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TORONTO'S BANGLA TOWN AND THE EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF BANGLADESHI-CANADIAN YOUTH

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Abstract

Toronto's Bangla Town hosts a rich web of co-ethnic operated institutions despite the fact that many residents are struggling economically. For generation 1.5 and 2 Bangladeshi-Canadian youth, ties with the ethnic concentration and co-ethnics can act as both, a trapdoor as well as a trampoline, thus contributing to nuanced educational and employment experiences. Their experiences and aspirations are explored through two qualitative research methods; focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews. The findings show that the involvement of these youth in Bangla Town influences their identity formation as 'third-culture kids' and in co-ethnic social networks. Identity formation and social networks, in turn, impact their educational and employment aspirations. Bangladeshi-Canadian youth illustrates the plight of children of recent immigrant groups in Canada that face obstacles such as racialization and poverty in integration and social mobility.

Keywords: Social Mobility; Integration; Identity; Children of immigrants

1. Introduction

This study examines the employment and educational experiences and aspirations of Bangladeshi-Canadian youth who are well connected to co-ethnics and their ethnic concentration using the framework of social capital, cultural capital and selective acculturation theories. These theories are used to interpret the subjective experiences of the participants, uncovered through qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The aim is to understand the nuanced influence of ethnic concentration and co-ethnics on the economic as well as social integration of the children of recent immigrant groups in Canada who often face multiple barriers such as racialization and poverty.

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A notable body of literature examined the integration and social mobility of American youth. However, only a limited number of studies focus on the children of specific immigrant groups in the Canadian context (see Kelly, 2014; Zaami, 2015). It is therefore imperative to study the children of recent immigrant groups and to understand and assist them so they may achieve their aspirations. Although broad statistical data can be useful, qualitative data is critical to understand the complex "psychosocial processes" that underpin the integration of these young people (Desai and Subramanian, 2000). In contemporary Toronto, a diverse North American metropolis built upon immigration, these young people are part of a significant demographic shift; the 'browning' of North American urban centers (see Al-Solaylee, 2016). Yet the experiences and aspirations of some of these ethnic groups are less documented than others. This study contributes to the limited literature exploring neighbourhood effects on the social mobility of the children of immigrants in Canada (see Zaami, 2015). The neighbourhood of concern in this study is Toronto's Bangla Town. I seek to answer the following research questions.

a) How do social and spatial connections to co-ethnics and experience of local ethnic concentrations influence youths' social engagement and economic integration?

b) How are their aspirations shaped by the latter social and spatial connections?

Scholars posit that integration of generation 1.5 and 2 youth is influenced by micro and macro factors (see Zhou and Bankston 2016). Generation 1.5 refers to a child who arrived in Canada at or before the age of 12. The latter age was chosen from the works of Rumbaut (2004) who helped popularize the term through his research about Latino-American youth. Generation 2 are Canadian born children with at least one immigrant parent. Micro factors such as income and immigration/citizenship status directly affect individuals and families whereas macro factors such as neighbourhood characteristics and racialization are more societal. One salient factor for the children of recent immigrant groups, as observed among previous generations, is their connection to local ethnic concentrations and co-ethnics. American and Canadian metropolises host diverse ethnic concentrations categorized by labels such as Chinatown and Little Italy. Toronto's Bangla Town is a recent ethnic concentration of Bangladeshis that are mainly young professionals selected under the skilled workers' program who arrived in Canada between 1996 and 2006 (Murdie and Ghosh, 2010; Halder, 2012). For many Bangladeshis, ethnic concentration serves as a source of familiarity and comfort in a foreign cityscape (Ghosh, 2014). Current studies of Toronto's

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Bangla Town mainly examine the place through the lens of first-generation adults, paying little attention to the views of generation 1.5 and 2 Bangladeshi-Canadian youth. This study focuses specifically on generation 1.5 and 2 youth, ages 18-24, who are currently engaged with Toronto's Bangla Town. Their engagement takes diverse forms and includes residence, work, volunteering, and social and recreational events.

2. Background

2.1 Overview of conceptual frameworks

Two theoretical frameworks form the foundations of this study. One is segmented assimilation theory and the later framework of selective acculturation which results from it. Selective acculturation provides an explanation of the way contemporary children of immigrants form their identities and prosper in a new country. It debunks traditional thinking around assimilation that posits the abandonment of all ethnic ties as the pathway to upward mobility. It also challenges the notion that the maintenance of ethnic ties as a pathway towards downward social mobility. Rather, selective acculturation posits upward mobility while retaining ethnic roots and ties. The ways in which Bangladeshi-Canadian youth who are active in their ethnic concentration alongside balancing co-ethnic ties can achieve higher social mobility will be explored in-depth.

The other framework anchoring this study deals with diverse forms of capital. Sometimes, material advantages accrued from having social capital, the resources available from your social contacts and social networks and cultural capital, also the knowledge of how to behave in specific social settings around particular groups of people are underestimated. The concepts of social and cultural capital are used to investigate how the experiences and aspirations of the Bangladeshi-Canadian youth are influenced by the absence of economic capital in the local ethnic concentration and among co-ethnics.

2.2 Segmented Assimilation Theory

Segmentation assimilation is a theory borne of skepticism with earlier versions of linear assimilation theory derived primarily from American experiences. These early theories suggested that most children of immigrants in the United States would adopt its dominant culture and linearly meld into the white,

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middle class population (see Warner and Srole, 1945; Gordon, 1964). This theory contends that recent waves of migrants, primarily from regions outside Europe, are culturally distinct and face a different set of socio-economic circumstances than earlier waves of European migration.

Segmented assimilation theory can be credited with raising concerns about certain children of immigrants experiencing downward mobility due to the challenging contexts they encounter in new societies. The primary concern is that these groups or individuals will incorporate permanently into the underclass of American metropolises. The theory aimed to challenge assumptions among past scholars around the social mobility of the children of immigrants. The major indicators of downward mobility among youth today are high rates of teenage pregnancies, incarceration and school dropout (Zhou and Bankston 2016; 75).

My study incorporates the focus on residential location and ethnic neighbourhoods in segmented assimilation theory. It is an important theory for analyzing how residential location and co-ethnic social networks influence the social and economic integration of the children of immigrants. For immigrants, particularly Bangladeshi first generation in the U.K, a cycle of social isolation results from and also exacerbates discrimination in ethnically diverse towns and cities (Amin, 2002). Despite challenges such as chronic un(der)employment and racialization, the children of immigrants refuse to accept treatment as second-class citizens (ibid). How generation 1.5 and 2 youth navigate these daily challenges are unpacked using diverse understandings of adaptation and acculturation that range from a predominantly ethnic orientation ('ethnic profile') to full assimilation into the dominant culture ('national profile') (Berry et al. 2006). The impact of the ethnic concentration and co-ethnics on the above specific generations in Canadian metropolises has not been studied much (see Zaami, 2015).

Segmented assimilation theorists Portes and Rumbaut (2001) proposed selective acculturation as a conceptual foundation to problematize the traditional dichotomy of upward versus downward mobility, where upward mobility is a result of melding into the dominant culture and full assimilation, and downward assimilation a route into the fringes of society due to retaining ethnic values and practices. Selective acculturation posits a pathway towards upward social mobility while maintaining ethnic values

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and practices. This concept may specially be useful for the Canadian context, particularly in metropolises such as Toronto, where many diverse ethnicities live together. I argue that it is a critical framework for explaining some of the experiences and aspirations of Bangladeshi-Canadian youth who are actively engaged in Bangla Town in their quest to belong and prosper in contemporary Toronto.

2.3 Social and Human Capital

Returning to the idea of capital and its many forms, Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as the resources that an individual or group can command through virtue of their networks and relationships based on exchanges of trust and reciprocity.

The widespread popularity and utility of Bourdieu's ideas meant that the concepts of social and cultural capital have been adopted in multiple disciplines. The transmission of knowledge, skills, and privileges to the next generation has been explored in recent decades by documenting "…the importance of the embeddedness of young persons in the enclaves of adults most proximate to them, first and most prominent the family and second, a surrounding community of adults" (Putnam 2000; 303). Describing the interconnectedness of different forms of capital and their transfer across generations, Coleman (1988; 109) stipulates "…one effect of social capital that is especially important: its effect on the creation of human capital in the next generation."

These theories provide a basis for examining the integration and social mobility of the children of immigrants. Adequate social and cultural capital, or lack thereof, benefits and/or hinders the employment and educational chances of the young. The aim here is to better understand this intricate interplay between different forms of capital for youth that face systemic challenges. In this case, Bangladeshi-Canadian youth whose parents generally possess either high human capital (higher education and professional accreditations acquired overseas), mixed cultural or social capital (strong ethnic orientation and support networks but less knowledge of the dominant culture and institutions) combined with low economic capital, may face less challenging circumstances when compared with skilled immigrants who are struggling to obtain employment commensurate with their qualifications and experience (see Mostafa et al., 2003; Murdie and Ghosh, 2010; Halder, 2012; Akter et al., 2014).

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3. Bangladeshis in Toronto

3.1 Research site: Why Toronto?

The recorded history of people leaving the Bengal delta for distant foreign lands is recent, with the earliest traces of migration to Europe being shipworkers attempting to settle in British port cities in the 1920s (Halder, 2012). Thereafter, in the 1940s, children of privileged families traveled abroad to study at British institutions (ibid). Following the partition of India and Pakistan by the British in 1947, Bangladesh was known as East Pakistan for decades until a short independence war with West Pakistan. Subsequently, it gained international recognition in 1971. The earliest immigrants to Canada during the post-partition (1947) era were migrants using Indian passports identifying as East Pakistanis, primarily the bourgeoise who opposed the idea of an independent Bangladesh and fled the domestic turmoil (ibid). After nationhood in 1971, Bangladeshi immigrants benefited briefly from being residents of a former British colony and commonwealth member hence gaining no-visa entry status to Canada. The largest wave of Bangladeshi migrants arrived in Canada between 1996 and 2006, mainly as young professionals taking advantage of the points system looking to attract highly skilled individuals (ibid).

For Bangladeshis, Toronto has always been the most popular destination in Canada. In 2011, 25,090 out of the 45,325 (approximately 55%) of Bangladeshis in Canada resided in the Toronto CMA (National Household Survey, 2011). As per Statistics Canada, in 2016, about 32,385 Bangladeshis lived in the Toronto CMA, still more than half of the Bangladeshi population in Canada. The allure of Toronto for Bangladeshis can be partly explained by their affinity for proximity to kith and kin, relying heavily on these social connections during initial settlement to find housing and employment (see Ghosh, 2007; Propa, 2007, Halder, 2012). Toronto hosts three distinguishable ethnic concentrations of Bangladeshis; the most well recognized is in the Crescent Town neighbourhood of east Toronto (official Bangla Town according to the Bangladeshis), a downtown concentration in the Regent Park neighbourhood and another smaller community west in the Cabbagetown neighbourhood (Halder, 2012). There are some more affluent but less dense ethnic concentrations in the surrounding suburbs of Brampton and Mississauga (ibid). Bangladeshis residing in Toronto's Bangla Town in the Crescent Town neighbourhood, primarily live in aging high-rise apartment buildings due to many factors like cheaper rents, larger units that can accommodate larger families and joint family living and the close proximity to other Bangladeshi

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residents and commercial/social organizations operated by and serving co-ethnics (Murdie and Ghosh 2010). Bangladeshis in Toronto, despite being mainly well-educated professionals remain one of the most impoverished and spatially concentrated immigrant groups (Akter, 2014; Ghosh, 2014).

3.2 Research site: Why Bangla Town?

Toronto's Bangla Town is an ethnic concentration on the border of East York and west Scarborough comprising several Bangladeshi operated businesses and social service organizations along the eastern stretches of Danforth Avenue that are patronized primarily by Bangladeshis who reside in high-rise apartment buildings nearby (see Murdie and Ghosh 2010 and Ghosh 2014). The study site of Bangla Town was chosen because it presents an effective case study about the plight of children of recent immigrant groups facing barriers such as racialization and poverty. Three specific qualities of Bangla Town and its Bangladeshi residents were crucial in its selection.

First, Bangla Town is an ethnic concentration where many residents have limited economic resources and opportunities. In the Crescent Town neighbourhood, where Bangla Town is situated, 81% of residents live in high-rise rental apartments and about 33% (double the city average) of residents are low-income earners (City of Toronto, 2018). Families with children and youth are more susceptible to material poverty with 43.6% of families with children under 18 in the low-income cohort (ibid). Due to residents' low income and the gap between their needs and available services; the City of Toronto has labeled it a 'Priority Neighborhood'. Administrators and planners identify these neighbourhoods for additional resources and services to address low scores in metrics such as economic opportunities, social development, participation in decision making and healthier lives.

Second, Bangla Town possesses a rich web of co-ethnic operated institutions, both commercial and socio-cultural, active in transmitting values and practices to the young. Within a small area, three busy mosques offer regular prayers and weekly religious schools, and four ethnic organizations run youth programs such as game nights and homework clubs. It is home to many of the roughly 42 distinct (formal and informal) institutions by-and-for Bangladeshis across Toronto identified by Halder (2012). Moreover, Ghosh (2014) describes how co-ethnics residing in high-rise apartments in Bangla Town use their private

units for diverse activities such as informal daycares, traditional art (Bengali folk songs) and religious (Quran/Arabic) classes for the young as well as in-home beauty parlors and catering, to serve a primarily co-ethnic clientele and supplement household incomes.

Third, residents of Bangla Town generally possess high levels of human capital. The youth generally have well educated parents and aspire to become well educated themselves. A study of 1,368 respondents (48% of them first generation Bangladeshis from Crescent Town) on the informal economy experiences of Bangladeshis, Chinese and Somalis in east Toronto, found that first generation Bangladeshis had significantly higher rates of post-secondary educational qualifications than the other immigrant groups; 88% held a graduate or professional degree such as MBA/MA/PhD (Akter et al., 2014). A smaller study of 100 Bangladeshi immigrants uncovered similar results; 72% held at least a Master's degree (Mostafa et al., 2003). In the latter survey, only 4% of respondents reported having a high school (Bangladeshi equivalent) diploma or less.

3.3 Research demographic: Bangladeshi-Canadian youth

This study involves 10 youth participants; Laiba, Iman, Aisha, Auntora, Yadu, Nirob, Raqib, Amar, Farid, and Neel. All study participants are represented using pseudonyms. The first 7 youth in that list participated in the focus group discussion with the latter 3 only featured in the semi-structured interviews. The ages of the youth ranged from 18 to 24 and there were 4 women and 6 men participating.

Iman, Aisha, and Raqib participated in both, the focus group and follow-up semi-structured interviews. Another three youth who had been unable to participate in the focus group were keen to contribute and participated in the semi-structured interviews: Amar, Farid, and Neel.

Most participants were currently studying in some capacity, mainly at the bachelors' level in university. Two youth had recently completed their bachelor degrees and were searching for full-time employment and/or further educational opportunities. Two youth had just completed high school and were enrolled to start university in the fall. None of the youth who either had part-time work or temporary full-time work in the past (internships during summer vacations), were working full-time in a single position.

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Whether participants will achieve the same levels of educational attainments as their parents remain to be seen. Certain racialized youth groups such as Filipino-Canadian males are attaining lower educational qualifications than their parents (see Kelly, 2014). Participants in this study generally aspired to the same levels of education, if not higher, than their well-educated parents. The latter corroborates Toronto District School Board (TDSB) data from 2011 – Bengali speaking students in Grade 9 in 2006 (n=255) had an 88.6% high school graduation rate, 70.6% university admittance rate, 10.6% college admittance and 9.4% did not apply to post-secondary education (ibid, 2014; 19). Among other ethnic groups, Bengali speaking youth had the second highest (right behind the Chinese) rates of high school graduation and university admittance. Bengali speaking youth had the lowest rate of non-application to post-secondary institutions among the identified ethnic groups. This data unsurprising shows how study participants repeatedly highlighted the socio-cultural pressures to achieve academic goals.

4. Research Methods

4.1 Overview of research methods

This study uses a qualitative, site specific case-study approach to examine the employment and educational experiences and aspirations of Bangladeshi-Canadian youth. These methods empower participants to have their voices heard. The research consisted of a focus group discussion and six semi-structured interviews. The focus group and all interviews were conducted in English.

Study participants were recruited using word-of-mouth outreach in youth serving community organizations within Bangla Town as well as respondent driven sampling within peer networks. The focus group saw youth discuss with their peers the meaning of ‘Bangla Town’, the concept of ‘moving up in life’ and notions of ‘fitting in’. A set of open-ended guiding questions were selected to encourage participants to reflect and share their thoughts. To create a friendly atmosphere, the focus group was hosted in a youth-serving community center in Bangla Town. The discussion helped identify points for follow-up in the semi-structured interviews. Three youth who were enthusiastic and engaged in the focus group process were invited for interviews. Another three youth who were keen on contributing to the study and had reached out to the researcher was also selected. Hence six youth participated in the semi-

structured interviews. The fieldwork occurred primarily in August 2018, with some remaining activities in September.

The focus group helped unearth specific themes and issues that were further probed in the interviews. Some issues were person specific while others were more thematic – these issues were uncovered through reviewing digital audio and typed notes from the focus group. The data from the focus group were considered before deciding how to proceed with the interviews. It was an iterative process that improved the quality of the information collected for later analyses.

Large amounts of qualitative data were collected and treated through the focus groups and interviews. The transcriptions from both research methods were coded and analyzed systematically; first using a surface level descriptive approach and then a more analytical deconstruction (see Cope, 2016). The latter was done with the key research questions in mind. For example, a specific question response would be coded with some key descriptions such as "Bangla Town" and "employment" and then added to a central coding index for easy tracking and future comparisons. Then later these descriptive themes were revisited multiple times and coded more analytically e.g. "prevalence of precarious employment in Bangla Town." This process was repeated many times for each question in each transcription until recurring themes, as well as the significant anomalies, helped garner a clearer understanding of the key research questions.

It is also important to note the significance of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The researcher is also a generation 1.5 Bangladeshi-Canadian youth who the participants could easily relate to and felt comfortable sharing important information. Moreover, access to these community spaces in Bangla Town and the youth who frequent these spaces were easier for the researcher given his long residence near the community and rapport with its co-ethnics as well as the ability to speak the Bengali language.

4.2 Focus group discussions

A focus group was conducted on the evening of Tuesday, August 7th, 2019 with a group of seven Bangladeshi-Canadian youth. The conversation took place in the heart of Toronto's Bangla Town at a

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community center that runs multiple youth programs. Participants shared their views on a variety of themes including Bangla Town, 'fitting in' and 'moving up'.

We delved on the following discussion themes. Under the 'Bangla Town' portion of the focus group discussion, questions were asked about specific sites frequented, the purpose of these visits, the boundaries of the ethnic concentration and its significance to the youth. Questions about 'moving up' unearthed the aspirations of Bangladeshi-Canadian youth, influences, and pressures from co-ethnics on educational and employment choices, barriers to social mobility and how their aspirations were (re)shaped over time. Questions under the theme of 'fitting in' dealt with belonging, differences and similarities in cultural identities and navigating multiple identities. Throughout the focus group, audio recordings and detailed notes were kept to triangulate the data.

4.3 Semi-structured interviews

The guiding interview questions were open-ended and designed to encourage participants to share their stories. The idea was to allow participants to express their thoughts and feelings freely, with basic follow-up prompts to help generate ideas in case they got stuck. Semi-structured interviews are meaningful because they allow the respondents to express their views and insights comfortably (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). Moreover, interviews are often recorded to allow the researcher(s) to transcribe the tapes later (ibid). All interviews in this study were recorded and stored for later transcription. Moreover, research notes were typed up during the interviews and compared against the transcriptions later on to ensure accuracy.

An interview schedule guided the conversation with five different themes, namely, Bangla Town, education, employment, peer networks and sense of belonging. The themes were valuable in constructing a comprehensive portrait of co-ethnic influences on the educational and employment experiences and aspirations of the youth. Based on the interview conversation and points from an earlier focus group, the researcher had a list of items for potential follow-up. The questions on Bangla Town started similarly to the focus group with queries about physical boundaries and present/past engagements with the place. On the topic of education, we discussed experiences and aspirations such as choice of current school and

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program, social and spatial influences on these choices and future educational aspirations. Under the theme of employment, similar to education, the discussion revolved around experiences and aspirations. We discussed past and present employment, future career aspirations and how these career aspirations were shaped by their employment experiences in and beyond Bangla Town. The theme of support networks delved into the individuals the youth trusted most for guidance and the formation of friendships and peer support networks. The final theme of belonging tackled issues of identity negotiation, ethnic labels and navigating cultural differences and similarities.

5. Findings and discussion

This section explores in-depth the influence of the ethnic concentration and co-ethnics on social and economic experiences and aspirations of generation 1.5 and 2 Bangladeshi-Canadian youth. This was to know how their aspirations are formed and re-formed and are considered in light of scholarly theories as well as subjective experiences. Similar to other visible minority immigrant groups in Canada (see Krahn and Taylor, 2005) and co-ethnic peers from the United Kingdom (see Dale et al., 2002) participants are expected to face high educational and employment expectations from co-ethnics. With few exceptions, visible minority second generation youth in Canada improve upon parental educational attainment (Kucera, 2008; Abada et al., 2008).

However, limited economic resources and opportunities, as well as mixed levels of social and cultural capital in the ethnic concentration are expected to challenge employment aspirations of Bangladeshi-Canadian youth. Some challenges may be attributed to a lack of professional connections and previous work/internship positions needed to launch a (white collar) career. The ethnic concentration with its collective values and the social capital made available to the children of immigrants encourages educational attainment and minority language retention (see Zhou and Bankston, 1994; Giorgas, 2000; Abada and Tenkorang, 2009; Vervoort et al., 2012). The ways in which these theories and past evidence manifest in the daily lives of participants are discussed in three main parts: Bangla Town through youthful eyes, identity formation and social networks and social networks and aspirations.

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6. Bangla Town through youthful eyes

Past studies have explored first generation experiences with Bangla Town; however, the voices of the1.5 and 2 generations remain largely absent. I attempt to unpack youthful views of the local ethnic concentration and co-ethnics. Previous scholarly works have defined Bangla Town in their own ways. The definitions are similar given that Bangla Town is a place with a small population and a limited number of institutions. In Akbar (2016; 112), Bangla Town is summarized as "The Bengali 'Para' [area] surrounding Victoria Park station and the Bangladeshi businesses and institutions on Danforth Avenue…" The place's significance is highlighted by comments that it hosts; "Most Bangladeshi businesses and major Bangladeshi religious, social, cultural and economic institutions [in Toronto]" (ibid). The proximity to local subway stations, businesses and social service organizations operated by and serving co-ethnics are thought to draw many Bangladeshis to the area (Murdie and Ghosh, 2010; Halder, 2012).

For the youth in this study, Bangla Town was primarily described as a place of residence, work, and volunteering. For those currently residing outside Bangla Town, there were still frequent visits for personal and familial errands such as weekly groceries and volunteering activities. Involvement in socio-recreational activities in Bangla Town was less frequent and involved periodic family parties, religious festivities and dining out. The engagement of youth with and within different settings such as schools, businesses, residences, and community organizations, as well as their interactions with co-ethnics within Bangla Town are thoughtfully considered. By emphasizing some places and people while leaving out others, participants revealed their relevance and significance. Some important interactions that happen in places away from Bangla Town were also considered. It was ultimately up to the participants, in collaboration with the researcher, to thread meaningful engagements and relationships during the focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews.

Participants held a positive view of Bangla Town, fondly identifying several well-known co-ethnic operated grocers and restaurants. There was a little critical commentary about Bangla Town aside from its limited employment resources and opportunities (discussed later in the third section of findings). The youth expressed more positive views of Bangla Town than some first-generation Bangladeshi-Canadians

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interviewed by Halder (2012). Moreover, participants presented an alternative voice to earlier 'South Asian' first generation youth who describe 'Little Bangladesh', 'Little Pakistan' and 'Little India' of Toronto as having a 'ghetto type reputation' (see Ghosh, 2013).

6.1 Boundaries of Bangla Town

The spatial limits of Bangla Town are an important consideration. Assimilationist perspectives propose that the movement of minority ethnic groups into more white neighbourhoods indicates acculturation and socio-economic mobility, although empirical evidence suggests the latter is only partially true (Bolt and Kempen, 2010). A local study found that second generation 'South Asians' aspired to low-density housing regardless of the neighbourhood demographics, with many seeing proximity to co-ethnics as an advantage and some even suggested that it was a necessity to live close to family members (Kataure and Walton-Roberts, 2013). Spatial boundaries are continually challenged by the children of immigrants who are transnational beings (see Reitz and Somerville, 2004). Given their families' migration histories (see Ghosh, 2014), many of generation 1.5 youth of Bangladeshi descent grow up in large, globally connected metropolises such as Dhaka and Dubai. Ghosh also discusses 'glocalization' and the increasing interconnectedness between (first generation) residents of Bangla Town and events in Bangladesh and other countries where they have family members.

Some of the youth in this study also think transnationally - Amar expressed in their interview: "**I'd be open to working anywhere in the world**." Focus group participants agreed that Bangla Town extends between Main Street (west) and Victoria Park (east) subway stations; a stretch of about 1.6 kilometers, a 20-minute walk. Many youth moved further east to nearby Scarborough neighbourhoods after their families bought a house or condominium. Moreover, several participants noticed new Bangladeshi operated businesses opening further east, beyond the acknowledged boundaries of Bangla Town. A debate ensued about how far east Bangla Town stretches past Victoria Park and Danforth Avenue. The youth agreed that the southernmost boundary is a big shopping complex called Shoppers World Danforth and the northernmost boundaries are the Crescent Town/Teesdale high rise apartments near Victoria Park subway station. The north-south distance between Victoria Park subway station and the Shopper's World Danforth complex is 600 meters or an 8-minute walk. Participants recognized that Bangla town was a

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neighbourhood in the east end of Toronto, as Farid stated, **"Toronto's Bangla Town is definitely east side Toronto, that's for sure."**

Another youth emphasized that Toronto's Bangla Town was easily recognizable to co-ethnics. The place has a reputational cache, **"So I know, any Bengali kid that like I met, that isn't from here, if I tell them the intersection, automatically, [they know it's] Bangla Town."** Moreover, the recognition that key institutions within Bangla Town such as co-ethnic operated grocers were known well beyond the local area was shared in the focus group.

> **"…so, it's [Toronto's Bangla Town] gotten that reputation, another thing that comes to mind is Sarker Foods [local ethnic grocer] because it's very well known in the Bengali community. Even while I am away in London [Ontario] my Uber driver talks about Sarker Foods so its very well known."** -Iman

Overall, after discussing specific sites and Bangla Town's boundaries, participants acknowledged that it is a small neighbourhood in a big metropolis, albeit a special neighbourhood to them and other Bangladeshis residing across the province.

6.2 Bangla Town and the next generation

For many first-generation Bangladeshis, Toronto's Bangla Town is an "imagined homeland" formed through social, cultural, religious and economic activities and organizations (Halder, 2012). It is a place that helps create a sense of "back home" in the public and private spheres, from co-ethnic operated home daycares in apartments to street side restaurants dishing out Bangladeshi cuisine (Ghosh, 2014; Akbar, 2016). The co-ethnic community usually plays a positive role for immigrants, helping them tackle economic challenges and social isolation by producing a homely cultural atmosphere (Giorgas, 2000). However, some first-generation Bangladeshis, particularly those who had moved to surrounding suburb areas after longer residence in Canada and greater affluence tended to avoid Bangla Town except for occasional groceries. They see the place negatively as a hub for less affluent co-ethnics politicking over leadership of ethnic organizations (Halder, 2012). Moving beyond the first generation, what did Bangla Town mean to its youth?

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When asked to name landmarks in Toronto's Bangla Town, restaurants, grocers and residential high-rise buildings topped the list for most study participants. The grocers and restaurants named were predominantly co-ethnic operated and serving Bangladeshis. The latter is interesting because Bangla Town includes other notable restaurants and grocers such as Popeyes and Metro, which the youth generally excluded in their responses. Many also named one or two local co-ethnic operated social service organizations, where the participants work(ed) or volunteer(ed). A majority named some local schools and public parks as well. The youth admitted venturing out of Bangla Town for recreation and socialization with peers. Aisha observed that her parents preferred local options, especially when they could hang out with other Bangladeshis, **"Yeah like he [my dad] will go to Gharoa [local ethnic restaurant] and hang out, for us it's more go downtown and other places."** However, Bangla Town was quite popular among the youth, as it was among the elders, for its diverse culinary choices.

> **"I think there is one similarity with the food, there's a lot of good restaurants here, so if we were to come here it would be over a meal. But I think the restaurants are places, I think, for the two [generations] coming together."** -Iman

Aside from cuisine, participants emphasized their involvement with social service organizations that offer a wide array of programs for multiple generations around Bangla Town. Many youths chose to describe their involvement with Bangla Town through the lens of work and volunteering. It should be noted that community organizations played an important role in recruiting youth for this study so participants are likely to have significant past and present engagement with these organizations in Bangla Town.

> **"My picture [of the mental map] was anywhere around BCS [Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services – a local social service organization] because that's where I feel I spend most of my time [in Bangla Town], so I could volunteer and work, and looking at everyone else's pictures, those who are in similar living situation as me [having moved away]. Also, for those their boundaries are similar to mine just because we focus on whatever we are involved in."** -Iman

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In addition to volunteering, participants work(ed) in Bangla Town, occupying diverse entry positions (mostly part-time and contractual) in Bangladeshi operated social service organizations and small businesses, such as cultural art school mentor, non-profit project assistant and tutorial center teaching assistant. Similar to their first generation elders they also had jobs in co-ethnic operated institutions located in Bangla Town. In contrast, only one participant worked full time in the summers at a big business franchise (Lowes) despite several establishments around Bangla Town e.g. Staples and Dollarama. Participants' experiences with employment in Bangla Town are explored in-depth later.

7. Identity formation and orientation

Identity formation is a life-long process; however, identity first becomes an important consideration during adolescence (Steinberg, 2008). Young people who move across cultures before their identities are fully formed may develop a flexible multicultural identity (Moore and Barker, 2012). J.W Berry et al. (2006) discusses the opposite negative outcome of "cultural diffusion" where the youth feels little or no sense of belonging to any group or culture. Belonging can be simply understood as feeling at home in a place (see Castaneda, 2018). The middle ground resonating with many generation 1.5 and 2 youth including those in this study is the "integration profile" (see J.W Berry et al., 2006). In the latter profile, contacts with the surrounding society and its dominant culture are delicately balanced with aspects of ancestral heritage. This balanced identity orientation was quite complex in practice as the experiences of participants described in the following paragraphs will demonstrate.

7.1 'Third Culture Kids

Useem et al., (1963) describes the third culture as the experience of growing up in a society different from one's parental or childhood upbringing, therefore developing a unique style or set of communication, life perspectives, interpersonal behaviours and such. Study participants were active in forming a third culture. The practice of third culture combines facets from surrounding society with heritage values (see Bhabha, 1996; AlSayyad, 2001; Ashutosh, 2012)**.** Every study participant identified with a dual hyphenated label – either Bangladeshi-Canadian or Canadian-Bangladeshi. For generation 1.5 and 2 youth, linguistic choices are an important political act of identity performance (Giampapa, 2001)**.** Participants strove to harmoniously balance both identities, as Aisha explained, **"Personally, it**

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doesn't make a difference [Bangladeshi-Canadian or Canadian-Bangladeshi], for me order is irrelevant because like 50-50 kinda thing."

Her view was disputed during the focus group where ethno-cultural identities and orientations were passionately debated. There were diverse opinions on the difference between being Bangladeshi-Canadian and Canadian-Bangladeshi. Some youth expressed that putting family above personal interests was expected of youth who are Bangladeshi first. Those who were Canadian first would prioritize personal ambitions such as leaving the family to pursue career options. Leaving the family was described as going away from home for university and/or career opportunities. Although severing family ties permanently was not mentioned, some youth did describe straining relationships by prioritizing their own aspirations over family expectations. Other youth perceived overlaps, arguing that strong community and family values were important for both Canadians and Bangladeshis. However, many youths viewed Bangladeshi culture as more family-oriented. Their view of 'Canadian culture' focused on "freedom" and "independence" whereas 'Bangladeshi culture' prioritized "authority" and "respect". These differences were expressed in almost every discussion of culture, as Rafid explained in their interview **"Bengali culture is a lot more traditional a lot more I think like respect and stuff whereas Canadian culture is a lot more freedom among other things."**

Moreover, in many homes, parents tried to preserve aspects of their heritage such as the mother tongue.

> **"So as a kid my mom basically forbade me and my brother from speaking English in the house which is also another interesting point because whenever I am visiting family back in Bangladesh, they are all really shocked we can speak decent Bangla."** -Amar

Beyond the home, generation 1.5 and 2 youth frequent many public settings, particularly educational institutions where they encounter people from many backgrounds and beliefs. Georgiou (2006) posits that the identities of these youth switch based on the setting. In my study, two participants mentioned consciously altering their expression(s) and behaviour(s) based on their surroundings. One of them did so to see if people inquiring about their identity would go on to question their 'Canadian-ness'. The other youth changed their behaviour depending on whether she perceived her surroundings as more 'Canadian' or 'Bangladeshi' alluding to the public (school) versus private (home) settings.

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"I think it depends on what environment I am in, whether I am in school versus whether I am at home so the way I deal with it would be very different. So, if I was at school I would deal with it in a more Canadian way and if I was [at home] I have to deal with it more in a Bangladeshi way. And like I say it in a very general way, but I just feel like the thing." -Aisha

Farid and Amar stated that religious values also had a strong influence on Bangladeshi culture. The vast majority of the Bangladeshi population are Muslims.

"Yeah so Bangladeshi culture can be kinda conservative and …some religious proponents [values and practices] also important to Bangladeshi culture, so most of them are Muslim so … you embody certain values and how people view life and certain activities you do. On the flip side, I would say … Canadians tend to be more … they tend to have more, much different [open] experiences than Bengalis have."-Farid

Laiba noted in the focus group that time was a big factor in identity formation, "**How long your parents have been here resulted in children being raised very differently. I think the longer the parents are here the more Canadian their values are.**" Focus group participants agreed that the 3rd generation would likely see themselves as primarily Canadians, Rafid chimed in; **"80/20 Canadian-Bangladeshi."** For the time being, generation 1.5 and 2 had to live harmoniously with both cultures and sometimes contrasting expectations.

7.2 Toronto's Bangla Town and Youth Identities

Focusing on a specific site in a large, ethnically diverse metropolis, Toronto's Bangla Town inspired a strong sense of civic involvement and ancestral heritage for the youth. There was a clear consensus among them that Canadians encouraged people to be proud of their ethnic background. Bangla Town was a fantastic place to learn about being Bangladeshi and different tenets of the culture. Discussing their lives in an ethnic concentration within an ethnically diverse city, Aisha distinguished Bangladeshi culture from proximate Asian neighbours; **"I feel like there is a lot of inherent [Bangladeshi] cultural traditions that are very different from just being Pakistani and Indian. And being able to understand why that is."** In Toronto, and across Canada, where other ethnic groups are larger and better known, Bangladeshis struggle to carve out a unique identity regardless of their generational status. They

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number only a fraction of the Indians, Sri Lankans and Pakistanis in Canada and also have lower incomes and are less likely to be home owners than their South Asian counterparts (Agrawal, 2013; Akbar, 2018).

Two participants suggested that the local ethnic concentration could sometimes be a hindrance towards acculturation for Bangladeshi-Canadian youth. These concerns revolved around the socio-cultural adaptation that J.W Berry et al. (2006) describes as social competencies in daily activities within intercultural settings. Two youth indicated that these concerns stemmed from their own parents' views about their child failing to become Canadian.

> **"My parents did not really push me to get involved in these Bangladeshi organization [in Bangla Town], it was actually the opposite, they were afraid I'd be too much of a … I would not be Canadian enough to fit into the society so they wanted me to go into I don't know taekwondo and all these other extracurricular activities as opposed to going to a mela [Bangladeshi festival] with your friends or something."** -Rafid

Regardless, these participants continued to be involved in Bangla Town through activities such as volunteering and employment despite parental opposition, keeping their involvement a secret. All participants who faced parental opposition were generation 1.5 and had spent some of their childhood in Bangladesh. Second generation participants did not mention such issues – on the contrary, their parents worried that they were becoming too Canadian and pushed them to actively engage with Bangla Town and co-ethnics.

Two generation 1.5 youth explained how Bangla Town invoked nostalgia for their childhood in Bangladesh.

> **"These [ethnic] organizations [in Bangla Town] and being involved in these organizations and developing this cultural identity if you lack the foundation I have – I already had the foundation [being born and raised in Bangladesh] so I am sort of I guess I'm just reminiscing, going through it and getting a taste of what it was like back home [in Bangladesh]. So yeah through these cultural organizations, sharing and being involved in the events I get to get a taste of what it was back home."** -Rafid

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Two other youth, both Canadian-born second generation, viewed Bangla Town positively and through a transnational lens as a place that strengthens bonds with relatives (particularly cousins) "back home" in addition to improving their understanding of Bangladeshi culture.

> **"Bangla Town has enhanced how I look at my culture and it makes me feel like I'm in Bangladesh a little bit. I can stay connected with the thousands of cousins I have back home that I am not super close with. It makes me feel like hey I am probably doing the same thing as them or like I have the same morals as them so its good, I like Bangla Town, it enhanced the way I view my culture."** -Neel

In addition to parental efforts to transmit heritage values and practices at home, cultural (Bengali song/dance/poetry/literature) and religious (Arabic/Quran) classes in Bangla Town played a critical role in identity formation and orientation for many participants. An interviewee who had lived her entire life in Toronto's Bangla Town highlighted how the place enhanced her sense of belonging as a 'third culture kid' navigating across intercultural settings.

> **"So basically, because I been here [in Bangla Town] and lived my entire life here, it's like I'm comfortable with my culture and everything around it. I find that I know a lot of people who moved here from Bangladesh or lived in a very 'white' environment and moved here, they have a lot of issues expressing their culture and kind of understanding their culture. Where to me it's pretty obvious – it's a pretty easy decision for me and so in terms of my view on my cultural identity – I know who I am, I know I am Bangladeshi-Canadian, I don't hesitate to say that whereas I find that a lot of people [my peers] do hesitate because they are, they don't know how to fit in essentially."**-Aisha

The latter sentiments were also expressed, in other ways, by fellow participants. Living in and being involved with Bangla Town helped participants feel connected to Bangladeshi culture and co-ethnics. This did not mean that they saw themselves as any less Canadian than their peers from other ethno-racial backgrounds or that their aspirations were limited spatially to Toronto's Bangla Town. Coming back to the diverse metropolis, Toronto markets itself as a city built on immigration with its official slogan being

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'Diversity Our Strength'. As study participants made clear through their words and actions, in a healthy diverse society there is a place for everyone to belong and prosper.

8. Social networks and aspirations

Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000) describe the significance of surrounding adults, particularly family members and their close connections, on the transfer of different forms of capital to the next generation. Social networks and access to cultural, social and economic capital, or lack thereof, for the children of immigrants has to do with both the surrounding community of people as well as the resources and opportunities in the residential location (see Zhou and Bankston, 2016). Most youths in this study faced immense pressures, primarily from parents and peers, to obtain university degrees and succeed in white-collar professions. Engagement with Bangla Town and co-ethnics generally heightened their educational ambitions. These findings corroborate the seminal works of Zhou and Bankston (1994) who argued that reinforcement of the "immigrant culture" emphasizing work ethic and ethnic community involvement has a positive impact on the children's education. But does good education lead to good employment for these youth and others like them? Participant experiences suggest that the leap from good education to employment is not a simple linear path especially in light of their views that they do not possess or have access to the social and cultural capital needed to succeed in the competitive Toronto labour market. Moreover, systemic changes including the rise of precarious employment for young people in recent decades (see Morisette et al., 2015) create difficult circumstances in the labour market that the participants described in-depth.

8.1 Bangla Town and career trajectories

Participants viewed Toronto's Bangla Town as a great place for specific purposes such as buying ethnic groceries and acquiring volunteering experiences. Views about employment opportunities were more negative. Focus group participants felt that a Bangla Town postal code or even Bengali as a language on their resume could be a hindrance when applying to corporate jobs. Some focus group participants felt that certain employers stigmatize specific cultures and neighbourhoods. There is empirical evidence to suggest that these fears are valid. Bauder (2002) and Zaami (2015) unpack institutional biases against

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racialized youth who are seeking gainful employment. One youth, who happened to attend a well-regarded university business program explained.

"**I think another aspect is that they're [Bangladeshi-Canadian youth] scared of how it will look on their resume so if they have Bangla [Bengali] in their resume - people are not really comfortable. Like they [employers] will have a bias towards you even though your ethnicity doesn't matter."** -Aisha

Further elucidating on how these biases might be acted upon and why they exist.

"Yeah everyone knows. They [employers] will do a quick google search and they will know where your area is, Bangla Town... it's that when you have Bengali people, they [employers] associate us as not well educated. Like I guess the way we act and behave – they [employers] have certain stereotypes of us so they assume that we won't fit in [to the workplace culture] but of course they are wrong." -Aisha

Discussing local employment, focus group participants agreed that jobs in Bangla Town were unattractive and lacked security and benefits. They expressed sympathy for their parent's struggles with employment in Canada, which had heightened their economic obligation to the family. Sometimes parents and children experienced similar labour market travails given the lack of well-paid jobs in Bangla Town. One youth shared the following anecdote:

"**Yeah, I used to work as tutor [at a tutorial center in Bangla town], originally first it was like $5/hour then, in the end, it was $10 an hour, that's because like I worked for 6 months more and he liked me better than the other kids, people who are just like start working $5 an hour. This one girl who in like grade 8, she was teaching and she got paid like $5 for 2 hours, she was super happy because she was like a kid. Still its like in Bangla Town they don't give you a proper paycheque. They're really cheap [employers in Bangla Town] so they want to save as much money so it's really hard for people to get jobs so they offer that."** -Neel

In addition to concerns about precarious employment in Bangla Town, participants also identified a lack of social networks to help launch their careers. As one youth explained, co-ethnics from Bangla Town, including their own parents and relatives, were primarily small business owners or front-line employees.

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These social connections were not helpful in securing internships and the jobs to which they aspired that were often well-compensated and secure white-collar positions in fields such as law, medicine, and engineering.

> "**I don't feel I have a good network of people. Why not? Generally, people get their networks from, I guess like their families, and a lot of our family friends either own small business [in Bangla Town] or they work for, in a position they are not really like top level or they are not in a position to provide you with a job or anything like that."** -Iman

8.2 Broader labour market challenges

Participants struggling with employment were not spatially confined to Bangla Town. Most work(ed) in precarious jobs across the city with limited shifts and hours while also studying full-time in high school or university. Several of them held multiple jobs while studying full-time to make ends meet. Many took on these responsibilities to pay their own bills and help their families' finances.

> **"I do small little projects, which help pay [the bills], so actually wait, I do tutoring so that's not full-time but part-time, I do some on-the-go research projects at school, some with BCS [local ethnic social service organization], and then I do some advocacy which I get an honorarium for with Toronto Public Health. And there is some other stuff that I do which I can't remember right now**."-Amar

These experiences reflect broader trends in Canadian society. A Statistics Canada survey found that individuals aged 17 to 24, both with and without a university degree, experienced a substantial decline in full-time employment from the late 1970s to the mid-2010s (Morissette et al., 2015). The decline in full-time employment rates among youth was driven mainly by gains in part-time employment rather than a decrease in labor force participation or higher unemployment. In other words, young people were more likely to work in part-time positions, often involuntarily, rather than be unemployed or leave the labor force.

The "game is getting harder" for many youths across Canada trying to enter the labour force as the job and income security enjoyed by previous generations dissipates quickly under the entrenchment of

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neoliberal economics (Martin and Lewchuk, 2018). The experiences of the children of immigrants are challenged by complexly intertwined factors such as neoliberal domestic/national government policies and patterns of globalization (Reitz et al., 2011). Labour market competition can be expected to be stiffer in a highly educated country such as Canada. In fact, among the OECD nations, Canada has the highest percentage of the population (54%) aged 25-64 holding a college/university degree (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Improving upon the labour market achievements of their parents and close relatives can be challenging considering that most participants grew up in a residential location with limited economic resources and opportunities. Two participants had bachelor's degrees and were actively seeking full-time employment. Both had been out of school for about a year and were still unable to secure full-time employment, relying on part-time positions from student life. One graduate could afford to dedicate most of his time to the job search, while the other had to work multiple jobs to help support themselves and their family while searching for a job. Frustrated, the latter youth was contemplating returning to university for graduate studies.

8.3 The role of parents and relatives

There are pressures on the children of immigrants, as Markowitz (1994) puts it, to create the self through the parents' image. Strong family values and ties follow the youth through the life course. There are general expectations to help parents and relatives navigate settlement struggles (see Desai and Subramanian, 2000). Most Bangladeshis stick closely with kith and kin in Bangla Town and other proximate neighbourhoods where they concentrate (see Halder, 2012; Ghosh 2014) and rely heavily on co-ethnics for help with settlement challenges such as housing and employment (see Ghosh, 2007; Propa, 2007; Halder, 2012).

Family bonds and attachments were debated among study participants, with some valuing autonomy and individualism more than filial and religious piety. This clash of values and expectations has been documented in the past literature on other Asian youth groups (Liu et al., 2000 and Chen, 2006). The

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centrality of the family for Bangladeshis was readily recognized among participants, however, some youth expressed concern that putting the family first might impede their personal ambitions.

"**Speaking on family … I think that's one that's affecting almost everything I have done. In a Bangla family, I'm expected to kind of prioritize my family over everything else so whether it be education or career – you kinda have to put your family first … sometimes it holds as a barrier to what I'm trying to do myself. So, there is [less] individuality, you're kinda held back I'd say."** -Aisha

Elucidating the Bangladeshi preference for specific white-collar professions, one interviewee posited that parents and relatives did not understand the benefits and pay that other jobs in Canada offered. Some of these misunderstandings can be attributed to the serious de-skilling and labour market challenges faced by the first generation (see Mostafa et al. 2003; Agrawal, 2013; Akter et al. 2014).

"…**for them [Bangladeshi parents/relatives] they don't really understand that in Canada other jobs can be good jobs too. For them its like, we come all the way here and oh like you want to be a teacher? They might not understand that teachers can get good pay and benefits too.**" – **Neel**.

Furthermore, focus group participants agreed that having children in recognized white-collar careers offered bragging rights for parents among other Bangladeshis as well as the promise of economic security; "**I think part of that is bragging rights. So, they [parents and relatives] want to go around telling people that oh you're a doctor and whatever and they also want a safety net, whatever you go into, they want it to pay well.**"

Further unpacking how familial and cultural expectations affect important life decisions, one focus group participant highlighted how identity orientation matters when choosing to stay home versus to go away for university, "**A Bangladeshi-Canadian would stay with their parents, sort of stay with them, help them out when they are in university whereas a Canadian-Bangladeshi would move out – you know, try to establish more networks and explore and sort of expand their boundaries.**"

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Another focus group participant voiced their surprise with the talk about family obligations, stating **"I'm kinda surprised that family [obligation] is that high [a priority] because people this age [peers ages 18-24] are generally more self-centered, so I'd expect education and job/career. That's what I feel like our life is more based on at this age."** Clearly, some youth wanted to break away while others accommodated family expectations and responsibilities. There was a palpable tension between familial responsibilities and obligations versus personal ambitions.

8.4 Agency and choice

Although familial and cultural influences are undeniable, the autonomy of the youth cannot be discounted. A second-generation youth whose parents had been in Canada for almost three decades mentioned; **"It's your choice right, where you are on the spectrum and which values where you are, I think different – I don't think every Bangladeshi-Canadian has the same values. I think it just depends on what you value more."**

In terms of the educational and employment trajectories of participants, parents and relatives expressed strong views and expectations. However, the agency was exercised by some youth in making their own decisions and sticking with them despite opposition, while others sought to balance their passions with expectations. Some parents, especially those in Canada for longer periods, were more likely to encourage their children's autonomy. Other families had simply given up on trying to prod their child in a specific direction.

One interviewee explained how his career aspiration to be a software developer stemmed from a childhood passion.

> "**I would say a lot of personal interest, just from whenever I got my first computer or I got to play around with computers, that developed my personal interest and in terms of family networks I didn't really have too many people in my family that I knew that was in tech or engineering and so on. So, it was self brought on interest more than anything – from a relatively young age."** -Farid

In some cases, the expected roles of child and parent were reversed - one interviewee wanted to pursue medicine in spite of parental opposition. The parents ended up respecting their choice.

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"I would say as a kid; my parents did not want me to go down the medical school stream. They saw, I would say, how difficult it is for certain people to get through the medical school route but I pushed for it and I went into sciences and I still enjoy it so I decided to stick with the program I picked." -Amar

For other youth, it was a delicate balancing act and a prolonged struggle, sometimes months and years, to convince their parents that their educational and career choices had merit. For example, parents would be more accepting of a business degree if the business school was 'prestigious' and the degree promised a lucrative career. Despite parental pressure, participants were usually confident in their ability to make their own decisions. Wisdom and maturity were demonstrated by their success convincing parents and relatives as well as other co-ethnics of the benefits of their decisions.

Aside from post-secondary choices, job/career decisions had to be balanced with familial expectations. One focus group participant shared the story of a Bangladeshi peer who worked in video production, which the parents had no idea about while pursuing a university degree in mathematics. Several interviewees indicated that their parents would oppose them taking a job that did not provide a clear pathway into a white-collar career. Parents saw these job experiences as a waste of time and a distraction from studying for school.

9. Conclusion

This study seeks to answer the key questions of 1) how do the spatial connections to co-ethnics and experiences of local ethnic concentrations influence youths' social engagement and economic integration and 2) how are their aspirations shaped by the latter social and spatial connections. The evidence suggests that Bangla Town helped participants form significant connections with co-ethnics and negotiate crucial aspects of their complex identities as 'third culture kids'. Both identity and social network formation were critical in shaping their educational and employment aspirations with social and cultural capital playing important roles. Their efforts to determine who they are, who they want to be and who they want to be around were often challenging for participants. Linear assimilation was not the envisioned outcome for the youth and they had to navigate diverse intercultural settings by balancing the values and practices

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of their ancestral heritage with the dominant culture. Growing up between cultures in an ethnically diverse metropolis afforded participants a valuable opportunity to maintain ethnic roots and ties through their close engagement with Bangla Town. The youth saw themselves being as much Canadian as they were Bangladeshi, a sentiment strengthened rather than weakened by their involvement with co-ethnics and the local ethnic concentration. There was very little evidence of cultural confusion among the youth – despite their parents' concerns.

Furthermore, economic integration was far from a straightforward process. Participants shared many worries about their access to social and cultural capital that they saw as critical for success in the Toronto labour market. Bangla Town and co-ethnic connections provided some valuable early stage job/volunteering experiences as well as demanding high educational attainment from the youth. At the same time, co-ethnics and the local ethnic concentration were seen as limited help in acquiring professional networks to facilitate career opportunities. Despite their challenges, most participants expressed grand career ambitions for the future that balance familial and cultural preferences for well compensated and secure white-collar professions with their personal interests. The drive to succeed was tied to their interactions with ambitious co-ethnic peers, pressures from family/relatives and their personal experiences with challenging socio-economic circumstances while they were growing up.

Part-time and contractual employment in Bangla Town mainly in co-ethnic institutions was seen as a stepping stone to greater future achievements. Most participants remain optimistic about their abilities to overcome challenges and achieve the secure, well-paid professional careers that may have eluded their parents and relatives in Canada. The participants' ambitions to balance aspects of their ancestral heritage with the drive to succeed both educationally and professionally in Canadian society reaffirms the significance of selective acculturation among recent children of immigrants. The children of immigrants seek to overcome the systemic barriers to social mobility experienced by their parents while retaining their ethnic identities.

This is an exploratory study focused on a specific research site and a group of youth struggling with specific systemic challenges. The research methods are also strictly qualitative. Beyond ethnicity and

class, empirical evidence from this study hints at the scope for future research examining how gender and religious identities impact the socio-economic experiences of the children of recent immigrants. Moreover, the distinctions between the experiences of the 1.5 and 2 generations are worthy of scholarly inquiry. There is also scope for further research detailing how parenting practices influence the identity formation and integration processes of the children of immigrants. In-depth studies can help suggest effective public policy and social service interventions that will assist youth who face multiple barriers yet possess great potential to contribute to prosperous and inclusive urban societies.

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