



Akm Ahsan Ullah, *Rationalizing Migration Decisions*, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010, 276 pages, ISBN 978-1-4094-0513-9

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In the international migration process of the late XXth and early XXIst centuries, the labour migration from and in the Asia Pacific region represents an important area of research. In the recent years, as part of the wider process of globalization, migrants from specific areas of origin – South, Southeast and East Asia – have become visible all over the world; meanwhile, labour migration inside the region has known different evolutions from the mid-1980s on.

Rationalizing Migration Decisions, written by Akm Ahsan Ullah, aiming to redress the paucity of research surrounding Bangladeshi labour migration, examines the decisions that people from Bangladesh make to leave their homes and migrate abroad - in this case, specifically to Hong Kong and Malaysia. After an analysis of the rationale for selecting the two destination countries of the workers from Bangladesh, the author investigates, during his research, two facets of the migration process: the pre-migration decision making and the rationalization of the post-migration experiences. Therefore, the book is an qualitative and quantitative analysis of: the problems and vulnerabilities faced by the migrants, of the migration costs, the access to jobs, the income and savings, the remittance transfers, the pattern of expenditure by the family at home and the ultimate financial impact of the migration; but, also, an endeavour whose final objective is to recommend a set of policies and strategies that will enhance the benefits of migration, both for the Bangladeshi migrant workers and for the governments of the sending and receiving countries.

The book is organized in 8 chapters. The first chapter examines the two destination countries of the workers from Bangladesh – Hong Kong and Malaysia, countries that have historically relied on migrant workers for their economic growth, and where the flow of the Bangladeshi migrant workers has developed since the mid-1970s/mid (Hong Kong) and early 1960s (Malaysia).

The second chapter presents the major theories of migration that the book deals with. Firstly, the author presents the conceptualization of the term “rationalization” – from psychological, sociological and economic perspectives. In view of these angles, “people’s rationalization of migration illustrates how migrant workers justify their acts of migration through their beliefs and choices made according to certain patterns” (p. 23). Secondly, are stated the theories of migration research that are applicable to the Bangladeshi migrant workers: the classical theories, the economic approach, the cost-benefit model, the neo-classical economic macro-theory, the human capital, the relative deprivation, the household strategy, the modern theory and the gender aspects. As a consequence of this, the chapter succeeded in associating the two book’s perspective on the migration process (pre-migration and post-migration rationalization) with the selected theories.

The third chapter focuses on the socio-economic and demographic background of the Bangladeshi migrants from Hong Kong and Malaysia; while the fourth chapter shows up the routes followed by the Bangladeshi migrant workers to get to the two destination countries. In the same time, in the fourth chapter it is examined the way in which the networks facilitate migration and the role that different social groups play in the process, as the migration networks are significant actors in both pre – and post-migration periods, in terms of reducing the risk and cost of migration.

The fifth chapter deals with the migration costs and the ways of financing initial migration (the sources for borrowed money or the period needed to repay the loans). As a result, is analyzed not only the monetary cost, but also the social and psychological costs of the migration debt.

The sixth chapter discusses the influence of work-related issues – the categories of work offered/available to migrants, contracts, employee-employer relations and wages – on the rationalization process. It is also analyzed the adaptation of the migrant workers to their host countries, which is a significant element in the rationalization of their post-migration experiences.

The seventh chapter deals with the process of deriving and transferring remittance. In this regard, are identified the channels of transfer, the dynamics of remittance use and its impact on the well-being of the receiving families; but also the influence of income in the host countries on migrants’ rationalization processes.

The last chapter provides the concluding remarks and recommendations. Consequently, the data analyzed, along the seven chapters, indicated that: the

Bangladeshi migrant workers were mostly influenced by the economic factors, both regarding the pre-migration decision and the post-migration experiences; that, at the decision-making level, the push forces (the realities present in their country of origin) are active and the pull ones – are more covert (meaning that the attracting factors abroad are not known, except through their expectations based on the information or disinformation received via agents, brokers, friends, relatives or media); the migrants' income prior to migration is usually succeeded by their income after migration; the relative deprivation in their home countries creates desire for a better life standard in the host countries; the networks are not limited to the personal ties, and their role in facilitating migration is limited; the migration decisions are not always taken collectively; the adaptation strategies are important for earning income in the host countries; the migrant workers transfer remittances in order to develop the human capital of those left behind (healthcare, education); a large amount of remittances are transferred to Bangladesh through informal channels; and the majority of the migrants (both in Hong Kong and in Malaysia) said that their income was much lower than they had expected or been promised, but the earnings were higher than they could get at home.

In the end, the author makes several observations and policy recommendations. Therefore, he identifies, at the Bangladeshi society level – weak points as: the lack of pragmatic policies, in Bangladesh, to promote migration; the flaws in the government policy regarding migration that has resulted in an exorbitant cost of migration; the little attention paid to the gender dimension of migration; the covert and corrupt practices in the national banking systems; or the absence of the required support from the Bangladesh embassies and consulates in Hong Kong and Malaysia. For all these reasons, the author considers that Bangladeshi policies are needed regarding cheaper, convenient and reliable ways of transferring remittance and the setting up of long term incentive programmes for attracting migrants as customers; but, in the same time, internal migration policies for the benefit of migrants and of the country as a whole, and bilateral agreements with the host countries, in order to manage migration effectively and combat illegal migration and trafficking.

Rationalizing Migration Decisions represents an exhaustive analysis of the psychological, social, economic dimensions that interrelate and develop along of the labour migration process, from the pre-migration moment to the post-migration one. The research - realized through a qualitative and quantitative

analysis, proceeded according to the established theoretical framework - has brought to light innovative conclusions and recommendations that constitute a valuable contribution for both the research on the Bangladeshi labour migration, and for the further research on labour migration and for the policy – making process. A contribution that, thus, makes the book an extremely useful tool not only for the researchers or practitioners, but also for the policy makers.