Bachelor's Programme in Economic History

THE RED THREAD

Economic development stories and authorship of ready-made garment workers in Dhaka

by

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Economic development narratives have traditionally been written by academics and policy-makers, for academics and policy-makers. So too the story of Bangladeshi development: a story of alternately success and hardship. By focusing on the economic narrative of those directly affected by development, this thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how economic narratives influence development as well as of what economic narratives are conceivable. This is done by analyzing ten semi-structured interviews with garment workers in Dhaka. The main conclusion is that there are signs of agency in authorship of the economic development narrative, but that the authorship agency is heavily suppressed. Policy implications include acknowledging creative freedom and authorship agency as important capabilities to reach free and inclusive development.

Key words: Economic History, Development, Economic development, South Asia, Bangladesh, Dhaka, Garments industry, Garment workers, Narrative economics, Narrative analysis, Subaltern studies, Development as Freedom

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1 Introduction

To see the world in a grain of sand,
And heaven in a wild flower.
- *William Blake*

Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose

- *Gertrude Stein*

Now roses seldom grow in the field of economics. We associate them with poems and love stories, where they – tiresome and tireless – continue to unfold their petals: to develop. The roots of the word development, which definition causes much dispute in contemporary economics, are to be found in precisely the unfolding: originating from the French words *des*, the prefix un, and *enveloper*, meaning enclose. That way, development connotes simultaneous embracement, or captivity, and unravelling, rather than the forward pointing process it is often understood as. When Little Briar Rose pricked her finger on a spindle she slept for a hundred years, held captive behind the growing briar. When garments injected Bangladesh, the story goes, the result was extraordinary economic growth and liberalization: a story of forward, upward development. Nevertheless, the briar grows also here, with thorns and thistles and thousands of rose buds to unfold, each enveloping a story of its own.

1.1 Research Problem

The contribution of the garments industry and economic development to the Bangladeshi society are indisputable. The effects on garment workers, however, are creating discussion among scholars. Female workers gain most attention partly because the majority of the work forces is female, and partly because they are most affected by the contradictory implications of the profession: exploitation and empowerment. On one hand, emphasis is put on the unsafe and unhealthy working conditions: wages that cannot be considered living wages; child labor; family conflicts when breaking with tradition; sexual harassment; vulnerability to volitation's in the global market; and suppression of unionizing (Kibria, 1995; Absar, 2003; Ahmed, 2004; Khosla, 2009; Hossain, 2017; Rahman and Chowdhury, 2020; Kabir, Maple and Usher, 2021). On the other hand, empowerment through: job opportunities and increasing economic assets; a larger degree of control over income; and ways out of forced marriage (Kibria, 1995, 1998;

Zohir, 2001; Hossain, 2017; Ashraf and Prentice, 2019; Rahman and Chowdhury, 2020). While there is an evident consensus that both pictures are true, some scholars complicate the picture further by asking how the patterns should be understood in the oscillation between tradition and neoliberalism that defines contemporary Bangladesh (Siddiqi, 2009; Huq, 2019). Important data collection and analysis of workers life stories has also been made (Kibria, 1995, 1998; Ahmed, 2004; Siddiqui and Uddin, 2016; Hasan, 2018; Ashraf and Prentice, 2019; Alamgir and Alakavuklar, 2020). In summary, much important work has been done, presenting a complex and nuanced story of both garment work and Bangladeshi development. Yet, the workers own stories of economic development, beyond their own direct experiences, as well as the preconditions to be the author of this story, has remained outside the range of academic interest. This should not come as a surprise, taking into consideration that narratives role in economics overall is still a widely underexamined field (Roos & Reccius, 2022). Therefore, taking interest in these stories is an important step to understand the mechanisms of economic development, and its effect on garment workers.

1.2 Aim

The Janus-faced Bangladeshi development, created by both neoliberal open-market policies and an intervening state, marked by corruption and a questionable democracy, accentuates the elusive relation between economic liberalism and freedom. Freedom under liberalism is described by Foucault as both exalted and always limited by the need to produce workers, buyers, sellers and indeed the liberal freedom itself (Foucault 2004/2014). Consequently, the possibilities for citizens to be co-creators of society are diminished, especially in malfunctioning democracies. Specifically in relation to South-Asia, Ong (2006) points out the formation of a self-enterprising citizenship, where rights and benefits depend on market performance. Adding to this, existing development narratives often derive from a neoliberal, monistic worldview (Longhurst et al., 2016), and are written by academics and policymakers for academics and policymakers. Based in a social constructivist understanding of society as being, or have the possibility to be, under negotiation, this thesis aims to examine the economic development narratives told by garment worker directly affected by the economic development. Further, Gayatri Spivak's agency-subalternity framework (1988/2014, 2005/2014, etc.) is used to understand what narratives are sanctioned, are tellable, or are even conceivable. Relating these narratives and authorship positions to Amartya Sen's theory of development as freedom (1999/2014) the following questions are examined:

- How do textile workers in Dhaka narrate the story of economic development in Bangladesh?

- To what degree do the workers agency/subalternity position allow authorship of this story?

- What do the stories and the degree of authorship reveal about the role of economic narratives in Bangladeshi development and freedom as development?

- Lastly, and with caution, alternative stories be sensed?

1.3 Definitions

1.3.1 Neoliberalism

Throughout this thesis neoliberalism is understood broadly, as a prevailing political and economic practice rather than, per se, a belief. As few economists today for example believe in an all-rational *homo economicus,* unaffected by her social environment, the implications instead concerns where focus is put and explanations ultimately sought. I draw my understanding from a definition of neoclassical economics by Arnsperer and Varoufakis (2008), assuming that the economic understanding of the broader ideology of neoliberalism, is based in neoclassical economics (Harvey, 2010). Three aspects of Arnsperer and Varoufakis definition are of considerable relevance. Firstly, socio-economic events and circumstances are explained on the individual level. Secondly, choices are made to maximize preference satisfaction, excluding beliefs, ethics and interest outside the personal sphere. Thirdly, by presenting itself as a science, thus based in an unquestionable reality, rather than as a social construction, openings for criticism and pluralism are being cut off (Arnsperer and Varoufakis, 2008).

1.3.2 Freedom

The term freedom has largely become associated with liberalism or even libertarianism, where autonomy and a minimal state is the end goal. This, however, has little to do with the freedom examined in this thesis, which implications draw from Sen (1999/2014) and Spivak (2018). To Sen freedom equals having the freedom to achieve that one has reason to value. A too narrow focus on liberties while ignoring the need for social institutions and other rights, might actually

defeat the purpose of freedom. In short, you cannot exercise your political freedom if you have already starved to death. As such, individual freedom and social arrangements through cooperation depend on each other (Sen, 1999/2014). Yet, and without disparaging Sen's ideas, an analysis of creative freedom is lacking. Freedom under the monism of neoliberalism is freedom within frames, as pointed out by Foucault (2004/2014). The existing perception of freedom, which Spivak chooses to call the rational freedom, does not enable actual world-transformation (Spivak, 2018).

1.4 Outline of Thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. First, a background on Bangladesh is provided, revolving around the history, development strategy, garments industry, societal challenges and lastly a look ahead. Thereafter follows a literature review on the social impact of the garments industry, the particularities in the workforce, and female agency. Chapter four explains the three-legged theoretical framework: Narrative economics; agency- and subalternity theory; and development theory. Next the data is presented, together with limitations and ethical considerations. Chapter six outlines the methodology used to analyze the data. Thereafter follows an empirical analysis divided into four subchapters: A holistic reading; a close reading detecting the story of economic development; reflections on authorship position; and a discussion relating the material to mechanisms of economic narratives and the development theory. Lastly, the conclusion summarizes and highlights the most important findings, provides policy implications and suggestions for future research.

2 Background

One story to be told about the development of Bangladesh is that of remarkable economic growth and societal achievements; another story is that of rising inequality, insufficient inclusiveness and hazardous working conditions. This complex picture must be put into the historical context. I will therefore provide a brief, and by necessity incomplete, background covering Bangladeshi history, patterns of development and future prospects.

2.1 History

Liberated in 1971, Bangladesh is a relatively young nation, but the area has a long history of both troubles and trade. Under colonial British rule from the late 18th century, Bengal exports to Europe grew extensively. Interestingly, already then Bengal textiles were much coveted (Dasgupta, 2000; Chaudhuri, 2006). Before the British colonization ended in 1947, a large famine hit the area in 1943 (Schendel, 2020). Thereafter the area became East Pakistan and experienced an additional twenty-four years of unfreedom. Independence was gained through a bloody war, whereafter Sheik Mujib, who still is regarded a national hero, became the leader of the nation. His rule would not linger for long, however. Another famine struck the country in 1974, leading to the assassination of Sheik Mujib and fifteen years of military rule (Hossain, 2017). As for now, 2023, Sheik Mujibs daughter, Sheikh Hasina has been prime minister since 2009 (Bangladesh Parliament, 2023). In contrast to the famine of 1943, the famine of 1974 is a taboo subject, suppressed by the government (Hossain, 2021).

2.2 Development strategy

Since the end of military rule Bangladesh has graduated from being one of the poorest nations to reaching lower-middle income status in 2015 (World Bank, 2022a). Considering the level of economic development, the country also ranks high in human development indexes (Hossain, 2017; Mahapatro, 2020; Rahman and Chowdhury, 2020). This is remarkable progress considering that the area is short of resources: even labelled a basket case by an official at U.S. National Security Council 1971. The development has largely been attributed the neoliberal strategy of opening markets to global trade (Hossain, 2017; Rahman and Chowdhury, 2020). Beyond this, Hossain (2017) presents two important explanations to Bangladeshi development: international aid, often conditioned upon market liberalization; and a strong social contract built on the government ensuring basic security, much due to the lessons learned 1974. In line with

the latter Mahapatro (2020) explains how the state, though being corrupt and malfunctioning, underpins and steers development through incentives and support. In summary, Bangladeshi development rest on a paradoxical coalition between a neoliberal open market and an intervening, both supportive and undermining, state.

2.3 Garments industry

The advent and success of the garments sector are to be found in an interplay between national and international interests. While the government under Sheik Mujib nationalized 92 % of the industry, corruption led to the enrichment of a small but powerful number of people. These would, ironically, become the proto-capitalist pushing Bangladesh towards opening the markets (Khan, 2008), and making the self-made entrepreneur an ideal (Ahmed, 2004). Additionally, developed countries implemented the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) in 1973, placing quotas on textile- and clothing exports from developing countries. This, however, did not apply for countries without important textile and clothing industries, and EU did not put quotas on Least Developed Countries. Together with a growing international demand, an opening was thus created for Bangladesh to enter the market (Khan, 2008; Rahman and Chowdhury, 2020). While some quotas where imposed on Bangladesh from 1985, these were soon relaxed, and the subsequent Export Processing Zones continues governmental support of the garments industry (Rahman and Chowdhury, 2020). One of the before-mentioned proto-capitalists was the retired civil servant Nurul Quader Khan, who made common cause with the South Korean multinational Daewoo, creating Desh Garments in 1979. Khan contributed with money and political support, while Daewoo had the know-how and wanted to avoid the MFA. Unintentionally, this also meant that know-how was transferred to Bangladesh, feeding the emerging industry (Khan, 2008) together with liberal investment policies. For example, the state ensured foreign capital full legal protection and implemented tax incentives (Siddiqi, 2009).

While the garments industry, as well as the Bangladeshi development, thus is deeply rooted in global trade, it would not have been possible without workers. Initially, factory owners were prone to recruit women from the rural middle class: a class of landowners, without money but firmly determined to avoid poverty. Recruitment was often made in the owners' home village, where they were known entities and could ensure the social acceptability of the job. In a society with few job opportunities for women, garments offered a steady income and low labor costs

compared to other countries for the owners. Hence, a compliant work force was, arguably, created and prices could be kept down (Ahmed, 2004). Today recruitment mainly occurs in poor segments of society, for example in female-led households or if the wage of the man is low (Kibria, 1998; Quayyum, 2019). The working force consists of four million workers. How many of these are women is a little unclear, but between 60 % (Rahman and Chowdhury, 2020) and 80 % (Huq, 2019). Difficulties in measuring may be due to the existence of an informal sector, where working conditions are worse and child labor is still reported (Rahman and Chowdhury, 2020).

2.4 Challenges

Contradicting the success story, Bangladesh is also marked by persistent and emerging hardships. Approximately 13.5 % of the population live below the international poverty line of US$ 2.15 (2017 PPP) per day per capita, and lately poverty reduction has decelerated. Extreme poverty in the city has not decreased, and the rural areas stood for 90 % of poverty reduction between 2010-2016. Simultaneously, the country is rapidly urbanizing (World Bank, 2022a). Gini-index measures further show that inequality has increased, from 25.9 1983 to 32.4 2016 (World Bank, 2023a). During the same period the income share held by the richest 20 % has increased (World Bank, 2023b) while the share held by the lowest 20% has decreased (World Bank 2023c). In line with the Kuznets curve this could be interpreted as early stages of modern economic growth, implying an approaching convergence. However, the large and growing disparities between the top and bottom deciles puts the inclusiveness of the Bangladeshi development into serious question. Similarly, the development is geographically uneven and some districts, mainly in the northern part, resumes underdeveloped (Mahapatro, 2020). Additionally, in a country ranked seven on the Long-Term Climate Risk Index (Eckstein et al. 2021), these districts are among the most affected by natural disasters (Mahapatro, 2020).

2.5 Solutions?

Bearing witness of a both ambition and decisiveness, the Bangladeshi government has elaborate plans for the future, but whether this is the best way forward is disputed. In "Vision 2021-2041" the Bangladeshi government pronounces the goals to reach Upper Middle-Income status by 2031 and being a High-Income Country with minimal poverty by 2041. To realize these goals the government has set up strategies for urbanization, industrialization, adaption to climate change, reducing inequality etc. (GED, 2020). This can be seen as a prolongation of the

developmental strategy that has led the country so far. Thus, however, it is coupled with the same weaknesses: corruption, bank loan default, underutilization of the development budget and the inability to steer industry toward higher value-added production (Mahapatro, 2020). Further, the strategy requires political stability. According to Hossain (2017), the challenges that development and globalization has brought along or shed light on, including deficient safety nets for workers at home and abroad, calls for a new social contract. Further, she points out that while the state so far has been decisive, it has always been weak and in need of societal support, but the increasing oppression of free speech is of great concern.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Social impact of the garments industry

Driving an extraordinary development, changing millions of lives in Bangladesh, and providing clothes to people globally, the garments industry has been of great interest to scholars locally and internationally. Existing literature highlights that especially for poor, uneducated women the garments sector has brought along substantial improvements. The sector is one of few job-opportunities for these women, and while the wage is low it is higher than in domestic services or staying in rural poverty. Earning a wage has also been reported to bolster self-esteem, thus increasing women's participation in the social sphere as well as in taking decisions at home (Kibria, 1995, 1998; Zohir, 2001; Hossain, 2017; Ashraf and Prentice, 2019; Rahman and Chowdhury, 2020). Since the Rana Plaza accident, when a building housing five garment factories collapsed, killing and injuring thousands of workers, international and national pressure improved working conditions, at least in the export zones and the formal sector (Siddiqui and Uddin, 2016; Hossain, 2017; Ashraf and Prentice, 2019; Quayyum, 2019; Rahman and Chowdhury, 2020). Yet, hardships of poverty and patriarchal oppression persist, simultaneously as new challenges have emerged in connection to working environment, urbanization and breaking with traditions (Kibria, 1995; Absar, 2003; Ahmed, 2004; Khosla, 2009; Hossain, 2017; Rahman and Chowdhury, 2020; Kabir, Maple and Usher, 2021). The degree of exposure to these hardships varies among the workers, where the poorest are often most exposed (Kibria, 1995). The tendency to make garment workers an emblem for either empowerment or exploitation makes research that accentuate the particularities of the workforce and the pathways to agency crucial. The following to sections examine these further. The focus is on female garment workers, partly because women make out an overwhelming majority of the work-force and arguably have experienced the greatest change, but also because women are in focus in most of the existing literature.

3.2 Particularities

The degree of empowerment or exploitation among female garment workers is dependent on a range of factors: from gender, socio-economic and geographical background to household constellation. While recruitment has been made primarily in money-deprived segments of society (Kibria, 1998; Ahmed, 2004; Quayyum, 2019), Kibria has identified three different family backgrounds: urban working-, poor rural-, and lower-middle income class. Class

affiliation influenced the level of control women exercised over their earnings, one indicator of empowerment. The urban working-class women mainly handed over their earning directly to, or to a common household fund controlled by, a male head of household. The justification for this order was found in Bangladeshi tradition: Firstly, there is no distinguishment between the economic interests of the individual and the family, and secondly, it this the role of the male to gratify these interests. Women from lower-middle class, however, largely controlled their income. Interestingly, this was ratified by almost the same explanation, but reversed: As it was a male task to support the family, it would be shameful to take the woman's money. Implying that her earnings should be used for luxuries, the male supremacy was not challenged (Kibria, 1995). The idea of the male breadwinner has a long tradition in rural Bangladesh, were household work, often performed by women, is not acknowledged as a part of the production process. This mirrors the highly hierarchal organization of traditional Bangladeshi society, marked by a patron-client relationship between landowners and poor (Hasan, 2018). The third socio-economic category, the rural poor women, were often unmarried and therefore had full control over their income. In spite of the control being based in necessity, this also increasingly led to the challenging of tradition and satisfaction with control over mobility, marriage, work and economy (Kibria, 1995). However, this picture is further complicated by findings suggesting that the factory operates similarly to the traditional household, with a patron-relationship between worker and manager or factory owner, and almost siblingship between workers (Hasan, 2018).

While the composition and conditions of the workforce has changed since Kibria made her study in 1995, it highlights the influence of socio-economic background and tradition on a work force that might appear homogenous at first sight. Significantly, the effects of time are becoming visible as the second-generation garment workers enter the factories. Growing up with the garments industry an integrated part of society might diminish the potential feeling of liberation but also make the strains of tradition less palpable (Hossain, 2017). The effects of Covid19, including deteriorating health and dismissal of workers (Kabir, Maple and Usher, 2021), in combination with a global recession, further accentuate the need for more research on the composition and conditions of the garment workforce. Alluding what Rehman Sobhan formulated as Bangladesh having gone from being aid-dependent to trade-dependent (Siddiqi, 2009), the female garment workers may go from being less patriarch-dependent to increasingly trade-dependent. Yet, this must be understood as a multi-layered process, where dependency do not exclude the reasonableness of women wanting these jobs (Kibria, 1998).

3.3 Female agency

Without ignoring the hardships and dependency described, the resistance and agency performed by women, despite their rights to organize being severely limited, should be emphasized (Ahmed, 2004; Siddiqi, 2009; Hossain, 2017; Ashraf and Prentice, 2019). While the right to organize was improved after the Rana Plaza accident, many are still reluctant due to few organizations, memories of repression but few of successful union activities and few alternative job opportunities for women (Quayyum, 2019). Some national union federations are also closely linked to political parties, leading to corruption (Ashraf and Prentice, 2019). Further, findings imply that female misrepresentation persist in the compliance codes, regulating the working conditions and seen as one of the big achievements of the unions. For example, specific circumstances concerning female workers are ignored by discussing workers as a homogenous group, and women are continuously excluded from labor management governance. Lately, however, female aspirations to take part in governance has increased (Alamgir and Alakavuklar, 2020) and awareness of issues specific for female workers is slowly rising (Huq, 2019). Indeed, the creativeness and commitment that enable female organization despite the hindrances (Quayyum, 2019), as well as prominent women union leaders, are forceful signs of agency. Widening the focus to include men, other achievements of the unions include have been increased wages after workers protests in 2013 and 2016 (Huq, 2019). Sometimes the protest has been more militant, containing vandalism, rebellion and confrontation with the police (Ashraf and Prentice, 2019), violently contradicting the idea of a passive, exploited work force.

4 Theory

This thesis emanates in a tripartite theoretical framework: The epistemology is provided by narrative economics; representation and subject-formation are understood in terms of agency, subalternity and individual empowerment; and lastly, development theory.

4.1 Narrative economics

The understanding of economic narratives consists of three parts. Firstly, with a reworked terminology, characteristics and mechanisms of economic narratives defined by Robert J. Shiller (2019). Secondly, a qualitative and pluralist approach inspired by Edward Fullbrook (2008). And thirdly, Longhurst et al.'s (2016) four key dimensions of economic development narratives.

4.1.1 Shiller

One of the most important milestones in getting narratives on the economic agenda, is the 2019 book *Narrative Economics – How Stories go Viral and Drive Major Economic Events.* Here Robert J. Shiller attempts to lay the foundation for a new theory of economic change, based on the role of narratives. He defines these narratives as being: 1) contagious; 2) able to change how economic decisions are being made; and 3) usually not the most prominent existing narrative (Shiller, 2019. p. 3). Linked to the latter, they are usually written by a few people (Shiller, 2019). As such, stories are both closely linked to human existence and means of power. They not only help us explain and understand our reality, but also shape it (Shiller, 2017). Shiller further makes seven propositions about economic narratives, presented in Table 1, of which proposition 2, 6 and 7 are of particular importance to this thesis (Shiller, 2019).

Table 1. Shiller's Seven Propositions of Narrative Economics (Shiller, 2019, p. 87-103)	
1	Epidemics can be fast or slow, big or small
2	Important economic narratives may comprise a very small percentage of popular talk
3	Narrative constellations have more impact than any one narrative
4	The economic impact of narratives may change through time
5	Truth is not enough to stop false narratives
6	Contagion of economic narratives builds on opportunities for repetition
7	Narratives thrive on attachment: Human interest, identity and patriotism

The economic narratives discussed in this paper, however, differs from Shiller's comparably positivist understanding. Firstly, in seeing economic narratives as "epidemics" that can be more or less "contagious" Shiller implies the existence of an initial, healthy economic state without narratives. Even if this state is regarded unattainable, the very idea of it is incompatible with an understanding of economics as constructed: economy is not infected by narratives, narratives is an integrated part of economics. Therefore, I would like to reformulate contagious as expansive. Instead of using the term epidemics I will stick to the word narratives, assuming the existence of several more or less expansive narratives existing simultaneously. This does not radically change the denotations of the terms, but it fundamentally changes the connotations.

4.1.2 Fullbrook

Fullbrook defines narratives as a sort of proto-ontologies: simplifications that include some details and exclude others, depending on what is important to the group or person affected. These details could be of global or microscopic nature, and the certainty with which the narratives are perceived range from accuracy to approximations. Importantly for the creative aspects of narrativeness, and contradicting Shiller's positivist approach, Fullbrook discusses narratives as being either open- or close ended. The open-ended narrative admits indeterminacies, while the closed does not. Lastly, his own perception can be regarded open-ended, as he stresses that the goal is not to integrate narratives to each other, but to accept a plurality of narratives in order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomena (Fullbrook, 2008).

4.1.3 Economic development narrative

In 1991 Emery M. Roe identified four development narratives, as well as underpinning how narrative simplifications are important tools in a complex world (Roe, 1991). Later development narratives include Sachs (2005), Easterly (2006), Stiglitz (2006) and Collier (2007). While the understanding of simplification and generalizations as necessities to enable action is the same, these narratives are fundamentally different from the narratives studied in this paper as they are narratives created by and for academics and policy makers. Yet, they provide useful information on how to detect stories of economic development, also among other groups. Four key dimensions of economic development narratives have been worked out by Longhurst et al.: "What is the purpose of economic development? What are the preferred

distributive mechanisms? Who governs the economy? What is the preferred economic form of organization?" (Longhurst et al. 2016. p.1).

4.2 Agency, Subalternity and Authorship

To examine what stories are sanctioned, what stories are silenced, and what stories are conceivable, I use a framework based in Gayatri Spivak's work on representation, agency and subalternity. The framework primarily draws from her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" from 1988 and "Scattered Speculations on the subaltern and the popular" from 2005, but also includes elements from other works by Spivak. The application of Spivak in this thesis stand on two legs: firstly, acknowledging the subject and power position of academics in general, western academics more specified and me as a researcher in this particular case; and secondly her understanding of subject-constitution, object-formation and positions of power.

4.2.1 Representation and the role of the academic

Spivak highlights the complex relationship between academia and representation. She states that the concern is to create an infrastructure for agency, not claiming access to, or existence of, a homogenous mind or will of a marginalized group (Spivak 1988/2014).

"Can the Subaltern Speak" (1988/2014) is a response to a conversation between Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. It criticizes their idea that the "masses" possess and can pronounce a genuine knowledge about reality, and that the role of the intellectual is merely to be a mouthpiece. Spivak argues that, firstly, no subject can transform into a transparent mouthpiece of another subject, and, secondly, not acknowledging the heterogeneity of the group represented is both ignorant and turns representation into an act of self-consolidation: By constantly outlining the Other, the Self remains unquestioned and unchallenged. (Spivak 1988/2014).

This call for reflexivity does not eliminate the importance of representation. On the contrary Spivak concludes that the subaltern *cannot* speak, and the question is how, and by whom, representation should be realized. The how relates to her division between representing as an art of depicting, darstellen, and of being advocate for, vertreten, as all segments of society and all power structures are heterogenous. While darstellung is related to the fallacy of a homogenous perception and will of the represented group, vertretung is both inevitable and needed. Secondly, to perform the act of vertretung, the representant need to abstractly perceive,

but not equate, the Self as the collective. Therefore, the representative needs deep understanding of and close connections to the represented group. The role of subaltern or development studies thus becomes to create problem solvers rather than to solve problems (Spivak, 2001/2014).

One risk coupled with trying to "create problem solvers" is paternalism. However, the emphasis Spivak puts on training fantasy and creativity, because only this can create actual change (Spivak, 2001/2014), may function as a safeguard and an important complement to existing development activities. Creative training might also enable "the readers", or the scholars to, with Derrida's words quoted by Spivak: "rendering delirious that interior voice that is the voice of the other in us" (Spivak 1988/2014, p. 273).

4.2.2 Subalternity, agency and individual empowerment

In order to examine the relationship between subject and authorship of an economic narrative, Spivak's concepts of subalternity and agency are useful. Agency is the ability of performing the act of vertretung, explained above, and in order to differentiate this from the ability to act in line with personal interest or desires, I have added a concept of individual empowerment. Subalternity can be seen as the opposite extreme point of agency on a scale of ability to represent and induce change on a collective level. However, subalternity is also linked to individual social immobility, and on the other end of this scale we find individual empowerment.

Subject: The basic assumption is that the subject is a decentralized construction, under constant reformulation, and including all of the three subject-positions. Being positions and not identities, subalternity, agency and individual empowerment are not excluding each other. The positions are created by contrast, just like gender, race and class. Hence, there is no homogeneous group of subalterns or agents. Nevertheless, the subject-positions are repeating themselves, paradoxically as it may seem, in the singularities (Spivak 2005/2014). The complexity of subject-constitution is exposed and an increasingly pressing matter in times of rapid change. Spivak relates this to immigration, particularly for women, when the self has to be perceived in relation to new norms (Spivak, 2014). While she relates this to geographical displacement, the matter is applicable also to developing countries experiencing modernization, urbanization, liberalization and so on.

Subalternity: Spivak places the subaltern position where "the social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action" (Spivak, 2005/2014, p. 139). Hence, the position implies the absence of power to change the personal or societal situation, as this power is located somewhere else. Consequently, subalternity means incapability of the abstract self-construction that is needed for representation (Spivak, 2005/2014). Spivak has a pronounced focus on women in developing countries, experiencing both the oppression of neo imperialism and of patriarchy: held captive between tradition and modernization (Spivak, 1988/2014). Importantly, subalternity in itself does not tell us anything about experienced happiness (Spivak, 2018).

Agency: Spivak defines agency as "institutionally sanctioned action". It requires abstract self-construction, the ability to metonymize and synecdochize the subject. By metaphorically perceiving the Self as the collective, the latter being a metaphor for the multiplicated singularities, representation is made possible. Here Spivak highlights both the collective aspect of agency, but also the linguistics embedded in human relations (Spivak 2005/2014). Being aware of this metonymizing act also safeguard against essentialism as it recognizes itself as a both fictional and utterly real act.

Individual empowerment: While agency is linked to the ability to act in the interest of the collective, empowerment can also be experienced on the personal level. The distinction originates in Spivak's critique on equating subject and individual. This is a prolongation of the stress she puts on the division between desire and interest: Desire is connected to what Marx identifies as "natural exchange" creating value, as opposed to "intercourse with society" connected to interest. Economy is an artificial system and economic agency can thus not be seen as a natural exchange (Spivak 1988/2014). Merging these two subject-positions prohibits the metonymizing act of agency.

4.3 Development theory

There are a plethora of ideas of the mechanisms, goals and consequences of development. One prominent thinker is Amartya Sen, who with his 1999 book *Development as Freedom* has been considered to bring back ethics to economics. In this thesis, chosen parts from *Development as Freedom* (Sen, 1999/2014), complemented by Spivak's (2018) perspective on development, creates a basis for discussing development.

Equally important to Sen as *how* development is the question of *why* development. According to him, freedom is simultaneously the goal of, the constitutive role, and means to, the instrumental role, development. Linked to the latter, he identifies five types of instrumental freedoms, presented in Table 2. By enhancing these freedoms, economic, social and political development can be fostered, which in turn results in greater freedom (Sen, 1999/2014).

Table 2. Sen's five types of instrumental freedoms (Sen, 1999/2014. p. 38)	
Political freedom	For example: rights to criticize authorities, free speech and press, decide who should govern.
Economic facilities	Opportunities to produce, consume or exchange economic resources. Sen stresses growth of income, distribution and access to finance.
Social opportunities	For example, education and health care.
Transparency guarantees	The need for openness and trust in social and economic interactions. Prevents corruption, lack of financial responsibility and dishonest dealings.
Protective security	A social safety net preventing for example misery, avoidable morbidity, premature mortality. Includes both fixed institutional security measures such as sickness benefits, and fast, short-term arrangements such as famine relief.

Further, discussing the interaction between traditions and development, Sen concludes that participation is vital. Social values, he explains, affect aspects such as: gender equity; child care; family size; fertility pattern; corruption; treatment of environment; and trust in economic, social and political relationships. Norms connected with development rather than tradition might not always be desirable, and the choice between the two can neither be done by local elites guarding the traditions nor by local or foreign experts. Instead, it must be done by the people, which, in turn, require freedom (Sen, 1999/2014). Of particular importance is female empowerment: both directly to enhance female well-being, but also indirectly to foster other freedoms. For example, female participation in politics, economic and social life enhances child survival, reduce fertility rates, can foster economic growth and the well-being of others (Sen, 1999/2014).

Evaluating freedom, and freedom as development, cannot be done with a mechanical index, but must be done explicitly. While this makes evaluation more complicated it can actually be a means to the goal as explicitly enhances possibilities to scrutinize and criticize (Sen, 1999/2014). To enable evaluation of freedoms Sen defines a set of concepts, of which I will describe a few of importance to this thesis:

Functioning: That which is of value. Range from essential activities, things or personal states, such as not starving, to complex ones, such as being self-confident or having critical discussions (Sen, 1999/2014. p. 75).

Capability: The set of functioning's a person can achieve. If functioning relates to achievements, capability relates to freedom to achieve (Sen, 1999/2014. p. 75).

Unfreedom: The lack or denial of freedoms. Can be due to economic, social or political reasons. (Sen, 1999/2014. p. 3) Forms of unfreedom include: famine; undernutrition; limited access to health care, sanitary arrangements and clean water; morbidity; premature mortality; insufficient education; unemployment; no economic/social security; no politic liberty; no basic civil rights. (Sen, 1999/2014. p. 13)

Social values: Sen emphasizes the role of social values in shaping society, economy and human life. Denying this, he argues, would limit our chances for development. These values are created in different ways: 1) Through reflection and analysis; 2) Following convention; 3) Public discussion; and 4) Evolutionary selection (Sen, 1999/2014. p. 270).

While Sen defines development as "the removal of substantial unfreedoms" (Sen, 1999/2014, preface), the process should ideally be much more generative according to Spivak. Asking the question of who has the right to define development, she places development in the aporia between the measurable and affection, between statistics and a vague idea of a good society. This vagueness, however, is only a problem if it is avoided, leaving development stuck in the measurable. If, instead, this impossibility is accepted as an opening, roads to constructive creativity may be opened. Accordingly, she asks for an inclusion of the humanities in development work, while not overestimating their potential: the open-ended, subject-focused humanities can only compliment the qualitative work of social sciences, and quantifying work

of sociology and economics (Spivak, 2018). In summary, Sen provides a solid framework for understanding development, and adding Spivak enables openness for stories that can only be sensed, but not defined.

5 Data

The analysis is based on data collected through interviews conducted at garment factories in Dhaka. The reliance on the interpreter and the factory owners disrupted the interviewing. A discussion on the limitations as well as ethical consideration follows the presentation of the interview material.

5.1 Interview material

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted at three ready-made garments factories in the suburbs of Dhaka: Three in the first factory, four in the second and the remaining three in the third. The interview guide was constructed in relation to the theoretical framework, presented in section 4 and interview technique as presented by Bryman (2018). The interviews were conducted with an interpreter and each interview took between 35-60 minutes to accomplish. An oral consent form was constructed and consent was collected for all interviews. All interviews were recorded, except number six and seven as the participant did not agree on being recorded. Instead, interviews notes were taken and a reconstruction was written directly after returning from the factory. The other interviews were transcribed. The interviews were anonymized and stored safely. Table 3 presents gender, age, occupation, relation status and socio-economic background of the participants. The socio-economic division is retrieved from Kibria (1995) presented in section 3.2.

Table 3. Interview Participants					
Participant	**Gender**	**Age**	**Occupation**	**Relation status**	**Socio-economic background**
1	Female	Unknown	Sewing operator	Married	Rural poor
2	Male	27	Sewing operator	Married	Lower middle-income
3	Male	20	Packaging	Unmarried	Rural poor
4	Female	33	Fastening belt system on pants	Married	Rural poor
5	Female	33	Sewing operator	Married	Lower middle-income
6	Female	20	Sewing operator	Unmarried	Rural poor
7	Female	27	Pant samples	Married	Rural poor
8	Female	32	Sewing operator	Married	Rural poor
9	Male	28	Sewing operator	Married	Rural poor
10	Male	23	Sewing operator	Unmarried	Rural poor

5.2 Limitations

Being primary sources, the validity of the interviews is high. However, due to suspicion among factory owners, not least after the critical journalistic coverage of garments industries after the Rana Plaza accident, the data collection was heavily reliant on the interpreter and his connections to factory owners and managers. Their gatekeeping affected the representativeness of the sample and the reliability of the information provided during the interviews. Other limitations to the data include reliability of interpretations, and the generalizability of the small sample. These limitations are examined, followed by strategies used for managing them.

Firstly, the gatekeeping role of the factory owners and managers meant that they controlled both the sample and the interview situation. One evident example is that instead of the requested female participants, interviews would be conducted with six women and four men. The sample selection may well have been further steered by the owners' interests. For example, no participant reported being active with the workers union. While a low degree of organization confirms previous research, it is also likely that the mangers would be hesitant to let me interview someone they knew was engaged in a union. Further, a factory owner was present during three interviews, a manager during five interviews, acting as a second interpreter during two of these, and a work leader during three interviews. Additionally, a work leader was witnessed to question one participant after the interview. The combination of these further reduces the reliability of the data collected.

Beyond the reliance on the benevolence of the owners and managers, the friendship between them and the interpreter made both the interpreter and me reluctant to provoke. Thus, sensitive questions might have been avoided or sensitive answers remain uninterpreted. It might also have steered the interpretations to depict the superiors at work in a more positive way. Further aggravating this situation was the consistent, and at times aggressive, pressure to hurry the interviews. In three of the interviews a professor in gender studies was present, which may also have steered the answers as well as the interpretations.

The reliability of the interpretations is further questionable, adding the imperfect English skills of the interpreter and his, as well as the interpreting managers, tendency to add own thoughts and opinions to the interpretations. Some statements remain uninterpreted, other are clearly

abbreviated, and yet others are extended. Combined, this sometimes makes it hard to tell the participants statements from the interpreters or managers statements.

Because of these limitations I chose to modify the study. Instead of focusing solely on women, I included men, however being attentive to disparities. Further, the analysis was directed towards how agency, subalternity and acts of silencing conditioned the collected narratives. Lastly, I chose to analyze the interviews as texts, written under and affected by the given circumstances, rather than testimonies. This approach also ties to the narrative theory and fosters generalizability, allocating focus from the small sample to underlying power- and narrative mechanisms. Nevertheless, a larger sample would have allowed for a deeper understanding of particularities.

5.3 Ethical considerations

Emanating in Spivak's "Can the subaltern speak" (1988/2014) this thesis emphasizes the active role all academic work has in shaping the discourse and conceptualization of the world, and pays attention to the subjectivity of me as a researcher. A critical ethical question of this study is the power imbalance between me and the participants: Me being a scholar from a wealthy country, considered a guest of the factory owners, and fixing the premises of the interview; and the participants as interviewees, workers and living with the Bangladeshi history of being colonized. Simultaneously, being a young woman my bodily appearance in combination with Bangladeshi social norm probably diminished my authority. However, informing, getting consent from and treating the data collected with confidentiality was of greatest importance and never neglected. Further, the focus on particularity and analysis of power structures of the thesis have been chosen partially because of the power imbalance.

Nevertheless, interruptions, attempts to hurry the interviews, and signs of suspicion from factory owners, demonstrate the sensitive nature of the interviews. Though I expressed the wish to conduct the interviews in seclusion both prior to and at the factory, this was not allowed for and I was in general excluded from control over the interview setting. One example of this was when suddenly a professor in gender studies accompanied us during three interviews. Before interviewing I ensured that the workers wage would not be affected. Still, the workers risk suffering from the owners, managers or work leaders' discontent: enhancing the importance of me not upsetting the latter. Nevertheless, the presence of superiors at work during the interviews

is not only a limitation of the study regarding reliability, but also ethically. Therefore, I was hesitant to ask about, or press for more information on, potentially sensitive subjects.

6 Methodology

Based in the theoretical understanding described in section 4, a model was worked out to analyze the interviews. The model is also influenced by Max van Manen's (2014) model of analysis, see Appendix B. According to van Manen, the aim of interpretation is to find themes that create meaning. To extract the themes, van Manen analyzes the narrative on three levels: the holistic, the selective and the detailed (van Manen, 2014). Tools for analyzing have also been collected from Spivak (1992/2014), White (2000) and Gordon (2018). After transcription, the data was read and analyzed as texts, and me, the participants and others who participated or interfered with the interviews will be regarded co-authors of these texts. This approach shifts the focus from the subject to the narrative.

Followingly, the five steps of the analysis model are described. The first step is exclusively based on van Manen (2014), while the second and third step also emanate in the theoretical framework. Aspects on how to read alternative stories into a text, drawn from Gayatri Spivak (2014), Luise White (2000) and David M. Gordon (2018), are added in step four. The study was slightly adjusted after the interviews, and the questions in step 2, 3 and 4 can be considered grounded as they were constructed informed by the collected data. The questions used in step 2, 3 and 4 are to be found in Appendix A.

Step 1. The holistic level

The text is subject to an overview-reading, looking for the main meaning of the text as a whole and the overarching economic development narrative. An attempt is made to formulate these two meanings as phrases.

Step 2. Detecting the story of economic development

This step concentrates on extracting stories of economic development by repeatedly reading, and asking a number of questions to, the texts. The questions in this step have been worked out in relation to the development theory, narrative theory and van Manen's five existential aspects: Spatiality, corporeality, temporality, materiality and relationality. See Appendix B for detailed explanations of the aspects. Further, individual empowerment is examined.

Step 3. Analyzing authorship

The third step is concerned with identifying signs of agency and subalternity in authorship. The text is read as consisting of both the explicit text and, with a term Spivak borrowed from Derrida, the "blank parts of the text" (Spivak, 1988/2014. p. 247): meaning the thought part, and, consequently, the interplay between the co-authors. The questions are based on the framework provided by Spivak, but they also relate to capabilities and particularities. Ultimately, the underlying questions are what story is possible and sanctioned to tell, and who is in position to write it?

Step 4. Looking for alternative stories

Continuing reading both the explicit and the blank parts of the text, the next step of the analysis consists of examining if there are alternative stories to be sensed. The word sensed is used to underpin that these stories are beyond accessibility for some, or all, of the authors and no attempt to define them will be made. This approach is chosen informed by Spivak's warning on claiming access to the Other's mind, as well as Luise White's warning on reading too much into silences. Nevertheless, White presents a strategy to read contradictions and confusions in order to detect where the hegemony fails to silence unwanted voices (White, 2000). While the method is mostly connected to archival works, the strategies are applicable and purposeful also for this study.

Step 5. Link to development theory and mechanisms of economic narratives

In the final step of the analysis the findings from the four previous steps are related to each other, development theory and the understanding of economic narratives.

Concluding remark

The steps are being ranked for the sake of clarity, however mobility between the three steps during the actual analysis was both allowed of and inevitable. Codebooks were worked out based on the questions in step 2, 3 and 4, see Appendix A, and the texts were coded using NVivo. The findings are presented in the following empirical analysis.

7 Empirical analysis

7.1 The holistic level

The holistic level reading serves two purposes: Providing an overarching understanding and avoiding overinterpreting details. Two phrases were formulated, one to summarize the text as a whole and one to summarize the story of economic development told. The summaries are simplifications revealing the core of the texts, but all texts express a multiplicity of perceptions.

7.1.1 Phrase 1

The phrases summarizing the texts as wholes, mainly revolves around the personal histories of the workers and the power dynamic between the authors. While the personal histories reveal great particularities, poverty prohibiting the preferred life is a pervading theme. Naturally, the texts are primarily decided by the interviewers' questions and the participants answers, but authorship was heavily marked by the interpreter, factory owners and managers interfering and steering question, avoiding topics and setting up the frames for the interview.

7.1.2 Phrase 2

The starting point of, and expectations on, development differs, but all texts highlight the garments industry as the main driver of economic development. Apart from this, a growing population is repeatedly pointed out as making change inevitable. Further, the texts describe development through hard and diligent work, as well as increasing inequality. Six out of ten texts express faith in the future, while the remaining four were chiefly doubtful, nostalgic or upset. All of the texts, however, report that the decreasing demand on garments cause less work, falling living wages, and a wish for more orders.

7.2 Detecting the story of economic development

7.2.1 Point of departure

Most texts begin in an abstract before, one or two generations back. Two texts mention the liberation war, one of them clearly understanding the present in relation to the horrors and heroism of 1971. Overall, two opposed, but often coincidental, depictions of the past emerge. The first, presented in all texts in relation to the personal but also permeating the societal story, is one of a simple and happy life. Some texts acknowledge the former hardships and express

uncertainty as to if this former happiness originates in the blissful unawareness of childhood or to lower commodity prices and a smaller population, which are two other reoccurring explanations. Yet, the texts persist that the past was happier as, despite the hardships, people lived with their loved ones. The second idea of the past is related to these hardships and focuses on the heaviness of agricultural work, the absence of modern facilities, the lacking availability of health care, education and infrastructure, as well as of ways to change or improve the living situation.

7.2.2 Change in existential aspects

Thorough changes were detected in all five existential aspects: spatiality, corporeality, materiality, temporality and relationality.

The most significant temporal aspects of the texts are the memories of the past, discussed in section 7.2.1, and future dreams or expectations discussed in section 7.2.3. Beyond this, all texts address the set times of factory life, eight-hour work, one hour lunch, and the longing for vacation. While this is never related to temporality in the past, the now repetitive passing of time is probably emphasized by factory work.

All texts describe employment in garments as fundamentally changing spatiality in several ways. Firstly, the choice to join the workforce is always driven by necessity: having more children to support; decreasing support from other family members; not having enough land to support the family; a sudden illness in the family; or decreasing competitiveness in earlier profession. Secondly, it implies geographical displacement: often from rural areas, and the known environment, social and cultural context; to a polluted, densely populated and rapidly growing city. Only two participants were not forced to moved, but lived in a rural area close to Dhaka. The participants backgrounds implicate that recruitment continues to focus on rural, landowning but money-deprived segments of society. Three participants have left their children to live with their grandparents in the village, as both parents work in the garments. Importantly, digitalization and social media are explained to mitigate the shattered family structure as it enables long distance communication. Digitalization adds a third and fourth major change in spatiality, also of interest for future research: the virtual and the global dimensions. Connected to both of these, one woman explain how social media provides a depiction of developed life, a life that is then imitated with accessible means. The global dimension is further accentuated

by labor migration abroad, mentioned in four texts. Out of these, one woman had her husband and brother abroad, affecting spatiality in two ways: On one hand breaking up the family, on the other hand the high wage of her husband made her continued work in garments a choice rather than a necessity. Fifth, two workers state that the facilities and working conditions in the garments factories had improved the last ten years, one worker and one manager, however, implied that this was not true for smaller factories.

A great change in spatiality, in line with the literature, emphasized in the texts is the opportunities for work and social mobility the garments industry has opened up, thus individually empowering the participants. Economic empowerment is further underpinned by the factory providing bank accounts for the workers, enabling saving, described in two texts. One of them, however, concludes that it is not possible now, confirming the pervading theme that the difficult present economic situation counteracts economic empowerment.

Two texts enunciate female empowerment: the wage is connected to opportunity and control, and women are explained to sometimes be the only earning member of the household. Another participant testifies that she and her father are in charge of the household economy, a position of control the mother might be expected to possess. Pointing in the opposite direction, another woman states clearly, and several imply, that she does almost all the household work. Accentuating this, the interpreter and manager repeatedly describe household work as non-work. The double work-load limits both spatiality and temporality. Unlike Kibria's (1995) findings, a rural poor background does not imply being unmarried or greater female empowerment. Instead, all women but the youngest one, still living with her family, were married, and in three texts women refers the decision to start working in the garments to her husband.

A major, but two-folded, change is also presented in relation to materiality: On one hand, a growing population leading to division of lands and more land-less people; on the other hand, the increasing ownership of modern facilities both in urban and rural areas. The latter is accentuated by increasing number of shops opening in the countryside. Apart from consequences of the economic downturn the last years, only two men tell stories of worsening material conditions: the first due to crisis in the family after his father fell ill; and the second came from a family of blacksmiths, but the increasing raw material prices in combination with

less demand resulted in downward social mobility. The latter is also related to the beforementioned transition from a local to a global spatiality, and market.

The changes in spatiality and materiality are also closely connected to changes in relationality and corporeality. In all texts describing rural-urban migration, home-sickness and missing friends and family in the village are expressed. Hence, both the lived body, connected with feelings, and the lived relations, connected with meaning of society, are affected. Change in collectivity is described on both a personal and societal level. The personal collectivity is mourned as lost when leaving village, or changed to sharing through remittances. However, a new community is found in the garments factory, confirming the literature (Hasan, 2018), which could also be part-explanation to the choice of one woman to keep working in the garments although this no longer was necessary. Apart from friendship, at least two of the seven married workers found their partner at the garments factory, while three marriages were traditionally arranged by the families, implying that the industry offers a new way to find a partner. As exemplified by the quote below, this factory-based collectivism also included the managers and factory owners:

> "…if they're facing problem, we are also facing problem, we are also facing crisis. If they don't have more works, how can they give us the salary or overtime?"
>
> - Male sewing operator, 28 years old

On the societal level collectivity was described as impinged by increasing inequality but enhanced by pride in a collective development effort. A new attitude to material wealth is described, more or less pronouncedly, in all texts: money has increasingly become the ultimate status symbol and with richness comes a tendency to greed. In one text a male participant is frustrated with the government and the rich exploiting the poor, and another man implies conflict between socio-economic classes. Simultaneously, pride in being a part of development is a pervading theme: a development which, in line with the neoliberal narrative, is realized by individual work.

Corporeality is further affected by materiality in two ways. On one hand, ownership is linked to feeling free: for example, one woman describes her husband opening his own shop as his freedom, and two other express the wish to open a shop. On the other hand, diminishing workload, removing the possibility for overtime and thus decreasing the wage, leads to worries

about how to manage the present as well as about the growing risk of unemployment in the future. Two women also describe going hungry.

7.2.3 Key dimensions of economic development narrative

The four key dimensions of economic development regard purpose, distributive mechanisms, governing and organization of economy. The question guide was constructed to evoke and uncover the economic narrative, with the preunderstanding that it seldom is the most prominent narrative (Shiller, 2019). In line with this, the participants often did not have a clear idea neither of past, present or preferred economic mechanisms. While there are particularities, and especially one man expressed a comparingly clear idea of present and past economic mechanisms, the repeated equating between economy and money is telling. Instead, the economic narrative is detected in implications and descriptions of other themes, rather than clearly outspoken.

The distributive mechanisms discussed in the texts are: sharing and give alms; greed and inequality; and rewarding diligent work. The first two are closely linked to the collective mentality described in 7.2.2. Eight texts describe Bangladeshi mentality as characterized by sharing and helping each other, in the past rural life as well as in the present. Practical contemporary examples of this include exchange of services in case of accident or illness, as well as allocation of money through remittances and alms. While this mentality is described being at risk by growing inequality and greed as rich forget the hardness of poverty, it is highlighted as desirable throughout the texts. Seven texts testify to the growing inequality: rich become richer, and poor are trapped in poverty. To nuance the picture, it is also repeatedly pointed out that some of the rich are providing financial support to the poor.

The forms of economic distribution and governance were mainly located to the inter-personal level. In two texts governmental interference are discussed: one male worker criticizing luxury consumption instead of staple commodities being subsidized, and another male worker crediting the government for supporting the garments industry and thus the economic development. The absence of claims on the government casts doubts on the social contract being as reliant on governmental protection as Hossain (2017) states. The inconsistency could, however, be rooted in the neoliberal policies ravingly incorporating Bangladeshi development, together with increasing repression of dissenters.

In line with the neoliberal narrative, the texts repeatedly present individual work as the preferred development policy. This points toward both organization, governance and distribution of the economy and confirms the self-enterprising citizenship suggested by Ong (2006). Working in the garments is described as honest and diligent work, in opposition to criminality: if you want to work, you will get work, as one woman puts it. The three remaining texts do not oppose this, however not expressing it as clearly. Two texts also accentuate the harshness of a no work – no food society. Beyond the neoliberal narrative, the texts largely attribute power to change, or governing, the economic situation to global buyers and increasing orders, substantiating the idea of an increasingly trade-dependent work-force, or to God.

The purpose of development is mainly described in abstract terms such as good, nice, developed or privileged. Two texts refer to developed countries as a yardstick. Other themes are no poverty, decreased unemployment, more industries and available health and education facilities. This can be contrasted to the personal dreams that are almost exclusively revolving around moving back to the home village, having either a farm or a business and living together with the family. One exception is the text co-authored by a man who had gone from lower-middle class to poverty and clearly strived for social mobility upwards again. In the other exception the male co-author states that such dreams are hopefully for the future, but for now he just wanted his family and himself to survive.

7.3 Authorship

Followingly, signs in the texts of the co-author's agency and subalternity in writing the story are presented and analyzed. This should be opposed to the subject-position indicated by life-situation. As the two intertwine, however, also the latter is touched upon. Further, writing the economic development narrative of Bangladesh is intrinsically writing a collective narrative, and requires agency. This section therefore focuses on agency, while individual empowerment is discussed in relation to changes in spatiality, section 7.2.2. The main co-authors are me as the interviewer, the participant and the interpreter. Authors co-writing some texts or parts of texts include one factory owner, two managers, three work leaders and one professor in gender studies. Focus remains on the position and story of the participants, but this must be related to the position of the other authors.

7.3.1 Signs of subalternity

The signs of the participants subalternity revealed in the text can be divided into five categories: Subalternity in life situation; narrative being silenced; involuntary representation; absence of economic imagination; and pre-existing power-structure between the co-authors.

The existing power-structure places and displaces the basis for writing between the co-authors. Firstly, the interview is a special text case, where participants tend to answer what they think the interviewer wants to be answered, thus diminishing the writeable even in the most open-ended interview. Additionally, in these texts the interviewer steer questions and answers toward what he thinks is of interest. Further, the participants not only relate to the interviewer but also to the interpreter and the other co-authors. There are signs that the participants were affected by the coauthors sought after wealth and well-being. For example, in one text a pizza is delivered for me, without my knowledge before, during the interview as a hospitality gesture from the factory owner. The participant, who before this describes food shortage, is noticeably distracted. The three texts co-authored by a professor in gender studies are more inclined to revolve around female empowerment. Whether this is the result of the participants relating to the professor or the interpreter choosing to emphasize and aggrandize the statements pointing in this direction remains unknown. Though unlikely, it could also be a coincident. Beyond this, many of the texts are written with a superior at work present, and after one of the interviews I witnessed the participant being questioned by a work leader. This might, for example, make the participants inclined to mention facilities available at the specific factory and avoid sensitive topics. Aggrandizing this, the friendship between the interpreter, one owner and one manager, likely steered the interpretations to depict the two latter in a more positive way. Further, especially work leaders repeatedly complain that the interviews take too much time. Most noticeably this affects the interpreter, who tries to hurry the interviews by telling me to finish off, asking questions in my place, shorten the interpretations and interrupt the participant. The stressed environment also obstructs both my and the participants focus on the story. Combined, these circumstances diminish what story the participants can tell, thus increasing the subalternity in their authorship position.

Acts of silencing by the superiors at work and the interpreter directly reject participants authorship. Most often this silencing is conducted by simply not interpreting, or interpreting but clearly withholding certain information. One example is when a man is asked about how

old his brother, also working in the garments industry, is. A short discussion between the interpreter and the participant follows, but the only translation to be given is: "Twenty to twenty-one". Almost the same thing happens when another man describes political conflicts and corruption, where the manager and the interpreter admittedly interprets that this is the subject touched upon, but leaves large parts uninterpreted as well as vigorously repeating that the participant is not involved in the conflicts.

The same man was also subject to another reoccurring form of silencing: being disparaged and involuntary represented. When asked about how he would describe the beginning of the garments industry in Bangladesh, the interpreter, manager and factory owner all engage in a long and impetuous persuasion campaign about the incapability of the participant to answer such a question:

> "They're simple operators, simple operators, they know nothing about this story, history, anything. They're just coming and they're working."
>
> - Manager

> "It's not a question for asking to him."
>
> - Factory Owner

While this is the most outspokenly example both managers and the interpreter make several disparaging statements throughout the texts, such as "they know nothing of the macro-economy" or "that is good thinking for their level". Other times it is more subtle: the manager or interpreter unasked representing the participant, implying that they know the answer better than the participant; or steering the questions by for example adding the word "garments"[1] to questions on the main driver and future of Bangladesh, or the word "taka"[2] questions of changes in mentality. Further subalterning the participants authorship, their responses were on one hand interrupted, when regarded unimportant, or on the other hand valued as "good" or "interesting". Importantly, statements indicating a neoliberal narrative, were often positively labelled.

The authorship position not only based in the moment of writing. What story is conceivable also depends on the authors life situation. Firstly, similarly to the point Sen (1999/2014) makes

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[1] The English word is used in Bengali.
[2] The currency in Bangladesh.

about freedom, you cannot exercise your authorship if you have already starved to death. The theme of poverty pervades all texts, and the solution is being sought in more orders and over-time work. Consequently, the basis for action is located to global companies, and the social lines of mobility to create such a basis are out of reach for the participants. The latter is aggravated by testimonies of: not being able to finish school but instead having to work; denial of living with family or in preferred environment; male governance of household; floodings causing disaster; and insufficient safety nets. Beyond this, social values and taboos also determine what story is told. One example could be that no text mentions the famine of 1974, not even the two texts discussing the liberation war 1971.

Lastly, the very unclear purpose of development and preferred organization and governance of economy described in section 7.2.3 heavily obstruct writing the economic narrative. Authorship, also economic, is partly an act of creativity and imaginability. If these capabilities are absent, there is no recognizable basis for authorship. While this absence is probably largely caused by the subaltern position, as well as neoliberal monism suppressing this capability worldwide, it also reinforces subalternity. As such also the other authors are in subaltern positions. Understanding this fully, however, require more research.

7.3.2 Signs of agency

Each of the three main authors inevitably possess their constitutive control over the story: Me in framing the text through the interview questions, the participant in providing the answers, and the interpreter by controlling what information is being transmitted between the other parts. Beyond this, examples of participants taking an agency-authorship position is displayed in two ways: directly, by metonymizing the Self as the collective and talking from a we-perspective; and indirectly, by expressing capability to represent the collective.

The most common collectives metonymized as a we are the family and the garment workers, but there are also examples where the entire poor social segment or Bangladesh as an entity is included. However, no text describes collective political action. Paradoxically, the call for overtime work and more orders, discussed signaling subalternity in section 7.3.1, is also a sign of agency: the participants repeatedly use the we-form, and states what the We want. Further, the appeal is in many cases repeated after being asked if there is something the participant would like to add, hence actively acting in the interest of the We:

> "We want there's more work, more jobs, then more order, then more work. We're dreaming."
>
> — Female Participant, age unknown

Examples of, unrealized, capability to represent the collective are found both in the imaginative and in abstract reasoning. The first refers to the few and rather vague, but still existing, imaginations of changing the society by for example establishing more hospitals, schools and garments industries or distribute money to the poor. The second refers to participants explaining the mechanisms or interests of different parts of society:

> "But, the middle class of the society is very crisis, because the, eh, the upper level is upper, level, but the lower, they can manage it somehow. But the middle, are always in crisis. She's telling. Because then they cannot go in that upper level, or they cannot get down them to the lower level"
>
> — Female Participant, 32 years old

There are also signs of participants agency, and individual empowerment, in relation to the co-authors. At least thirty-three times the participant interrupts, implying that his or her opinion is more important. This count is likely an underestimation as it was difficult for me to tell interruption from conversation in Bengali. Interestingly, the text most expressively discussing conflict, corruption and exploitation of the poor is co-written by a manager. It is also one of the texts were the acts of silencing and avoiding themes is most prevalent, but that the participant made these statements in the presence of the manager reflects certain power. This could partly be due to the participant being a male from a lower-middle income family, which will be further discussed in section 7.3.4. Similarly, reflecting self-esteem in the importance and relevance of the own voice, the woman from lower-middle income group explains having the intension of becoming a counselor and to advise people on improving their lives.

7.3.3 Sensing other stories?

Two types of alternative stories can be sensed in the texts: silenced stories and stories existing in the inconsistencies. The first can be exemplified by the acts of silencing described above: silencing or avoiding topics regarding corruption, emerging conflicts between segments of

society or the age of a worker, points toward an alternative story of corruption, conflict and child labor. The second is for example sensed in the inconsistency between describing working in the garments industry as both an opportunity, and a choice made out of out of necessity rather than will. Important in the development context is also the story sensed in the inconsistency between statements of wanting a future developed Bangladesh, more similar to other developed countries and marked by neoliberal distributive mechanisms; and the personal dream of a village life characterized by collectiveness, sharing and family. Often these two are described in the same text. The reader of the alternative story is left with confusion or a desire to explain the inconsistency. A more fruitful approach might be to, as advocated for by Fullbrook (2008) and Spivak (2018), allow the existence of this open-ended and vague narrative and perceive it as an opening to creative freedom and development.

7.3.4 Particularities

The narrative unfolding and the authorship behind it, is thus multifaceted and often paradoxical, confirming the significance of particularities. While research more focused on this would be needed, I will highlight the most pronounced in the examined texts: Socio-economy, gender and age.

Eight participants come from a rural poor family background, one woman belong to the lower middle-income group and one man had gone from lower-middle income to poor. The texts showing the strongest signs of individual empowerment are the two co-written by a man and a woman with lower-middle class background. The same two texts also formulate the neoliberal development narrative most pronouncedly. While the signs of direct authorship agency are few, these texts show strong indirect authorship agency. It could be assumed that the socio-economic background would imply higher education, also in economy and society, however this does not apply for the woman, who left school at age 13 to marry.

Gender is another important aspect determining degree of authorship. Female authors are more often being involuntary represented and disparaged by the interpreter or manager, than their male counterparts. This could be read as a combination of patriarchy and the household-resembling patron-relationship between workers and superiors in the factory. Further, in texts co-authored by women the We metonymized to is most often the family and sometimes the workers. Examples of metonymizing to larger societal segments or all of Bangladesh, as well

as imaginative agency, are almost all deriving from texts cowritten by male participants. Consequently, men are more often silenced or partially not translated in order to avoid certain topics. Nevertheless, signs of agency are found in all texts, strengthening earlier findings of increasing female agency.

One of the texts most clearly lamenting the past, was co-written by one of the youngest participants, a 20-year-old woman. In line with this, the other 20-year-old participant, a man who still lived in his home village, depicted the dream future as having a farm in the village. Interestingly, this both confirms Hossain's (2017) claim that a new generation garment workers may not be content with business as usual, but also contradicts that traditional bounds would be weakened.

7.4 Discussion: Economic narratives and development as freedom

In many aspects the texts present a development story of increasing freedoms, in other of persistent or emerging unfreedoms. After shortly examining these patterns, the section will continue by discussing the absence of creative freedom.

The described improvements in materiality, spatiality and corporeality have indeed improved the economic facilities, social opportunities and protective security in Bangladesh. As such, the texts tell a story of how development and work in the garments industry facilitates capabilities to obtain described functionings including: opportunity of social mobility, not starving, ownership, being able to share with others, female empowerment, educating children, saving money, and the indefinite idea of development. Simultaneously the texts also describe processes working in the opposite direction, for example: the unhealthy environment in the city; the fragility in the standard of living made clear by the present economic downturn; inequality and greed; political corruption; and insufficient safety nets. Further, other functionings described in the text such as living close to loved ones and in a beautiful environment, not having to worry about money, equality and generosity, are described as diminishing or being denied. Thus, the texts also tell a story of unfreedom in relation to economic facilities, social opportunities and protective security. The acts of silencing and testimonies of corruption also imply political unfreedom and lacking transparency guarantees. The degree of freedom depends on a range of particularities: while women have been empowered, the texts show that men possess a higher

degree of economic and political freedom; poverty imply a higher degree of all five unfreedoms; and younger generations might be less inclined to endure unfreedoms. To understand the patterns of freedom and unfreedom more research on particularities is needed.

Adding creative freedom and authorship to Sen's framework further complicates the picture. Bangladesh's neoliberal development narrative in combination with the authoritarian state legitimized by a social contract built partly on providing security and partly on the pride emanating in independence, can be seen as a patriotic example of Shiller's (2019) seventh proposition: That narratives thrive on attachment. The reoccurring use of neoliberal narratives as well as the approval of these statements from superiors at work and the interpreter indicates both the expansiveness of the narrative, and opportunities for repetition, fostering continuous expansion, as discussed by Shiller (2019).

The strong dominance of one narrative combined with subalterning authorship of workers, especially women and poor, heavily reduces creative freedom and confirms that economic narratives often are constructed by a few people (Shiller, 2019). This in turn obstructs the capability to create economic narratives and social values through analysis, reflection and public discussion: and consequently, to choose between traditional and imported norms, ways of living or structuring society. This decision is instead left to the few possessing agency in authorship, contrary to what Sen (1999/2014) promotes.

8 Conclusion

It might be so that a rose is a rose is a rose, but repetition both reenforces and diffuses. Yet, there are a multitude of particular buds in a briar bush. Economic development narratives are often written by the few, for the few. This thesis points toward both subalterning mechanisms deciding authorship of these narratives, but also toward the importance of letting those directly affected by a development write the narrative.

As important as the question Spivak made on who should define development, is who should write and tell the economic development narrative of, thus vertreten, the garment's workers. In line with Shiller (2019), the economic narrative is not the most prominent collective narrative among textile workers in Dhaka. It is the story of enhanced freedoms and remaining as well as emerging unfreedoms; of belief in the future and nostalgia; of opportunities and inequalities. It is a story without a clear end goal. These inconsistencies can, however, be allowed and attended as buds about to bloom, instead of avoided or pushed into an already existing narrative. The importance of this is emphasized, as this study shows that the existing economic narrative steers what distributional mechanisms, organization and governance of economy, as well as purpose of development, is conceivable. The signs of agency in authorship among the textile workers revealed, and alternative stories sensed, in the texts are therefore important as they point towards capability of authorship and vertretung.

Discouragingly, today authorship capability is suppressed in several dimensions: from subaltern positions in the authors personal lives, to silencing from superiors at work, a strong neoliberal narrative and an authoritarian state. In order to understand these mechanisms fully, further research on the economic narratives of other segments of the Bangladeshi society, the Bangladeshi government and international organizations is needed. Further, patterns on how these narratives are being pursued would need to be mapped out. More research is also needed on the particularities of the garment workers and the implications of the generational shift in the work force as well as of spreading digitalization.

While support of creative narratives is not likely to be pursued by an authoritarian state, as these might threaten the established order, policies strengthening creative freedom and agency in authorship can be implemented by the UN and other NGO:s active in Bangladesh. Developing the capability of people affected by development to write the economic narrative, and to

metonymize the Self to vertreteten the collective, underpins an inclusive development and safeguards against paternalism and neo imperialism. In the long term, increasing narrative freedom, and consequently narrative pluralism, contributes to a freer development as freedom. The implications are also not limited to Bangladesh, but calls for thoroughly rethinking development globally.

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Appendix A: Questions for analysis

Questions for analysis – Step 2	
Point of departure	
1	What is the starting point of the personal history?
2	What is the starting point of the societal history?
Change	
2	What is the main driver of change in the personal life?
3	What is the main driver of change in the society?
4	Has the distributive mechanisms changed?
5	Has the governance of economy changed?
6	Has the organization of the economy changed?
7	Are there changes in the relationality: lived relation, family, love, friendships, meanings of community, collectiveness, ethics of community, otherness in society, alienation?
8	Are there changes the corporeality: lived body, how the body is experienced, needs, physical work load, morbidity, mortality, desires, feelings?
9	Are there changes in the spatiality: lived space, mobility, restrictions, virtual/real.
10	Are there changes in the temporality: lived time, experience of time, circular or linear.
11	Are there changes in the materiality: lived things and technology, quantity and quality, relation to material things?
12	What does the story tell about political freedom?
13	What does the story tell about social opportunities?
14	What does the story tell about economic facilities?
15	What does the story tell about transparency guarantees?
16	What does the story tell about protective security?
17	What functioning's are revealed in the story – what is valued?
18	What social values are present in the text?
Looking ahead	
19	Is there a societal utopia? What is it?
20	Is there a personal dream? What is it?
21	What are the expectations on the development of the society, are they hopeful or pessimistic?

| 22 | What are the expectations on personal life, are they hopeful or pessimistic? |

Questions for analysis – Step 3	
1	What signs of being told from a position of agency are in the text?
2	What signs of being told from a position of subalternity are in the text?
3	What signs of being told from a position of individuality are in the text?
4	What can be detected in the text concerning how the interviewer is creating Otherness and steering the story?
5	What can be detected in the text concerning the interpreter's preunderstanding/perception of the interviewees?
6	What can be detected in the text concerning the managers, factory owners and work leaders' preunderstanding/perception of the interviewees?
7	What can be detected in the story concerning the interviewees, interpreters and factory owner's/manager's preunderstandings/perceptions of the interviewer?
8	What is being silenced or avoided?

Questions for analysis – Step 4	
1	Are there inconsistencies in the story? What do they suggest?
2	Are there confusions in the story? What do they suggest?
3	Does the silences or acts of silencing suggest an alternative story?

Appendix B: van Manen's Model of Analysis

From Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing by Max van Manen, 2014, New York: Routledge.

1. Max Van Manen's Levels of Analysis

In exploring themes and insights, we can treat texts as sources of meaning at the level of the whole story; at the level of the separate paragraph; and at the level of the sentence, phrase, expression, or single word.

(1) In the wholistic reading approach we attend to the text as a whole and ask, "How can the eidetic, originary, or phenomenological meaning or main significance of the text as a whole be captured?" We then try to express that meaning by formulating such a phrase.

(2) In the selective reading approach, we listen to or read a text several times and ask, "What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?" These statements we then circle, underline, or highlight. Next, we may try to capture these phenomenological meanings in thematic expressions or through longer reflective descriptive-interpretive paragraphs. Some phrases that occur in the text may be particularly evocative, or possess a sense of punctum. These phrases should be copied and saved as possible rhetorical "gems" for developing and writing the phenomenological text.

(3) In the detailed reading approach, we look at every single sentence or sentence cluster and ask, "What may this sentence or sentence cluster be seen to reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?" Again, we try to identify and capture thematic expressions, phrases, or narrative paragraphs that increasingly let the phenomenological meaning of the experience show or give itself in the text. If the whole experiential account is particularly powerful then we try to lift it out as an exemplary story or anecdote. (van Manen, 2014. p. 320)

2. van Manen's Guided Existential Inquiry

(1) RELATIONALITY: Lived relation or lived Self-Other. The existential theme of relationality may guide our reflection to ask how self and others are experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied. To explore relational aspects of a phenomenon is to ask: How are people or things connected? What meaning of community? What ethics of being

together? The etymological meaning of relation includes reference to what people return to. Therefore, we speak of family as relations: the intimacies that draw us to return and reunite. How is the self-experienced in relation? In what ways is the subject-object relation constituted? Is the other experienced as object or in his or her otherness (alterity)? We may even experience the other in a nonrelational relation such as when the self is erased from the relation in experiences of sacrifice, total dedication, or service. Phenomena such as love and friendship can be examined for their relational qualities and significance. (van Manen, 2014. p. 303)

(2) CORPOREALITY: Lived body. The existential theme of corporeality may guide our reflection to ask how the body is experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied. As object? As subject? Sartre has shown that, in ordinary life the body tends to be experienced as passed over in silence (passé sous silence). While we are bodily engaged in the world, do we not really pay attention to the body? How and when do we become aware of our bodies? How do our desires, fears, cheerfulness, anxieties incarnate themselves in the world in which we dwell? How is the phenomenon we study perceived, sensed, touched by the body? We may look at our own body in the same appraising manner as we may look at someone else's body–however, this look is not the same, since we perceive our own body with our own body. So, how is the body of self and other perceived differently? Similarly, how do we experience being touched by some thing or by a person? (van Manen, 2014. p. 304)

(3) SPATIALITY: Lived space. The existential theme of spatiality may guide our reflection to ask how space is experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied. How do we experience interiorities differently from exteriorities? For example, how is space in a cathedral experienced differently from a small church? What effect do high ceilings have on us? How do we shape space and how does space shape us? For example, how do we experience the bed and bedroom differently when we are healthy from when we are sick? How is space experienced differently from place? How do we experience the worldly or unworldly moods of certain places? How do we enter, dwell, and exit virtual spaces or places of novels, films, or the computer screen? How do we experience the dimensions of cyberspace? (van Manen, 2014. p. 305)

(4) TEMPORALITY: Lived time. The existential theme of temporality may guide our reflection to ask how time is experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied. Everyone knows the difference between objective (cosmic) time and subjective (lived) time, clock time

and phenomenological time. We experience the time of waiting differently from when we are actively involved in something. For example, when we travel by car for a three-hour drive to another city, it may feel that some stretches of the road are longer than other parts, even though they are objectively the same length. It may just feel that it takes longer to do, for example, the first 50 miles than the last 50 miles. This experience also shows that lived space and lived time are mingled. Space is an aspect of time, and time is experienced as space. That is why we speak of the "length" of time it takes to do something. Even the clock has a lived sensibility to the passing of time. Note, for example, that a number display on a digital time piece shows time differently from an analogue time piece with hour, minute, and second hands. A clock or watch with an analogue face shows time as movement in space, when the hands slowly but determinately sweep across the dial. We tell what time it is by glancing how far the hands of the clock still have to go for lunch time to start. Lived time is also experienced as telos: the wishes, plans, and goals we strive for in life. Our sense of identity is experienced in terms of the times of our childhood, the periods of our working or love life, and so forth. (van Manen, 2014. p. 305-306)

(5) MATERIALITY: Lived things and technology. The existential theme of materiality may guide our reflection to ask how things are experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of "things" in our lives. The things are our world in its material thing like reality. With almost any research topic we can ask, how are "things" experienced and how do the experiences of things and world contribute to the essential meaning of the phenomenon? In a real way, we see and recognize ourselves in the things of our world. And the things tell me who I am. How do they do this? How are things extensions of our bodies and minds? How can things be experienced as intimate or strange? Things can disappoint us or reflect our disappointment back to us. And they can remind us of our responsibilities. (van Manen, 2014. p. 305-306)