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"Marry into a Good Family"

Transnational Reproduction and Intergenerational Relations in Bangladeshi American Families

Nazli Kibria

The work of families includes that of intergenerational cultural reproduction—the passing on of traditions and affiliations from one generation to another. Among immigrant families, such work may be especially significant, constituting a critical element of their strategies of survival and adaptation to the receiving society. In this chapter I draw on a qualitative study of Bangladeshi immigrant families in the United States to explore some of the dynamics of cultural reproduction that mark the relations of Bangladeshi immigrant parents and their U.S.-born and/or raised young adult children. I focus in particular on strategies of *transnational reproduction*, that is, those aspects of family socialization that are concerned with ensuring the continued meaning and significance of transnational social ties for the next generation. As we will see, for Bangladeshi immigrant families in the United States, these strategies can be a source of intergenerational tension, making visible the divergent understandings across the generations of the meaning and significance of transnational ties between the United States and Bangladesh.

Transnational Reproduction

The community ties of immigrant groups, based on a sense of shared origins and culture, are widely seen as an important resource for their members. These ties are increasingly viewed by scholars in transnational terms, in explicit contrast to a conception of the immigrant community as territorially bounded by the destination nation. From the perspective of transnationalism, the community of support for immigrants is one that crosses national borders to stretch from the receiving to the sending society. Indeed, an extensive body of literature shows transnational ties to be an important source of social capital or trust networks which immigrants can draw on for social support. For example, in her study of West Indian immigrants in London and New York, Vilna Bashi[1] describes how transnational social networks can successfully organize the migration process, providing access to employment and housing as well as legalized immigration status.

In addition to such critical material resources as jobs and visas, transnational ties may offer other types of benefits, such as emotional support. Active engagement in transnational networks and institutions can sustain the meaning and significance of the society of origin—the "homeland"—as a point of social reference for immigrants. As scholars of immigration have often noted, a dual frame of social reference is what helps many immigrants to cope with the challenges that they face as racialized, low-wage workers in the receiving society.[2] That is, they are able to resist the dehumanizing effects of race and class stigma in the receiving society by turning to another social context—the "homeland"—to understand themselves. Under these conditions, considerable energy and resources may be directed toward maintaining transnational ties, especially in ways that strengthen one's sense of self-worth. Hung Cam Thai's study of remittances by Vietnamese immigrant men vividly illustrates this point.[3] Toiling in low-wage jobs in the United States, these men remit money to kin in Vietnam, often at considerable material hardship to themselves. The remittances, however, are what enable them to cope with the degradations of their life in the United States, offering a means for claiming and valorizing social worth in the community of origin.

Given its general significance, the transnational sphere is likely to be an important focus of cultural reproduction in immigrant families. That

is, integration into the transnational sphere of members is a vital aspect of immigrant family life. However, transnational reproduction is also a highly variable process, shaped in its character and significance by the diverse conditions of immigrant life, including that of the transnational sphere that is part of it. As Peggy Levitt has noted, transnational ties differ greatly in their organization and significance across immigrant groups.[4] While in some cases these ties are sparse and informal, in others they are dense, multifaceted, and institutionalized, encompassing not just economic but also religious, political, and other dimensions of life. If intergenerational transnational reproduction is challenged by conditions of sparse transnationalism, it may be supported by dense transnationalism, which can facilitate the efforts of immigrant parents to socialize the second generation into the cultures of the transnational sphere.

A portrait of intergenerational transnational reproduction under conditions of dense transnationalism is offered by Robert Smith in an ethnographic study of Mexican migrants and their children in New York.[5] The cultural socialization strategies of the immigrant parents included the widespread practice of sending adolescent children to the home community of Ticuani for extended visits. During these trips, the second-generation Mexican Americans participated in the community life there, attending festivals and dances, in many cases experiencing a richer and less restricted social life than in New York. Smith argues that for these second-generation persons, Ticuani remains an important point of reference they use to affirm self-esteem and forge an identity that is distinct from that of the stigmatized ethnic minorities with whom they are often equated in New York, such as African Americans and Puerto Ricans.

Bangladeshis in the United States and the Emerging Transnational Social Field

According to the 2000 U.S. census, there are more than 200,000 persons of Bangladesh origin in the United States. Informal estimates are much higher; one study puts the number at about 350,000.[6] Much of this immigration has occurred since the 1980s through family reunification channels as well as the Diversity Program.[7] According to census figures in the United States, in 1980 there were 5,880 foreign-born Bangladeshis; in 2000 there were 92,235.[8] Because of the relatively brief history of

settlement in the United States, the Bangladeshi community is largely an immigrant one, and U.S.-born and/or raised persons tend to be of relatively young age.

As far as socioeconomic status, almost half of all foreign-born Bangladeshis report that they are college-educated,[9] suggesting that many are from middle-class backgrounds in Bangladesh. In the United States, however, only about 24 percent of foreign-born Bangladeshis are in managerial and professional jobs; 30 percent are in service and manufacturing jobs, and 8 percent are self-employed.[10] Reflecting these conditions, the accounts that I gathered from immigrant Bangladeshis were often marked by a sharp sense of downward class mobility after migrating from Bangladesh.[11]

Since the 1990s a number of notable Bangladeshi geographic concentrations have developed, in such states as New Jersey, California, and Texas. The New York area, in particular the borough of Queens, is especially prominent, with an estimated 40 percent of foreign-born Bangladeshis having settled there. It is not surprising, then, that New York is widely viewed by Bangladeshis as the center of a nascent transnational public sphere between the United States and Bangladesh. For example, many media companies in Bangladesh, including television channels and newspapers, have begun to open offices in New York, as have various political parties and religious groups. A growing transnational business sector provides services in both locations, including real estate, travel, food, and clothing. Throughout the United States, there has also been a mushrooming of local "hometown" associations, as well as larger community organizations that maintain branches in Bangladesh and are often focused on specific charitable projects.

Among the notable characteristics of this emerging Bangladeshi American transnational social field is the prominence of immigrants and the relative invisibility of second-generation Bangladeshi Americans within it. Besides the recent history of Bangladeshi settlement in the United States, this pattern may also be related to a larger trend of second-generation disengagement from the transnational sphere. In the course of my research, I found a widespread stance of ambivalence toward Bangladeshi affiliation among second-generation Bangladeshi Americans.[12] Many informants identified themselves either as "Muslim" or "South Asian," seeing these as more powerful and meaningful bases of identification than "Bangladeshi." In fact, Bangladeshi identity could even be a point of disidentification—an affiliation from which young people tried to dissociate themselves due to its negative connotation, stemming in part from the images of poverty and corruption that surround the country. Thus, transnational reproduction in Bangladeshi

immigrant families unfolds within a larger context in which second-generation Bangladeshis may be quite uncertain about the meaning and significance of the transnational sphere for themselves and their futures.

In what follows I explore some of the strategies of transnational reproduction evident in Bangladeshi immigrant families and the divergent perceptions and experiences for parents and young adult children that were part of them. I draw on research from a larger project on the contemporary diaspora from Bangladesh that is concerned with developments of national and religious identity among the settled communities of Britain and the United States, as well as the labor migration streams to the Persian Gulf states and to Malaysia.[13] I focus in this chapter on my findings for the United States From 2001 to 2007, I conducted 72 in-depth interviews with Bangladeshi Muslims[14] in the Boston, Detroit, and New York metropolitan areas; 40 involved first-generation immigrants, and 32 were carried out with second-generation persons whom I defined to include persons either born or raised in the United States from the age of twelve or earlier. Almost all of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed; they were conducted in Bangla and/or English, depending on the wishes of the informant. To supplement the interviews, I also conducted participant observation at community and family gatherings.

"Marry into a Good Family": Children's Marriage Decisions

I interviewed Mahbub[15] and Shaheen over tea and snacks at their comfortable Long Island, New York home. The couple had been living in the New York area for about fifteen years and were raising three children, ages eight, thirteen, and nineteen. Both Mahbub and Shaheen were college-educated and from urban, middle-class backgrounds in Bangladesh. After some difficult initial years in the United States, Mahbub had successfully entered into a real estate business with the assistance of relatives.

Mahbub and Shaheen spoke at length about their preferences for whom their children should marry in the future. Like most Bangladeshis of middle-class background, they did not expect to formally arrange the marriages of their children. They did, however, hope to be matchmakers in what may be described as a semi-arranged marriage. That is, they hoped to introduce children to a list of potential partners whom they had scrutinized for suitability. If the children did not allow them to play this role,

they hoped at the very least to weigh in on the choices that the children made. In terms of specific criteria, they were especially adamant about the importance of marrying into "a good family":

> SHAHEEN: With my oldest son in college, he is getting to the age when we think about marriage. I tell him, the best thing would be a nice, well-educated girl from a good family in Bangladesh. There are many girls now in Bangladesh who are smart, speak English, and could adjust quite well here. If he wants to marry a Bangali[16] girl who is already here in America, who was brought up here, that is OK, but I would worry more about the family.
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> NK: What about the family do you look for?
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> MAHBUB: A good name.
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> SHAHEEN: Devout Muslims, honest, smart. . . .
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> MAHBUB: A good family is one in which the girl is well brought up. It's also one in which the family has a good name in the sense that they are well-known and well-established. They have a good position in society as a family. If you marry into a family like that, you can count on them to help you if you ever need something or you are in trouble.

The frequently mentioned notion of a "good family" appeared in the accounts of Bangladeshi immigrants as a reference to such desirable traits as religiosity, education, and honesty. These traits were furthermore signaled by the social reputation and status of the family and its extended kin networks. That is, the "good family" was one that had a "good name," reflecting both the perceived moral conduct of family members and their social standing, as indicated by occupation, wealth, education, and political connections. Here it is relevant to note the central role of political connections and state protection in the historical development of the middle-class in modern Bangladesh.[17] For middle-class Bangladeshis, marriage into a "good family" is often viewed as a potentially important route to enhanced social capital. In the specific case of Mahbub and Shaheen, the experience of needing and receiving assistance from kin during the trying initial years in the United States gave them a particular consciousness of the measure of security that could be provided by kin, especially those with resources, during difficult times.

As we have seen, Mahbub and Shaheen, like many other Bangladeshi immigrant parents, expressed a preference for their children to marry Bangalis from Bangladesh, rather than Bangalis from the diaspora. Those

from Bangladesh, I was told, would be more familiar with Bangali culture and thus more able and likely to approach their family relations in a manner that was in keeping with Bangali traditions. For those in the United States, Bangladesh also tends to offer better opportunities for contracting marriages that represent gains in family-based social capital. This is because in Bangladesh, marriage to a U.S. citizen may carry positive value, offering the possibility of legal migration through family sponsorship and, more generally, the prestige of having family members in the United States. Under these conditions, those in the United States may be able to effectively exchange their legal presence there for family-based capital, through marrying into families of higher social standing than their own.

Jamal, a Bangladeshi immigrant in his early fifties, favored a strategy of marriage to a Bangladeshi citizen for his U.S. citizen children, seeing it as a way to garner family-based social capital. Jamal spoke to me with some satisfaction of the successful negotiation of the marriage of his daughter Jhumpa to a young man from Bangladesh. Jamal came from a rural family of modest means in Moulvibazaar, Sylhet, a district in northeastern Bangladesh. Over the course of his twenty-seven years in the United States he had worked as a waiter, a security guard, and a newspaper vendor. In 2005 he had arranged the marriage of Jhumpa, the youngest of his four children, to a man from a prominent and well-educated family in Moulvibazaar. He spoke of the reciprocal benefits derived from the marriage. On his daughter's side, there was the formation of ties to a well-connected family of good social standing in Bangladesh. The son-in-law had gained the opportunity to live and work in the United States, and to provide resources from abroad to his family in Bangladesh:

> Our new son-in-law is from a good family. You know the MP [Member of Parliament] ____; that man is their close relative. One of the brothers in the family is a manager at Sonali Bank [a major government bank], and another brother has a successful business as a building contractor. My son-in-law is a good person, of good character (*bhalo chele, bhalo choritro*). He has a BCom (Bachelor's of Commerce) degree. Here I hope that he will study further and then find a good job. His family knew that there were more opportunities for him here.

At a later point in our conversation, I asked Jamal about his other children, in particular the two others who had been raised in the United States. In a tone of sadness and resignation, he told me that his older son had married

a Puerto Rican woman and one daughter was studying in college, determined to be a doctor and refusing to get married. We see then that the parents' ideas about how children should marry are not necessarily accepted by the children themselves. Indeed, the issue of marriage was a frequent point of tension and argument, if not overt conflict, between Bangladeshi immigrant parents and their teenage and young adult children.

As one might expect, the U.S.-born and/or -raised Bangladeshis framed their talk of marriage decisions around popular notions of romantic love: you married the person with whom you were in love. With some exceptions, most were quite opposed to the idea of arranged marriage and, to a lesser degree, to that of semi-arranged marriage as described earlier. However, there was also widespread appreciation among the young Bangladeshi Americans for the parental desire to see children marry endogamously, that is, to others who were also Muslim and Bangali in origin. Endogamous marriage made sense to the second generation on the basis of the common background, and thus the enhanced "cultural compatibility," of spouses. In contrast, there was much frustration and indeed disgust over what one second-generation informant described to me as "the older folks' obsession with 'good family.'" Take for example the comments of Khoka, the nineteen-year-old son of Shaheen and Mahbub, the immigrant parents whose comments appeared earlier. When I spoke to Khoka alone, he strongly rejected his mother's concerns with "good family":

KHOKA: My mom is starting to talk about marriage. It's always like [making a face] 'a nice Bangali girl, from a good family.' I say to her, 'What should I do with a good family, I'm not marrying the family.' I don't even know what 'a good family' actually means.

NK: Really, what do you think it means?

KHOKA: It's all about this status stuff which is not all that important to me. It's the person inside that matters.

NK: So you're not concerned about marrying Bangali?

KHOKA: It's not a priority, although I do think it would be nice because there are the similar cultural values.

As suggested by Khoka's comments, the children of Bangladeshi immigrants chafed at their parents' urgings to "marry into a good family." This was an idea that ran counter to the egalitarian ethos of intimate relationships that is part of the dominant U.S. culture and to which they subscribed. The resistance of the young adults here may also be attributed to

the idealism of youth, which sees true love as having no social bars. But what was also at play was the second-generation's generally weak appreciation for the value of ties to Bangladesh and, more generally, for the significance of the transnational social networks in which their immigrant parents were embedded.

Many of the second-generation Bangladeshi Americans I spoke to felt "Muslim" to be a more meaningful basis of self-identification than "Bangladeshi." Marriage to a fellow Muslim was thus a higher priority than marriage to a fellow Bangali. Tanya, a twenty-three-year-old who had graduated from a state college in New Jersey, was deeply aware of how her ideas on this matter were different from older family members. Tanya had grown up in the New York–New Jersey area, surrounded by a large extended family. The "whole clan," as Tanya put it, had been enthusiastically engaged in trying to find her a suitable partner since she graduated. Honoring Tanya's sharp concerns about the supposed chauvinism of men from Bangladesh, they had agreed to limit their search to Bangladeshi men in the United States. Just a few weeks before I interviewed her, Tanya had been introduced at a party orchestrated by her aunt to a young Bangladeshi man from Texas who was studying in Connecticut. Much to the dismay of her aunt and other family members, she rejected him:

> I tried to explain to my aunt (*khala-moni*) that we just had nothing in common. He seemed to be into Texas culture and I'm a real New Yorker. . . . I don't know, there was something about him, I just didn't like him. My family was going on and on about him, "Oh, he comes from such a good family." His father is a doctor in Texas, and I guess the family in Bangladesh is very high-status. My aunt kept on going on and on about how they were such a good family (*bhalo family*). I told them I didn't care about that. So then we had this big discussion, like a family meeting, and they asked me, what did I care about? I told them that there had to be some compatibility there. And the most important thing to me was marrying a Muslim; I didn't really care about whether they were Bangladeshi. I would be happy to marry someone who was white or black or whatever, so long as they are Muslim. My family is quite religious but they didn't seem to like that idea. My father said, you are Muslim and Bangali, you cannot separate those things. I was thinking to myself, maybe you can't separate them, but I can separate them.

Tanya's account suggests how family discussions about the characteristics of acceptable marriage partners could make visible the generational divide

about the importance of Bangladeshi identity. The challenges of transnational reproduction under these conditions were also made apparent by the divergent perspectives of the generations on another immigrant socialization strategy—family trips to Bangladesh—a topic to which I turn next.

"We Come from a Good Family": Family Trips to Bangladesh

Immigrant Bangladeshis described visits to Bangladesh as times of great excitement and joy at reuniting with family and friends. Nayla, a forty-year-old immigrant who had lived in the New York area for about fifteen years, described the intense feelings of belonging that flooded her senses when she visited *desh*—the homeland:

> Last summer we went back for two months. I am very excited about going back. Before I went I did shopping of ten thousand dollars, filling twelve suitcases. Everyone expects a gift; it is something special, to get an item from America.
>
> We enjoyed ourselves very much. My son and daughter [ages ten and twelve] spent some time with our family and they came to understand our culture a little more. There was a lot of visiting and chatting [*adda*], shopping. We lived like royalty . . . no cooking, no cleaning, no laundry, no grocery shopping. I would like to go back, I dream about that day. *Desh* is *desh*.[18] There are so many people, transportation is very bad, no one respects the law. The government is corrupt, the politicians do nothing but call strikes. In spite of all the problems, I miss *desh*. We are respected [*maan-shomman*] there. When I go there I forget about the hard life here, where you are nobody, just another dark-skinned person.

For Nayla, as for many other Bangladeshi immigrants, trips to *desh* were a respite from the drudgery and indignities of life in the United States. There was relief from the daily, often harried routines of jobs and housework. Perhaps most importantly, they were a time of self-affirmation, an opportunity to renew one's sense of social worth. As suggested by Nayla's remarks about feeling like "not just another dark-skinned person" when she was in Bangladesh, there was escape, albeit temporary, from the racial marginality she experienced in the United States. There was also an affirmation of class privilege. Immigrants from middle-class backgrounds in Bangladesh could

feel the burdens of working-class status in the United States lift from their shoulders, at least for a while, when they were in Bangladesh.

Immigrants spoke of the trips to Bangladesh as opportunities for their children being raised in the United States to become acquainted with the extended family and with the country in general. These desires were accompanied, however, by an awareness that many children were somewhat uncomfortable if not ambivalent about being in Bangladesh. The validity of these perceptions was largely confirmed by my conversations with second-generation Bangladeshi Americans, who were in general far less cheerful about their trips to Bangladesh than their parents. To be sure, there were positive aspects to being in Bangladesh for them as well. Many spoke of the pleasures of getting to know cousins and other family members and of the novel comforts of being in an environment where one could "blend in" with respect to skin color. And there were certainly appreciative accounts of being pampered, of being taken care of in unaccustomed ways, such as being chauffeured around and eating lavishly prepared and served meals. At the same time, the visits were typically a time of deep unease.

When I spoke to Abedin, an immigrant who had been in the United States for about eighteen years, he and his family had just returned from a six-week trip to Bangladesh. Abedin came from a middle-class family with roots in the district of Kushtia. After studying English for a few years at a college of modest academic reputation in Dhaka (the capital city), he had come to the United States, seeing little economic future for himself in Bangladesh. Only after several years of intense economic hardship had he managed to bring his wife and young child to join him. He and his wife were now operating a twenty-four-hour convenience store in which they also held partial ownership. As the children (ages thirteen and twenty) had started to grow older, Abedin and his wife had resolved to visit Bangladesh as frequently as possible, at least every two to three years. Abedin was well aware of his children's ambivalence about these visits. He hoped nonetheless that the trips would give them a sense of connection, especially an awareness of their family lineage. It was, in fact, with this particular consideration in mind that he had made it a point while in Bangladesh to take his children out of the urban comforts of Dhaka for a visit to their ancestral village home (*gramer bari*) in Kushtia. For the urban middle class in Bangladesh today, the ancestral village home continues to hold considerable symbolic significance as a place of heritage and belonging. Ties with the village are usually maintained through land holdings and the upkeep of often uninhabited family homesteads. The ancestral

village is also a focus of charity for urban residents. Among the diaspora, for example, *zakat*[19] payments as well as other charitable donations are often directed to the ancestral village, to institutions such as schools, medical clinics, and orphanages, as well as mosques and madrasahs (Islamic schools). As we see in Abedin's account, these contributions may serve to affirm ties and status within village society:

> My children, Kamal and Samia, are like others who are raised here [in America]. They find the environment in Bangladesh to be difficult, you know, the heat, the crowds. I made it a point this time to take them for five days to our ancestral village home. Usually I send my *zakat* money to the mosque and madrasah there. When we were there, I gave a feast for all the people of the village, almost twenty-five hundred people. Everyone has great respect for our family. At the mosque there they say prayers for our family. I wanted the children to know our ancestry [*bongsho*], that we are a respected family. My hope is that they will come to understand the importance of these things, even after I am gone.

When I later spoke to Kamal, Abedin's son, he affirmed much of what his father had to say about their recent trip to Bangladesh. He and his sister had been reluctant to go and had done so only under considerable parental pressure. He rushed to assure me that this was not because he disliked the country or that he wanted to deny his connection with it. He just found it difficult to adjust to the climate, food, and especially the daily, unrelenting sights of poverty that one confronts there. When I asked Kamal about the best part of his recent trip, he described the visit to the ancestral home village in Kushtia, the one that had been purposefully arranged for him by his father:

> KAMAL: My parents like to go to Bangladesh every two years or so but I don't like to go as often as them. The climate is really harsh for me. Every time I go there I get sick, it gets very difficult for me to adjust. I think it's the mentality, too, because you walk through the streets and see all the poverty, that's very difficult. And I'm not used to the food.
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> NK: What would you say is the best part about being there?
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> KAMAL: It's the feeling that you get from helping people. That's why I liked going to the village, even though the living conditions there are tough. My dad does a lot to try and help relatives and people he knows in our village. When we were there we were treated like celebrities, there were

> people coming and touching my father's feet [a gesture of respect]. One day, if I'm financially successful, I may want to do some things to help there, like set up some scholarships and a foundation to give medicine and food to people. I want to help Bangladesh. It's hard to think about it because the country is so messed up. The corruption, the bureaucracy, it's all so bad. The country is always high on the most-corrupt list.[20] How can you make a difference under those conditions?

Abedin's plan to give his children a sense of connection to the ancestral village had clearly been successful, although perhaps not exactly in the manner that he had intended. For Abedin, giving to the village was certainly a project of charity, of moral obligation. But it was also one of identity, of family status and self-worth. For Kamal, however, it was largely if not exclusively a way to channel the desire and effort to help the poor of Bangladesh. Of note, too, is Kamal's stance of frustrated resignation about the efficacy of charitable efforts in Bangladesh, given the nation's political and other problems. All in all, he seemed uncertain about the prospects of maintaining ties with Bangladesh in the future.

If, as in the case of Kamal, many second-generation Bangladeshi Americans emerged from their trips to Bangladesh with a sense of uncertainty about the significance for themselves of ties with Bangladesh, I did encounter some notable exceptions to this pattern. Arun, who had grown up in Boston, was in the midst of a graduate program in architecture when I spoke to him. After graduating from college he had, at the urging of his parents, spent a summer in Bangladesh, visiting relatives and touring the country. He had enjoyed himself immensely, so much so that he now planned to move there after completing his degree:

> When I went to Bangladesh, people there were complaining about how hot it was and I was telling them, stop complaining, it's not really that hot [laughing]. I'm like, turn off that AC. I liked the experience of blending in, not being different. I feel like life here is kind of one-dimensional, whereas in Bangladesh it feels multidimensional, it's all in living color and it's so rich in terms of relationships.
>
> There are also a lot of opportunities there. Just when I was there, even before I had enrolled in the master's program, I was being offered jobs. My uncle was saying, you come here and you can do some work for that person, we'll hook you up with that company. Here it's more difficult. First of all, it's pretty hard to get established as an architect. And then I do feel that

it's easier for white people to get professional breaks. In Bangladesh I would be the one getting the breaks.

Arun had felt a great sense of affinity with the country, but he had also been attracted by the possibility of greater professional opportunities there. His well-connected relatives in Bangladesh had indicated to him that they would be able to open professional doors for him there. In contrast, he saw the professional opportunities in the United States to be more limited. This was because of the generally challenging nature of the architecture field in the United States, as well as his status as a racial minority. In Bangladesh, he would be able to harness his family background of class privilege to his advantage. Second-generation transnational engagements may be enhanced by such conditions, when these ties are seen as an economic resource, even a path of upward class mobility.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have explored some of the strategies of transnational reproduction that are part of Bangladeshi American family life. As we have seen, Bangladeshi immigrant parents urged their children to marry in a manner that would integrate them into transnational social networks, especially those that were rich in social capital. And in an effort to expand their children's understanding of the meaning and significance of transnational social and family ties, they took them on trips to Bangladesh, at times going to great lengths to ensure that these trips were enjoyable and memorable. The course of these strategies could make visible the profound differences between the generations in their relationship to the transnational sphere and, more generally, to identification with Bangladesh. For the most part, second-generation Bangladeshi Americans, unlike their immigrant elders, were uncertain about the meaning and significance of ties with Bangladesh.

As I have argued, the ability of immigrant elders to successfully integrate the next generation into the transnational sphere is shaped by the richness of the transnational ties and institutions that are a part of their lives. Although the Bangladesh–U.S. transnational sphere is a growing one, it is also recent, developing since the expansion in the 1990s of the size of the Bangladeshi population in the United States. Thus the second-generation Bangladeshi Americans in my study grew up, for the most part,

in the context of a sparse transnational sphere. Furthermore, as noted by scholars of transnationalism,[21] second-generation immigrants often turn to transnational ties in response to conditions of racialized exclusion in the receiving society. Second-generation Bangladeshi Americans have turned not to transnational ties with Bangladesh but rather to involvement with Muslim and South Asian American communities in order to cope with their sense of marginality in the United States, much of which is informed by the post-9/11 growth of anti-Muslim sentiment. This does not necessarily mean that transnational engagements will be absent from the lives of second-generation Bangladeshi Americans in the future. My findings do, however, emphasize that their transnational engagements are likely to be quite different from those of their immigrant parents, and also mediated by their identification as Muslim Americans and/or South Asian Americans.

NOTES

1. Bashi 2007.
2. See Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Waters 1999.
3. Thai 2006.
4. Levitt 2001: 9.
5. Smith 2006.
6. See BAFI (Bangladesh-American Foundation Inc.), "Community Profile: Bangladesh-Americans at-a-Glance," available online at http://www.bafi.org/community/community_profiles.asp.
7. The Diversity Program, popularly known as the Green Card Lottery, accounted for 30.5 percent of Bangladeshi admissions during the 1996–2002 period. Reflecting its purpose of achieving diversity from countries with low levels of immigration to the United States, the lottery, established in 1990, has been open only to those from countries that have sent fewer than 50,000 people to the United States in the past five years.
8. Kibria 2007: 618.
9. Kibria 2007: 618.
10. Kibria 2007: 618.
11. According to the 2000 U.S. census, median household income for the general U.S. population was $42,148; for foreign-born Bangladeshis, it was $40,000. As far as poverty levels, 16.3 percent of foreign-born Bangladeshis were reported to be below the poverty line, in comparison to 9.4 percent for the general U.S. population.
12. Kibria 2008.
13. Kibria forthcoming.

14. While Muslims constitute the majority, the Bangladeshi immigrant population includes Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists. Reflecting my concern with negotiations of Muslim identity, my study focused on Bangladeshi Muslims.
15. All names have been changed to protect the identity of study participants.
16. The term "Bangali" is the one that is most often used by persons from Bangladesh to describe themselves and others from the region of Bengal, which encompasses part of present-day India and Bangladesh.
17. Islam 2004.
18. This expression is meant to underscore the point that Bangladesh is *the* homeland.
19. *Zakat* is one of the core requirements for Muslims, involving the donation of a proportion of one's money to the poor and needy.
20. A reference to the widely reported international rankings of country corruption by Transparency International.
21. Smith 2006.

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