

## Migration, mobility and changing power relations: aspirations and praxis of Bangladeshi migrants

Nitya Rao\*

*School of International Development, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK*

*(Received 6 September 2011; final version received 2 March 2013)*

This article, based on empirical research in two villages in Bangladesh, examines the ways in which migration is not a mere response to poverty and family survival, but becomes an instrument to interrogate the power of the traditional elite and contribute to social and status mobility in the local context. By focusing on four key inter-related dimensions of place, work, consumption and marriage, and on the hierarchies embedded within different migrant destinations, it points to the ways in which migration strategies are related to mobility strategies, and contributes to refiguring class and gender identities. Religion and the construction of a modern Islamic identity, bearing simultaneously elements of materiality and spirituality, serve as a crucial mediating force in this process, bridging the gap between aspirations and praxis.

**Keywords:** migration; mobility; gender; status; identity; Bangladesh

### Introduction

Recent developments in theorising migration and social change highlight the ways in which migration processes mediate a renegotiation of hierarchies of power and social status (Castles 2010; Van Hear 2010). As a result of this lived reality, migration across physical space and place is now better conceptualised as a dynamic process, imbued with power and meaning, which allows for greater agency and fluidity in shaping ideologies, identities, aspirations and social relations, particularly of class and gender (Massey 1994; Mahler and Pessar 2001, 9; Deshmukh-Ranadive 2002, 57).

Mobility here implies a sense of change, the movement of people across place and jobs, but also the 'divisions and hierarchies between things, persons and practices that reinforce the arbitrary provisions of culture' (Bourdieu 1977, 89). Mobility then involves refiguring the understandings of culture, religion, tradition and modernity, especially in their definitions of class and gender relations.

On the basis of data from two Bangladeshi villages, differing in educational achievements and cultural norms but located in zones of high emigration, I explore in this article the meanings attached to different migration destinations – the rural, urban and international, and the ways in which movement through these geographical spaces contributes to economic and social mobility. In Bangladesh, notions of space and physical movement have shifted radically in the last three decades, fuelled by improvements in transport, communication and rural infrastructure, expansion of market forces as well as export-led growth (Siddiqi 1998). People have become responsible for their own lives, developing individual, often risky strategies, to meet their immediate needs and rise in the social hierarchy in their own locality. In this process, not just do physical boundaries

---

\*Email: n.rao@uea.ac.uk

breakdown, but social norms and the ideological values given to different places, their gendered and hierarchical positioning relative to each other and the activities performed there are also renegotiated.

The next section briefly sets out a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between migration and mobility strategies, focusing particularly on the creation of new identities that both challenge class hierarchies and highlight new elements of gender difference, including adventure as an element of masculinity. After a brief discussion of the research context, I analyse the four key themes of place, work, consumption and marriage, demonstrating the ways in which the social and spatial realms are co-constituted.

### **Gendering space and mobility**

Embedded within a gender perspective is a focus on understanding power relationships between people across multiple axes of difference. This involves shifting from binary divisions of male/female, migrant/non-migrant, modernity/tradition, individual aspirations/familial responsibilities and global/local to understanding the interactions between these characteristics and ideas (Massey 1994; Gray 2011). This is because each activity involves both a material dimension and an ideological valuation; fortunes can be explained not just economically, but also through political character, social structure and local culture, and recognition that people's lives are driven by more than basic survival needs. In the context of the ambivalence about working class youth, especially boys, underlying the new Labour agenda in Britain and its implications for both their labour market engagement and physical and social containment/exclusion, McDowell (2007) points to their continuous struggles and aspiration for building a respectable identity and for social recognition, in order to challenge historically imposed hierarchies. People then exercise agency and take actions in pursuit of their dreams and aspirations, whether or not they materialise in practice (Mahler and Pessar 2001).

Bhabha introduces the concept of 'beyond', which 'signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future' and represents a desire for recognition; but the very act of going beyond is like crossing a boundary or border into something unknowable and uncertain (1994, 6). Yet rather than being disjointed, the 'non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures' opens up a 'third space' where the renegotiation of culture can be initiated (*ibid.*, 218). This third space makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent and contradictory process, helping us understand why the hierarchical claims of cultures are untenable, and how the same signs can be 'appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew' (*ibid.*, 37). Space and time interact in the study context to produce differences in the representations of both work and identities as I show in this article.

Despite difficult working and living conditions, migration entails an exposure to new ideas, places and practices, and when transposed to particular local contexts, with a different everyday, lived experience results in negotiations over the meanings of that particular place and its culture as well (Gardner 1993; Zeitlyn 2006). This mutuality unsettles the physical, social and cultural boundaries of the modern nation-state, highlighting not so much the heterogeneity of the population as elements of cultural mixing and hybridity. Such side-by-side production of alternate images breaks down the binary categories of 'othering' that perpetuate domination and leads to the articulation of an alternative modernity which recognises different pathways and starting points for mobility.

Writing on the human consequences of globalisation and the new freedom of movement, Bauman (1998a) highlights that rather than establishing a universal, global order, processes of migration redistribute privileges and deprivations, creating new hierarchies and re-stratifying society based on people's ability to move (their degree of mobility). For those able to do so, globalisation could provide a creative and emancipatory experience; but for those left behind, or at the bottom of the hierarchy, this is rarely possible. They tend to confront the growing individualisation and decline of community networks by adopting quite different strategies, those that strengthen local norms and identities. This tension is reflected in the study location, where migration facilitates social mobility not just through bringing in higher earnings and consumption of elite goods, but also equally through investing in social and religious practices, including ritual contributions and personal sacrifices, which are valued both at individual and community levels and central to the process of building social prestige. Although making efforts to keep in check accelerating class inequalities, contradictions, however, are inherent in this process. Traditional hierarchies of class and religion are challenged, yet gender hierarchies seem to have intensified.

Modernity creates a sense of insecurity, 'disembedding' or the "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction' (Giddens 1990, 21), more so in a context of global production, where people are placed within large systems of production which are both insecure and over which they have little control. In this process of traversing different worlds at the same time, both physically and ideologically, women play a significant role in providing a sense of security and familiarity by being made responsible for the task of social reproduction, and caring for the well-being of all others (Picchio 1992; Rao 2012). Exposure to new countries, media, technology, lifestyles and wealth does not necessarily bring in more liberal ideas. In fact in Bangladesh, despite a secular party being currently in power, there has been a growing conservatism of religious practice and gender norms since the 1990s.

Consumption is a key tool in the process of producing a 'hybrid' identity. Often viewed as repressive, a tool for the exploitation of poor countries by the rich, and posing contradictions with the interests of labour, consumption emerges here as a social, cultural and moral project (Miller 1995). It carries elements of creativity, but more importantly represents alternative ways of enhancing social position. It means more than the purchase of goods; it has an intimate place in value creation and in addressing not just resource access, but also issues of status and exclusion. In Appadurai's terms, 'commodities, like persons, have social lives', as it is desire and demand, reciprocal sacrifice and power that interact to create economic value in specific social situations (1986, 3–4). Consumption, a marker of social inequality, can then also be a symbol of social success and a route to social mobility. As Bauman (1998b) notes, work has lost its privileged position in shaping people's identities in today's world. Value now is not placed so much on the kind or nature of work performed, but rather its capacity to generate pleasurable experiences. This focus on consumption, both material and social, is visible in the narratives of Bangladeshi male overseas migrants discussed in this article.

Education has been seen as one marker of cultural capital and economic success (Bourdieu 1977). Yet, the generally low quality of state educational provision in South Asia leads to poor acquisition of skills (Ahmed and Govinda 2010, 324) and provides little opportunity for economic advancement. Poor, working class and rural children consistently underachieve at every level of the educational system compared with those in the middle and upper classes. The reasons for this educational exclusion are several: the need for children, especially boys, to earn, and girls to help at home, the irrelevance of

schooling in improving life chances, the quality of teachers, children's health and nutritional status, and ethnic and minority group identity (Hossain and Zeitlyn 2010). Location emerges as a strong cross-cutting theme, with a majority of children in remote, rural schools, lacking qualified teachers and adequate supervision, consistently performing worse than their urban counterparts (Ahmed et al. 2005). It is then not surprising that underprivileged boys opt for vocational courses, and girls for religious education; as apart from fewer risks of failure, they also contribute to alternative ways of achieving upward mobility, be it through migration or marriage (Rao and Hossain 2011, 2012).

What one finds then is a gendered reconfiguration of the social and ideological space to account for both the insecurities inherent in physical relocation, marked by rural–urban and overseas migration, and a fragmentation of the cultural system – the shift from production to consumption – that erodes existing status hierarchies and opens the space for mobility across social positions. There are attempts to reconstitute the boundaries between the public and the private space through ideologies of masculinity that re-emphasise men as providers, but also as engaged in the public realm of visible consumption, gift exchange, politics and contribution to public prestige (e.g. support to the local mosque), apart from engaging with personal risk and adventure. Femininity in turn focuses on the private – with exclusive emphasis on household maintenance and social reproduction roles. Before exploring how different types of migration and spatial configurations impact on notions of mobility vis-à-vis the village, community and family, I briefly set out the study context.

### **The study context**

Comilla and Manikganj districts, where this study was conducted, are well connected to the capital Dhaka. Migration to different locations both within and outside the country is high, despite differences in levels of education and poverty.<sup>1</sup> Sadara and Achingaon villages, in Comilla and Manikganj, respectively, were selected for in-depth study to understand how migration processes interact with mobility strategies locally. A preliminary household census to identify key personal attributes (age, marital status and education) and household characteristics including the size of the household and its occupational and migration history was conducted between June and December 2006 and followed between February and June 2007 by 16 in-depth interviews in each village with both men and women to gain insight into their strategies for negotiating physical, social and ideational space and hierarchies.

In both villages, a large number of adult men are migrants (30% in Sadara and 34% in Achingaon), a quarter of them overseas, mainly to the Gulf countries, but the similarity in occupational profile ends there. In Achingaon, 32% of men are still in agriculture, and another 21% in rickshaw/van pulling and daily wage tasks, including factory work. Of the remaining, a majority are involved in petty trade. Only 5% were non-manual workers, involved in teaching or religious work. In Sadara, on the other hand, a much lower 21% of men are agriculturists, 17% petty traders and a significant 28% are non-manual workers, engaged in both public and private employment, locally and in Dhaka and other major cities.

Interestingly, when Bangladesh emerged as an independent country, it was predominantly a rural society populated by peasant smallholders, mostly Muslim. The landlord class had left earlier for India, following the Partition of 1947, their lands redistributed by the government (Lewis 2011). Yet over a period of time, large sections of the population became functionally landless, working as wage labourers and rickshaw

pullers (Hartmann and Boyce 1983); in the study villages, this was over 85% (Rao 2009). The new elite came to be drawn essentially from provincial, lower middle class families (Lewis 2011). Although class differentiation did exist, it has accelerated in recent times, based no longer as much on the local availability of education and employment opportunities as on the differences in consumption patterns, made possible by migration, especially overseas, as I discuss in the following sections, alongside engagement with street-level politics of the *mustaans* (van Schendel 2009).

Most women are classified as home-makers in both locations, yet amongst those who work, Achingaon has more factory workers and Sadara white-collar workers, mainly as teachers and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) workers in the village. Women's work participation since the 1980s has challenged social norms, but also led to resistance (Siddiqi 1998; Rozario 2001). Female migration is 3% in Achingaon, but negligible in Sadara.

Differences in the educational context partly explain the occupational differentiation. Achingaon has a primary school, two NGO run non-formal primary schools and two madrasas.<sup>2</sup> Half the children at the primary level go to the government school, the rest divided between the maktab and the NGO schools (Rao and Hossain 2011). The alia madrasa is the sole secondary education provider in the village. Sadara has a government primary school, a high school and two kindergarten schools.<sup>3</sup> Reputed as a good school,<sup>4</sup> the secondary school completion rates are much better than in Achingaon, contributing to higher levels of white collar and business activity. Very few attend the madrasa in the neighbouring village.

Yet even in a remote and apparently backward village like Achingaon, marginally more girls than boys study up to the secondary level – an indicator of the success of the government's secondary school stipend programme as well as the need for boys to contribute to household earnings in a context of poverty. The girls mostly study in the alia madrasa, recognised as equivalent to secondary schooling by the state.<sup>5</sup> The quality may be poorer, but it is local and cheaper than the general high school. Though dropouts persist, both during and after secondary schooling, madrasa education scores over secular schools in emphasising a mindset governed by Islamic principles of honesty, hard work and morality. Students develop the capacity to be patient and steadfast under difficult conditions; useful for young men in work contexts which are increasingly harsh, demanding and providing few benefits (Rao and Hossain 2011, 628). For girls, knowledge of and ability to read the Quran is seen as an essential quality for making a good marriage alliance (Aftabuddin 2006), signifying not just literacy and religiosity, but equally the creation of pious and competent home-makers, following the instructions of their migrant husbands (Rao and Hossain 2011, 631).

I turn now to exploring the implications of migration for the social and ideological constructions of gender relations across space, place and time.

### Migration and the meaning of place

The images of places represent different, and at times, competing forms of power, deriving from the particular mix of social relations, rather than mere geographical referents (Massey 1994; Mahler and Pessar 2001). In her Bangladesh study, Gardner (1993) notes that 'bidesh' or abroad suggests material success and economic transformation, yet home or 'desh' continues to provide a sense of group identity, spirituality and fertility. Despite long periods away from home, the migrants continue to 'belong' to their home village and social group within it. The economic dominance of families with migrants has meant that

despite all hardships and uncertainties, migration remains the only way to succeed, the first step in the ladder out of poverty (Orr et al. 2009). Although poverty and family obligations are important reasons for migration, today many in rural Bangladesh aspire to consumption patterns of the mega-cities. Such aspirations are seen as non-achievable by living and working in the villages. Khalek, aged 50, a farmer in Achingaon said:

After high school I got a job in the air force but my father didn't allow me to join. I was his only son. All my friends are well off now with three or four houses each in Dhaka and private cars. I have none of these as I have lived in the village as a farmer for the past thirty years.

Mapping migrant destinations in the study villages, one finds that the major stream of movement is from the villages to Dhaka, or other major cities, for work in factories and workshops. For men, this is considered a stepping stone in acquiring skills to facilitate emigration abroad, largely to the Gulf States, whereas from Sadara, a few have also managed to migrate to developed countries. The numbers migrating overseas have been steadily increasing. Between 1976 and 2009, 6.7 million Bangladeshis, mostly male, half of them unskilled, worked overseas on short-term contracts (Siddiqui 2005) and their remittances comprising 10% of Bangladesh's GDP (Rahman et al. 2009). In recognition of migrants' contributions to the economy, and to protect them from harassment and cheating, the Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE) was constituted in 2001. Detailed records of the migrants are maintained to protect their interests, establish convenient procedures for remitting money and launch other incentive schemes. In 2004, a Policy on Overseas Employment was adopted.

Female migration, as already noted, is low. Only women from the poorest households in Achingaon migrate – for agricultural work to other rural areas, or factory work in the urban centres. Shamim, aged 20, of Achingaon said:

I'm working in a garment factory in Savar, 40km away, for a year. I studied at the alia madrasa, but poverty compelled me to drop out. A relative arranged this job so I could support my family and save for my dowry.

Improved road communications enable young women like Shamim to commute to work from home. This serves a dual purpose: income earning, while also helping their families maintain their respectability by demonstrating control over the movements and social interactions of their daughters.

Since 2003, restrictions apply to the independent migration of unskilled and semi-skilled women workers below 35 years, making the number of female overseas migrants less than 5% of the total (Siddiqui 2005, 10). The few who have gone, mostly as domestic workers, face arduous working conditions and lonely personal lives, and have often migrated only because it was cheaper for them to do so than for their husbands. As 38-year-old Zahera, the mother of six children, and a migrant to Bahrain, pointed out, visa and commissions cost her only 70,000 Taka, it would have been almost double for her husband, and they could ill afford this investment (Rao 2012, 35–36). The gendered differences in policies, practices and entitlements, wherein women are excluded from decision-making, but integrated in subordinate, service-oriented roles, thus also shape the differential experiences of migration for women and its ideological valuation as a form of subordination rather than freedom or adventure (cf. Mahler and Pessar 2001).

Further, with minimal budgets, loopholes in the law are used by agents to make quick money. In the absence of back-up support, migrants' success depends on their initial wealth and relative power: poor economic migrants moving across space often end up as

refugees or illegal migrants, confined and controlled in temporary ghettos. Several international migrants from the study villages have faced imprisonment and deportation. Hasina, aged 35, of Achingaon, narrated:

My husband was doing well in Saudi Arabia. He was arrested for gambling. They found his visa was not in order. He lost his job and was immediately sent home. We are still repaying the 100,000 Taka<sup>6</sup> debt for his visa and travel.

Deportation of illegal and irregular workers is a common problem due to the largely privatised and unregulated nature of migration, the expenses of regularisation, pressure to migrate, and indeed, the wide prevalence of cheating and corruption (Zeitlyn 2006). A total of 50,000 Bangladeshi workers were deported from Saudi Arabia and UAE in 1996 and 100,000 from Malaysia in 2001 (Kibria 2004). Globalisation has generated a demand for mobile and flexible labour, simultaneously immigration controls have exacerbated, putting the poor in a double bind. Most villagers pay 150,000–200,000 Taka, about twice the official cost of 84,000 Taka for migration to the middle-east, as commissions to the chain of middlemen and agents. Their documents are often not in order, and 27% reported not being successful, yet their dreams and aspirations and the social imagination of travel overseas drive them to take these actions (Rao 2009).

Overseas migration largely involves manual labour, work that many of the migrants would not dream of doing at home. The distancing of the worksite invisibilises the degradation associated with such work, whereas higher returns contribute to higher status. More importantly, such migration is represented as an adventure to a new land, of negotiating and surviving in unknown contexts (Piketty 1995; Rao and Hossain 2012). The religious dimension of migration to the Gulf is highlighted, crucial to the construction of identity as a ‘good Muslim’. Working in Saudi Arabia is seen to enhance chances of performing the *hajj* to Mecca. A *hajji*, or one who has performed the *hajj*, is respected as a learned and blessed person, irrespective of his or her literacy levels, or labour engagement. *Hajj* is an aspiration of all Muslims, and although the local elite often lack the resources to undertake this pilgrimage, the poor, by engaging with manual work in the Gulf, are able to do so, in the process challenging the dominant interpretations of piety, respectability and learning propagated by the traditional elite.

Within migrant destinations, including those overseas, there is thus a hierarchy of place based on cost, risk and distance. Migration to Dhaka is preferable to rural migration in status terms; overseas migration to internal movement, south-east Asia to the middle-east and Europe, and America to the rest of the world. In Sadara, it is interesting therefore to note a shift from migration to the middle-east to the more developed Asian countries. Kabir, aged 38, migrated to South Korea for 8 years. After 3 years, his wife joined him, and they both worked in a plywood factory. Their earnings were substantial and today they are the richest couple in the village – they have bought land, built a house, furnished it with numerous consumer durables and lead an urban middle class lifestyle (cf. Gardner and Ahmed 2006). In identifying the factors that contributed to this mobility, Kabir acknowledged that:

My secondary level education qualification was important, but also my family’s support in making the initial investment of 500,000 Taka for going to South Korea. I had to work hard and persevere in a strange environment, but my wife’s contribution to the income pool was equally important.

Migrants to both the Gulf and South-east Asia from these villages aspire to eventually settle down in the village; migration and the negotiation of the outside world that this involves gives them the means, both material and symbolic, of doing so respectably.

### **Work, consumption and challenging social hierarchies**

Globalisation has broken many barriers, especially in making consumer cultures accessible to people across social classes and statuses. The organisation of labour too has changed, moving towards increasing flexibilisation, characterised by informal or semi-formal employment relations, rather than more secure forms of employment (Mitter 1994). This creates opportunities, albeit temporary and insecure, though labour markets continue to be segmented by gender and ethnicity/nationality, especially in the lower strata of unskilled or semi-skilled work. Dilbar, aged 25, an Achingaon graduate noted:

Ten to fifteen years ago Manikganj villagers mostly worked in agriculture. But now this is impossible, so people go to Savar, Nabinagar, Manikganj and Dhaka to work in the welding shops and garment factories. They get jobs to support their families. They learn new skills in the process that has demand overseas and build networks that can help them move.

Bangladeshi overseas migrants earn more than their local counterparts, but their work is both unstable and accorded low status at the destination (cf. Ye 2013 forthcoming). At home, they, however, attempt to shift this perception, constructing narratives that differ considerably from their real lived experiences, rarely communicating the harshness of their lives overseas to their families. The male migrants' loneliness is articulated but not the degrading nature of the job or the poor working conditions, easily hidden due to the separation of the site of wealth generation from that of its consumption (Osella and Osella 2000). Male discourse is predominantly around freedom and autonomy, focusing on outcomes rather than the process (Batnitzky, McDowell, and Dyer 2008). Migration for them is a strategy to accumulate money to set up a respectable business locally in the future. As Babul, aged 35, from Sadara, who had spent 8 years in Saudi Arabia, noted:

I had to sell a portion of the family land in order to migrate. Luckily I returned with 1.2 million Takas. I have bought land, made a brick house with a latrine, invested in a tubewell and started a fruit business in Dhaka

Success is, however, not assured and returns vary by the type of migration and the costs incurred. Although organising migration internally cost 13,700 Taka and could be financed through family savings, overseas migration to the Gulf required at least five times this amount, a minimum of 92,500 Taka. Agents' commissions and bribes could double this amount. Financing this necessitated disposing land or livestock (in 26% of the cases) or borrowing from moneylenders at high-interest rates – 10% monthly (in 54% of cases) (Rao 2009). Migration to countries like South Korea required 400,000–500,000 Taka as mentioned earlier and could be afforded by only a few in Sadara.

Similar to the level of investments, the scale of remittances too differ; their use reflecting people's priorities and aspirations. Studies on the use of migrants' remittances in Bangladesh indicate that the multiplier effect of remittances on consumption is 2.826, against 0.409 for investment spending (Murshid, Iqbal, and Ahmed 2002). Such studies assume consumption to be a non-productive investment, rather than a conscious strategy for social mobility, which can open future opportunities (Bourdieu 1984). The poor adopting the material markers of the elite becomes the first step in challenging their exclusive claims to particular assets and lifestyles such as brick houses, mobile phones and motorbikes or cars. Even in a poor village like Achingaon, the number of mobile phones at 44 was quite remarkable. TVs are not as common as in Sadara, which has a better standard of living. Of late, DVD players, cameras and gold too are purchased.

Although status here appears to flow from a display of wealth, made possible through remittances, gaining elite status and prestige nevertheless also requires the adoption of

particular forms of social and moral behaviour. Ritual performances such as the obligatory five daily prayers (*namaz*), fasting during the month of Ramzan (*roza*), charity to the poor (*zakat*) and the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) are called upon to establish their 'Islamic' identity, behaviours ostensibly observed and internalised during their stay in the Gulf. Muzaffar, aged 25, described how influenced he was by the religiosity he saw in Saudi Arabia, including the segregation of women. A part of their remittance is invested in community activities such as contributions to the mosque, and to public and religious events in the village. Elders too articulated the importance of contributing to community institutions such as the mosque or madrasa, or making a sacrifice during the Eid festival, to gain social recognition and prestige through the accumulation of religious merit, earlier a privilege of the elite. This held true for almost all the overseas migrant households in the village, raising an interesting question about whether status follows the material and cultural contributions they make, or is linked to the process of migration itself including the distance travelled, images of the place of destination and so on. In the case of migration to the Gulf, both appear to play a part – contributions are often nominal, yet are seen to represent Islamic values of charity and concern for the community, communicating obligations, prestige and power, and contact with distant social actors and institutions, which together constitute the social imaginary of mobility.

### **Gendered ideologies: the changing meanings of work and marriage**

The reproduction of households and societies depends on many activities, productive and reproductive, some essential for daily life, and others for status enhancement. Given a context of poverty in Bangladesh, women's contributions to both production and reproduction are recognised as necessary. The simultaneous rise of globalised capitalism reflected in the rapid expansion of the export-oriented garment industry, seeking female labour and overseas male migration, 85% of it to the Gulf states (<http://www.bmet.org.bd>, accessed on 29 May 2012), alongside the Islamisation of politics and its social visibility, particularly the rise of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* from the late 1980s, have created a contradictory tension for women in terms of their class and gender identity (White 2010). With the separation of production and reproduction, arising from male migration, both spatially and socially, women's nurturing roles are now being glorified as central to the well-being of the family. Staying at home is seen as a sign of honour, with women who go out to work increasingly subjected to violence and harassment – a reaction also to aid dependence and NGO activities seeking to empower women. Fatwas are issued against them and the local *shalish* (village council), seen as the arbiter of Islamic morality, is used to curtail their movements and freedoms (Siddiqi 1998; Feldman 2001b, 2010; Shehabuddin 2008; White 2010). The military rule from the late 1970s weakened Bangladesh's secular credentials, leading to an alteration of the Constitution in 1988, public recognition of *hajjis*, establishment of mosques and madrasas and allowing space to Islamic parties, while at the same time encouraging female employment (Feldman 2001a).<sup>7</sup>

Although migration opens possibilities for changing roles and activities, women's migration here is rarely seen as contributing substantially to consumption or status enhancement but often the opposite. Women's engagement with productive work is considered a consequence of extreme poverty or even the failure of the man to provide, reflecting a lack of choice or constriction of spaces for negotiation rather than greater freedom. As Feldman (2001b, 1113) points out in relation to the discussion around veiling and wearing the *burqa* in Bangladesh:

The issue here is not that women desired no choice in decisions about veiling; rather, they desired greater choice in decisions about whether or not to work. Moreover, for these women, veiling was not a symbol of the appropriateness of their behavior in maintaining family honor but was an expression of their husbands' and families' ability to provide completely for their subsistence.

Muzaffar had brought his wife a burqa as a gift when he returned from Saudi Arabia – a sign of wealth and prosperity that the poor cannot afford. His wife used it when she went to the market or a social function, to establish her moral and material superiority over others, but did not allow it to restrict her everyday activities (cf. Thangarajah 2003). She could not, however, imagine a life of seclusion; her feelings towards the burqa remained ambiguous. Although symbolising successful manhood, it could potentially restrict her physical mobility and invisibilise her work.

There is an implicit understanding here of social stratification based on differential valuations of gender roles, and their segregation, more so in the commitment to being a good Muslim and hence abiding by Islamic discipline (Shehabuddin 2008). Within this framework, women's primary role is seen to lie in social reproduction rather than in productive work, with women who buy in having greater public prestige (cf. Gardner 2001), irrespective of other characteristics such as education, as illustrated by the following two examples.

Roshanara, aged 44, was born in a poor family. She, however, was a bright student, got a scholarship in grade 5 and was able to complete secondary schooling from Sadara in 1982. She said that:

The teachers praised me as a good student. But my father's poverty led to my taking a job with an NGO before I could finish my SSC exams. Sadara is not my own village. I lived with a relative here. I married Hafiz in this village and so could keep my job. When I joined I got 750 Taka per month. Now I get 12,000 Taka per month, so Hafiz engages only in part-time business, helping me when required.

Roshanara has a respectable, white-collar job located in the village itself. Her earnings now are high enough to support them, so her husband engages in family agriculture and seasonal trade to supplement her earnings. More importantly, he is available to accompany her outside the village when required, thus making sure that her respectability is maintained. Although NGOs working in rural areas do provide employment to a large number of women in their field offices, such employment is mediated by women's marriages and familial rights and responsibilities, rather than career aspirations.

But for poor women, earning is often not a choice. Reshma, aged 16, of Achingaon, worked in a garments factory for 4 months as a helper in the button section on a monthly wage of 900 Taka. She rented a house near the factory along with other women coworkers for 500 Taka per month. She worked over 14 h a day, but got no overtime pay. Her salary was insufficient for her living expenses, so she quit the job and returned home.

For young and unmarried women like Reshma, parents constantly worry about their daughters' safety and fear gossip that could jeopardise her chances of a good marriage. Their work is justified through its ideological construction as short term and temporary. In Achingaon, 60% women migrants migrated for less than 3 years, whereas over 65% of men migrated for more than 3 years. This is not accidental, but a strategy to prevent women from pursuing individual acquisition, developing a career in the industry and perhaps ultimately breaking off from her networks through marrying a man of her choice in the city where she works (cf. Paul-Majumder and Begum 2006). Although working women are central to the globalising order, there are attempts to rework the notions of domesticity, reconciling public employment with the performance of domestic duties

(Sen and Stevens 1998), maintaining family relations and promoting their religious identity (Feldman 2001b). The need for cash income has led to a shift in position from prohibiting women to work outside to the type of work women do and how they conduct themselves.

Parents try to get their working daughters married quickly, as frequency of questions about her reputation increase with the duration of her migration. The dowry demands too are likely to rise. But here lies an interesting gender paradox. Although several women mentioned the need to earn a dowry as a reason for migration, the very process is seen as 'spoiling their reputation', and inappropriate for a woman of status (Rao 2012). Migration and the movement across physical space enhance their personal confidence,<sup>8</sup> yet a price is paid in terms of higher dowries and submission to controls over their autonomy and sexuality like commuting to work from home, travelling in groups, modesty of dress and getting married as soon as possible.

Despite considerable investment in girls' secondary education, women's educational success has not translated into economic advantage. Gender wage gaps remain high, with women on average earning 60% of what men earn (World Bank 2007). In such a context of low wages, difficult working conditions and weak social security provisioning, women like Reshma themselves consider marriage rather than a career as the ultimate form of future security (cf. Kabeer 2000). Their agency, expressed through making a successful marriage, at times even adopting the veil, is driven by strategic-instrumental reasons, alongside personal identity and status concerns (Rozario 2006). With migration seen as essential to securing and improving livelihoods, they aspire to marry migrant men, especially those overseas, even if this means a life of loneliness and submission to controls for them. Male remittances serve to ensure male authority and women's fidelity, supported by the adoption of religious practices in their daily life (Gardner 2001; Huq 2008; White 2010). The rapid expansion of religious education through the madrasas in Achingaon has further valorised the importance of education for marriage and household reproduction.

Marriage is central to the identity of a good Muslim for both men and women in Bangladesh. The right marriage alliance contributes substantially to status recognition and is hence considered worthy of investment. A substantial part of migrant remittances is in fact used for arranging visas for potential sons-in-law, performing marriages and other social ceremonies and paying dowries. Karim, a 32-year-old man, married and with one child, is an example. Marital negotiations included an agreement that his in-laws would sponsor his migration to Saudi Arabia. His brothers-in-law, who live in Saudi Arabia, arranged for his visa and ticket. The bride's father considers it an investment in the future well-being of his daughter. This is an interesting turnaround, by which alternative practices and values are used to transform a negative subject position – that of being a 'migrant worker' – into a positive one – as desirable grooms. Gaining economic strength through consumption, both individual and collective, and acquiring social status by investing in social activities have together resulted in a large number of young men not only migrating/aspiring to migrate overseas, but also remaining abroad for at least 5 years (Afsar, Yunus, and Shamsul Islam 2002; Siddiqui and Abrar 2002); the first few years required merely to repay their loans and reclaim assets.

Numerous poor women, however, continue wage work after marriage.<sup>9</sup> Given both the nature and quality of work available to them and the ways in which it is negatively perceived and devalued in the local context, they too are keen to construct their identity as home-makers rather than workers. This does not necessarily make them victims of male control; rather it can potentially help expand the socio-cultural spaces available to them, using their identity as a 'good wife' to manoeuvre for their own security and dignity.

Nevertheless, in renegotiating status, women then often end-up adopting practices that reaffirm asymmetric gender relations.

### **Conclusion: refiguring spaces for action and thought**

In a globalising world, the movement and mixing of peoples and cultures remains embedded in unequal power relations. The demand for cheap labour is growing but the sectors of work remain segregated by gender, ethnicity and place. Nevertheless, with the potential to earn substantially higher incomes overseas, or in distant urban locations, people compromise on the type of work they do. Tasks that are seen as ‘degrading’ in the locality do not carry the same meanings when performed far away. It is not seen locally, but more importantly, it helps them build both material and symbolic wealth. ‘Place’ plays a critical role both in its impact on labour market opportunities and choices and in shaping social perceptions about the ability of differently positioned people, especially those lacking in both material resources and social networks, to negotiate and cope with an unknown context. Although this may be the case for men, for women, migration continues to be viewed as an undesirable option, a result of poverty, but also the inability of the man to fulfil his provider roles.

A crucial shift is visible from the realm of production, which in many ways involved surrendering freedom to work in a disciplined environment (still true of women’s factory work) to the realm of consumption and control over one’s time and lifestyle. With global labour markets offering only temporary and insecure contracts, work has lost its privileged position in constituting a person’s identity, and is replaced instead by enhanced self-image. This is clear from the increasingly ambiguous descriptions of the nature of work performed, yet clarity in terms of lifestyles, tastes and preferences, especially in male articulations about their lives. Men aspire for freedom as reflected in starting their own enterprises, constructing ‘modern’ houses with consumer durables, marrying an ‘educated’ woman or indeed observing elite religious practices.

Socially, marriage is an important symbol of status and strategy for confronting global insecurities. Marriage results from successful migration and the ability to provide dowries, but also facilitates migration, both financially and by ensuring that the wife can take charge of family care and nurture. An important component of marriage is the emphasis on a gendered ideology of seclusion for women, as an added pathway to enhanced male status, security and prestige. For women too, in a context of poverty, the material and symbolic markers of status and prestige override their concerns for personal companionship from husbands, or restrictions on their movement. Yet given the qualitative shift in home-making roles, from service provider to home manager, rather than a return to tradition, the new controls and their contingent meanings signify a form of cultural hybridity, combining elements of modernity and tradition, individual interest and familial responsibility.

To confront the insecurities embedded in individualisation, there is an attempt to reinforce and build an identity as valued members of the community. This comes not just from providing for their families, but also the adoption of symbolic practices in their personal lives, in the realisation that money alone cannot help them rise in the social hierarchy – they need additionally to demonstrate enterprise and risk-taking abilities; and reliability and concern for the community as good Muslims. The latter may appear as conservative religious practices, yet serves to create back-up social support at a collective level, to turn to if their strategy of engagement with globalisation was to fail, more so, in the absence of state social security provision.

This article has attempted to unravel the multidimensionality of migration and mobility, with a close linkage between the physical, political, economic, social and ideological dimensions, differentiated by class and gender. The poor use migration strategies and the 'third space' this exposes them to, both to refigure the local meanings of social and status hierarchies and to claim elite status for themselves. Their historically given identity is challenged to create instead a sense of cultural belonging for themselves and others in their position. Yet, similar movements and activities are represented differently when performed by men or women: although migration is seen as status-giving for men, it is viewed as inappropriate for women. Neither are the relationships between physical and social space linear; an expansion in physical or economic space does not necessarily lead to a corresponding shift in ideational spaces, in thoughts, attitudes and actions for all members of a household. Rather, people draw on different spaces and strategies, including present and past experiences of migration, to achieve social and economic mobility, from their own specific location. In the present case, the emphasis is placed particularly on reconfiguring their identity as good Muslims in both class and gender terms.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Development Research Centre on Globalisation, Migration and Poverty for a research grant during 2005–2008 and my Research Associate in Bangladesh Munshi Israil Hossain for making the empirical work for this article possible. I would also like to thank the Javeriana University, Bogota, Colombia, for inviting me to present an earlier version of this article at a conference on Renegotiating territories in the twenty-first century, and the questions and comments from the participants. I specifically thank Amit Mitra for his extensive inputs and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments on this article.

### Notes

1. Comilla had a literacy rate of 45% in 2001 (42% female) as against Manikganj with a literacy rate of 40% (35% female) (Statistical Pocketbook Bangladesh 2004). The Human Poverty Index of Comilla was 26.7% as against 35.4% for Manikganj, yet both show declining rates of poverty (Deb et al. 2008). <http://www.undp.org.bd/report/reports/growth.pdf>, accessed 15 August 2011.
2. Although the alia madrasa provides a combination of religious and general education, the quomi madrasa is concerned exclusively with religious education.
3. Kindergardens are mainly an urban elite phenomenon, and while unusual in rural areas, they are gradually spreading in more prosperous rural communities (Hossain and Zeitlyn 2010, 17).
4. Forty-eight competitive, merit-based scholarships were secured by students from here between 1982 and 2006.
5. Asadullah and Chaudhury (2008) report that girls now constitute 50% of secondary-level madrasa enrolment in Bangladesh.
6. 127 Taka = 1 GBP as on 11 July 2012.
7. The military rule from the late 1970s weakened Bangladesh's secular credentials, leading to an alteration of the Constitution in 1988, public recognition of hajjis, establishment of mosques and madrasas and allowing space to Islamic parties, while at the same time encouraging female employment (Feldman 2001b).
8. Dowries were earlier seen as women's assets, expanding their economic spaces and ability for action. It is, however, now seen more as a transfer of moveable or immovable assets to the in-laws and husband, over which the woman has little control.
9. Paul-Majumdar and Begum (2006, 17) found that 38% of female garment workers in their sample were married women.

### Notes on contributor

Nitya Rao is professor of Gender and Development at the School of International Development, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. Her research focuses on gendered changes in land and

agrarian relations, migration, livelihood and well-being, gendered identities and intra-household relations and equity issues in education policies and provisioning. Her book on the theme of land as a resource in the struggle over gendered identities entitled *'Good women do not inherit Land': Politics of Land and Gender in India* was published by Social Science Press and Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, in 2008, and republished in 2012. She has recently worked on two major research projects, one on 'Gender Differences in Migration Opportunities: Implications for Educational Choices and Outcomes' funded by the Development Research Centre on Globalisation, Migration and Poverty and the second on 'Intra-household Allocation of Resources: A Cross-Country Comparison' funded by DFID-ESRC. Her research has mainly been conducted in South Asia.

## References

- Afsar, R., M. Yunus, and A. B. M. Shamsul Islam. 2002. *Are Migrants Chasing After the "Golden Deer"? A Study on Cost-Benefit Analysis of Overseas Migration by the Bangladeshi Labour*. Dhaka: International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Regional Office for South Asia.
- Aftabuddin, M. 2006. "Perceptions, Motivations, Learning and Uses of Literacies in Relation to Livelihoods: A Case Study of Two Bangladeshi Villages." PhD. Nottingham: Department of Education, University of Nottingham.
- Ahmed, M., and R. Govinda. 2010. "Universal Primary Education in South Asia: A Right that Remains Elusive." *Prospects* 40: 321–335.
- Ahmed, M., S. R. Nath, A. Hossain, and Md. A. Kalam. 2005. *The State of Secondary Education: Progress and Challenges*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE).
- Appadurai, A., ed. 1986. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Asadullah, M. N., and N. Chaudhury. 2008. "Holy Alliances: Public Subsidies, Islamic High Schools, and Female Schooling in Bangladesh." In *Girls' Education in the 21st Century*, edited by M. Tembon, and L. Fort, 209–238. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- Batnitzky, A., L. McDowell, and S. Dyer. 2008. "A Middle-Class Global Mobility? The Working Lives of Indian Men in a West London Hotel." *Global Networks* 8 (1): 51–70.
- Bauman, Z. 1998a. *Globalisation: The Human Consequences*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. 1998b. *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Castles, S. 2010. "Understanding Global Migration: A Social Transformative Perspective." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36 (10): 1565–1586.
- Deb, U., Z. Hoque, N. Khaled, and S. K. Bairagi. 2008. "Growth, Income Inequality and Poverty Trends in Bangladesh: Implications for Development Strategy." Paper presented at the Dialogue on Addressing Regional Inequalities: Policy Options and Strategies, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Dhaka, February 28.
- Deshmukh-Ranadive, J. 2002. *Space for Power: Women's Work and Family Strategies in South and South-East Asia*. New Delhi: Rainbow.
- Feldman, S. 2001a. "(Re)presenting Islam: Manipulating Gender, Shifting State Practices, and Class Frustrations in Bangladesh." In *Resisting the Sacred and the Secular*, edited by P. Jeffery, and A. Basu, 33–52. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Feldman, S. 2001b. "Theories of Patriarchy: A Perspective from Contemporary Bangladesh." *Signs* 26 (4): 1097–1127.
- Feldman, S. 2010. "Shame and Honour: The Violence of Gendered Norms Under Conditions of Global Crisis." *Women's Studies International Forum* 33 (2): 305–315.
- Gardner, K. 1993. "Desh-Bidesh: Sylheti Images of Home and Away." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 28 (1): 1–15.
- Gardner, K. 2001. "Women and Islamic Revivalism in a Bangladeshi Community." In *Resisting the Sacred and the Secular*, edited by P. Jeffery, and A. Basu, 203–220. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Gardner, K., and Z. Ahmed. 2006. *Place, Social Protection and Migration in Bangladesh: A 'Londoni' Village in Biswanath*. Brighton: Development Research Centre on Globalisation, Migration and Poverty, University of Sussex.
- Giddens, A. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Gray, B. 2011. "Becoming Non-Migrant: Lives Worth Waiting For." *Gender, Place and Culture* 18 (3): 417–432.
- Hartmann, B., and J. K. Boyce. 1983. *A Quiet Violence: View from a Bangladesh Village*. London: Zed Books.
- Hossain, A., and B. Zeitlyn. 2010. *Poverty, Equity and Access to Education in Bangladesh*. CREATE Pathways to Access: Research Monograph No. 51. Sussex and Dhaka: Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity.
- Huq, M. 2008. "Reading the Qur'an in Bangladesh: The Politics of Belief Among Islamist Women." *Modern Asian Studies* 42 (2–3): 457–488.
- Kabeer, N. 2000. *The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Decisions in London and Dhaka*. London: Verso.
- Kibria, N. 2004. *Returning International Labour Migrants from Bangladesh: The Experience and Effects of Deportation*. Boston, MA: Boston University.
- Lewis, D. 2011. *Bangladesh: Politics, Economy and Civil Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mahler, S. J., and P. R. Pessar. 2001. "Gendered Geographies of Power: Analyzing Gender Across Transnational Spaces." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 7 (4): 441–459.
- Massey, D. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- McDowell, L. 2007. "Respect, Deference, Respectability and Place: What is the Problem with/for Working Class Boys?" *Geoforum* 38: 276–286.
- Miller, D., ed. 1995. *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Mitter, S. 1994. "On Organising Women in Casualised Work: A Global Overview." In *Dignity and Daily Bread*, edited by S. Rowbotham, and S. Mitter, 14–52. London: Routledge.
- Murshid, K. A. S., K. Iqbal, and M. Ahmed. 2002. *A Study on Remittance Flows and Utilisation*. Dhaka: International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Regional Office for South Asia.
- Orr, A., B. Adolph, M. R. Islam, H. Rahman, B. Barua, and M. K. Roy. 2009. *Pathways from Poverty: The Process of Graduation in Rural Bangladesh*. Dhaka: The University Press.
- Osella, F., and C. Osella. 2000. "Migration, Money and Masculinity in Kerala." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6: 117–133.
- Paul-Majumder, P., and A. Begum. 2006. *Engendering Garment Industry: The Bangladesh Context*. Dhaka: The University Press.
- Picchio, A. 1992. *Social Reproduction and the Political Economy of the Labour Market*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Piketty, T. 1995. "Social Mobility and Redistributive Politics." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 110 (3): 551–584.
- Rahman, M., D. Bhattacharya, M. A. Iqbal, T. I. Khan, and T. K. Paul. 2009. "Macroeconomic Management in the Face of Global Challenges." In Keynote Paper. CPD Conference on Development with Equity and Justice: Immediate Tasks for the Newly Elected Government. Dhaka, Centre for Policy Dialogue.
- Rao, N. 2009. "Gender Differences in Migration Opportunities, Educational Choices and Wellbeing Outcomes. Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty." *Research Report*, March, [http://www.migrationdrc.org/publications/research\\_reports.html](http://www.migrationdrc.org/publications/research_reports.html).
- Rao, N. 2012. "Breadwinners and Homemakers: Migration and Changing Conjugal Expectations in Rural Bangladesh." *Journal of Development Studies* 48 (1): 26–40.
- Rao, N., and M. I. Hossain. 2011. "Confronting Poverty and Educational Inequalities: Madrasas as a Strategy for Contesting Dominant Literacy in Rural Bangladesh." *International Journal of Educational Development* 31: 623–633.
- Rao, N., and M. I. Hossain. 2012. "'I Want to be Respected': Migration, Mobility and the Construction of Alternate Educational Discourses in Rural Bangladesh." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 43 (4): 415–428.
- Rozario, S. 2001. *Purity and Communal Boundaries: Women and Social Change in a Bangladeshi Village*. Dhaka: University Press.
- Rozario, S. 2006. "The New Burqa in Bangladesh: Empowerment or Violation of Women's Rights?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 29 (2): 368–380.
- Sen, K., and M. Stivens, eds. 1998. *Gender and Power in Affluent Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Shehabuddin, E. 2008. "Jamaat-i-Islami in Bangladesh: Women, Democracy and the Transformation of Islamic Politics." *Modern Asian Studies* 42 (2/3): 577–603.

- Siddiqi, D. M. 1998. "Taslima Nasreen and Others: The Contest Over Gender in Bangladesh." In *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity Within Unity*, edited by H. L. Bodman, and N. Tohidi, 2015–2027. London: Lynne Rienner.
- Siddiqi, T. 2005. *International Labour Migration from Bangladesh: A Decent Work Perspective*. Working Paper No. 66 Geneva: International Labour Office.
- Siddiqi, T., and C. R. Abrar. 2002. *Contribution of Returnees: An Analytical Survey of Post Return Experience*. Dhaka: International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Regional Office for South Asia.
- Thangarajah, C. Y. 2003. "Veiled Constructions: Conflict, Migration and Modernity in Eastern Sri Lanka." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 37 (1&2): 141–162.
- Van Hear, N. 2010. "Theories of Migration and Social Change." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36 (10): 1531–1536.
- van Schendel, W. 2009. *A History of Bangladesh*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- White, S. C. 2010. "Domains of Contestation: Women's Empowerment and Islam in Bangladesh." *Women's Studies International Forum* 33 (2): 334–344.
- World Bank. 2007. *Bangladesh Gender Assessment: Celebrating the Victories, Addressing the Challenges*. Washington, D.C. The World Bank.
- Ye, J. 2013 forthcoming. "Migrant Masculinities: Bangladeshi Men in Singapore's Labour Force." *Gender Place and Culture*.
- Zeitlyn, B. 2006. *Migration from Bangladesh to Italy and Spain*. Occasional Paper No. 48. Dhaka: South Asia Migration Resource Network (SAMReN).

## ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

### **Migración, movilidad y las cambiantes relaciones de poder: aspiraciones y praxis de migrantes bangladeshíes**

Este artículo, basado en investigación empírica en dos pueblos en Bangladesh, analiza las formas en que la migración no es una mera respuesta a la pobreza y la supervivencia de la familia, sino que se vuelve un instrumento para interrogar al poder de la elite tradicional y contribuir a la movilidad social y de estatus en el contexto local. Enfocándose en cuatro dimensiones interrelacionadas de lugar, trabajo, consumo y matrimonio, y sobre las jerarquías insertadas dentro de los diferentes destinos de los migrantes, apunta a las formas en que las estrategias de migración están relacionadas con las estrategias de movilidad, y contribuyen a refigurar las identidades de clase y género. La religión y la construcción de una identidad islámica moderna, conllevando simultáneamente elementos de materialidad y espiritualidad, sirven como una fuerza de mediación crucial en este proceso, cerrando la distancia entre las aspiraciones y la praxis.

**Palabras claves:** migración; movilidad; género; estatus; identidad; Bangladesh

### **移民、流动性与改变中的权力关系：孟加拉移民的渴望与实践**

本文根据在孟加拉两处村落的经验研究，检视移民并不仅是对贫穷与家庭生存的回应，而是成为整合传统菁英权力、并于地方脉络中有助于社会及身份流动的工具。本文透过聚焦地方、工作、消费与婚姻这四个相互关联的主要面向，以及在不同的移民目的地中体现的阶层关系，指出移民策略连结至流动性策略、并造成阶级与性别认同重塑的方式。宗教以及现代伊斯兰认同的建构，同时承担了物质性与精神性的元素，提供做为此一过程中的重要中介力量，弥合了渴望与实践之间的差距。

**关键词：**移民；流动性；性别；身份；认同；孟加拉