thrown in so that the story brought something new to the table.

I have long felt that the portrayal of Bangladesh, particularly in the Western media, tends to be mired in stereotypes. Poverty and despair, natural disasters and violence characterise most of the news coverage from my country. And yet I know very well that there is much more to Bangladesh than what is reflected in those stories. Ours is a society in transition, one where the challenges of poverty and violence exist alongside development and opportunity. Traditional pressures hold people back, even as education and employment open up new horizons. To see young women travel from their villages to the cities in search of factory work, for example, is to observe something that was unthinkable even a generation ago.

Within Bangladesh, the rural-urban divide is increasingly breaking down as a result of migration and the undreamt-of developments taking place in communications technology. Few would guess that this country has one of the fastest-growing Facebook communities in the world! In cities like the capital Dhaka, the sense of being connected to and affected by a wider world and its trends are almost palpable.

And while globalisation is alive and well in Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi diaspora has also reached every corner of the world. Remittances make up a huge part of the country's foreign exchange earnings – feeding not just families, but also the aspirations of a new generation within the country. It is *this* Bangladesh - in all its diversity, contradictions, beauty and chaos - that I wanted to portray in *Lifelines*.

When it came to selecting the fifteen stories that make up the anthology, I sought textured narratives to provide a nuanced picture of contemporary Bangladesh. *Lifelines* tells the tales of Bangladeshi migrants to foreign countries, as well as those who dream of migration from the village to the city. It touches on global events such as the 9/11 attacks, even as it engages with the challenges posed by local traditions related to sex and marriage; above all, it draws on the universal experiences that make up the stuff of family, relationships and life in general.

The stories are told from the perspectives of Bangladeshi men, women and children living in different parts of the globe; most are struggling to find a balance in an increasingly complex world. In particular, given the gendered realities of Bangladeshi society and prevailing stereotypes about its people, I wanted *Lifelines* to make it clear that there is no simple, reductive story to tell about Bangladeshi women or their struggles.

Widely-held views around violence and poverty fail to recognise that there are many stories that don't fit those narratives; stories which are less often told or heard. Very few people, for example, know that Bangladesh is the home of two female conquerors of Mount Everest. Furthermore, one of them is currently engaged in the Seven Summits campaign to climb the highest peak on each of the seven continents, with the aim of showing just how far Bangladeshi women have come in four decades of independence. Impressively, WasfiaNazreen is already past the halfway point towards achieving her target.

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My own story 'Getting There' reflects some of these contradictions in a changing society. It follows the journey of a young woman, Laila, who has the opportunity to leave behind her damaged childhood and create a new life for herself in a different city. While such journeys are commonplace in the western world, in much of South Asia the chance to escape your past is less frequently an option. A family crisis forces Laila to return to her parents' home - and in the process of dealing with the situation, she begins to realise that things were never quite as she had thought. So 'Getting There' is a story about family dynamics and coming to terms with your past, but not necessarily in the way in which you expected to.

In essence, I wanted *Lifelines* to reflect what I know about the reality of my country as both a writer and a development worker, as well as, of course, a Bangladeshi woman. And while putting this anthology together was hard work, and there *were* a few bad days, in the end, the experience of editing the book taught me a great deal about writing: what worked and what didn't, and why. In the process, it made me a better writer, too. That alone would have made the process worthwhile, as far as I am concerned - and it leads me to conclude that I should probably just have surrendered gracefully, and gone with the flow in the first place...

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