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“Without a Mobile Phone, I Suppose I Had to Go There” — Mobile Communication and Translocal Social Constellations in Bangladesh

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Summary

Recent estimates put the global number of mobile phone subscriptions close to the number of humans currently alive on Earth; at the same time, the global number of both domestic and international migrants is approaching the one billion mark. This article addresses the linkages between these two processes: Although migrants and mobile populations always had ties to their places of origin, the recent boom in access to affordable communication — specifically in the form of mobile phones — has fundamentally changed the way in which millions of migrants “live” translocality. These changes are traced in this article in the translocal social constellations of rural-to-urban migrants in Bangladesh. Translocality is conceptualized through a theoretical framework of strong structuration theory, with the key elements herein being networks, places, and resources. Using the two examples of remittances and the chatroom, it is shown how changing communication practices are now shaping and rearranging the country’s translocal structures. These structural changes encompass social and spatial reconfigurations of translocal networks, shifts in resource endowment, and shifts of norms and expectations regarding social and economic interactions and transactions.

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