

**The Political Economy of Labour Migration from
Bangladesh**

Power, Politics and Contestation

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to enhance our understanding of the role of political and social factors in shaping the terms under which migrant workers are incorporated into global labour markets by examining the case of Bangladesh, one of the world's principal migrant labour-sending countries.

The literature on migration and development has given little attention to the role of political and social factors in shaping the development impact of labour migration while that on the political economy of migration has focused overwhelmingly on labour-receiving countries. The few available studies on the political economy of migration in labour-sending countries have concentrated on how states have facilitated exploitation of migrant workers by, for example, celebrating them as national heroes/heroines and in so doing normalising violation of their rights. The existing literature has thus told us little about the contestation that occurs over migration policy within labour-sending countries. This is despite the fact that it has a significant bearing on who has access to overseas migration, on what terms, and to whose benefit.

This dissertation aims to fill this gap in the literature by analysing the contestation that has occurred over Bangladesh's labour migration policies and their implementation since the country achieved independence in 1971 and the implications this has had for the protection of migrant workers' rights. It makes two broad claims.

The first relates to the changing nature of the country's migration policies and their implementation in Bangladesh. Between 1971 and 1990, it argues, Bangladesh pursued an approach to labour migration that can be broadly characterised as neo-liberal with weak protection of migrant workers' rights and moments of direct state intervention. By contrast, in the period since 1990, it has pursued an approach that can be characterised as neo-liberal constrained by stronger protection of migrant workers' rights again with moments of direct state intervention. In both periods, there has been poor implementation of measures to reduce fraud in the recruitment process and protect migrant workers' rights.

The second claim relates to the political and social dynamics underpinning these policies and their implementation. Drawing on social conflict theory, the dissertation argues that the above continuities and shifts in the nature of Bangladesh's migration policies and their implementation have reflected: i) the continued political dominance throughout the post-independence period of an alliance between the dominant fractions of the domestic bourgeoisie and predatory state officials, ii) the patriarchal nature of Bangladeshi society and the ideological salience of Islam, iii) the increased scope for subaltern elements to participate in the policy-making process as a result of democratisation, and iv) the structural power of foreign governments, particularly those in receiving countries and that have provided aid to Bangladesh.

The final part of the dissertation suggests six policy-related implications of the analysis. As the main implication, it suggests that rights advocates in labour-sending countries should consider focusing on promoting democratic reform as it ultimately serves to provide better protection of migrant workers' rights by creating electoral incentives for politicians to pursue pro-poor policies and opening up new opportunities for migrant workers' groups to emerge, participate in and influence the migration policies and their implementation. The dissertation concludes by stating that in the foreseeable future, protection of Bangladeshi migrant workers' rights seems to rest on the outcome of political and social struggles between competing forces over the implementation of existing rights-based policies.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Rupananda Roy

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List of Abbreviations

- ADB— Asian Development Bank
- AL—Awami League
- ASA— Association for Social Advancement
- ASK—Ain O Salish Kendra
- BAIRA— Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies
- BLA— Bilateral Labour Agreements
- BLAST— Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust
- BMET— Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training
- BNP—Bangladesh Nationalist Party
- BNWLA— Bangladesh National Women Lawyers’ Association
- BOESL— Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited
- BOMSA— Bangladesh Ovibashi Mohila Sramik Association
- BRAC— Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
- CA— Chief Advisor
- CEDAW—Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
- DEMO— District Employment and Manpower Office
- DFI—Development Financing Institution
- DFID— Department for International Development
- EBP—Evidence-Based Policymaking
- EEF— Extended Fund Facility
- EPZ— Export Processing Zone
- FDI—Foreign Direct Investment
- GDP—Gross Domestic Product
- GNI— Gross National Income

ILO—International Labour Organisation

IMF —International Monetary Fund

IOM— International Organisation for Migration

MFA— Migrant Forum in Asia

MoEWOE— Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment

MoU— Memorandum of Understanding

MoWCA—Ministry of Women’s and Children’s Affairs

MP— Member of Parliament

NEC— National Economic Council

NELM—New Economics of Labour Migration

NGO— Non Government Organisation

NIP— New Industrial Policy

NPCG— Non Partisan Caretaker Government

NSB—National Seaman’s Board

ODA— Overseas Development Assistance

OEDB—Overseas Employment Development Board

OEP— Overseas Employment Policy

OSD— Officers on Special Duty

POEA—Philippines Overseas Employment Administration

PSC— Public Service Commission

RIP 1975— Revised Investment Policy 1975

RIP 1986— Revised Industrial Policy 1986

RMMRU—Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit

SAMReN— South Asia Migration Resource Network

SAPs— Structural Adjustment Packages

SDC— Swiss agency for Development and Cooperation

TIP— Trafficking In Person

TTC —Technical Training Centre

VAT —Value Added Tax

WARBE—Welfare Association for the Rights of Bangladeshi Emigrants

WEWF—Wage Earners' Welfare Fund

WID— Women in Development

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