THE MEANINGS AND THE RATIONALITIES UNDERLYING LABOR MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH TO MALAYSIA

Petra Dannecker

Abstract

This paper deals with Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia, who have contributed to the remarkable economic success of the country during the last decades. Nevertheless due to economic restructuring and the economic downturns migrants are more and more treated as scapegoats for all kinds of problems Malaysia is facing. So far the forms and patterns as well as the social processes the movement of Bangladeshi migrants has initiated is discussed in the literature. The migrants themselves, their perceptions and interpretations of the situation they are confronted with as well as their rationalities for migrating to Malaysia have been given less attention to. This paper is an attempt to bring the migrants, their motives and rationalities into the discussion hoping that this will lead to new considerations of common stereotypes about migration, migrants and their community.

About the author:

Dr. Petra Dannecker is a lecturer at the Faculty of Sociology at Bielefeld University, Germany. She did her M.A. from Konstanz University where she studied Political Science, Sociology and Literature. Her PhD, "Between Conformity and Resistance: Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh" was completed in 1998 at Bielefeld University. Currently she is conducting a research project on Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia and the development and construction of new transnational social spaces. Her research interest includes gender, feminization of labor, globalization, industrialization and migration.

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I INTRODUCTION

In times of globalization international migration has become an important economic, political and social issue controversially discussed on various national and international political levels and in different scientific disciplines. This is not astonishing since worldwide more and more people are on the move. Although migration is as old as our historical memory and has since then affected nearly all regions in the world some new dimensions are characterizing the migration movements in the last decades. Besides the quantitative growth of migrants also the destinations and the areas of origin diversified. Furthermore, as Castles and Miller pointed out in 1993, a feminization as well as a differentiation of migration patterns can be observed. The diversification and differentiation of migration movements is reflected in academic writing.

A growing body of literature deals with the different forms and patterns of migration in different areas and the cultural and social processes these movements are initiating. Within this process classical theories of migration are getting questioned, for example the classical push and pull models or concepts of multiculturalism that deal with the processes migration movements initiate in the host societies. New concepts like for example transnational migration or discourses on hybridity are gaining ground. Metaphors like 'flows', 'borderland', 'imaginations' and 'journey' are used to highlight that processes of globalization in general and migration in particular are changing the way people rationalize their experiences and give new meanings to them. These metaphors and new concepts also 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). Furthermore the organization and meaning of space and time and their routinization undergo changes in different disciplines, as does the notion of home.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to these discourses and discussions with an empirical study on Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia. The intention is to shift the focus from structural aspects, which are of course important and still dominate the current literature on migration, to the migrants themselves, their perceptions and interpretations of the situation they are confronted with and part of. Therefore the narratives of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia[1] will be analyzed to learn more about the motives and rationalities (Schuetz 1971) which made them to leave their country. This will hopefully lead to new reconsiderations of

common stereotypes about migration, migrants and their communities and add to the reflections on theoretical concepts and approaches trying to explain why people move.

II LABOR MIGRATION IN ASIA: THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

In Asia labor migration on a big scale started as early as in the 1970s. Mainly migrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippines fulfilled the increased demand of labor in the countries of the Middle East. Economic and social integration of the migrants was not intended as the fixed term contracts for a limited time reveal (Weiner 1982). Economic changes, the Gulf war in 1991 and the increasing competition between labor sending countries as well as the uneven regional development in Asia resulted in a change of direction and diversification of migration flows. The rapid economic development in Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia was accompanied by a shortage of local workers due to demographic and educational changes in these countries.

Migrant workers from less developed Asian countries responded. Thus migrant workers have, as pointed out by Gonzalez (1999, 143), contributed to a great extend to the economic success of these countries although this is hardly ever mentioned when analyzing the so-called "miracle economies". Thus during the last two decades some countries developed into labor sending countries, like Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka or the Philippines, whereas other are labor sending and receiving countries, like Malaysia or Thailand, while only Singapore, Taiwan and Brunei can be classified as pure labor 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; Battistella 2002). Nevertheless the correlation is not as clear as often stated, especially not in Asia, where long distance migration historically played an important role in the development and construction of societies and nation states long before economic growth and global restructuring took place.

Despite the important role migration has played historically, this region is an excellent example of what Castles and Miller describe as the "Age of Migration" (1993) because of the quantitative growth of the number of people moving[2] and the discussions and changes these movements have initiated in the sending as well as in the receiving societies. Lately discussions about the economic role of migrants and the social implications of migration for

the host societies have increased. Governments of several receiving countries in Asia are now trying to reduce the number of migrant workers. Especially since the economic crisis in 1997 and the economic recession after September 11th the impression arises that migrant workers are the cause of the economic, financial and social problems these countries are facing. Migrants are more and more perceived as scapegoats for all kind of troubles these societies have to cope with. Despite these discourses economic actors still point out the importance of migrant workers for the receiving economies.

Malaysia has one of Asia' largest foreign labor pools. In 1998 10% of Malaysia's population and about 27% of the country's labor force was made up of foreigners (Aidcom 1999, 2). The majority of the migrants come from Indonesia, followed by Bangladesh and the Philippines (Pillai 1999, 181). The importance of migrant labor for specific sectors like the service and domestic sector (Chin 1998) and the manufacturing, construction and plantation sector is well documented (Karim et al 1999; Pillai 1999, Abdul-Azis 2001). Nevertheless in recent years labor migrants have become the targets of a number of accusations.[3] In the media, in official statements by politicians and union leaders as well as in a number of articles dealing with migration they 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 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. in their study about migrants in Malaysia argue that that the criminal activities of migrants create considerable problems for the local authority and internal security (1999, 69). Especially Bangladeshi migrants find life in Malaysia more difficult mainly due to reports in the media of criminal acts committed by them (Gurowitz 2000, 868). Fights between both 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 and thus the potential danger of migrants became 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 is painted (Karim et al. 1999, 69). In public discourses as well as in some scientific studies the migrants are often treated as a homogenous group threatening the assumed unity of the

society. 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". But who are these Bangladeshi migrants subsumed by the society's stereotypical perception and how do they rationalize and put meaning upon their journey?.

III WHO ARE THE PEOPLE MOVING: CHANGING THE PERSPECTIVE

In Malaysia the Bangladeshi migrants are highly visible especially in the urban areas. They are working on petrol stations or are selling fast food in different chains. As elsewhere they are doing the kind of jobs local labor is unwilling to do (Pillai 1999, 180). The Bangladeshi workers who are employed in the manufacturing, construction or plantation sectors near Kuala Lumpur are strolling around on Sundays in "little India" doing their weekly shopping or they are sitting together in public places or parks gossiping. The 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 daily interactions between migrants and locals the migrants are an object of suspicion at best. One might argue that one reason for the observable suspicion is a lack of knowledge about and interest in the Bangladeshi migrant workers.

This indifference characterizes also part of the literature on migrants in Malaysia, especially the studies concentrating on the economic or demographic aspects of the in-migration. In these studies the reasons for migration are either not discussed or explained by reference to classical economic models and perspectives. The focus is generally more on the effects of migration on Malaysia, its economy and 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. This general framework might be one reason, besides the fact that the political space in civil society is very limited (Uhlin 2002, 154), why NGOs in Malaysia have taken up the issue of migrant and migrant's rights only to a very limited degree. Besides Tenaganita, an NGO working for migrants rights, "(p)otentiall allies for migrants are hard to come by" (Gurowitz 2000, 870). Interviews with NGOs and human rights groups in Malaysia during the field research for this study confirm Gurowitz's statement.

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In Bangladesh on the other hand the discussions and discourses on migration are also not very differentiated. The government is interested in exporting labor because the national economy relies on the remittances send by migrants. Neither the reasons for migration nor the treatment and experiences of their citizens abroad causes much attention. The increasing number of studies and writings on migration in Bangladesh reflect the increased economic importance of migration in and for Bangladesh. It is for example estimated that at least one fourth of the foreign exchange earnings are migrant workers' remittances. The foreign exchange from remittances is used largely in payment of import bill (Murshid et al. 2001, 7). Yet most studies concentrate on the demographic and economic feature of migration whereas the experience of moving from one area and from one culture to another is hardly ever in the center of analysis[4]. There are nowadays quite a number of NGOs in Bangladesh dealing with the issue of migration and the problems migrants face. Nevertheless, besides some exceptions these organizations tend to promote the classical stereotypes on migrants and their motives.

Therefore the following analysis will provide a different perspective. The focus will be on the question why and how people move and the role of networks within this process. Nayeem's narrative[5], which is typical for quite a number of Bangladeshi migrant workers interviewed in Malaysia, allows reconstructing the different realities of migrant workers and their perceptions of the migration process. Furthermore the recontextualization of Nayeem's narrative and interview sequences from other migrant workers in the broader societal framework (see Lachenmann 1995, 12) will allow us to redirect our theoretical journey. This actor-oriented approach does not intend to ignore the so-called macro level but, as Long (1992, xi) proposes, "to grasp the large impact signaled by small things".

It serves to demonstrate interesting links between economic development, migration, religion and new forms of networking on a transnational level. Some typical findings of this study concerning the motives for migration as well as the organization of the migration process and the networking of migrant workers will be analyzed according to the narratives and will be embedded in theoretical approaches on migration. Moreover the narratives permit to highlight and discuss some historical as well as social and economic features of the migration flows between Bangladesh and Malaysia.

(i) 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 staying in Malaysia for 6 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 expires. 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 went up to class 10. Asked how it came that he went to Malaysia he told that a lot of men from his rural neighborhood 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 safe money for a better life for me and my family. In my areas there are no employment possibilities. I was also curious to see other places and other countries and to gain experiences which is not possible in Bangladesh". Malaysia was at that time the preferred destination for people from his area, he said. "Returned migrants told us that Malaysia is a good country. That it is safe and that there are 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 supports actively the in-migration of Bangladeshi men. 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[6]. The local agent is well known in the area and has 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 check, which was also quite expensive, and to give an interview. The interview with a representative of the factory 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 gave already 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 star at them otherwise we will get problems with the police. Then in a group of 30 Bangladeshis we left. We were all very nervous; none of us had been sitting 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 will start working".

Most migrants interviewed came from rural areas in the South of Bangladesh, like Nayeem. His village is around 200 km 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. With the bus it takes around 7 hours from Nayeem's village to travel to Dhaka. The village is nicely located but still without electricity or a regular reliable public transport system to the next district town.[7] Despite these characteristics many migrants from this area are finding their way to Malaysia. Whereas migration from Bangladesh has a long history, people from the South of the country started mainly in the 70s to migrate as labor migrants to the Middle East.

After World War II, people from the area, which is now called Bangladesh, migrated overwhelmingly to Britain (Gardner 1995; Siddiqui 2001) and settled there. Most of these migrants came from Syhlet, a district in the North of Bangladesh. Only with the change of direction to the Middle East the Southern districts developed into the main areas of origin for

Bangladeshi labor migrants. This change of direction was accompanied by a chance of conditions. As pointed out already the migration to the Middle East took place on the basis of special job contracts for a limited amount of time. 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). In general migrants, like Nayeem, have to leave after six years.[8] The integration of migrants is not intended nor are they granted social and economic rights equal to those of the citizens. This type of temporary migration is nowadays the dominant pattern of migration in Asia and challenges classical theoretical approaches to migration. Temporary migration challenges not only the different actors involved in the host as well as in the sending societies but also changes the meaning of migration for the migrants and their families.

Because of this pattern of short-term migration nearly everywhere in the South of Bangladesh one comes across returned migrants. A lot of returned migrants open a small grocery, garment or telephone shop after coming back. In many households of migrant workers the symbols of success are presented: 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. Although reports about corruption on the side of recruitment agencies, about changed conditions in the receiving countries or about the situation in detention camps are increasingly available the imaginations concerning the economic and social benefits of migration are not getting reconstructed.

The imaginations about migration are the most important elements in these areas for inventing a better future. The argument for migration lies in the constructed reality of people's lives, their experiences and in the imaginations described. 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.[9] Migration became the only alternative for relatively well-educated young men in the rural areas who lack economic possibilities in their places of origin. The interviews with the migrants in Malaysia show that neither the young men have thought about other means to fulfill their economic and social responsibilities for their families nor did the respective families. Labor migration has become a semi-permanent form of engagement with the regional labor market (Aguilar 1999, 121).

Migration is so common in the 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 is not a process, which seems to be possible in the village, the region or even in Bangladesh thus migration becomes the goal per se. Scrutinizing the decision making process as will be done in the next section reveals how deeply this perception is rooted within the families and the communities.

IV THE COMPLEX AND INTANGIBLE MOTIVES FOR MIGRATION

The uneven economic development in Asia since the 70s in general and between Bangladesh and Malaysia in particular constitutes the general framework the migration flows are part of. Nevertheless to focus exclusively on economic disparities, as done in the neo-classical economic theories[10], is not sufficient to explain the migration flows, the symbolic aspects of movements or the ways migrant workers and their families rationalize their decisions.

The long distance migration between Bangladesh and Malaysia started in greater numbers only from the mid 80s on when the Malaysian government opened the manufacturing sector to migrant labor. Migrants from Indonesia and the Philippines came even before the labor shortage occurred due to Malaysia's location and its historical and cultural affinities with its neighbors (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 focusing explicitly on geographical differences in supply and demand for labor. Recruitment stops for Bangladesh migrants in 1997, 2001 or 2002[11] did neither lead to a decreasing desire to migrate to Malaysia nor did the numbers of migrants drastically go down. Instead the number of migrants entering Malaysia without documents went up, according to NGOs and their representatives interviewed.

As studies worldwide reveal neither economic changes in the receiving countries nor the closing of borders do hinder people from moving because, as Skeldon puts it, "Migration, or more exactly mobility, of some form is a universal experience" (1997, 2). Instead organizations and networks trafficking people between Asian countries are mushrooming (Abou Chabaké 2000, 133). Bangladesh is the main "supplier" of labor in Asia. The Bangladesh Human Rights Network (2003) assumes that around one million people are

working outside Bangladesh without proper documents, most of them women who have to work in the sex industries in India, Pakistan or the Middle East. Due to the restrictions implemented in many receiving countries recently concerning labor migration of also Bangladeshi men it can be assumed that the number of migrants trying to cross the borders without documents will additionally increase, independently of the availability of jobs in the receiving countries.

Neo-economic theories try to explain migration by referring to a push and pull framework assuming that two forces, one in the country of origin (e.g. push) and the in the country of destination (e.g. pull), contribute to the conditions that make people migrating. Migrants are treated in these concepts as individuals and as such as purely economic actors, who seek to maximize utility by evaluating conditions in different contexts. "Individuals migrate because it is their benefit … to do so", is stated by Borjas (1989, 457), a statement that reflects an argumentation still characterizing this school of thinking. Although criticized in the literature this assumption is regarded as a matter of fact whenever the issue of migration is discussed in Malaysia or elsewhere. An economic approach that criticizes the neo-economic school is the so-called "new economics of labor migration" (see Stark 1984; 1991).

In these concepts the argument is put forward that through migration households try to reduce the risk of market failure. Migration is thus seen as the result of a collective and calculated family or household strategy. 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 due to the lack of employment possibilities and investment possibilities in their locality, according to the narrative. It can be argued that his family invested in his migration as the promised profit out of the investment in migration is expected higher than investments in other sectors.

The fact that nearly all migrants interviewed explained that the decisions to migrate derived out of complex family, group or network structures supports the argument further. Part of the capital needed was generally given either by the family members and/or a loan was taken. This explains why the majority of migrants interviewed do not belong to the poorest of the poor.[12] Especially the male migrants normally had a relatively high educational background and the fact that part of the money came from the families or relatives for

example through selling of land or savings indicates that they belong to the better off rural households.[13]

Even though Nayeem's narrative seems to underline the conception of the approach of the "new economics of labor migration" a closer look reveals several shortcomings. The first shortcoming is that the calculations of utility by the households, for example concerning the financial benefit migration will bring, as employed in the literature, ignores that the awareness space as well as the room for maneuver of the households is limited. There is a lack of information about the chances of employment abroad and the possible income, as the interviews reveal, thus strategizing in the sense used by these approaches (see Stark and Levhari 1982) has to be questioned. Neither the migrants nor their families had any concrete information about the demand of labor in Malaysia, the political framework or the earning and working conditions.

All migrants stated that the only detailed information they got before leaving concentrated around topics of behavior abroad and often a short training on sewing machines for example. As stated already their main source of information are the former migrants or representatives of recruitment agencies, who are, not surprisingly, very reluctant to give any concrete information. The recruitment agencies know that the income the migrants will earn is much lower than promised and does not legitimize the fees they take for the organization of the recruitment process. All migrants interviewed stated that the income they earn is much lower than written in their contracts. The arguments given for the differences were many and diverse. Whereas some migrants argued that they were wrongly informed by the agencies from the beginning others stated that the employers are simply not fulfilling the contracts they signed (see also Rudnick 1996).[14]

The returned migrants are reluctant to talk about these problems because only a success story will enhance their status and reputation. Even though most of the migrants interviewed in Malaysia did not present their actual stay as a success neither financially nor 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 neighbors. I will not tell them how people treated me or that I earned not nearly as much as promised" because that would mean that they were not able to fulfill their duty abroad successfully. Not to be successful is not an option in a country where

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migration is perceived as the only way out and the only possibility to improve the economic 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 construct their time abroad normally in bright colors independently of their experiences or the financial loss migration meant after paying back the loans taken. Unaffected of the experiences and the social and economic reality the migrants are confronted with abroad, the myth of migration as improvement is reproduced. It cannot be assumed that in such a context households can make precise calculations before decision-making. Therefore it is rather unrealistic that economic motivations are really, as argued in these approaches, the main reasons for movements. This brings me to the second shortcoming.

In the conception of the "new economics of labor migration" as well as in other approaches, like the classical network approaches, households are treated as rational and calculating units and the main production and reproduction entities. Feminist critique of the concept of the household have instead demonstrated that households are not homogenous units but stratified by gender and generation with conflating interests and embedded in different networks (see Folbre 1986; Wolf 1990; Elson 1991; Chant 1991; Lachenmann 1997; Lachenmann 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. But not in all cases 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 have to obey their fathers or elder male family members.

Jakir, a migrant working in a sweatshop without proper documents, said that he would like to go home as soon as possible. "My father forced me to go to Malaysia because there was nothing I could have done at home. 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 neighbor'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". Especially in the last case 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.

They felt compelled to fulfill the expectations of their families and migration as a *rite of passage* (Turner in Aguilar 1999, 100).

There are of course also examples where the prospects of adventure lead to migration often against the interest of the families as in the case of Munir who said 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 to get married. I had to struggle, borrow the money from friends and neighbors. After everything was organized they had to agree". As the examples show 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 reason 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. The possibility to escape from their families and the embodied power structures as well as from the responsibilities, which are part of their position within the given setting, are other explanations given for their desire to leave.

Migrants belonging to this group stated for example that despite the work load and the social problems they face in Malaysia they feel free. Juhurul said "Here is money and I am more free here. I cannot live and do the things back home I do here. My parents and everybody will observe what I am doing; here this is not the case. At home I have the responsibility for all since I am the eldest son, that is why I enjoy being abroad. I send money back and everybody is happy with me". In these cases the remittances sent back are a mechanism acquiring legitimacy for the journey, which was undertaken in the first place without permission from the family. Despite the conceptual problems highlighted so far with the concept of household and household strategies, the unit of the household remains in many studies the unit of data collection and interpretation trying to explain the reasons for migration (Goss and Linquist 1995, 328).

A third shortcoming of the economic approaches to migration is that the imaginations and the constructions of the world abroad never play a role in their conceptualizations. As pointed out already part of the imagination concerning migration is definitely economical. The migrants as well as their families construct a world outside Bangladesh where jobs are available, life is secure and possibilities exist, although the situation in most of the receiving countries is different. The desire to see other countries and places, an unfulfilled love or marriage or the political situation are reasons for moving as well. One migrant said, "I wanted to fly. I thought if I can take a plane and go somewhere else I am lucky".

The crossing of borders in a physical sense is not only closely connected with the hope of an economic improvement but also furthermore embedded in the construction of the world abroad. A world that is politically stable, where people live in nice houses and treat each other in respectful ways and where economic opportunities exist, just to name some of the expectations mentioned. 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. In rural areas of Bangladesh the distribution of "global" information through newspapers, television and movies is still in the beginning, nevertheless the images created by these media reach more and more households and thus are part of the construction of imagined worlds as well.

Whereas the families and communities imagine the life abroad, the migrants, in the case of this study, the young men from these groups or communities, are the ones who have to cope with the realities of having to move. But the realities they are confronted with are not being communicated, neither through the narratives of the returned migrants nor through the networks. This is one reason why the migration dynamics will not stop although the political framework is changing in Malaysia as elsewhere.

V NETWORKING AND DESTINATIONS

As shown above the decision making processes are very complex, thus purely economic theories only shed light on some aspects influencing migration flows. It is increasingly recognized that social networks play an important role for the likelihood of migration. Mainly sociologists and ethnologists have shown that social networks not only decrease the risks and costs of migration but also are also important for the direction of

migration flows. In contrast to the economic models described above 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 incorporating 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. 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). It is generally accepted that 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". In the newer approaches on transnational migration, networks are of special importance since they encompass both the host society as well as the receiving society and together with activities and patterns of life constitute the transnational space (see Glick-Schiller 1992, 1999; Pries 1999 and Faist 2000).

The social networks which have developed between Bangladesh and Malaysia are one reason for the continuous flow of Bangladeshi migrants to Malaysia, which shows that social networks are not only a resource for migrants but furthermore determine the destinations of the migration flows. It will be analyzed in the following what kind of information is flowing through these networks making Malaysia one of the most favored destination for Bangladeshi migrants. Often it is argued that networks are linked by common interests, a cooperate identity or obligations (Massey et al. 1987), nevertheless it can be observed that within the networks strategies are developed to combat insecurity which became an integral element of the existing networks.

VI THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MUSLIM BROTHER COUNTRY

As mentioned already the migration between Bangladesh and Malaysia started only in the 80s 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 90s

onwards not only the wages, higher than in the Middle East countries, were an incentive to migrate to Malaysia, but also the special agreement concerning migration between Bangladesh and Malaysia. The memorandum of understanding, which both countries agreed on in 1994, was presented by the Bangladesh government and in Bangladeshi newspaper as part of the "Muslim Brotherhood" between the two countries. 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. The information that Bangladeshi migrants are welcomed in Malaysia as workers because of their religious background is transported through the social networks and makes Malaysia a very attractive destination.

Nayeem highlights that returned migrants described Malaysia as a safe country, a Muslim country in need of foreign workers. Another migrant said during the interview "I came to Malaysia since people in my area said that Malaysian people like Bangladeshis because they are hard working and good Muslims". Social networks, of which the returned migrants are an important part, do not only connect different places, provide funds for transportation and assistant for people who are planning to migrate or for migrants who newly arrive in Malaysia, but they are the most important channels through which the image about Malaysia is transported. In this construction religion is beside economic possibilities the most important element. For the families of the migrants Malaysia is seen as a safe place to go to because they hope that their sons will be accepted as Muslim brothers after arrival. The migrants articulated similar expectations.

The experiences the migrants narrated show that they are not treated as Muslim brothers by the Malays, neither at their workplaces nor outside, that personal relations are more the exception than the rule, that they are not allowed to marry Malay women and that even in the mosques they do not really feel welcome. Still the "Brother Country" myth does not get reconstructed. It is a construct filled with hopes and fantasies in Bangladesh but empty of all meanings in Malaysia as the interviews reveal. Nevertheless the migrants hardly ever openly criticize Malaysia. 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 migration, which is 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. Thus only in the migrant community in Malaysia the difficulties and discrepancies between the expectations and the realities the migrants are confronted with is getting discussed, but this is hardly ever communicated back home.

(i) Interactions Within a Multiethnic Setting

The fact that Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country is not an information wide spread in Bangladesh[15]. Most of the migrants interviewed explained that only shortly before leaving they were told by the agencies that they might be confronted with situations, which are not 'typical' for Muslim countries. As Nayeem explained he was only shortly before leaving informed that Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country. Other migrants were surprised that the representatives of the 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. Shortly before the interview a neighbor, a former migrant, told me that most of the Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia are working in factories owned by Chinese but I just could not imagine that they will come and interview us in Dhaka".

Most of the Bangladeshi migrant workers interviewed in Malaysia worked in factories or companies owned by Chinese Malaysians. The majority of the workers stated that they have no problems with the Chinese, on the contrary most of the workers said that they like the Chinese because they give them work. Although the relations between Chinese employees or supervisors and Bangladeshi workers are restricted exclusively to the organizational hierarchy at the workplaces, the Bangladeshis migrants feel accepted as hard working people by their Chinese superiors. They complaint that that they earn not as much as promised and that the working hours do not allow them to practice their religion on a regular base but the fact that they felt respected was often valued higher.

The relationship between the Indian Malaysians and the Bangladeshi migrants is completely different. 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 that Malaysia, as a Muslim country is safe but that the local Indian people, who are for the Bangladeshis not Malaysians but migrants as well, initiate problems mainly because they are jealous. "They do not like us because the Malay like us better since we are Muslim and hard working people" was often articulated. The Indians are made 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 in-migration and length of stay. The local Indians 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 multiethnic setting in Malaysia the local Indians have, 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, p. 201). The growing number of migrants since the 1980s as well 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, particular the Bangladeshi migrants, and the local Indians. It was argues by union representatives for example that migrant workers, earning lower wages than local workers[16], are getting the jobs while locals face unemployment.[17] 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 especially with the local poor, who are very often local Indians. The majority of the Bangladeshis I talked to, especially the men, rented for example houses or flats in cheap housing areas or squatters. In low-class areas ethnic segregation still dominates the squatter settlements in Malaysia (Evers and Korff 2000, p. 63). The Bangladeshi migrants are thus not only perceived as intruders competing for low cost accommodation but additionally as increasing the market value and the price of

accommodation. On average they pay roughly 100 to 150 RM more than their local neighbors for the houses or flats they were sharing.

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 dominates 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 80s however it can be observed that the Islamic lobby gains influence politically trying to establish a difference from India, especially the Hindu Bengalis to pressure Bangladesh's identity as an Islamic state.[18]

In this process a closer alignment with other Muslims countries is aspired (Kabeer 1991, 117). The fact that most migrants interviewed highlighted the Muslim Brotherhood between Malaysia and Bangladesh and furthermore stated to support the Bangladesh Nationalist Party or the Jamaat-i-Islami party, which both try to increase the difference between Bangladesh and India 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 also the question of friendliness or unfriendliness with India (Gosh 1993, 699) may, besides the competition on the labor market, also cause the problems between these two groups. How the Indian Malaysians define themselves is for the Bangladeshi migrants of less importance.

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 indeed that Malaysia is a safe country for Bangladeshi workers because of the Muslim Brotherhood. Independently of economic restructuring in Malaysia and the economic crisis Malaysia experienced in 1997 and 2001 information about available job opportunities is still floating through the networks. Nevertheless the empirical data reveals that in recent years the awareness about potential "dangers" migrants may be confronted with increasingly enters the

to implement training programs, ensure the welfare of migrant workers at home and abroad and control and regulate recruitment agencies. Furthermore the government agency is actively involved in recruitment (Siddiqui 2001, 70).

In 1984 the recruitment agency (BOESL) was founded to compete with private agencies. The government holds 51% share of the company. The majority of migrants nevertheless leave Bangladesh through one of the approximately 475 private companies officially registered under the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies

(BAIRA) (Siddiqi 2001, 76). These agencies collect the necessary information about the demand for foreign employment in the receiving countries, take permission from the BMET and then process their cases for deployment.[22] Additionally there are an unknown number of organizations and travel agencies recruiting migrants without official permission. Especially these organizations betray the workers by selling faked passports or visas. The mushrooming of recruitment and travel agencies involved in migration to Malaysia started in 1994 when the Malaysian and Bangladesh governments agreed to recruit workers on a regular basis (Rudnick 1996, 49). Although the Malaysian government froze the agreement in 1995 most agencies had established networks with Malaysian agencies or employers that allow them to recruit and send workers independently of the political framework.

Most of the private agencies have their head offices in Dhaka and work with agencies in Malaysia as well as with local agents in rural Bangladesh. The local agents are often former migrants exploiting their practical knowledge. Families who intend to send their sons abroad, as in Nayem's case either approach the local agents, or the local agents try to recruit migrants by approaching families they are familiar with. Most of these local agents are earning their livelihood from the fee they charge, thus economic interests often become the organizing principle for these relationships.

Lately more and more information is spread in Bangladesh about agencies selling faked passports and visas or about local agents not fulfilling their promises although they have taken money. In the newspapers and in TV spots people are told to be careful when approaching a local agent or an agency. The practices of agencies are also permanently discussed within the migrant community in Malaysia as well as at home. Through and within the networks the risks, which are part of the recruitment process, are evaluated and strategies

developed to cope with this side of the migration process. The TV and radio spots broadcasted by the government are not meant to discourage people from migrating but to promote its own recruitment agency. Whereas this agency is presented as safer and more reliable than the private agencies the migrants who were aware about the existence of the government agency stated that this agency is as corrupt as the private ones. "You have to give bribe to the guard just to enter their office. Then everybody you talk to wants to have money. Thus you have to spend a lot of money even before you hand in your application.

The main problem is nevertheless that you have to travel to Dhaka several times and that you do not know anybody there. Thus it is better and more secure to trust a local agent you know well", explained Shabu. This interview sequence does give some important insights into the political culture in Bangladesh and the government institutions. As Hossain (2000, 509) argues the transfer of political power from military to civilian rule in 1991 did neither lead to a stable democratic system nor to the dissolution of the feudal political culture or corruption. Personalized relations still dominate the political sphere, which is one reason besides the corruption, why people distrust the government organizations, especially if their social networks do not include government employees. Therefore it is not surprising that most migrants and their families prefer private recruitment agencies working with local agents who are known in the area or community.

All migrants interviewed were very well aware that the recruitment process is very insecure. But this knowledge does not affect the perception of migration as the best and only economic alternative for young men; instead strategies are developed and employed to minimize the possible risks. Most families of the migrants collected information about the local agents working in their area before hand. Agents who have previous migration experiences generally enjoy a higher reputation. The success of returned migrants is another aspect increasing the reputation of local agents. Nabi for example explained that he trusted the local agent because he knows 20 men who went through him. "I knew that he successfully found jobs for them therefore I gave him the money he expected". Others said that they chose a local agent having a house and land in the neighborhood that means that he cannot just take the money and run away.

Additionally transnational networks are getting involved in the recruitment process. Nayeem's father for example read in the newspaper that agencies are more and more cheating,

selling wrong visas. Thus he contacted the son of a neighbor, who was at that time working in Malaysia, to find out whether the company Nayeem was supposed to work at really existed. Only then he gave the money to the agent. Berger described in novel how Portuguese migrants developed strategies to reduce the risks of being cheated. "Before leaving they had their photographs taken. They tore the photograph in half giving one half to their "guide" and keeping the other themselves. When they reached France they sent their half of the photograph back to their family in Portugal to show that they had been safely escorted across the frontiers; the "guide" came to the family to prove that it was he who had escorted them, and it was only then that the family paid the $ 350" (Berger in Kumar 2000, 54).

Nevertheless several migrants interviewed in Malaysia told that the local agents they approached took the money and disappeared even though they were well known in the area and had a high reputation. The migrants call this "take and run". After such an experience the families of the potential migrants feel even more compelled to send their sons abroad since only a successful time abroad can compensate the financial loss. Furthermore one migrant explained that for him and his family this experience was so embarrassing that only "my success abroad can counterbalance the fact that my family was being cheated".

Personal relations with local agents are, as the examples show, constructed as minimizing the risks of being cheated during the migration process. Nevertheless the empirical data shows that more and more local agents are exploiting the social relations and the networks they are part of. It can be assumed that the corruption and the exploitation will increase further. The number of people making their living from migration has increased dramatically over the last years, especially in rural areas in Bangladesh, whereas at the same time governments of receiving countries are trying to reduce the in-migration. This parallel process enhances the possibility of illegitimate practices even further.

But not only the local agents are betraying potential clients, agencies in Dhaka are betraying the local agents as well. Shabu for example described that in his area the local agent had recruited several young men to work in Malaysia for an agency in Dhaka. He collected the money from the families and handed it over to the agency. When he went to Dhaka next time to collect the passports and the visas he found that the agency did not exist any longer. The local agent living in the area tried to give them part of the money back losing not only a lot of money himself but his reputation as well. The personal relationships between potential

agents and agencies in Dhaka may reduce the risks which are part of the recruitment process nevertheless insecurity is inherent to the process of labor migration and will increase further.

Despite these uncertainties migrants and their families develop strategies to carve out "spaces of control" (Giddens 1982, 197) to pursue their goals. The strategies developed to contain the uncertainty again show the importance of the imagination and the strength of the dreams and fantasies tied to migration. Thus it has to be questioned thus whether rules and regulations trying to control the in-migration will bring the expected results, especially taking into account that recruitment agencies and enterprises have mushroomed in the last two decades and always carve out market niches to prey on potential migrants and their imaginations.

VIII CONCLUSION

The object of the paper was to analyze the different dimensions and aspects of labor migration from Bangladesh to Malaysia. Whereas in the literature so far the focus has been placed mainly on economic and demographic aspects influencing the movement of people from one place to another, from one culture to another, I intended instead to focus on the migrants themselves, their rationalities and motives for migration. The migration between these two countries occurs within a complex system of formal and informal institutions and networks and is embedded in economic as well as political structures. Nevertheless the empirical data shows that the imagination as well as the success in a qualitative, non-monetary sense is as important for migrants as the expected economic benefits.

This counts for the individual migrants as well as for their families and communities, who do not see avenues to fulfill their desires and hopes, both material and non-material, in their area of origin or on a national level. Nayeem for example is planning to migrate to South Korea as soon as possible. He cannot imagine staying in Bangladesh. Nevertheless this does not mean that the migrants and their families are unaware or ignorant about the problems, which the recruitment process as well as living, and working in another country may bring. Although, as described above, the returned migrants tend to present their time abroad in bright colors, information about corruption and illegal recruitment practices or potential dangers and insecurities abroad is spread in rural Bangladesh. But insecurity as well as corruption is part of every day live in Bangladesh as well.

Thus assessing the situation at home and listening to the success stories of returned migrants and the prestigious new self, which they gain through migration, does not lead to a declining desire to migrate but to the development of strategies to minimize the potential risks. Networking and personal relationships play an important role in this process. Thus to assume that rules and regulations might stop the in-migration seem to be an illusion. As long as a better future is closely related to a temporary life abroad, the potential migrants will find ways to start their journey. The constructions about the world abroad are an intrinsic part of our globalizing world as is the economic development and the demand for labor Malaysia experienced during the last three decades.

Notes

1. The narrative interviews with Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia were collected during a 3 months stay in 2001. Most of the migrant workers interviewed worked in the garment factories in Kuala Lumpur. Additionally interviews with representatives of unions, NGOs and other organizations and resource persons working in the area of migration were conducted. I am very grateful for the support I received from IKMAS. The discussions helped me to develop my ideas. I also have to acknowledge the willingness of the Bangladeshi migrants to share their experiences with me. However, the views expressed are the author's responsibility.

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. Wickramasekera (2002, 14) with references to ILO 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 in the 1990s of 40%.

3. Wickramasekera (2002, 4) calls these accusations "popular myths about migrant workers".

4. Among several exceptions are the studies conducted by Siddiqui (2001; 2002) on female Bangladeshi migrants, Kabeer's (2000) research of female Bangladeshi home workers in London, Gardner's (1995) study on the effects of oversea migration for the area of origin or Eade's (1997) articles on Bangladeshis in London.

5. I have edited and shortened the narrative 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.

6. 80.000 Bangladeshi Thaka are approximately 5.360 Malaysian Ringgit or 1.410 US$.

7. 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.

8. In 2001 the government reduced the duration of stay 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 very appropriate. The migrants interviewed were angry and disappointed since it takes them on average 2 years to pay the money back they needed to pay the agency.

9. In the case of female migrants the situation is different. Female migration is an issue controversially discussed in Bangladesh. Islamic leaders and political actors raise regularly their voices against women leaving the country without male guardians. It is argued that women not only lose their *izzat* (honor) due to their movements but that also the families' public position will suffer. Thus women who migrate are often socially sanctioned. 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 means a challenge to 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).

10. See for example Lewis (1954); Todaro (1969) or Borjas (1989).

11. In 1997 due to the economic crisis the Malaysian government announced that all migrant labor 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. Numerable studies reveal that it is a myth to assume that it is the poorest who move. As Skeldon (1997, 8) argues "The poor do move, but so do wealthier groups, and the latter are likely to move further and more often than poorer people. Thus, making the poor richer will not generally lead to lower migration". Malaysia is a good example for this analysis. The economic development has neither lead to a stop of out-migration of Malaysian citizens nor to a return of Malaysian migrants even though the government has launched special programs and incentives for Malaysian migrants to return (see for example Yun 2000).

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 indebt.

14. It has to be added that it was very difficult to get an overview over the income structure. Although the majority of workers were employed in the garment sector it turned out that the payment structure differs not only from factory to factory but also within the different sections of one factory. Some workers get a fixed monthly salary, others are paid on contract base means they are getting paid by pieces produced whereas another group is paid on a daily base. All workers try to increase their payment by doing overtime. The monthly income varied between 500 to 1000 Malaysian Ringgit. In Rudnick's study of the textile industry in Penang the Bangladeshi migrant workers earned between 400 to 700 Ringitt per month (1996, 58).

15. According to government statistics the Malays constitute 57,8% of the population, followed by Chinese (24,9%) and Indians (7,0%) others while non-citizens constitute 7,2 % (Embong 2000, p. 9).

16. 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".

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

18. For a more detailed analysis see Abecassis (1990); Kabeer (1991); Gosh (1993) or Hours (1995).

19. According to Mahmood (1994, 520) Bangladeshi migrant workers in Japan are often found in relationships with Japanese women. Marriages are either from the side of the Japanese families nor from the side of the Bangladeshi families accepted.

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

21. Marriages between migrant workers and local women, especially between Bangladeshi men and local women, is an issue not only discussed in public but also in parliament. One MP was quoted in the New Straits Times (2001, 4) saying that the government has the duty to protect women from "just marrying any Bangladeshi or Indonesian". The debate occurred in a session which was dealing with the issue why young Malaysian women are reluctant to get married. Migrant workers are not allowed to marry while being in Malaysia. Foreigners who are found married to a Malaysian will lose their permission to stay and will face deportation.

22. For a more detailed description of the recruitment process see for example Siddiqui 2001 and 2002.

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