction of the migration flows (see Pang, 1993; Hugo, 1998; Battistella, 2002, or Skeldon, 2001). Nevertheless, the correlation is not as clear as often stated, especially not in Asia, where long distance migration, uni-directional and permanent in nature, historically played an important role in the development and construction of societies and nation states long before economic growth and global restructuring took place (Kaur, 2004). Despite the important role migration has played historically, this region is nevertheless an excellent example of what Castles and Miller mean by the "Age of Migration" (1993) because of the quantitative growth of the number of people moving,[2] especially temporarily, and the discussions and changes these movements have initiated in the sending as well as in the receiving societies. In many of the receiving countries, nevertheless, discussions of any significance about the economic role of migrants and the social implications of migration for the host societies began only in the late 1990s. This correlates with more comprehensive policies on the issues of migrant workers and attempts of the receiving country governments to reduce the number of migrant workers due to the economic crises in 1997 and 1998 (Battistella, 2000), and the economic recessions and the changing political context after September 11th. Whereas migrant workers before these events were more or less invisible, they are increasingly constructed by locals, political parties and analysts as the cause of the economic, financial and social problems these countries are facing or may face, as well as a security concern (Pillai, 1999: 182). Migrants are used as scapegoats for all kind of troubles these societies have to cope with, although economic actors in the respective countries still point out the importance of migrant workers for the receiving economies and also pressure the governments to allow in-migration. Thus, in this context Silverman's (1998:18) statement that "many countries cannot live without foreign workers, but do not want to live with them" proves true.

Malaysia has one of Asia' largest foreign labour pools although the available data vary to a great extend. It is estimated that 10 per cent of Malaysia's population and about 27 per

cent of the country's labour force was made up of foreigners in 1998 (Aidcom, 1999: 2). The reasons why it is difficult to give a clear picture are manifold. On the one hand, the Malaysian government is reluctant to release their data. Many NGO representatives, especially in Malaysia, interviewed argued that the government does not want to display how the economy depends on foreign workers. On the other hand, Malaysia appears to have the largest number of undocumented migrants, which makes it even more difficult to calculate the number of workers who fulfil the labour shortage (International Organisation for Migration, 2005: 110). Nevertheless it can be stated that the majority of the migrants come from Indonesia, followed by Bangladesh and the Philippines (Pillai, 1999: 181). Also, the importance of migrant labour for specific sectors like the service and domestic sectors (Chin, 1998) as well as the manufacturing, construction and plantation sectors, is well documented (Karim et al., 1999; Pillai, 1999; Abdul-Aziz, 2001). Despite this dependency, labour migrants have become the targets of a number of accusations in the last decade leading to the construction of the "Others", the migrant workers (Dannecker, 2005a). In the media, in official statements by politicians and union leaders, as well as in a number of articles dealing with migration, migrants are blamed for an alleged increase in the crime rate and the moral degradation of society. Kassim (1997: 73) for example, with reference to unpublished police records, claims that criminal activities among immigrants has increased and that the crimes committed by them are "mainly violent crimes such as murder, attempted murder, armed gang robbery and rape". Also Karim et al., (1999: 69) in their study about migrants in Malaysia, argue that the criminal activities of migrants create considerable problems for the local authorities and internal security. Bangladeshi migrants in particular find life in Malaysia more difficult because of the media increasingly reporting criminal acts committed by them (Gurowitz, 2000: 868). Fights between local groups and migrants or between migrant groups and the police or even between migrant groups from different countries are discussed thoroughly in the media, making the potential danger of migrants a public issue. Often such reports are embedded in discussions about the deterioration of the health situation in Malaysia or a scenario of future ethnic riots between locals and migrants (Karim et al., 1999: 69).[3]

In public discourses as well as in some academic studies cited above, migrants are often treated as a homogenous group threatening the assumed unity of the society.[4] This of course is neither new nor specific to Malaysia. As stated by Aguilar (1999: 104), "Often – especially at times of economic contraction – migrants as a category may be branded palpably as sources of pollution or contamination that endanger the imaginary homogeneity and purity of the social body". Nevertheless, the Bangladeshi migrants who are subsumed by the society's stereotypical perception do come despite the decreasing economic possibilities and the daily problems they are increasingly confronted with. Why and how they rationalize and put meaning upon their journeys are thus important questions discussed in this paper. The aim here is not only to gain a deeper understanding of this particular case but, moreover, to develop important insights regarding temporary labour migration and its conceptualisation in general.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE MOVING: CHANGING THE PERSPECTIVE

In Malaysia, the Bangladeshi migrants are highly visible, especially in the urban areas. They work in petrol stations or construction sites or sell fast food in various chains. As elsewhere they are doing the kind of jobs local labour is unwilling to do (Pillai, 1999: 180). The Bangladeshi workers who are employed in the manufacturing, construction or plantation sectors near Kuala Lumpur stroll around on Sundays in the "Bangla Bazaar" (Sultana, 2007) doing

their weekly shopping or sitting together in public places or parks. Interactions with Bangladeshi migrant workers are part of the daily life of the majority of people in urban Malaysia. Despite the economic relevance migrants have in Malaysia and despite the regular interactions between migrants and locals the migrants are, as pointed out already, increasingly an object of suspicion at best. Informal and formal interviews in Malaysia reveal that one reason for the observable suspicion is a lack of knowledge about and interest in the Bangladeshi migrant workers. This indifference, which is not unique to public discourses in Malaysia but can be observed worldwide, increasingly characterizes the academic literature on migrants in Malaysia, especially studies concentrating on the economic or demographic aspects of in-migration. In nearly all studies available in Malaysia the reasons for migration are either not discussed at all or explained by reference to classical economic models and perspectives (see Kassim, 1987, 1999, or Karim et al., 1999). The focus is generally more on the effects of migration on Malaysia, its economy and multi-ethnic society, and not on the migrants and their experiences, working conditions, or histories. There is often an implicit or even explicit tendency to view migration and the migrants in a negative light not only in the academic literature but also by civil society actors. Malaysia's multi-ethnic and political framework, as well as the fact that the political space for civil society organizations is very restricted (Uhlin, 2002: 154; Dannecker and Spiegel, 2006: 298), might explain why non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Malaysia rarely take up the issue of migration or migrant's rights. With the exception of Tenaganita, an NGO working for migrants' rights, "potential allies for migrants are hard to come by" (Gurowitz, 2000: 870).

In Bangladesh, the discussions and discourses in the political arena on migration are also not very differentiated. The government is interested in exporting labour because the national economy relies on remittances sent by migrant workers. The objective of a new Ministry set up by the former government to deal with labour migration and diaspora is to negotiate future migration movements with foreign governments and employers (Waddington, 2003). The reason for migration or the treatment and experiences of their citizens abroad continues to raise little attention or provoke political intervention. There are nowadays quite a number of NGOs in Bangladesh dealing with the issue of migration and the problems migrants and their families face – but with some exceptions, these organizations tend to promote the classical stereotypes on migrants as being uneducated, unskilled and poor, and tend to concentrate their activities around health or economic issues exclusively. The increasing number of studies and publications on labour migration from Bangladesh reflect the increased economic importance of temporary labour migration for the country. Thereby, the role remittances may play for the development process is a new topic on the research agenda (see Bruyn de and Kuddus, 2005; Rahman, 2000; Hadi, 1999) reflecting the increased interest worldwide in the so-called migration and development nexus (Nyberg-Sorensen et al., 2002). This is not astonishing given the fact that at least one-fourth of the foreign exchange earnings are migrant workers' remittances with its contribution to the GDP at about 4 per cent (Murshid et al., 2001). However, the impact of remittances on households and communities is rather controversial. As this brief summary has shown in Bangladesh, in a manner similar to other countries, in the political arena as well as in academia, economic aspects of labour migration and development structure the discourses. Neither the experiences of moving from one area and from one culture to another nor the actors, their perceptions and rationalities, have entered the research agendas or the debates to any significant extent.[5]

Therefore, in the following, an actor-oriented approach is applied (Long, 1992 and 2000). Nayeem's narrative[6], which turned out to be typical for quite a number of Bangladeshi migrant workers interviewed in Malaysia, will serve as an extended case study for the analysis of motives as well as the perceptions of the migration process. Nayeem's life-history as well as sequences of interviews with other migrant workers, allows, as Long proposes, the

researcher "to grasp the large impact signalled by small things" (1992: xi). It furthermore serves to demonstrate interesting links between economic development, migration, religion, development and new forms of networking on a transnational level and allows for the discussion of some historical as well as social and economic features of the migration flows between Bangladesh and Malaysia.

Nayeem and his journey to Malaysia

Nayeem is a young Bangladeshi migrant worker employed in a garment factory in Kuala Lumpur. He comes from a southern district in Bangladesh and has been in Malaysia for six years already. He is very open and outspoken and willing to share his experiences. It turned out that he will have to leave soon because his contract and thus his permission to stay will expire. He is excited about going home but at the same time sad about his departure. "I will miss my Bangladeshi friends and colleagues and my work. At home there will be nothing to do". Nayeem is the eldest son of his parents. He has two younger brothers and three younger sisters of whom one is married already. Nayeem's father is a local mullah. The family also has some land, which they mortgage out to landless peasants. He attended school up to tenth grade. Asked how it came about that he went to Malaysia he reported that a lot of men from his rural neighbourhood went abroad. It was actually his father who, together with an uncle, came up with the idea that he should also try to work abroad. At first he said he was skeptical but after a while he started liking the idea. "I thought that while working abroad I can save money for a better life for me and my family. In my area there are no employment possibilities. I was also curious to see other places and other countries and to gain experiences which are not possible in Bangladesh". Malaysia is the preferred destination for people from his area, he said. "Returned migrants told us that Malaysia is a good and safe country with many possibilities to earn money. They also said that it is better to go to Malaysia than to the Middle East countries, because of the money, but also because Malaysia is a Muslim country but more free than Saudi or Kuwait". The agent whom his family approached confirmed that image and furthermore told them that Malaysia actively supports the in-migration of Bangladeshi men because they are hard working people. His father and his uncle raised the money for the trip. They sold some land and took a credit to pay the local agent who then organized the papers in Dhaka. They had to pay altogether 80.000 Bangladeshi Thaka.[7] The local agent is well known in the area and had been a migrant himself before becoming a broker or *dalal* between an agency in Dhaka and his rural area of origin. Nayeem had to travel to Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, only once for a medical assessment, which was also quite expensive, and to give an interview. The interview with a representative of the factory where he was supposed to work was very short. "He just looked at me, asked how old I am. I told him that I have no work experiences in the garment sector but he said that this is not necessary, that the work is very easy. My age and my appearance were more important. After the interview I had to wait for several weeks. We got nervous because we had already given most of the money. The local agent told us that it always takes that long but it was a very tense time, I was mainly sitting around waiting. Then one day the *dalal* came and told me that we will leave tomorrow. We went to Dhaka first and stayed there for some days. I got some information about the work place and how to behave in Malaysia. They told us that in Malaysia not only Muslims are living but other people as well. These other people have other cultures. Women might wear short skirts and that we should not stare at them otherwise we will get problems with the police. Then as a group of 30 Bangladeshis we left. We were all very nervous; none of us had sat in a plane before. After arrival we had to wait nearly 8 hours at the airport before the bus came to bring us to the hostel. The next day we had to line up and a supervisor decided in which section we would start working".

Most migrants interviewed came, like Nayeem, from rural areas in the south of Bangladesh. His village is around 200 kilometers away from Dhaka, the capital, where most of the recruitment agencies are located. Locals, who have been migrants themselves or have relatives working in agencies in Dhaka, are the brokers between people from rural areas who intend to migrate and the recruiting organizations. By bus it takes around seven hours to travel from Nayeem's village to Dhaka. The village is still without electricity or a regular reliable public transport system to the next district town.[8] Despite these characteristics many migrants from this area find their way to Malaysia. Migration from Bangladesh has a long history. Until the 1970s people from the north of Bangladesh were the most mobile, migrating overwhelmingly to Britain and settling there (Gardner, 1995; Siddiqui, 2001). The labour shortage in Middle Eastern countries not only led to a change of direction but to migration mainly from the southern districts. This change of direction was accompanied by a change of conditions. Migration to the Middle East took place on the basis of special job contracts for a limited amount of time; economic and social integration of migrants was not intended (Weiner,1982) and often not sought after. In Malaysia, the permission to stay is also tied to specific economic activities. Once the activity is completed migrants are supposed to return to their countries of origin (Siddiqui, 2002: 8). Social and economic rights equal to those of the citizens are not granted. In general migrants, like Nayeem, have to leave after six years.[9] This type of temporary migration is nowadays the dominant pattern of migration in Asia (International Organisation for Migration, 2005: 104), challenging not only the different actors involved in the host as well as in the sending societies but also changing the meaning of migration for the migrants and their families.

Because of this migration pattern, one comes across returned migrants nearly everywhere in the South of Bangladesh. A lot of returned migrants open small grocery, garment or telephone shops after coming back. In many households of migrant workers the symbols of success are present: a tin roof, a TV or other electronic goods. Thus it does not astonish that in these areas migration is associated with economic success and accompanied by an increase in status. The thoughts and images about migration became in these areas the most important elements for inventing a better future. Thus the argument for migration lies in the constructed reality of people's lives, their experiences and in the thoughts and images about migration produced and reproduced on a daily base. The imaginations are based on the presentation of the migration process by returned migrants and the respect they gain in their communities due to their experiences abroad.[10] The interviews with migrants in Malaysia as well as with their families back home show that neither the young men nor their respective families thought about other means to fulfil their economic and social responsibilities. Labour migration has become a semi-permanent form of engagement with the regional labour market (Aguilar, 1999: 121). Migration is so common in areas of the South, the imagination about life and success abroad so often reproduced, that all aspirations and hopes for a better future are projected on a temporary life outside Bangladesh. Change and development are not processes that seem to be possible in the village, the region, or in Bangladesh. Scrutinizing the decisionmaking process, the subject of the next section, reveals how deeply this imagination is rooted within the families and the communities independently of the real possibilities and treatment in the receiving countries. One definitely can speak in this context of a "culture of migration", as Kandel and Massey (2002) in their study of Mexican migration to the United States.

THE COMPLEX AND INTANGIBLE MOTIVES FOR MIGRATION

The uneven economic development in Asia since the 1970s in general and between Bangladesh and Malaysia in particular constitutes the general framework of which the migration

flows are part. Nevertheless to focus exclusively on economic disparities and to assume that economic rationales can sufficiently explain why people are crossing borders is not a sufficient explanation as will be shown. Instead, focusing on the actors allows for the examination of the symbolic aspects accompanying the movements and the ways migrant workers and their families rationalize their decisions and journeys.

The long distance migration between Bangladesh and Malaysia started in greater numbers only from the mid-1980s on, when the Malaysian government opened the manufacturing sector to migrant labour. Migrants from Indonesia and the Philippines came even before the labour shortage occurred due to Malaysia's location and its historical and cultural affinities with its neighbours (Pillai, 1999). But neither the migration from Indonesia or the Philippines before the economic development nor the migration of Bangladeshi migrants in recent years can be explained by theoretical models or approaches focusing explicitly on geographical differences in supply and demand for labour. The fact that neither the recruitment breaks for Bangladeshi migrants such as in 1997, 2001 or 2002[11] nor deportations led to a decreasing desire to migrate to Malaysia proves the argument. The circumstances that no decline in numbers can be observed but rather in-migration without documents, according to NGOs and their representatives interviewed, shows a change of the migration pattern but not a reorientation concerning the preferred destination. In this context organizations and networks trafficking people between Asian countries were and are mushrooming (Chabaké and Armando, 2000: 133). The Bangladesh Human Rights Network (2003) as well as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2005) estimate that around one million Bangladeshis are working outside Bangladesh without proper documents.[12] This well known phenomena, namely that people are moving despite the lack of economic opportunities or are not moving despite economic possibilities abroad, can hardly be explained by reference to a push and pull framework. But despite criticism as articulated for example in network approaches (Massey et al., 1987, or Faist, 1997) or approaches focusing on cultural, political or social factors (Zolberg, 1989) the push and pull model is still used in many studies explaining temporary labour migration.

In these studies temporary labour migration in particular is still defined as the result of a collective and calculated family or household strategy within the given structures, an argument developed in the new economics of labour migration approach (Stark, 1991). Thus the assumption that migration households try to reduce the risk of market failure prevails. Nayeem's description of the motives for migration seems to support this line of argumentation. The male members of his family actually decided about his migration as he is the eldest son of the family (Rahman and Fee, 2005). It can be argued that his family invested in his migration as the expected profit from such investment is higher than investments in other sectors. This pattern, namely that the decision to migrate derived out of complex family, group or network structures, which supports the argument mentioned above, was found in nearly all cases studied (90%). Part of the capital needed was generally provided either by the family members through, for example, the selling of land or savings and/or a loan was taken. The fact that almost all migrants and their families interviewed had either access to credit facilities, at least at the local credit markets, or land to sell indicates that they do not belong to the poorest of the poor regardless of whether they entered Malaysia as documented or undocumented migrants (see Hadi, 1999: 4; Rahman and Fee, 2005: 68).[13] This finding supports an argument often put forward in the literature on migration that it is a myth to assume that the poorest of the poor move (Skeldon, 1997; Yun, 2000). Furthermore two third of the migrants interviewed had a relatively high educational background, which means that they finished at least secondary school. In the context of Bangladesh where UNESCO estimated that in 2005, 58 per cent of the population was still illiterate, the finding suggests that migrants tend to be more educated than the national aggregate.

At the first instance Nayeem's narrative seems to underline the still dominant explanations for temporary labour migration, namely that economic calculations are the main reason why people like Nayeem are leaving. A closer look nevertheless shows that the economic rationale which is applied to explain the movements is deeply interwoven with imaginations, non-material as well as material. The argument that the calculations of utility by households concerning, for example, the financial benefit migration will bring, as employed in the literature, ignores the fact that the awareness space as well as the room for manoeuvre of the households is limited as well as the role images and myths play. Because there is a lack of information about the chances of employment abroad and the possible income, as the interviews reveal, strategizing must be questioned. Neither the migrants nor their families had any concrete information about the demand for labour in Malaysia, the political framework, nor the earning and working conditions. Besides the images about migration in general and the myths about Malaysia in particular all migrants stated that the only detailed information they received before leaving concentrated around topics of behaviour abroad and often a short training session on sewing machines, for example.

This is not surprising since migrants' and their families' main sources of information are former migrants or representatives of recruitment agencies, who only give selective information serving their interests. Returned migrants will rarely talk about the variety of problems they faced abroad because only a success story will enhance their and their families' status and reputation. Whereas in Malaysia none of the migrants interviewed presented his stay as a success financially or personally, they all stated that they will not recount their experiences at home, especially not the financial aspects or the treatment they went through. One migrant said, "I cannot disappoint my family or my neighbours. I will not tell them how people treated me or that I earned not nearly as much as promised because that would mean that I was not able to fulfil my duty abroad successfully". Not to be successful is not an option in a country where migration is perceived as the only way out and the only possibility to improve the economic and social situation of the family and where exploitation or failure abroad are attributed to the bad luck or the carelessness of the migrant himself (see also Aguilar, 1999: 110). Returned migrants therefore normally construct their time abroad in bright colours independently of their experiences or the financial loss migration meant after paying back the loans taken. Regardless of the experiences and the social and economic realities the migrants are confronted with abroad, a social behaviour, namely a specific way to narrate the migration experiences, accompanies migration and return, leading to the reproduction of the myth of migration.

Moreover feminist critiques of the concept of the household have demonstrated for quite some time that households are not homogenous, rational and calculating units and the main production and reproduction entities but are stratified by gender and generation with conflating interests and furthermore embedded in different networks (see Folbre, 1986; Elson, 1991; Lachenmann, 1997, 2001). Despite these conceptual problems the household remains in many studies dealing with temporary labour migration the main unit of data collection and interpretation, especially when explaining the reasons for migration or the development processes which might occur due to migration in general (Goss and Linquist, 1995: 328), Bangladesh in particular (Siddiqui and Abrar, 2001).

In Nayeem's case the interest of the male household members to increase income by sending a younger male member abroad gave rise to his curiosity to see new places, although he was not involved in the decision making at first. But not in all cases do the desires and needs of the young men coincide with collective interests. Several migrants explained that they were afraid to leave, that they would have preferred to stay but that they were obliged to obey their fathers or elder male family members. Jakir, a migrant working in a sweatshop in Kuala Lumpur without proper documents, said that he would like to go home as soon as possible.

"My father forced me to go to Malaysia. Since I am here I am afraid every day especially when I go out. I told my father on the phone how the situation is but he says I should stay, not tell anybody, and try to earn money for the family". Manu explained that the neighbour's son went abroad and that his parents bought a car from the money he sent. This was the main reason why his parents send him abroad "…they wanted to have a car as well, I was not eager to go". Here the material desire of some members of the family led to his migration. These young migrants left Bangladesh because of the social pressure from the side of their families.

Thus, in taking up the argument that a culture of migration does exist in the areas studied, this does not imply that all people desire migration or that the ones who leave are the ones who were involved in the decision making process, as the household approaches argue. There are of course also examples where the prospects of adventure lead to migration as in the case of Munir who explained that "…from the newspaper and former migrants I got the impression that life in foreign countries is very nice and that the people are good. There is enough food and work. Therefore I wanted to leave. My family did not like the idea. They wanted me to stay and get married. I had to struggle, borrow the money from friends and neighbours. After everything was organized they had to agree". The possibility of escape from their families and the embodied power structures as well as from the responsibilities which are part of their position within the family setting are other explanations given by quite a number of migrants for the desire to leave. The concept of household strategies is not able to explain the different rationalities, motivations and interests within the so-called household unit. A households is not, as Folbre pointed out (1986: 5), an individual by another name. There are conflicting interests, power relations and negotiations between household members. In the case of the male Bangladeshi migrants it can be argued that power relations between the different generations are one of the reasons why the young men are leaving. Whereas some migrants had hardly any say in the negotiation processes concerning possible migration others strategize to get the permission to migrate.[14]

As this discussion shows images produced and reproduced are leading to constructions of the world abroad by the different actors involved which do play a decisive role in explaining decision making processes concerning temporary labour migration. No doubt part of the construction is closely connected with the hope of economic improvement but not exclusively as the empirical material shows. In rural Bangladesh symbols of a successful migration can be found everywhere, like a new tin roof, TVs or telephone shops equipped with a fax machine and a cordless phone as well as posters displaying foreign countries landmarks. But the world abroad is not only presented as a place providing economic opportunities or goods. The world abroad is furthermore fabricated as politically stable, as a place where people live in nice houses, treat each other with respect and where politicians are not corrupt. Security economically, politically as well as socially was the main aspect mentioned by the interviewees when the world abroad was described. The narrative–based accounts of strips of reality (see Appadurai, 1990: 299) by returned migrants offer the elements which form the scripts of the imagined lives abroad. Although in rural areas of Bangladesh the distribution of "global" information through newspapers, television and movies is only beginning to develop, nevertheless the images created by these media reach more and more households and correspond with the narratives of the returned migrants and thus are part of the construction of imagined worlds as are the material goods presented by migrant families. Whereas the families and communities imagine the life abroad, the migrants, in the case of this study the young men, are the ones who have to cope with the realities of having to move. But the realities they are confronted with are not communicated, neither through the narratives of the returned migrants nor through the networks. This is one reason why migration dynamics will not stop although the political and economic framework is changing as in

Malaysia. Economic explanations focusing on individuals as rational economic actors or on household exclusively without including the desires, myths, and symbols, as done for example by Kandel and Massey (2002), will only be able to give a limited insight into this global phenomenon.

NETWORKING AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MUSLIM BROTHER COUNTRY

Networks between Bangladesh and Malaysia are on one hand an important reason for the continuous flow of Bangladeshi migrants to Malaysia. In sociology as well as in anthropology it has since long been recognized that social networks play an important role for the likelihood of migration. Social networks are sets of relations that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin (Massey et al., 1987; Boyd, 1989). Networks not only decrease the risks and costs of migration but are also important for the direction of migration flows. The network approaches do not concentrate on individual actors or households or the macro-economic framework exclusively but instead on the mechanisms which link together spatially distant places. These approaches allow for the incorporation of the individual migrants as well as the different social units into a single analytical framework. Lomnitz (1988) and Massey et al. (1987) were the first to highlight the relevance of networks for migration decisions as well as for the direction of migration flows. As also this analysis so far has shown networks provide potential migrants with information, especially about possible destinations, sometimes with funds for transportation and contacts with agents and agencies (Gurak and Caces, 1992). Abroad they give assistance in form of housing or employment and mediate between the receiving society and the ''newcomers''. Furthermore networks as well as the strategies developed within networks combat insecurity which is always part of the migration process. But on the other hand the social networks also constitute spaces for the construction and the circulation of images, beliefs and myths as will be shown in the following. In the case studied the construction of a Muslim brotherhood between the two countries plays a distinctive role and is floating through the networks. Throughout the migration process and through the networks this construction is reproduced and transferred ''home'' and turned out to be of special importance for the migrants to rationalize their experiences.

As mentioned already the migration between Bangladesh and Malaysia started only in the 1980s leading not only to a mushrooming of agencies organizing the migration process but furthermore the development of transnational networks linking together the spatially distant places Bangladesh and Malaysia. For the Bangladeshi workers who came from the late 1990s onwards not only were the wages, higher than in the Middle East countries, an incentive to migrate to Malaysia, but also the special agreement concerning migration between Bangladesh and Malaysia. Several sources in Malaysia argued that at that time the government was aiming to attract Bangladeshi workers so as to prevent an influx of Filipinos and thus to increase the number of Muslim migrants. This is a good example of demography being an important issue in a multi-ethnic society. The memorandum of understanding, which both countries agreed to in 1994, was presented by the Bangladeshi government and in Bangladeshi newspapers as part of the ''Muslim brotherhood'' between the two countries (Rudnick, 1996). The term was and is used not to refer to a specific group calling for an Islamic political and social system but to highlight the transnational solidarity between the two countries as part of the Umma, the worldwide community of Muslims. Even though the Malaysian

government froze the agreement in 1995 Bangladeshi recruitment agencies and the Bangladeshi government still continue to construct a special relationship between the countries based on religious grounds.[15] The impression that Bangladeshi migrants are welcomed in Malaysia as workers because of the Muslim brotherhood between the countries is transported through the social networks and therefore widely spread in Bangladesh, determining the direction of movements, such as in Nayeem's case.

Nayeem highlights the fact that returned migrants described Malaysia as a safe country, a Muslim country in need of foreign workers. Another migrant said during an interview: "I came to Malaysia since people in my area said that Malaysian people like Bangladeshis because they are hard working and good Muslims". This interview sequence reveals that social networks not only connect different places, provide funds for transportation and assist people who are planning to migrate or for migrants who have newly arrived in Malaysia, but lead to the constitution of new spaces where images are constructed and transported. For the families planning a migration according to these images Malaysia is a safe place to go to because their sons will be accepted as Muslim brothers.

The experiences the migrants narrated in Malaysia nevertheless show that they are not treated as Muslim brothers by the Malays, neither at their workplaces nor outside and good personal relations are more the exception than the rule. They are not allowed to marry Malaysian women and even in the mosques they do not really feel welcome. Despite this the Bangladeshi migrants do not reconstruct the "Brother Country" myth or criticize openly Malaysia or Malay people. Therefore the construction is still filled with hopes and fantasies in Bangladesh but empty of all meaning in Malaysia, as the interviews reveal. Only one migrant, Opu, said "The Malay think we are bad because we are from a poor country. In their understanding we are not Muslims. There is nothing like Muslim brotherhood." Others were much more careful stating for example "We do not have enough time to make relations with Malays. They just want to eat and you have to pay" or "It is better to be separated. The Malays have another culture thus it is better when we are between us and they between them". Nabi concluded the interview with the following quote: "Malay people do not give us any problems but they are also not friendly. If you have an accident on the road they will not help you, they will leave immediately. That is how it is here in Malaysia". To be very reluctant to criticize Malay people or Malaysia is one of the most expressive modes of the migration experience embedded in the construction of the "Brother Country" and the meaning this special relationship has for the aspirations and future hopes of people in Bangladesh. Only in the migrant communities in Malaysia the difficulties and discrepancies between the expectations and the realities the migrants are confronted with is discussed, but these discussions are hardly ever communicated back home.

That Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country is a significant factor in this constructed image but not widely spread in Bangladesh.[16] Most of the migrants interviewed explained that only before leaving they were told, especially by representatives of the agencies, that they might be confronted with situations which are not "typical" for Muslim countries, as in Nayeem's case. Other migrants were surprised that the representatives of the Malaysian factories interviewing them in Dhaka were Chinese. Nabi said, "When I entered the room in the agency to give the interview I was astonished to see a Chinese woman sitting there. Only before the interview a neighbour, a former migrant, told me that most of the Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia are working in factories owned by Chinese". Despite the fact that most of the Bangladeshi migrant workers interviewed in Malaysia worked in factories or companies owned by Chinese Malaysians and felt accepted as hard working people by their Chinese superiors, this aspect of employment is not floating through the networks since it does not correspond with the image of Malaysia as a Muslim brotherhood country.

In Malaysia most Bangladeshi migrant workers faced problems with Indian Malaysians. For the Bangladeshi migrant workers the Indians are a threat to their safety – they are afraid of being blackmailed or insulted. Thus they do not go out alone and prefer to be in a group. They also avoid certain public places or moving around late at night. Often the migrants put forward the view that Malaysia, as a Muslim country, is safe but that the local Indians, who for the Bangladeshis are not Malaysians but migrants, initiate problems because they are jealous. Opinions such as, "They do not like us because the Malay people appreciate us since we are Muslim and hard working people" were often stated. The Indians are held responsible for many of the problems the Bangladeshi migrants are facing, especially for the bad reputation they have in Malaysia lately and the new politics concerning labour migration. They are perceived as a threat to the constructed Muslim brotherhood between Malaysia and Bangladesh.

The tensions between Bangladeshi migrants and the local Indians have their roots in the specific context in Malaysia and in the difficult relationship between India and Bangladesh lately. Within the multi-ethnic setting in Malaysia the local Indians have had, due to their specific history of immigration as well as their numerical insignificance, relatively limited political and economic influence both before and after independence (Kaur, 2000: 201). The growing numbers of labour migrants since the 1980s as well as the economic downturns in the 1990s have undeniably led to fears about their economic, political and social status within the country. The competition for jobs and housing mainly takes place between the migrants, particularly the Bangladeshi migrants, and the local Indians. It was argued by union representatives for example that migrant workers, earning lower wages than local workers[17], are getting the jobs while locals face unemployment.[18] Furthermore they were made responsible for the deterioration of working conditions. The large concentration of foreign workers in the urban areas and their economic activities puts them in direct competition with the local poor in particular, who are very often local Indians.

The relations between India and Bangladesh might also add to the tensions that can be observed. Religion, historical experiences and the constant flows of Bangladeshis to India are factors characterizing the relationship between India and Bangladesh since India's partition in 1947 and Bangladesh liberation from Pakistan in 1971. Furthermore Bangladesh's "confused identity as Bengali or Islamic" (Gosh, 1993: 697) influences and is influenced by its relation to India. Since independence, the search for a national identity has dominated the political sphere in Bangladesh. Secularism and cultural aspects of the national identity were put forward in the first years of independence. Since the late 1980s, however, the Islamic lobby gains political influence by trying to establish a difference from India, especially from the Hindu Bengalis, to push Bangladesh's identity as an Islamic state (see Kabeer, 1991; Gosh, 1993; Hours, 1995; Hossain, 2006). In this process a closer alignment with other Muslims countries is aspired to. The fact that most migrants interviewed highlighted the Muslim brotherhood between Malaysia and Bangladesh and furthermore stated their support for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party or the Jamaat-i-Islami party, which both promotes the Islamisation of the society and culture, shows that the discourses about national identity have migrated as well. For the migrants these political parties try to establish good relations with other Muslims states thereby influencing, from their point of view, their migration possibilities and experiences. Thus the tensions between Bengali and Islamic definitions of national identity, which involve in policy terms the additional question of friendliness or unfriendliness with India (Gosh, 1993: 699) may, in addition to the competition on the labour market, also cause the problems between these two groups. Despite the difficult relationship between local Indians and Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia the meta-narrative in Bangladesh as well as in the Bangladeshi communities is nevertheless that Malaysia is a safe country for Bangladeshi workers because of the Muslim brotherhood.

Nonetheless the empirical data reveals that in recent years the awareness in Bangladesh about potential 'dangers' migrants may be confronted with in Malaysia increases. But interestingly the potential dangers are not those of getting betrayed by agencies, fights with local Indians, a shortage of available employment possibilities or deportations as the migrants interviewed in Malaysia highlighted.[19] The fact that migrants are getting involved with local women is a danger discussed in Bangladesh as well as in the migrant community in Malaysia. Quite a number of migrants explained that they went home in between their stay abroad to get married despite the fact that they are not allowed to take their wives with them.[20] Asked why they spent so much money to go back to get married they stated that their families pressured them. It seems that the fact that Bangladeshi migrant workers have the reputation of "courting" local women and that some of them are even getting involved with local or migrant women flows through the networks. Families arrange marriages back home to minimize the risk that their sons are getting in an unwanted relationship which will negatively influence their and their family's reputation. The Bangladeshi workers are very much aware that relations with women abroad are unacceptable, especially for their families. Therefore almost no one dares to talk about this issue or their own experiences. The workers know that they have the reputation of courting local women but the majority of the interviewed workers stated that this reputation does not reflect their behaviour. Only some workers talked openly about relationships with local women but pointed out that their families will never accept a foreign daughter-in-law regardless of whether she is Muslim or not. Shabu, for example, said that his family wants him to come back to get married. But he has a girlfriend, a Malay garment worker from another factory. He said that he wants to stay and marry her. "My parents will not talk with us, I know, but what else can I do". Nayeem has a relationship with a young Malay colleague. Although the other workers knew about this relationship they tried to avoid the issue and felt embarrassed when Nayeem spoke openly about his friendship. One reason why he was reluctant to go home was that he knew that his parents already had arranged a marriage. "Probably some returned migrants told my parents about my relationship and so everything is arranged and I will have to marry as soon as I come back".[21] Most of the workers interviewed who travelled home in between to get married said that their parents were worried about the rumours concerning the relations between migrant workers and women in Malaysia.

The constructed Muslim brotherhood is an image which floats through the networks and one of the reasons why Malaysia has been the preferred destination for Bangladeshi temporary labour migrants from the 1990s onward. Even though the experiences of the migrants in Malaysia are not in accordance with the beliefs and hopes filling this construction is still getting reproduced in Malaysia as well as in Bangladesh. Whereas the majority of migrants need this construction to rationalize their interactions and experiences abroad others are actively involved in the construction of the image to develop their own agenda such as for example to enjoy a certain freedom from the expectations of their families.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the paper was to analyse the different dimensions and aspects of labour migration from Bangladesh to Malaysia. To be sure the migration process between these two countries occurs within a complex system of formal and informal institutions and networks and is structured by economic as well as political dimensions. Nevertheless, the theoretical contributions focusing on economic or political frameworks or economic rationalities can deliver only in very abstract terms the roots for the observable mobility. The causes for migration are, as

the empirical data has shown, complex and deeply rooted in images and myths constructed about the world abroad. The constructions on which the images are based are not exclusively economic but also include non-material dimensions. In the case studied the construction of a Muslim brotherhood between the two countries plays a significant role for the observed migration flows between Bangladesh and Malaysia. Networks and the constitution of new spaces are crucial for the production and reproduction of the construction and leads to a shared cultural perception of migration or a culture of migration. At the same time, the image constructed is necessary for the migrants to rationalize their experiences and legitimise their and their families' endeavour. Thereby, especially in the case of the migrant workers, new identity formations like the mobilization of religious identities develop and get negotiated leading to social and cultural transformations at home and abroad.

The constructions and the rationales for migration that have been discussed in this paper are of course difficult to conceptualise. They are hard to define, difficult to measure and make generalizations complicated. In the case of labour migration in the global South newer approaches are neither developed nor applied and theoretical reasoning on the basis of economic models and explanations continues to dominate the discussions in this area. Nevertheless, in the context of diaspora communities and transnational migrant communities, new concepts and approaches have emerged that attempt to include the diverse social, historical and cultural processes these movement were and are part of as well as the broad variety of activities and practices which have changed social relations and have led to the constitution of new spaces. This paper is meant as a call for a better integration of theory and empirical research focusing on the actors, the labour migrants in the South. Such a perspective reveals that not only the economic development and labour shortages as experienced by Malaysia in the last three decades are part of our globalizing world but also the images and myths which cause and accompany the observed movements from Bangladesh.

NOTES

1. The paper is based on primary data gathered from fieldwork in Malaysia, mainly Kula Lumpur, and Bangladesh over three months in each place. Multiple qualitative methods and strategies were used, as for example in-depth and informal interviews and participant observations. Besides interviews with migrant workers, interviews with representatives of unions, NGOs, recruitment agencies and other organizations and resource persons working in the area of migration were conducted accompanied by the analysis of secondary data. For example press extracts were analysed since they constitute an important medium in which news and views about migrant workers are spread. Altogether around 80 in-depth interviews with male as well as female migrant workers and returned migrants were conducted as well as informal interviews with migrant workers' families, especially in Bangladesh. In Kuala Lumpur, the first phase of the fieldwork, the migrant workers were selected through theoretical sampling. Since the aim was to focus, at least at the beginning, on the garment sector, due to the previous work of the author, different sites were identified. Nevertheless it turned out that it was not possible to map factories with a high amount of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore one factory was chosen as a starting point. Through the interviews with the workers, at their homes after work or on weekends, and through their networks contacts to other workers in the same area but at different work places were established. Especially in Malaysia it took some time and frequent visits to develop a relationship which allowed in-depth interviews and group interviews since the migrants were very careful with whom to share their experiences. For the interviews with the workers as well as for the interviews with migration 'experts' different semi-structured questionnaires were used. The interviews in Bangladesh took place mainly in the rural area in the South, where most of the workers interviewed in Malaysia came from. Some of the workers returned meanwhile, thus they were interviewed again.

Other workers interviewed in Malaysia gave me their addresses in Bangladesh and allowed me to visit their villages to talk either to their families or former migrant workers. The interpretation of the data gathered took place with ATLAS/ti.

2. The data about the number of migrants in Asia vary to a great extend and covers in most of the cases only the officially recorded flows available. Wickramasekera (2002: 14) with references to International Labour Organisation (IOM) sources estimates that 1997 alone 6.5 million foreign workers were in Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Battistella (2002: 406) speaks of an increase in migration in Asia of 40 per cent in the 1990s as does the IOM (2005).

3. To change the public opinion of migrants in Malaysia is definitely difficult to achieve. Nevertheless a systematic migration policy or temporary migrant workers programmes would be the first step to reduce the fear that all foreign workers will turn into permanents, take away possible jobs or occupy all segments of the labour market. Furthermore organisations are needed to lobby the interests and rights of migrants. Whereas in other countries organisations do exist taking up migration issues such advocacy groups can be hardly find in Malaysia yet (an exception is Tanaganita). As long as there are no political or public forces questioning the meta-narrative on migrants neither the public perception of migrants in general will change nor will the role they were and are playing in the economic development of the country be appreciated.

4. Besides the studies cited so far there are of course studies analyzing the historical as well as the current migration processes and their interacting with nation building processes and identity formations in Malaysia (see for example Spaan, et al., 2002; Yun, 2000, or Dannecker, 2005a). Nevertheless in Malaysia such issues are hardly ever discussed or on the "local" research agenda because taking up such issues means also discuss the highly politicized issues of ethnicity and religion.

5. There are exceptions as the studies conducted by Siddiqui (2001, 2002) on female Bangladeshi migrants, Abdullah's study (2005) on Bangladeshi migrant workers in Singapore, Kabeer's (2000) research of female Bangladeshi home workers in London, Gardner's (1995) study on the effects of overseas migration for the area of origin or Eade's (1997a and 1997b) articles on Bangladeshis in London. Nevertheless most of the studies deal with the Bangladeshi diaspora communities and not with temporary labour migrants.

6. I have edited and shortened the life-history and reduced the spoken word to a literary form hoping that it has remained as far as possible true to my source. Nayeem was one of the migrants whom I met several times in Malaysia as well as in Bangladesh.

7. 80.000 Bangladeshi Thaka are approximately 5.360 Malaysian Ringgit. The sum here is roughly equivalent to US$ 1.410.

8. Here I refer to observations made during the second phase of the empirical research in Bangladesh from January to April 2002. Interviews with returned migrants, male and female, were conducted. Additionally some migrants I interviewed in Malaysia and who went home in between were interviewed again.

9. In 2001, the Malaysian government reduced the duration of stays from six or seven years to three years. Employers argued that this time frame is too short for providing training and skills and thus they declared that from an economic point of view the new rule is not appropriate. The migrants interviewed were angry and disappointed since it takes them on average two years to pay the recruitment costs back.

10. In the case of female migrants the situation is different. Female migration is a controversial issue controversially in Bangladesh. Islamic leaders and political actors regularly raise their voices against women leaving the country without male guardians. It is argued that women not only lose their *izzat* (honour) due to their movements but that also the families' public position will suffer. Therefore the families of female migrants often try to hide the migration of their daughters or wives. Symbols of success are hardly ever found in households of female migrants. Female migration challenges the social construction of womanhood and gender relations and is therefore not perceived as a success as in the case of the male migrants. This counts for international as well as for rural urban migration (Dannecker, 2002).

11. In 1997 due to the economic crisis the Malaysian government announced that all migrant labour might be forced to leave by the following year (Pillai, 1999: 189). In 1998 an amnesty was granted but continually extended. While some migrants were indeed deported new migrants were recruited for the plantation and manufacturing sector (Gurowitz, 2000: 867). In 2001 the government

announced that they will stop the in-migration of Bangladeshi migrants and that contracts of Bangladeshi migrants already staying and working in Malaysia will not being extended (New Sunday Time, 2001: 1). In 2002, an amnesty for so-called illegal migrants and tough penalties for migrants and employers were announced leading to the departure of many migrants especially from Indonesia and Bangladesh to avoid paying heavy fines.

12. Examples are women and children who have to work in the sex industries in India, Pakistan or the Middle East, seasonal rural labourers crossing the border to India during harvest times or labour migrants entering receiving countries like Malaysia without documents.

13. If the migration is not successful, these better off families nevertheless face downward mobility. Especially when the agencies are corrupt or the income in the receiving countries is much lower than promised the families end up deeply in debt.

14. In case of female migrants this was the dominate pattern. Whereas all women interviewed had a desire to migrate the families were in most of the not supporting the migration according to the gender order restricting female mobility (Dannecker, 2005b).

15. Several times I met groups of Bangladeshi migrants at the airport in Dhaka having the address of an agency printed on the back and ''Malaysian and Bangladesh Muslim Brotherhood'' on the front of the T-shirts they were wearing.

16. According to government statistics the Malays constitute 57.8 per cent of the population, followed by Chinese (24.9%) and Indians (7.0%) others while non-citizens constitute 7.2 per cent (Embong, 2000: 9).

17. It was not possible to get any clear picture about the differences in payment. For Singapore Wong (2000: 89) found out that ''(...) the daily wage level for Singaporean and Malaysian workers in the construction industry is double that of foreign workers''.

18. There are quotas nevertheless forcing national and multinational companies to employ a certain number of local workers.

19. See for this discussion Dannecker (2005a).

20. The migration policy in Malaysia does not allow unskilled and semiskilled migrants bringing their families. The reason why a number of young Bangladeshi men and women are getting involved with locals can be identified as a by-product of this policy.

21. Three months after his return he got married to a young woman from the neighbourhood. His parents arranged this marriage while he was still abroad.

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