

An Account of Anxiety and Consumption in the Bengali Affluent Middle Class

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Economics and Social Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Social Science in Anthropology

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Approval

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Abstract

In this research, I attempt to unpack the concept of anxiety surrounding consumption of the Bangladeshi 'middle class.' My hypothesis is that class identities of this group are indistinguishably linked with their consumption. By tracing the historical formation of the metropolitan 'middle class' in Bangladesh and reviewing relevant literature, this paper aims to revise the market situation that the individuals of this group are embedded in. The objective of this ethnography was to create an account of urban anxieties that arise out of the metropolitan middle class consumption and this was done through structured and semi-structured interviews from members of this group. Existing literature suggests strongly that the 'middle class' should be understood as a unique historical formation- born out of the specific colonial past of the nation- and that shortcomings exist in homogenizing this particular class category. With these ideas in mind, the central research questions are: How can we identify the Bangladeshi middle class? What types of consumption are definitive of this class group? What is this urban anxiety? What could it represent? These questions will be addressed in this paper to illustrate the relationship between urban consumption and anxiety.

Keywords: Dhaka; Affluent Middle Class; Anxiety; Consumption; Bangladesh; Urban Politics

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Background

I wanted to start off my reasoning with a story from when I was six years old. I remember sitting at a table having dinner with my family as guests at an elder uncle's house. It was a setting of polite company. The rules of dinner time table for children were simple and concrete; answer when you are spoken to, or otherwise, eat quietly. As the adults spoke, I had just heard the word *chotolok* (reminiscent of the word 'peasant') in conversation, and knowing it as the antonym of *borolok* (someone wealthy but with potentially equally negative connotations), I asked my father with innocent curiosity whether we were *borolok* or *chhotolok*. It seemed I had said something unfit for polite culture as the room tensed up just a little bit. What I had said was socially repulsive. My father responded saying that we were actually *bhodrolok* (i.e we were gentlemen). The response was applauded and cheerfully laughed over by the dinner table, and I was pleased to have received an answer that was comforting. That is, one that didn't make me insecure about having to face the awkward shame associated with wealth. Speaking out loud about wealth inquisitively, is considered socially repulsive and obscene. It was an interpretation of class beyond simple materialist means but one that accounted for behavior and values. In fact, it was so comforting that the event became a nice little memory that stayed with me, that class identity was not simply a measure of one's economic conditions. A decade ago I lost my father to a heart attack and the years following would be the rollercoaster ride that affluent middle class life is. What I wanted to explore was how urban life could be more than the mechanistic rat race of money, power and status it appears to be- and how such a life could be *meaningful*.

Dhaka is the capital city of Bangladesh. Previously colonized by British rule, Bengal became independent with India and Pakistan when the colonizers left. In 1971, Bangladesh fought The Liberation War to become independent from the state of Pakistan. Since then, the structure of state has reformed at almost every decade. At the turn of the millennium, after many democracies, military rule, emergency states and dictatorships, Bangladesh chose a path of progress, with a two-part plan to be completed by 2030 to achieve goals of infrastructures, humanitarian and secular concerns. The path to progress feels shaky living in the urban areas. Dhaka is one of the most densely populated cities in the world. More people move in to the capital every day. Despite staggering growth in GDP as well as in various sectors of the economy, life in Dhaka seems more

and more unstable. Income gaps are huge within the capital, and it manifests in the form of class conflicts, political instability and an anxious urban populous.

All interlocutors of the group I have interviewed identify as being members of the Bengali Muslim middle class. Deconstructing and understanding this group is vital to the research. Having conducted interviews and outlining consumption patterns of five families, my own understanding of this class group differs from how they immediately identify. The ‘metropolitan middle class’ would be best described as an affluent sections of the middle class living in metropolis. Members of this group have a surplus income, which is used for a particular lifestyle. This lifestyle engulfs, but is not simply limited, to their consumption patterns- encompassing all of their choices, aspirations and desires. This also includes their aesthetic preferences- exotic foods, cosmopolitan fashion, intellectual goods as well as values such (liberal, sexual, etc.) as all manifested in their cosmopolitan taste. Class functions to both retain and recreate structure. One’s education and language are deeply tied in to this. Through these strategies members of the group *identify* each other. Their professions are not linked to production but mostly administration and technical/professional work. Existing sociological literature around the Bengali middle class (Sabur 2014, Riaz 2010) have proposed that the affluent middle class is created through its unique colonial history. These authors also suggest that the affluent middle class has secured political power for several decades.

Consumption patterns are unique measures of social class stratification. The affluent middle class has been found to generate a surplus income- which determine the consumption patterns. Certain sites of consumption will be studied in this research. Conflicts and paradoxical elements within these sites of consumption create anxiety for individuals- and this is the level at which this paper seeks to penetrate queries.

The anxiety in question that I’m trying to study surrounds the individual’s relationship with consumption within Dhaka’s market situation. My basis for understanding the concept of anxiety is through the works of *Søren Kierkegaard*. Kierkegaard describes anxiety as a ‘dizziness of freedom’ and a ‘burden of choice.’ (*Søren Kierkegaard*, 1844 p. 73) An anthropological reflection of his ideas suggest that they represent the phenomenology of the subject’s ‘agency.’ Anxiety is also a kind of urban *buzz word* but has been in common usage among my five informants to

describe their lives as members of the Bangladeshi middle class. This anxiety in question is different from the use of the word in Psychology, but it suggests certain paradoxes exist within the urban middle class rationale. Placing the Kierkegaardian perspective in this context, the anxiety is an embodied manifestation of making choices and living through parallaxes of the Bangladeshi middle class- and an account of this phenomenon will be an interesting area for anthropological insight. Within the interviews, the term is used as a stand in for dread, choice paralysis, alienation, misery, uncertainty and a sense of meaninglessness. They often refer to it as the dominant mental condition they were going through during the time of interviews. It is a psycho-social phenomenon that many of the interlocutors have tried to verbally express to me during interviews. In this paper, I will be outlining the various ways this anxiety that is manifested is rooted in one's class position and subsequent consumption.

Recognizing the Affluent Middle Class

The urban populous exhibits signs of an unwanted burden being placed on them due to the project of supposed progress. Much of the developing nation's 'progress' entails a shifting *market situation*. There are massive differences in life between rural and urban areas of the country. However, within the different stratifications of city life, class situations are hugely different. As with most developing nations, the urban center is overdeveloped. Urban life has also drastically changed within the last two decades. Being born and brought up in Dhaka, I'm acutely aware of how contemporary consumption has affected and transformed middle class lifestyles and identities. Consumption thus, worked as a starting point through which I make an entry into the daily lives of members of this class group. As pre-existing research on this topic suggests- everyday practices of this group carry enormous sociological insight for understanding the phenomenon of class relations (Sabur, 2014).

Critical assessment of the formation of the Bangladeshi middle class understood the process as distinct from its agrarian predecessors (Jahangir, 1986). Recent work in this field recognizes that the affluent middle class was morphing into a 'transnational' class (Sabur, 2003). They can be identified with their (i) surplus income and subsequent consumption, (ii) assets and wealth, such as owning land and property in Dhaka over multiple generations (iii) highest possible education attained within economics constraints (iv) transnational aspirations and movement. (Sabur, 2010, p. 13)

Methodology and Fieldwork

For this research, I deliberately chose a snowballing sampling method. I started interviewing other students from my university and ended up conducting interviews from other private and public universities as well. This was Stage I of the research, where I wanted to create an understanding of the affluent middle class identity. Then I started speaking with people who are of different ages- the youth and adults over 40. These narratives helped me give a full idea of their identity. My goal so far was to study consumption patterns, but as the interviews went on- the subject of our interviews turned to anxieties about living a life embedded within consumption. With this new connection in mind, I moved on to the next stage of research.

Stage II of the research was carried out through structured and semi-structured interviews as well as participant/observation of five individuals in Dhaka. I had a basic outline of questions but did not prepare a questionnaire for the interviews. I had initially tried that method but it hampered results and formalized the situation. Instead I opted for open-ended questions and interactions between interlocutors albeit being mediated by me. All interlocutors were Bengalis and residents of Dhaka. Four out of five are Muslims. Two of the five are women. All informants have completed education and identify as the Bangladeshi middle class. Three of the five informants did not grow up in Dhaka but in Chittagong, making the move to the capital for tertiary education. The rationale behind this choice is that all three men had already completed their first step toward and *anthropology* of urban Dhaka. The move to the metropolitan city was described by them as an alienating process which took about a year to adjust to. With fresh memories of their move and adaptation to Dhaka, I found the interviews insightful as their lives and personal narratives were intertwined with the affluent middle class transnational culture- but from an *outsider's* perspective. The informants were selected based on their age, ranging from 20-30. Interviews went on for the bulk of 2018, starting from February to December. During this time, I have conducted short interviews of their families and peers as well. Inspired from "Insight for Future Ethnographic Work" (Sabur, 2014) - where she borrows the 'extended case method' and adds a genealogical standpoint to class formation - I have attempted to incorporate this intergenerational data into my research. This was accompanied with a thorough review of relevant literature as well as a close watch of local media and writings of journalists.

In writing this, I have realized I find it uncomfortably paradoxical to summarize and reduce the very individuals (and their strategies) I spent months interviewing befriending. I believe the details that makes each of my interlocutors unique and people who find life meaningful is fundamentally uncommunicable via a short ethnography. At the level of analysis I am attempting of post-colonial urban life, much of what unites people disappears as the task is to find *essential* qualities of class groups to discourse over. However, I believe that their narratives weaved their way into the structure of my research. Consumption thus, becomes an avenue for the very personal and important stories of my interlocutors. What is challenged is the subversive consumerist ideology that more choice is *good* for the consumer- a paradoxical trap that three out of five of my interlocutors admit to have fallen into after the lengthy interviews were done. It has been a journey of locating unconscious consumption and deconstructing fetishes said consumption patterns.

This is an auto-ethnography. For various reasons, as I will demonstrate below, I have taken up this research despite the problems of positionality that arise from studying one's own society. This comes with certain biases and power positions that are difficult to ignore. One of the things I wanted to avoid was a fascination with the *exotic* that is almost necessarily tied to anthropology; rather I wanted to place various power structures and its dominant hegemonic ideology under the microscope.

An account of my informants' consumption patterns were recorded. My focus was however, primarily of phenomenological concerns- dealing with everyday lives of individuals. This was done to move beyond numeric data to make tangible the element of choice and meaning in the stories of my interlocutors. The points of analysis became certain spheres of consumption common among the Bangladeshi middle class, and these are as follows: (i) Education (ii) Social Media and Technology (iii) Digital Entertainment (iv) Substance Abuse (v) Transportation.

Research Site

This research was conducted over a period of one year consisting of various methods to record various narratives scattered throughout the city. My primary sample is a group of 5 people who identify as members of the Bangladeshi middle class. I have conducted about 400 hours of both structured, semi-structured and eventually informal interviews with this group. Interviews were held alone or in pairs. I also spent time as an observer attending various functions, accompanying them during commute and visits back home. Members were chosen based on their age (young adults), their education (typically tertiary) and as natives of Bangladesh. While most interviews were located in Dhaka, some were conducted during visits to Chittagong. This is because 2 out of 5 interviewees have their families live in Chittagong- and grew up there themselves. They provided an *outsider's* view to Dhaka's cosmopolitan context, having moved to Dhaka in recent memory. Consumption patterns were recorded for these interlocutors. I have also interviewed their respective families briefly with regards to anxiety surrounding class and consumption.

Significance

Finally, I would also like to add the political necessities of conducting such research. Dhaka also high levels of inequality (Hossain 2007, p. 8-15) in economic in socio-economic terms with rampant class divides and points of conflict. The thesis is an exploration of life for the affluent middle class. It is an attempt at outlining and criticizing functioning ideologies for this class group.

Literature Review

As mentioned earlier, the existing works on the Bangladeshi affluent middle class has directed my research. Sabur (2014) outlines the importance of looking at everyday practices to deconstruct this class. Ali Riaz (2010) breaks down the class identity of the Bangladeshi middle class.

Hamza Alavi's work outlines a theory of the post-colonial state. He demonstrates that political power is captured and remains with the middle class in these societies. He identifies further divisions within these class groups - such as the professional class, the state officials and the entrepreneurial class and claims that they are in a constant struggle for power. His work dictates that every time there is a crisis or vacuum of power, it is then disputed over by other middle class groups (the three mentioned above).

Homi Bhabha (2010) recognizes two concepts: *hybridity* and *mimicry*. *Hybridity* is a mixture or interplay of two or more identities. Built-in to the ontology of hybridity is the idea that identity is instrumental. *Mimicry* is essentially a reenactment or imitation of the colonizers. Homi Bhabha's work is essential to contemporary post-colonial studies. Through hybridity and mimicry, the affluent urban populous become reminiscent of global citizens- insofar that they *can* use language, fashion and aesthetics to exert power. To quote Homi Bhabha on mimicry against the *real thing*, he says the mimic is "almost the same but not quite."

In his canonical works Weber argues that 'market situation is *primary* in determining class' (Hadden, 1997. P. 148). According to Weber, class situation is defined by the three factors of (i) *life chances*, (ii) *economic interest* and (iii) *market situation*. His claim that the *market situation* is the most important signifier of a class situation resonates with the subject of this thesis- that consumption and class identity are necessarily linked. Weber's argument is a critical one about class, which differs from the binary Marxist proposition. Marx proposes a materialist interpretation of class defined simply by categories of ownership of capital and labor. Marx's stance on class distinction, albeit better known in popular culture for its poeticism, misses out on the multidimensional nuances and sociological insights that Weber offers through his ideas on class distinction.

This notion of class further complicates the division (of the Marxist owners of capital and suppliers of labor) into innumerable hierarchical segments which accurately factors in the various forms of

power, status, cultural value, history and individuality. The Weberian definition of class is a group that resides in the same sociopolitical and economic landscape and functions inside similar *market situations*- which ultimately offer *comparable life chances*. (Weber, 1947)

The basis of this study is a Weberian approach, particularly derived from his notion of class stratification. A class situation is seen as an amalgamation of three distinct variables. It seems that these three distinctions ((i) *life chances*, (ii) *economic interest* and (iii) *market situation*) are also interrelated in themselves. Weber supposes that the market situation, among the three, is the most important factor to class. My interests were drawn to Dhaka's market situation, which is another word for urban consumption. (Weber, 1947)

To bridge the gap between the larger social structures and the individual and phenomenological, I looked at the work of Pierre Bourdieu. His concept of the *habitus* seeks to find that connection between these two structures. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is critical and extremely relevant to this study. It refers to a symbolic sort of capital that one attains through their position in a particular class, such as tastes, skills, mannerisms, belongings, etc. There are three different types of cultural capital; institutionalized, objectified and embodied. (Pierre Bourdieu, 1986, p. 56) Bourdieu's work on Taste and Distinction is essential for this comparison. Important to note is the trickle-down factor of taste, and how dominant aesthetics may cause 'symbolic violence' on working class aesthetics through naturalization and misrecognition. This has been an insightful guide into looking at the workings of taste and power. It also provides a new perspective to look at objects; aesthetics as indistinguishable from the moral. Critical is the idea that taste is an important example of cultural hegemony.

By reviewing Søren Kierkegaard's ideas on the interconnectedness of choice and anxiety, I could explore the phenomenological regions of affluent life. In philosophical terms, anxiety is the dizziness that arises out of freedom. (Søren Kierkegaard, 1844, p. 16). Much of the philosophical framework is borrowed from Kierkegaard's works on anxiety, freedom and choice. His poetics and profound insights on psychology provide the philosophical backbone for this text.

Loic Wacquant's (2004) work on American ghetto boxers shows how fieldwork comprising of general tools such as interviews, personal notes and close observation and abstract egesis can recreate the habitus. A student of Bourdieu himself, Wacquant's approach of synthesis is one I will be following when it comes to studying the various languages and consumption patterns displayed by the participants of this study. Locating the habitus and how the hierarchy works, and power is played out on an everyday level is crucial to this study.

For the **Education** section, I looked at Mark Mallman's (2015) study shows that lower income university goers face trouble adapting to the academic spheres because they do not possess the necessary *habitus*. This shows how classes are further fragmented and find expression through behaviors and language and is of relevance to this paper.

Also important were the ideas of Arjun Appadurai (1990) on the 'flow of culture' through his thoroughly reviewed concepts of scapes: ethnoscapas, technoscapas, financescapas, mediascapas and ideoscapas. I use this framework to conceptualize cultural effects of globalization.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard points out that virtual reality of the social media technology in question, appears as more "real" than "reality" itself. This notion does not seek to see virtual reality as existing outside of *social reality* but an augmentation of existing social norms and biases. We need to keep in mind the Simulacra and how it functions in this case. For Baudrillard, this phenomenon works in four stages that I might overly simplify here- with reference to the social media platforms in question. (i) A faithful image of reality is made, like taking a photograph. (ii) The image then appears as a perversion of reality; the picture of a person does not equal to the person. (iii) The sign *pretends* to function as a faithful copy; the picture may not be you but it still represents you. The claim that the sign is equal to the real thing exists but it is not an actual representation but merely suggestive. (iv) Pure Simulacrum- whereby symbols have no connection to reality whatsoever. The virtual becomes an echo-chamber of reverberating symbols. As social media functions to store an imitation of *reality*, it also takes *reality* as it were further and further away into the simulacrum, reiterated and repeated infinitely.

Other noteworthy works that inspired this paper are Michael Savage (2000), John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (2013)- where they both discuss the importance of theorizing and studying contemporary society and reframing class issues.

To situate the Dhaka urban without the post-colonial, it is necessary to look at the political landscape and who holds power. This is shown by the work of Hamza Alavi (1972) who argues that the state is controlled by the indigenous bourgeoisie under the Metropolitan patronage. In studying the consumption patterns of what can be called urban consumer culture, this research aims to see the extent of which value has been divorced from the material satisfaction of wants to the sign value of goods (Baudrillard 1996, 1998).

Consumption and Class: A Starting Point

One of the anthropological contributions Max Weber is best known for having developed a multidimensional theory of social stratification in the 19th century and in some sense it is the foundation for my approach to research. Weber argues that ‘market situation is *primary* in determining class’ (Hadden, 1997. P. 148). Weber’s argument is a critical one about class, which differs from the binary Marxist proposition. Marx proposes a materialist interpretation of class defined simply by categories of ownership of capital and labor. Marx’s stance on class distinction, albeit better known in popular culture for its poeticism, misses out on the multidimensional nuances and sociological insights that Weber offers through his ideas on class distinction.

This notion of class further complicates the division (of the Marxist owners of capital and suppliers of labor) into innumerable hierarchical segments which accurately factors in the various forms of power, status, cultural value, history and individuality. The Weberian definition of class is a group that resides in the same sociopolitical and economic landscape and functions inside similar *market situations*- which ultimately offer *comparable life chances*. (Weber, 1947, p. 180-183)

Here we have to make distinctions between the terms ‘class situation’ and ‘market situation.’ Weber distinguishes a *class situation* as an amalgamation of three things- *life chances*, *economic interest* and the *market situation*. The *market situation* has to do with the materialist-economic reality that the particular class group is interested in. (Weber, 1947, p. 190-193)

Weber argues that *Consumption* is closely linked to a group’s ‘*class situation*’. (Weber, 1947, p. 194-195) I have borrowed this Weberian framework and attempted to locate it in the socioeconomic landscape of urban Dhaka; and the objective is to produce an outline of the contemporary *class situation* within this space. My goal ultimately though, simply describe consumption patterns, but rather to use said patterns as a pivot to center the study of the social structures that urban life is embedded in. Urban life is inseparable from consumption and a close study of anxiety showed a deep relationship between the two.

Urban Dhaka’s *market situation* has been visibly and rapidly changing in recent years. Using Weber’s concept we can argue that this change in the economy and market affects the *class situation*. The market coexists with the phenomenological and personal and I wanted to construct

a meaningful understanding of reality in two dimensions of analysis- (i) the level of the individual - the personal meanings and identities that are attained from certain kinds of consumption (ii) the level of the social - generalize the narratives of interlocutors to explore shared life goals within the affluent class.

Within the constraints of this paper, I have chosen to draw my attention to some key locations of analysis to draw attention to the objective mentioned above. They are listed below, and the **Analysis** section is an effort to unpack these areas:

- Education
- Technology and Social Media
- Entertainment
- Substance Abuse
- Transportation

CHAPTER TWO – THE CHARACTERS

Introducing the Characters

i) Ayman is a Bengali Muslim male who is 27 years old. He has finished his undergraduate program and aims to move to the United States for higher studies. Originally from Chittagong, Ayman moved to Dhaka in 2012 to attend a private university. His mother is a high ranking government official in the Ministry of Railways. His father is a professor in Chittagong Medical College. Both his grandparents grew up in Chittagong. His grandfather worked for USAID while his grandmother was a housewife. The family owns multiple land and properties in Chittagong. In Dhaka, he shares his apartment with 2 friends and pays 15,000 taka for his part. His other costs such as food and transport are another 15,000 taka. His family earnings are (an estimation) 1,50,000 taka per month. Ayman's parents suggest he not get a job till his education is complete- as it can serve as a distraction to his primary goal of performing well in university. Ayman has been Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Social Anxiety Disorder. Most of our interviews took a turn from the various segments of consumption in his life to the problems he faced in moving to Dhaka. Apart from the burden of success that his parents expect from him, there is also a burden of living a social life in Dhaka. We discuss the various things that trigger him- such as how to be polite, hip and relevant and how not to offend people and still remain funny; we discover that these were problems of how to be perceived.

ii) Milli is a working mother of two who is a 37 year old Bengali Muslim. She works at an event management company and is a member of the Chamber of Commerce for women. She aims to be a successful entrepreneur. Her husband and her both work and leave her kids at a Daycare center. Her husband is a freelance graphic designer and photographer. Their combined income is 80,000 taka per month. My interviews with Milli circled around the problems of motherhood and consumption; how even love had to be proved through consumption. Milli struggles most and faces tremendous anxiety, lack of sleep and frustration over juggling work and family life. During our interviews, she has even asked for my help and opinions on how to teach her kids better and what schools they should be moving to when they are older. She claims that times have changed

drastically and the methods her parents when she was growing up are no longer useful. She is also most concerned about her kids addictive use of the internet and digital entertainment. Her father was a clerk in the Navy and her mother was a homemaker. Milli and her husband own a small apartment in Dhaka and inherited wealth in her homeland.

iii) Hridoy is a 28 year old Bengali male. He is currently doing his Masters in a private university in Dhaka. He works at an international consultancy house for media and communication. Earning 40,000 taka and living with his mom and brother in Dhaka, Hridoy claims that he is not part of the affluent middle class because he does not own a car (suggesting with irony that these two go hand in hand). He is the sole earning member in his Dhaka house. Hridoy's father worked in the Middle East for several years after moving back to Chittagong where Hridoy grew up. After high school, Hridoy felt that the stay in the Middle East had changed his father and the two had an ongoing conflict which Hridoy suggests has to do with his father's fundamentalism. It was then that he one day left Chittagong and moved to Dhaka. He bunked with friends and got two jobs while also tuitioning on the side. In a few years, he saved up enough to get himself through university. A year ago his mother and brother moved in from Chittagong to his house in Dhaka. His mother is a homemaker and takes care of the household. Hridoy suggests that there is no alternative to the mother's touch at home.

iv) Ajhor is a 32 year old Bengali Muslim male. He is currently between jobs and working on his start-up project. Having grown up in Chittagong and attending high school and university in Delhi, Ajhor was a stranger to Dhaka affluent culture when he had moved in 2012. Since then he's worked tirelessly at popular radio stations and media outlets. Before leaving his job last year, he was earning 1,00,000 taka a month and living with his whole family in Dhaka. Right now, he has invested all his savings on his start-up record company. This includes his mother, father, sister and younger brother. His grandfather was the first man to have gotten a Bachelor's degree in the village of Rangunia in Chittagong. His grandmother studied till middle school. Out of the five sons they had, two of them are PhD. holders in various branches of engineering science, and the rest three finished their Bachelors or Masters programs and got into private service, such as the merchant

navy and banking, or got into business. Out of their four daughters, the younger two are Masters holders. His mother is a Masters degree holder in Bangla Literature, although her parents studied till high school and middle school respectively, as they were zameendars and society did not require further education from them in that era. Apart from his mother's eldest brother of ten siblings, who is a PhD. holder in engineering, the rest did not pursue higher studies. To note, his maternal grandfather is the founder of Fatehabad High School and College in Hathazari, Chittagong. The family owns multiple houses and property in Chittagong and Dhaka. Ajhor fell really sick in 2015 with a pancreatic condition. This was at a time that his entire family was planning a move to the United States. During the course of the interview, Ajhor and I got really close. Some sensitive information was revealed about his health which he wanted to keep from his family. Eventually, he made an excuse to stay in Dhaka while all the other members of his household (and extended family, including grandmother) have moved to the United States. His health condition has also had him indulge in various pain medications. We discuss urban life, affluent culture and the very important role of the family- as he suggests he is only now finding out.

v) Nidhi is a 25 year old Bengali Muslim female. She works as a teacher in a private English Medium school. She earns 30,000 taka and lives with her parents and sister. Her parents are both doctors and work/has worked for the government. Her father is retired and works as a consultant in his old government job of Administrative Medicine. Her mother is a professor in Dhaka Medical College. We discuss social life, the role of the smartphone in contemporary life and the various troubles women face in commuting throughout the city.

CHAPTER THREE - ANALYSIS

Education

One of the long-term *fixed consumptions* common to the group of primary interlocutors in Phase 1 is that they all went to universities. Higher education is a cultural maxim in affluent societies and offers individuals the opportunity to attain higher levels of structural socialization. This is done through its teaching of behavioral, technical and linguistic skills. Participating in an institution means participating within a social group. Aside from learning technical aspects of individual subjects at a university, one must behave and talk a certain way. Having been educated or being in the process of education holds ornamental symbolic value itself. The ornamental value is identified with markers such as taste, politeness and fashion. These traits become signifiers of 'education.' Functionally speaking, a precursor to higher education is a political position that dictates the use of identity as *instrumental*. It is a strategic point of influence for creating new members of the affluent group to exert hegemony.

A significant amount of the affluent middle class' income is spent on education for their children. Previous studies have shown the high expenditure on rent and exotic foods among the affluent middle class. (Sabur, 2003, p. 81) The proportional and absolute amounts of income spent on education is staggering. From 12,000 taka to 50,000 taka of the affluent class family's monthly income is spent on the education of their children. In affluent societies, the family (almost always parents) typically bears the cost of education.

For some background, we need to talk about the current education system's structure. The schooling system in Bangladesh can be categorized into three specific groups. The 85% majority of students are enrolled in mainstream Bangla medium schools. The dominant urban elite consist of around 6% of the population study in more expensive English medium schools (and a selective group of private Bangla and cadet schools). The rest are enrolled in *madrasas* for reasons of religious inclinations and/or economic constraints. These numbers are estimates, however, as available statistics are not up-to-date. The numbers are taken from a newspaper editorial about the education system's role in dividing the masses. Manzoor Ahmed (*The Daily Star*, Education System Divides the Nation, 2018) also writes that the class stratification is such that these "children

study and live in different worlds.” This confirms the thesis that the education system is divisive in its function.

A primary question to be asked was: why exactly did cosmopolitan parents find education so important? Coming out of an urban post-colonial upbringing, the answer to this question seems almost obvious but somehow shrouded in doubt and almost mystical. Education and associated costs are by no means inexpensive. The *burden* of education falls as a major fixed cost on urban consumers regardless of their class positions. Higher costs on education entail greater opportunities for career and life success. People also recognize that education is not purely a professional endeavor but entails one think and behave in an *educated* manner- signifying spiritual or even metaphysical qualities. Families thus seek to maximize this potential for students by choosing the best institutions they can. The most ‘effort’ the child of urban families put in is into their education. Much of their livelihoods, such as where one lives, security and all kinds of supports provided are directed into their educations.

The education structure in the country is divisive in its premise. The most persistent form of observable anxiety is a manifestation of class anxiety. This has to do with completely different languages, idioms, interests, tastes and also codes of behavior that divide the class boundaries within urban life. They are, as Manzoor Ahmed suggests, worlds apart.

The interlocutors from affluent classes recognize that the monetary support from their parents come from a place of long-term hardship and sacrifice. Upon meeting parents of my selected interlocutors, it was no surprise that they regarded university education as an essential step into fulfilling the criteria for (at least) reproducing their status and class. An English education has been common for them. These families resemble a *Tagorean* aesthetic. The majority esteem modern, liberal values while retaining a localized Bengali Muslim identity. Values of this identity include modesty, special care for family, civility and Muslim religiosity. That which I’m trying to describe is an ontological category. It is the idealized form of values. For the rest of this paper, I will refer to this position as the Bengali Muslim Values (and it will be discussed in further detail later on).

On interviewing the parents, it didn’t appear as if an education was some dry ritual to simply retain social status. Typically, the mothers are deeply passionate about their hopes and dreams for their children and their eventual success. There is a hermeneutic twist to the word ‘success’ (which kept

coming up in conversation). There are certain negative connotations to the use of the word in younger generations than within older one. The type of *success* in question accounts personal and psychological well-being and growth, but also tacitly demands social mobility in the upward direction typically within the near future. Speaking of these things ethnographically tends to leave it drier than the reality of the situation.

The actual relationships between parents and children are deeply complex, with sacrifices and long-term dreams and all kinds of things that are easy to *observe* but harder to *participate* in. The participants who have moved from home to Dhaka feel doubly anxious about achieving the status of “success” (“out there in the real world,” as Ayman adds). Education is kind of a deal between the two parties. “Success” and “failure” became the terms of talking about Ayman’s future education prospects by his parents in a very sincere interview.

Dhaka itself has been booming with universities in the last decade. There are, as of now, 51 private universities and 8 public universities in Dhaka city. Private university education now an affordable choice that no longer involved diasporic strategies, transcended certain stratified class borders within this time. University education; the degree, the acquisition of language skills, networks and tastes, are all parts of the process of upward social mobility.

The importance of meaning and identity is closely linked to this sort of *fixed consumption* associated with education. The rising demand and price of a private education in Dhaka involves a type of *mimicry* of the ‘global citizen’ that starts from an early age at school. Note that the ‘global citizen’ is not a homogenous category- and the affluent youth of Dhaka brought up on English education and foreign (mainly American) media have their own unique twist on identity. Azwaad, who recently graduated from high school, tells me a paradox that highlights this identity well. He says that he is ‘too white for the brown kids and too brown for the white kids.’

The function of the education system, apart from creating professionals and future employees, also serves as a type of individualizing ritual for the upcoming members of the prestigious of Dhaka’s urban dwellers. Some mothers will often pray for their children, holding them by the shoulder right when they have to enter the hall before any certified exam.

I was excited after having studied the consumption as education because it paid off ethnographically to have looked into it with a closer eye because this suggests that consumption,

other than being a signifier of class, is also deeply linked to cultural rationale, identity and meaning in life. (Robert G. Dunn, 2008))

As Dhaka's market adopts the global neoliberal tendencies, it also feels the surge of consumerism and increasing choice that typically follows. These shifting scapes of the economy *redefine* traditional rationales and opens the floor for new choices. Some of these choices, like sending your kids to university for a westernized education are not describable by (the Weberian distinctions of) wealth, prestige and power, because they fail to encapsulate the tremendous emotional investment. Behind the run for wealth, prestige and power is *meaning*. While interviewing one of the interlocutor's (Ayman's) mother, she broke down in tears on the subject of his success and well-being (which are usually syntactically connected in a sentence as if it were one thing). The love of parents fuel this anxiety towards the great potential their children could attain. The rising number of private universities in Dhaka create life chances but also an intangible dimension of choice. The amount of choices available in this dimension can be the cause of tremendous anxiety, but more on that later.

A detailed quantitative research on consumption was outside the scope of this ethnography, but this emerging pattern of increased choices and anxiety about attaining them is persistent. Dhaka has seen a surge of privatization in all dimensions of education, trade, agriculture, etc. This choice might also be attainable but much harder to attain for middle-income families or single parent families, as some of my interlocutors suggested. On the topic of financing education, Ayman's mother is earnest about it being one of their immediate duties as a parent.

On the other end of the spectrum, Mili, an entrepreneur at BWCCI, also tells me that half her time goes into being a mother, and another half of which goes into deciding how her son should be brought up- where to send her child to school and how much the internet should be allowed, etc. The market for *consuming* education seems also to subsume and manufacture a dimension of parental responsibilities that has *inelastic demand* for the affluent class. The anxiety about increased choices of education also affect those who go abroad from Dhaka. Choosing where to study is a cause of tremendous stress for entire families. For many families, public universities are/were a priority but the competition gets tremendously high and preparation surprisingly expensive.

The esteemed status of a university education is attained through this sort of consumption (that is, paying tuition for an education-based service as well as access to a particular social group) is also recognized as a legitimate creator of (classed) *identities*. Consumption and *taste* have been long recognized in anthropology since the 60's as signifiers of class. I've focused the study of consumption to education because it was a socially recognized fulfillment of the urban upper class roles, and typically reasserted and reaffirmed the aspirations. This trend, however, of increased choices in the market seemed to appear in all other fragments of their day-to-day lives, and the rest of my study of consumption is an outline of the noticeable paradoxes and anxieties of the everyday lives of Dhaka's residents. The increasing choices echo an overarching global and western theme in politics, art, fashion and economics. The generation brought up on television and the internet typically have their tastes and fashion of consumption sway towards being global, *mimicked* and urbanized. Here, part of being educated also meant to acquire transnational strategies and modes of living. This means a certain type of fashion has to be displayed. Speaking in English fluently also becomes a marker of status. The pace with which the internet functions, it also becomes important to be aware of pop culture to be *relevant*.

Affluent class societies are a relatively small social group. Finding one another amidst Dhaka's chaos effectively resembles a social game for the affluent groups. Members of the affluent middle class can identify each other's language and shared life goals. I'm tempted to imply that judgement of taste functions as a signifier for class situation and works to bring people of the same class group together. It functions as a superficial indicator that dissolves social friction.

For my interlocutors with household incomes less than 80,000 taka (approximately), talk consumption of day-to-day items are taboo or too socially repulsive to speak about. In many cases my inquiries were dismissed with quiet smiles from older women. This marks a strange level beyond which is becomes comfortable to talk about one's day-to-day experience with the market.

Education institutions also start to resemble bureaucracies and corporations. Autonomy is taken away from teachers and students into invisible and fractured administrations. The primary goal, like for any corporation, becomes maximizing profit. In interviewing the students it seems apparent that life within educational institutions are, at least, as much about socializing as it is about

distribution of knowledge. Institutions and the culture around it function effectively in distributing *tastes*. As Bourdieu points out, the language, fashion and aesthetic acquired through this culture allows access to newer *habitus*.

One's education directly affects major life decisions. This means their friends, colleagues and eventual life partners are in some ways tied to one's educational identities. The *habitus* thus defines the aesthetic categories (or *taste*) and allows its agents to exercise agency. Anxiety is linked to taste as existing in these social groups means to communicate yourself to that group- and it calls for performativity and self-awareness. Note that aesthetic markers such as taste are markers for the transcendental (for example, in *success* or *pure love*).

One has to fit into the role espoused by educational institutions- which may or may not be warmly welcomed by the institution of family. The main purpose of education is the job- perhaps the highest cause of anxiety. Education involves some sort of cocooning of the individual's set of skills which are to bloom and while it offers some flexibility in identity, jobs become rigid markers of one's place. The identity provided by educational institutions can be seen as a progression starting from the traditional family to the nuclear urban family and how certain identities are commoditized within this sphere of consumption. Rampant in this urban space is the intergenerational conflict. It is interesting to note that usually both sides of the conflict use their education as the rationale for their positions.

Education, thus, provides affluent individuals with the necessary skills for growth and agency. As the urban dwellers exercise more *choice* (in terms of consumption) due to their class position and wealth, they also embodied a higher anxiety associated with the burden of these choices.

Technology and Social Media

Although a small portion of one's income is spent on buying new technological gear, it does have a great deal to do with one's most valuable resources- their time. This aspect of consumption had to be mentioned due to the different ways it affected the phenomenological experience of daily life and involved a lot of the efforts and concerns of my interlocutors.

Due to the rise of global trade and low trade restrictions, the market situation of urban consumption has expanded in the last decade. More people than ever are connected to the internet. For the last decade, this has been ongoing for the ruling party; to establish a technologically-adept 'Digital Bangladesh.' Certain affluent urban spaces in Dhaka have had access to the internet since the early 2000's. However, the radical growth in recent years has been due to the universality of mobile phones and apps which do various tasks from paying bills online to getting home delivery service from any number of restaurants and personalized transport rides to name a few.

The growth of the local IT sector, as well as continually new technology entering the local market makes for drastic changes in lifestyle. The internet reconstructs the entire way communication takes place in a perpetual state of like-never-before. Video chats make it easier for the Chatgaiyas to stay in touch with their family over long distances. Some of the young men I have interviewed eventually wish to join the growing IT sector. Transportation has also been privatized in such manners with Uber-like ride sharing services entering the market as well as various other local reiterations of such businesses. All among the youth and young adults who were my interlocutors see privatized transport as a blessing, usually not having vehicles of their own in Dhaka (despite half of them having access to a family vehicle). They would rather prefer private motorbike/car rides than take public transport, which is deviously overcrowded. However, services like these are sometimes tens of folds more expensive than public transport, and increasing markets such as these create further class distinctions and anxieties. And this is no surprise, Dhaka has been referred to as the 'traffic capital of the world.' Conditions in public buses make every-day commutes extremely tedious and frustrating. It is true though, that ride sharing services and digital technology has improved the conditions for commuting for the affluent classes.

A rather unspoken but plainly visible motif started happening as I got a few days into my project. My interlocutors, especially if we were in a formal interview setting, would reach out for their

phones and scroll through social media. It became a problem into getting through the interview with any flow to the conversation and was rampant because the closer I got to them, the more comfortable they felt spending more time on their phones at sudden intervals. This was because most, if not all, the urban residents I've interviewed or talked to, were deeply addicted to using social media. They report three to six hours scrolling through their phone on social media daily—engaging in *surfing* the web and also reportedly having to reach for the phone first thing every morning. This trend, however, surpasses simply the small sample group I focused on but can be noticed on a larger scale. I had brought this up with my interlocutors in a humorous manner, but still warned them I'd be asking questions about why they picked up their phones when they did.

Few of respondents, the women and two of the men who are more adventurous volunteered cheerfully. Over the next month, they too had thought about it closely and our discussions centered around this too. The general idea was that reach out for the phone was triggered usually by a sense of either boredom, small insecurities or just plain loneliness. Despite the rapidly growing urban spaces, there is a trend about affluent societies; the children, teenagers, young adults, and adult women (both working outside of home and not) inform me that life in Dhaka is *boring*. The phenomenon presented itself as a growing yet publicly unarticulated cultural nihilism, dominating patterns of behavior in the young among the affluent.

I believed this to be a crucial find for the sake of this research. The overarching rationale for this from the point of view of the volunteering respondents was that they usually picked up their phones to engage in social media or the internet, and far from this being an act of solipsism, was a way of connecting back to society. This was an important aspect of urban life that is so common to many and the repetition of it appears borderline neurotic. Ultimately, the phone and interactions with the internet at large were also part of a bigger strata of consumption (which also comes with a dubious *data-fication* of personal life) that had actual phenomenological implications about how one ought to act in social life. The phone appeared an infinite distraction and served as a tool for *escapism*. This largely affects and dominates the threshold my interlocutors have for boredom, waiting and need to communicate. Part of transnational culture dictates an unending string of pleasure through consumption. With methods of media ultimately convenient, exchanging information becomes urgent. And with it comes more entertainment and subsequent advertises- whose only desired effect is to create an anxiety that can be satisfied with consumption.

Like getting an itch and responding to it by scratching, many of my interlocutors, (especially the men and the younger women) will itch their anxieties and insecurities with scrolling through social media. In one of the late night stay-over interviews with the interlocutors in a group of over a dozen, on discussing the use of social media, many come out saying they spend hours scrolling through their homepages without even having posted or contributed anything at all. It acts as a fall-back for avoiding work, insecurities and sleep among other things. The discussions then took an ironic and humorous turn, with the (albeit, cynical) joke being that they were powerless to the impending changes made by technology and might as well go along with the changes anyway, and this is in fact, true.

The reproducibility as well as permanence of data on the internet poses a constant pressure of having to *maintain* one's identity over time. Social media also has a tendency to be extremely public about sensitive topics. These tendencies of social media affect traditional methods of dialogue and discourse as well as one's expressions of their identity. However, the ease with which media travels reinforce traditional discourses which dominate majoritarian modes of communication- instead of producing a radically new discourse. Some of my interlocutors think that how human life is experienced and communicate has fundamentally changed with the advent of smartphones, or at least that they feel this way for themselves.

As I accompanied some of my interlocutors getting around the city and interacting in public spaces, I could notice this negation of the *actual public*. Interactions are minimized and/or obliterated altogether in public spaces unless it is for business. Urban life is busy however; there is no doubt. My interlocutors, both male and female, describe this type of *negation* as a strategy to get around urban spaces. There is a restless insecurity regarding the *public*. Males are typically more concerned with saving time while females are generally more concerned with safety in public spaces. I'm interested to see how consumption of social media is tied in to the urban dwellers' relationship to the *public*. Social media use has this tendency of projecting a privatized-public as the *actual public*. Agreements, beliefs, dialogue, etc. within this space can be falsely accepted as a *public* agreement. There is a façade of public coherence in social media, which is in fact, an in-group coherence of the affluent middle class. While the direct effects of this is incredibly complex, for the extent of this research, I have focused on how social media's easy methods of dialogue can

inversely distance dialogue *among* classes while favoring dialogue *within* the affluent middle class. It seems that the affluent middle class has a need to identify itself from the *public* and much of the culture revolves around being separate and identifiable from the public.

Social media's symbolic *public* space dominates the old idea of the *actual* public space. It has become a space of political debate and majoritarian action with the ability to exert power where attention is drawn in large numbers. Members become identifiable through their social media personas, and therein, the virtual profiles become a simulacra of the actual person.

Entertainment

Upon query about using their phones too often, and this is by no means a local phenomenon, some of my interviewees defended their position asserting that even browsing through social media was ultimately a social act, even if they hadn't interacted with anyone else. And a fraction of this, I think, remains true. However, as my interviewees also believe, the routine act of using their phones for hours daily was linked with boredom. My interviewees (especially women), all at one time or another report having tremendous and painful times of *boredom*. The sheer number of people sharing this sentiment with me throughout this research appeared like a sort of *dread* that umbrellas the urban region. It was important for me to observe, right away from the start, that the day-to-day life of my urban interlocutors was surrounded by digital entertainment. Just about everyone I suggests that they are to various extents addicted to digital entertainment of one medium or the other.

There are many notable mediums of digital entertainment that I've observed within this timeframe. Rather than dwell on the objects of entertainment, my objective was to nail down i) the relationship between entertainment and users with respect to the current urban situation and ii) deconstructing the nature of urbanized boredom and the subsequent rise of digital entertainment as a chosen response/solution.

None of the participants can voluntarily go a full 24-hour day without digital entertainment. I had set it up as an almost humorous test for anyone interviewed to take up the challenge and to get back to me. Syed took up the challenge and informed me just a few hours short of the 24-hour mark that he had to use his phone for work, etc. It was an odd test for numerous reasons. The internet was no longer a place for just entertainment, but also serious business and had radically transformed the way people in Dhaka communicated with each other. The internet was indeed "serious business" proven by the sheer amount of collective time spent on it. Entertainment on the internet was also serious business. It had also replaced with even more radical ferocity the previous-most entertaining furniture in each household: the Television. The television is silently considered obsolete compared to the sea of choices offered by the internet and falls out of use and/or fashion in affluent urban spaces. Digital entertainment on the internet is so vast that I am still deeply unsure how to talk about it. Observable in my interlocutors, were a range of activities carried on mostly mobile phones, and some on laptops, computers, tablets, etc. I have tried to make

a short list based on what has remained common across individuals which is as follows. Urban Dhaka consumes television shows, films, cartoons, self-help videos, how-to videos, political content, pornography, sports, play online and offline interactive (and otherwise) games, share media, read, browse, scroll, click, tap. As mentioned, what I'm interested in was the relationship between user and entertainment. Consumers of digital entertainment are extremely acute in their demands, sitting in the privacy of their rooms. The entertainment itself becomes a marker of taste, which is connected to class. The men I have interviewed have a very rigid idea of what exactly they want, and what sort of entertainment is worth their time. There is an inclination towards American film and TV shows in general. Having watched certain films or TV shows or played certain games become markers for one's repertoire/intellect/status. There is a community of global gamers in Dhaka, some of whom I've also come to know through this research, who claim that they make friends based on their taste of games. Taste in music is also one such marker and functions as a way to select access to groups, but this trend is only observable in the males. These examples show how these forms of media are the 'social capital' disguised under the label of entertainment. In urban spaces, time is money, or more fittingly, time is *value*. The streets of Dhaka, earthquaking with swift footsteps in the hundreds of thousands getting from point A to point B can be seen on any working weekday solidify the image of how valuable time is to the inhabitants of the city. In my interlocutors, I could observe that there is a real sense of *loss* associated with time that is wasted or not fully utilized. Much of urban life's allure is that it offers a supposed escape from boredom; a belief my interlocutors embody. However, the culture falls short in having these needs met as much of adult life is tedious and repetitive. The infinite choice associated with the internet had this effect that there was always something better or more worthwhile that my interlocutors were missing out on. Perhaps the form of anxiety most talked about with my interlocutors had to do regarding taste and doing things *worthwhile*. The choice of the Entertainment also acts as a marker of individuation. What I mean is that these choices are distinctions made on the basis of taste and get associated with the identity of the individuals. They incorporate stories, morals, characters, dialogues, catchphrases, syntax, etc. from the Entertainment. The Entertainment becomes an object that endows status and prestige. However, choosing your Entertainment becomes itself a tedious task because much of urban identity is tied in with taste and fashion. A trope common among affluent young adult males getting acquainted with each other is a rapid exchange of their tastes and preferences in digital entertainment, such as

taste in movies or games or films, etc. This trend is less common among women. I'm inclined to believe, due to my limited experiences in researching, that an aspect of this is a masculine recognition.

That is not to say that women aren't precise about the type of Entertainment they prefer. However, their stance on this appears more reserved and private than that of the males, who tend to *wear* out their tastes on their sleeves.

What is complex about the relationship between user and Entertainment is that what you like and prefer becomes closely linked with one's identity. Entertainment is held dear to one's personality. It serves as access to stories, values, aspirations, tales of heroism, etc. to my interlocutors. In Dhaka's current setting where religion is in decline among the youth, and affluent urban groups have a distaste for local media and advertisement, foreign digital entertainment functions as the *snorkel* through which my interlocutors access art and internalize values. There is an inclination of the affluent class to prefer foreign entertainment while retaining a tendency to esteem local art/media as generally *low art*. It is regarded as signifiers of taste of the *mainstream* (typical viewers will suggest it is *lesser*) and involves an ironic distance between affluent entertainment consumers and locally produced *low art*.

The upper class is associated with an English education, almost always in foreign curriculum and closely linked with diaspora. This transnational affluent class has their compasses of *taste* face westwards- dominated by American Entertainment and media.

It was difficult to do an urban ethnography objectively and not analyze the effect of digital entertainment mainly because it stayed common across groups both horizontally and vertically. Thus, the market situation of urban life comes with a(n almost religious) dependence on entertainment and this seems to be a trend.

A staggering amount of time is spent on entertainment and an equal amount on *choosing* how to be entertained. Affluent urban dwellers are incredibly skeptical about television and radio advertisements. These tactics eventually get parodied and mistrusted by consumers who are supposedly more aware of market conditions than ever before. Thus, the Entertainment has to evolve to overcome the advertisements once again, as the advertisements also get more entertaining over time. This cycle in the media continues. The distaste for 'obvious' or 'poor'

advertisements, usually overly exaggerated, sentimental or naïve, creates a vacuum filled in by Entertainment; the trendy types of which are exactly the opposite, highlighting realism, irony and self-awareness. The word ‘Entertainment’ is also a misnomer, or slightly misleading. This is due to the further commodification of art, games, music, film, etc. As the media evolved, the Entertainment got better and in the last two decades or so, have replaced many of the ways of *being* traditionally. It is virtually impossible to separate affluent urban lifestyles from using digital entertainment. It appears- as if a necessity. Consumption of digital entertainment could be interpreted, I argue, as a new kind of ritual.

Hridoy, Ajhor and Ayman have their relationships surrounding pop culture via Entertainment. One of these practices is showing each other films on monthly intervals. The Chatgaiya men will spend dozens of hours playing together in highly interactive online games and jump from game to game after several months of playing or ‘defeating’ each game. Much of their time outside of gaming also involved critical analysis and discussion about said games. For many mainstream superhero American movies, for example, which are highly in demand in Dhaka (and from what I gather, the trend is common among urban spaces within the subcontinent), it is vital for a certain group to be up to date with having consumed the latest *product*. My purpose for mentioning these examples is to show that far from being a solipsistic Entertainment of the self, the Entertainment also gathers and creates space for a communal identity. My starting point anthropologically was to view the Entertainment as a *thing*, but what spending time observing such phenomena can show how meaning is created and life is centered on such products.

Marvel superhero films, for example, are hugely popular globally. Newspapers covered articles on huge lines that gathered on the premier of these films. The Chatgaiyas would often discuss these movies in hindsight. While the viewing of film was informed to be by an interlocutor as an ‘experience,’ a possible reference to the visually spectacular and high-production CGI, it is only in discussion that they ponder and philosophize on the subject matter. There are moments in their discussion of revelation, when the characters are humanized and their stories deeply felt. An interesting moment of realization common in these discussions when the stories click is that a lot of the truths and heroisms in American films are already *known* to my interlocutors through cultural stories. Particularly among males, there is a tendency to *borrow* from American media. Certain actions are justified through quotes or rationales of (super)heroes from the movies. The

women I have interviewed are very outwardly more self-aware than the men about using Entertainment as identity. The entire process can be too self-engrossing for young females in Dhaka. Women are more reserved with their Entertainment- as in the process is more solitary than communal. Of course, this is a large generalization but this recurrent enough during my research to draw my attention. During my interviews, I noticed that in groups, women were more likely to use their smartphones. Part of it might have to do with the male tendency for dominating space. Nidhi tells me that when she is around a lot of her male friends, there is a sense of alienation- and the smartphone functions as a tool that can help her escape. I am tempted to suggest here that all demand for Entertainment is a desire for escapism.

What is of particular interest to me is how closely this gendered difference resembles that of ritualistic traditions of Bangladesh. In urban Muslim practices, women stay home with their daughters while the men and their sons (and rarely prepubescent daughters) go to the mosque for communal prayer. Though this has been the norm in urban and rural Muslim families for the last many decades, it is becoming more common for women to also attend communal prayer for Jumma or Eid in urban spaces with mosques that have designated and segregated spaces for women and men.

My hypothesis was that the relationship between an individual and Entertainment is capable of being deeply interlinked and provide status (via taste), identity and *meaning*. In this section I have attempted to outline how in post-colonial spaces, foreign digital media and Entertainment could create identity and class signifiers. And finally, viewing Entertainment as a ritual that mirrors religious rituals in its conduct. Ultimately, this is an ever-expanding phenomenon in urban spaces, and the reason for adding this section to the research was to express the religion-levels of anxieties people face regarding Entertainment. Culture also flows through Entertainment. The majority consumed by urban Dhaka is American. As the population's main source of "*culture*," American culture plays a huge in urban identity. Mannerisms, idioms, political beliefs, aspirations and all sorts of social cues are borrowed and mimicked. Part of this has to do with glamour- as Edward Said would tell you all about.

Arjun Appadurai has a theory of global flow of culture. He describes it with five distinct scapes: ethnoscapas, financescapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, ideoscapas. In the previous chapters, without really addressing the terms, I've already talked about how technoscapas and ideoscapas

and how they have shifted in recent times due to growth in education and technology. The inherent tenant of the neoliberal dogma is an opening of the financescapes. With Entertainment, global culture defines the urban ideoscapes. It functions as a syphon through which globalism enters.

One of Entertainment's foundational pillars is the *choice* of picking your *own* Entertainment-consumption itself has an inner component of *individualization*- and it has to do with exercising choice. The various forms of Entertainment make previous forms less entertaining. And thus it becomes a cycle where entertaining Entertainment becomes less entertaining the more it is consumed, and then one must find a newer and better Entertainment- that will not only succeed in providing a decent time but also boost one's *social capital*. This potentially allows them to access new parts of the habitus but also keeps them anxious about finding the next best one. Entertainment can also be oversaturated and leave one encountering dread when one finds themselves unable to enjoy. Entertainment leaves one more vulnerable to being bored easily and wearing out the tools to deal with it. Digital Entertainment is a fascinating and outstanding product in urban life. On the flip side, Entertainment has the ability to highlight *pleasure* and *having a good time* as currency, as well as deeming many other non-virtual aspects of social life seem less entertaining or just plain boring.

Boredom is horrific to some interlocutors because it forces them to face anxieties. It reminds me of when a child is naughty and asked to sit alone in their room as punishment. Being bored and feeling dull in a society where fun ought to be maximized seems to appear as a kind of cultural sin. It's the biggest fear for my younger interlocutors. Consumption of Entertainment in heaps suggests a larger anxiety for this population that looms over when they are feeling dull. This might point to a cultural addiction to digital Entertainment.

Substance Abuse

Affluent young members of this class are expected to focus their energies on education. Thus, they are usually not expected to help the family financially or pay rent, etc. The surplus income associated with the affluent class dictates a surplus consumption. Namely, the pursuit of hedonistic pleasure remains common in all my affluent interviewees. Pleasure and cyclical consumption became points of interest during the interviews, and it is a topic I could not avoid when studying affluent consumption.

Drugs use in Dhaka has increased in the last several years and my hypothesis is that it is closely linked with the anxiety in question of urban spaces. It has appeared within my research that perspectives regarding usage of certain substances has changed in recent times. The position, which I would describe as a particular brand of Modern Islam dominant in urban spaces for the last half decade. I will get into the details regarding the evolving perspectives of drug use in liberal urban spaces later but it is important how to discuss how anxiety is related to usage. For many across gender and age substances act as a mean of coping with anxiety and stress. The phenomenology of this act is typically described by users as pleasurable, relaxing, enjoyable and fulfilling. These stand in stark contrast to the experiential conception of anxiety described earlier. The description include frustration, boredom, restlessness, skepticism and cynicism. There is a paradoxical element of the logic of substance use to counter anxiety- and it is that substances are addictive and anxiety inducing themselves. Users fall prone to specific patterns of substance use and becoming dependent on its effects.

This measure to counter anxiety using dependency, medicine and recreational use can turn into a vicious cycle when the logic reaches its full circle. In the rest of this section, I will discuss various narratives which highlight the circularity of using substances to treat anxiety and the subsequent anxiety this tactic brings about.

Marijuana use is most common among male teenagers and young adults. It is often cited as “less dangerous” than other substances. It is rather surprising how readily available and cheap the substance is in urban areas despite the problematic legal and social perspectives that surround it. My diasporic interlocutors informed me that it could be cheaper than anywhere else globally. It is no surprise then that marijuana use is rampant and in copious amounts. In my research, I have found the emergence of similar social patterns and rituals in various groups but independent of each other. This suggests larger social gears at play.

Recreational use of substances is considered fashionable in urban areas. Maybe it suggests what I think is effectively true: that global (especially popular American) identities go hand in hand with the cosmopolitan and transnational notion of *fashion* or trend. It is perhaps no coincidence that the United States has had an ongoing movement for legalizing marijuana.

As a “native”, my understanding of the social gender roles suggest that certain traditionally masculine codes of conduct are closely linked with the rituals surrounding substance use. These include stoicism or heroism through stasis (the immovable male figure who is unaffected by outside trouble), individual pleasure and abstractionism. I think the connection may be more intricate than it may appear at first glance between substance use and traditional masculinity that is neither obvious nor apparent. However, drug use and personal pleasure can be traced back to this aspect of local masculinity which presents itself as an entitlement for pleasure. It’s a right to one’s pleasure and prerogative to remain entertained.

This not to suggest that substance use is a strictly male activity. It is common for men to initiate an experiment used early and they typically assume responsibility of *gathering* substances for themselves and their female associates.

The pleasure of the substance allows individuals to momentarily step away from what they find to be restrictive norms and enter a “safe space” where immediate experiences, obscenities and otherwise unutterable personal truths can be shared and sometimes even rejoiced. Humor functions in a special way as a *social lubricant* in these spaces. Some interviewees describe marijuana as something that helps them “be themselves”. The matter of pleasure as recreation seems to me purely a social endeavor.

Many people use drugs because they feel it counters the boredom of urban life. Use is usually accompanied with a fascination for the substance, the function of which seeks to create an entirely new narrative, carefully leaving out the pre-existing notions about harmful effects of use.

Ya ba is a methamphetamine drug that is widely used in Bangladesh and has been deemed an epidemic. I have failed to incorporate interviews of users of this drug for they have a vampiresque quality to their lifestyle- and become unavailable cyclically. A lot of young adults get hooked very quickly to this highly addictive substance causing much conflict within the structure of the family.

The image of the non-user fits into the traditional societal role which represent traits of humility, modesty and active restraining from excess pleasure. Substance users are a minority, but have a strange way of relating back to the majority. They are often talked about as hideously normal or having grotesque traits. Usually treated like a herd of sheep, the *normal* non-user is invisible and ‘just like everybody else.’ The image is hardly ever realized in a particular person or subject but kept as a far-away symbol. Users either wear out their habits or keep them incredibly private. There appears to be little middle ground. Most *feel* (or claim to have *felt* during their early years of use) that a type of alienation and hiding is involved with use.

Note that the image of the non-user is aligned with the view that salvation ought to be achieved through work and humility. All this suggests a shift in contemporary societal roles of urban dwellers that deviate from the Bengali Muslim values. I believe this is a dialectic shift caused by the change in economy and in flow of a type of global consumerist culture (which could be identifiable through its special assertion on individualism, privacy, personal fashion, utilitarian pleasure).

In interviewing the students of a reputed school in Dhaka, I was inclined to believe that the abundance of use was a developmental and social rite-of-passage. The rite-of-passage, I think, mostly has to do with a living-on-the-edge kind of lifestyle; that the millennial generation is constantly critical of its predecessors. Both male and female teenagers alike recall the thrill of breaking the rules and the laughter and euphoria that creates “liberating” friendships. This is a very common narrative among the youth. Substance use, despite it having to do with immediate and personal pleasures, is oddly a social affair. I was surprised to see how early students experiment with marijuana- usually around 13 to 15 years old. Use is also something to be hidden from family

and authority figures giving users an exercise of secrecy, agency and choice. It seems to me that the thrill of secrecy is one's first encounter with controversial private truths.

Affluent urban students are acutely aware of a stereotype about them- a trope- that has weaved into culture through jokes and euphemisms of the image of the "farm chicken". This image provokes a comfortable and sedentary lifestyle without mobility or purpose due to the huge income gap of Dhaka city and highlights the contrast between lifestyles of two ends of the income gap. In affluent circles, almost paradoxically, suffering and getting into tight situations make for great inspirational stories. It is targeted at affluent young males as a symbol poking fun at their sedentary and indoor lifestyles. These stories typically are surrounded around drug use and an excess of pleasure.

Despite the pleasures surrounding drugs, the realities appear rather grim under the surface. Using drugs to counter traditional anxieties, help with stress, sleep and ease of socializing creates in itself a new set of anxieties which are unique in its construction. Unique insofar that it creates dependency on users who not only become further ill-equipped to deal with anxieties around traditional social behavior, but also

Bangladesh has a big industry for medicine and several corporations dominate the market. In urban areas you can find over-the-counter drugs with little provision on the consumers. Un-prescribed use of pharmaceutical drugs is common across various ages. One of these practices was way more popular than I thought to be. Rampant is high school students' self-diagnosed use of anti-anxiety and anti-depression medicine.

The pleasure is also a sensitive experiential component because it is the same currency through which one develops very personal realities such as love for one's parents. Substance use affects the same currency of pleasure and may cause despair in addicts. I have met quite a few urban residents over the year dealing with issues of mental health.

The economy of substances is affected by several factors such as state intervention. In 2018, the Bangladeshi government announced that it would be rounding up drug dealers and this was awfully received by many chronic users in the urban area. Within a week of the government intervention that left users cut off from their suppliers, the research interviews had taken a grim turn. Users displayed signs of severe depression, withdrawal, solipsism, loneliness and to my dismay- a refusal

to follow through with interviews. Chronic users agree that recreation soon turns into habit, and habit into necessity- and this theme of addiction is all encompassing when it comes to certain types of consumption.

I think the reason for adding this chapter among broader use is an analogy for the larger cultural rationale of maximizing utility. Consumption also seems to have a similar pattern of cycle as substance use. Go to school, then high school, college and university. Buy an iPhone Gen 1, then 2 and so on. Watch a superhero movie and then you have to watch all the ones that follow. A disruption of this system is seen as an unfaithful act- as being *disloyal* to the brand. This is of course, fueled by advertises and as one could guess- the function of all advertises is to create an anxiety relievable only by purchase. With substances, one does not need to imagine far the jump from purchase to pleasure. Functioning within neoliberal societies thus entails that consumption and pleasure become not just calculated and equated but also maximized. This may either leave the consumer vulnerable to exploitation or cause a cycle of anxieties to stop that from happening- which need to be relieved.

Transportation

In recent years, the state has taken an active approach to develop roads and highways and other infrastructure. The busiest highways have patiently waited through constructions of expensive flyover projects in key locations of the city. All efforts and projects attempt to stabilize the traffic problem. Any local will tell you, on any day of the week, how wasteful street traffic can be and how urgent the issue is. Improving infrastructure regarding roads and highways has been one of the big narratives of progress for the state.

The highway traffic consists of public and private busses, trucks, sedan cars, SUVs, CNGs or auto rickshaws, motorbikes, vans, minivans or tempus. Also functional are traditional rickshaws as well as their newer electronic counterpart (which are banned in urban areas but still operate).

Streets and highways in Dhaka act as narrow vessels for very high density traffic.

Rent in urban spaces is pretty compared to the outskirts of the core urban area. Commuting in Dhaka is an experience of boredom, anxiety and an encounter with wastage of time. Depending on where one resides relative to their workplace or educational institution, daily time spent on roads averages about 2 to 5 hours. A vast majority of cars in Bangladesh operate inside Dhaka.

Most of the working class in Dhaka are first or second generation migrants from other districts. The urban life is associated with a kind of "busyness" and the topic of traffic is a daily conversation within any corner of the city. This is contrasted to the rural life that people have a nostalgic longing for- portraying an image of solitude, freedom and a life closer to nature. Traffic pervades a significant amount of time and energy for most inhabitants of the capital. Such talk is accompanied with this almost generational mythos of decentralization. Quite independently of each other, people across class groups self-diagnose Dhaka's traffic problem with solutions of development outside of the capital. This, effectively, remains a fantasy- as the biggest projects (in terms of scope and finance) of urbanization and goals towards progress of the capital. Despite higher than ever before taxes on private cars, which is the bulk of highway vehicles, there appears to be no slowing down the increasing number of vehicles as well as population growth in Dhaka.

Bribery within the enforcers are very common in Dhaka. If you ask an auto rickshaw or CNG driver what he has to pay for renting (drivers very rarely own their own vehicle and have to rent them out daily) it out he will also add the regular amount he is expected to pay to the cops. This applies even if all his paperwork is appropriate.

The traffic itself, incurring dozens of millions of work hours daily, amounts to a huge annual loss. Some of my interviewees show signs of fear around transport and traffic. This is a fear of discomfort, boredom, heat and the dread that arises from being helplessly stuck. Many interlocutors have lost family and friends in traffic accidents. A huge percentage of workers who have their jobs in the city live in the outskirts or outside the capital area and commute back and forth daily.

Some companies have started to access this new market around the anxiety of traffic and transportation. Global and local companies offering ride sharing and package delivery services grew increasingly popular among the middle class. Businesses have begun turning their heads towards digital marketing and delivering products straight to the homes of consumers- thereby evolving the traditional idea of the marketplace. Ride sharing apps contribute to reducing the overall urban traffic.

These businesses, despite their strategies for effectively participating in the transport market also pose security questions of their own.

There is a multiplicity of experiences using public transport in Dhaka. One could do with a short tutorial on riding busses. The experience is a completely different one for women. Being a conservative Muslim majority nation, women have been secluded from public life and traditional roles are typically tied to the household. It was not until the 1990s that after an RMG revolution, a significant portion of women joined the Bangladeshi workforce. Yet after many decades, social life for women, especially regarding transport, has not gotten much easier even in urban areas as they are extremely prone to molestation and theft. In the past year or two, there have been dozens of reported cases of rapes and abductions of women - some occurring inside moving busses on the highway.

Urban spaces put women in a double bind- whereby the household is safe and considered the women's place but is limiting and restrictive of their personal agency. In contrast, the outside world is liberating but brutish and responds with hostility to the actualization of women's agency.

Nidhi, one of my primary interlocutors, and a regular commuter on public transport, told me in detail about the many anxieties of women who have to travel. Moving from place to place, she tells me, it's like an intricate game where one of offered many options, but each method has pros and cons and makes her purse lighter accordingly. Public transport is the cheapest but Nidhi reports many accounts of sexual harassment that she has faced on busses. Most intra-city busses have a designated space for women and differently abled people. These seats are usually limited and exist on a ratio of 10:1 with the "non-female seats". Nidhi tells me that the worst part of daily traffic is the time it wastes for her: giving room for anxiety to build up. The traffic makes it difficult to be punctual and acts as an impairment for the agency of women- who are already in a position of the subaltern and exists in a conflict prone process of negotiating individual freedoms in a conservative socio-political landscape.

One of the markers of the previously evoked idea of "success" is to have your own car. This effectively eradicates the anxiety around public or rented forms of transport and offers security and comfort associated with the affluent classes. Cars are expensive though. Not only are they heavily taxed, most affluent urban families will have a family driver working for them. One of the driver's many duties is to stand in line with the vehicle and do the tedious task of refilling gas (typically every day or every other day- taking from one to two hours) before every afternoon when it remains closed for a third of the day.

For short distances, rickshaws are extremely popular in Dhaka. A particular variant of the rickshaw that originated within Dhaka in the 1950s, have a distinctive art style resembling a king of pop art of movie poster-like drawings of the 1980s when posters were not printed but hand drawn. Each rickshaw has a distinct drawing on its back.

In central urban areas, rickshaws saw an intervention from the government for safety concerns. The state allowed rickshaws to register to function within certain spaces. In these spaces, the rickshaw art has disappeared and the three-wheeled vehicle is now imprinted with a number and a list of fixed rates from point A to point B.

The traffic affects the anxiety of drivers of vehicles the most, I think. The very few I could really get to open up to convey frustration. The sitting and mostly waiting accounting for an existential dread and trouble sleeping. This frustration directed towards an abstraction - an invisible face of the 'public' or 'everybody.' Despite the horrendous experience of traffic commonly felt towards the city, my experience of one night suggested a different perspective. Traffic was stuck for up to an hour near the parliament area for one state official. There was an instant sense of unity among the civilians in their outrage against the issue. The issue met with criticism and humor but no sign of violence. People getting out of their cars and speaking to strangers, giving a face to the traffic.

Busy signals are usually full of roadside salesmen and saleswomen. Selling a collection of toys and books, small electronic appliances and snacks. There are children doing the same thing, occasionally not interested in selling products but using it as a guise for begging. Many of these children simply want to talk. Traffic oddly also resembles are part of Islamic ritual whereby men gather at the mosque for Friday Jummah prayer and stand in filled, straight lines regardless of their class positions. I found this important to note because even within anxiety-ridden circumstances capable of inducing existential despair, there might actually be a weird egalitarian aspect to it whereby the traffic could be experienced as unifying and even holy.

Politics and Power

We have seen the various ways anxieties arise out of spaces of consumption. The report was rooted in the everyday experiences and stories of my interviewees. This anxiety around consumption is representative of several problems that can be traced back to the level of state. In this section I would like to discuss some of the broader social and political implications of contemporary urban trends of consumption and attempt to deconstruct what the anxieties of members of the affluent class.

Weber himself categorizes the distinctions into life chances, economic interest and market situation. For example, we have seen how a shift in the market situation around Education affects one's life chances and economic interest. His claim is that the market situation is the most important marker of class.

Each group in the middle class also represents a particular class situation which exists as a multilayered and complex structure.

With the rising levels of GDP that the nation has seen in recent years and how drastically urban life has changed, there is an urgency for studying society's relationship with the market situation, which stays most constant between classes among the other signifiers of class (i.e economic interest and life chances). Weber also discusses how the market situation is primary in identifying class.

The anxiety in question resembles both extremes of social integration- which still manifests as a kind of alienation.

Weber looks at how the capitalist rationale evolves from religious (specifically Christian Protestant) ethics.

Part of the anxiety present in the urban citizens is a political issue which creates insecurity. The assumed role of the nation state as well as its rhetoric is of a structure that provides security. Here one ought to be highly critical of the state's exertion of power and where it decides to intervene.

There are high amounts of wealth inequality in Dhaka and the gap has only increased with time.

The urban populous is fragmented by class and in each degree of stratification, the class situation is uniquely different. Thus suggests, as market is the primary factor in determining class situation, that it (i.e market situation) is also subtly different between classes.

According to Hamza Alavi, the post-colonial state functions primarily to serve the political goals of affluent classes and corporations. Urban Dhaka has a large section of its population in poverty.

This group consists of unemployed people of working age and beggars. Marx recognizes this situation (the class of beggars who fall out of the system of industrial society) as a feature of capitalism and diagnoses that it is through the rationale of capitalism that the system targets and flushes out particular class groups. Urban areas almost completely move to the service sector.

Consumption in the neoliberal landscape produces a commodity fetishism. One's sense of individuality is created and reinforced by commodities - such as their tastes and their education background. Commodities (and the market situation) drastically change how daily life and rituals are carried out. I found that the urban populous feel estranged from traditional methods of living and surviving. Instead, there is a rigid faith in the tenets of neoliberalism - which suggests an emphasis on personal choice and identity, as well as faith on the market forces for self-correction. Older writing narratives like religious, nationalism and language come under scrutiny and are replaced by a utilitarian view of the world - one that acts according to efficiency and convenience. The individualism heralded by neoliberalism might also just be a factor that contributes to social alienation or as Durkheim calls it- a state of anomie. The very commodities that create individual identity also have an effect in "othering" those who are not participants of the fetish- thereby providing a fragmented multiplicity of identities that are difficult to put under one umbrella.

Commodity fetishism tends to erode and continually overwrite traditional roles and rituals. Some of these cases I observed during the research was the two Eids and Pohela Boishakh - which are celebrated in urban areas through carefully chosen excesses of consumption and pleasure. Celebrations give rise to the urban reality of conspicuous consumption - a clear signifier of excess in consumption. The urban rationale for celebration is coincidentally a reenactment of traditional

ritualistic celebration which requires in part to distance oneself for the mundane, daily life. The urban hermetic also dichotomizes mundanity of daily life against the celebratory rituals, but the twist is that what lies beyond efficiency and convenience is a type of hedonism rooted in excess and unadulterated pleasure.

Despite the liberal in neoliberal, state intervention actually seems to increase with increasing markets. You may wonder if the whole global premise is a type of post-imperialism.

Othering is a central point of study in anthropology. Ali Riaz defines it in the following manner:

Othering is the simultaneous construction of the self or in-group and the other or out-group in mutual and unequal opposition through identification of some desirable characteristic that the self/in-group has and the other/out-group lacks and/or some undesirable characteristic that the other/out-group has and the self/in-group lacks. (2015)

I want to further complicate this position with reference to the dialectic discussed above. While this definition fits part of the Othering process in post-colonial urban areas, it might fall short because it suggests certain constraints that the Othering process does not follow. The way in which this definition fits is the urban notion of the mainstream. Usually referred to as society or simply "they", the urban affluent class invokes this image. The Othering process functions through jokes, stories and myths while holding the dominant aesthetic. Bourdieu calls this negation of the working class aesthetics a form of symbolic violence. As Ali Riaz describes the other/out group lacks desirable traits; particularly characteristic of taste associated with bourgeois culture. Where this definition falls short is that the Othering process can go in a completely different direction where the undesirable traits are associated with one's own existing identity and the Othering is a kind of idealized Othering where the out group possesses all the necessary traits *desirable* to the former. This form of idealized Othering accounts for global flow of culture and how tastes define that certain classes mimic global life. This image of the idealized other is also of an imaginary community functioning through workings of art and media. Hence, the Othering process is not limited to one certain group and the workings of power between them are not so clear cut. One can presume that Dhaka's mimicry of global urban life has to do with reasons of acquiring power and status.

If Hamza Alavi is correct, and state power is in fact held by the middle class, then this ethnography suggests that the middle class interests are tied within consumption, education, status and pleasure

within the market and despite having a critical stance towards the state and its apparitions- reality is that cynicism, apoliticism, intellectualization and consumerist passivity are the political strategies used by this group to retain and exert power. Reminiscent of Soviet era bourgeoisie hegemony, the dominant ideology in post-colonial spaces is a stance of criticism and/or disinterest (which successfully creates distance) resulting in political stasis. This position is an ironic one because hegemony is reserved using the very mechanics of opprobrium that is said to question the authenticity of political power.

In these terms, one could say that the urban post-modern stance is one that arises as a response to the Bengali Muslim Values that dominate the majority of the country's population. I am keen to suggest that Dhaka's growing anxiety has to do with its changing market situation i.e. urban consumption. Built into this system of consumption is choice- and while celebrated by neoliberal values, it is this expansion of choice which contributes to the growing urban "postmodern" culture. Choice entails one fit the role of the "rational consumer." This position entails a utilitarian and economic end but is greatly determined through aesthetics and taste. It is the skepticism of rational consumers and the strategies one assumes to operate freely in the market that disillusion grand narratives. As advertisements mimic social cues to sell products, the rational consumer must adapt with enhanced suspicion and skepticism. This is because the neoliberal system- one that favors freedom for market where businesses have an aim to make profit only, the rational consumer has to keep from getting exploited. One could say that the urban condition regarding anxiety comes out of a view of the world as seen through doubtfulness.

Post-colonial urban mimicry of global culture is neither traditional nor global but a separate categorical reality itself. It is the global subaltern using the master's tools. It is a post-colonial strategy to penetrate and access a global affluent class. It creates a plethora of life chances. It is also unique in its creation. Dhaka's colloquial lingo involves a smart interplay of both English and Bangla: Banglish. Perhaps, one ought to think of Banglish as a whole new language itself.

Some manifestations of this dialectic can be found in recent events in Dhaka. One such instance is a government law for all urban firms to have their Titles written in Bangla alongside English. There was also a case where Islamic political groups took legal action to remove the stature of

Lady Justice from the Supreme Courts' lawn- claiming it was un-Islamic and that a Greek symbol of justice was irrelevant. The state's tactical response was to remove the statue but place it a few yards away inside the premises where it could not be seen from the outside. I suggest this may be a more accurate metaphor for contemporary post-colonial politics than one might at first imagine.

Discussion on Anxiety

Kierkegaard describes anxiety as a dizziness of *freedom*. I am particularly inclined to make a rough anthropological translation of this- I claim that we could also say that anxiety is a particular phenomenology of agency. This paper has discussed various levels of anxiety the post-colonial urban populous functions through. This phenomenon is partially informed by larger structures of families, communities, civil life, state and global. To the individual however, anxiety manifests in a fashion regardless of outward structure because it is experiential, personal and inwards. The individual is defined within the aforementioned larger structures while itself remaining a subject. Kierkegaard regards the self as ‘a thing with relates itself to itself.’

Please note that for Kierkegaard, anxiety is a universal human truth. I want to be clear that my position is not that the phenomenon of anxiety is restricted within one class group or the other. Urban anxiety in Dhaka has to be understood as a phenomenological manifestation of cultural paradoxes and the experience of agency by subjects. These paradoxes, and the *difference*, is unique to Dhaka’s urban populous- their brand of anxiety. Thus, it is rooted in the particulars of Dhaka’s urban history, economy and culture. For this study, urban anxiety has been insightful in understanding certain workings of society discussed above.

Kierkegaard’s philosophy suggests that anxiety is different from the feeling of ‘fear’ inasmuch that the threat is not *obvious*. Instead of running from anxiety, Kierkegaard asks us to confront it. He suggests that true freedom, or true choice, comes from encountering and overcoming that sea of despair. In today’s world of advertising and consumerism, the premise of *choice* could be brought into question, as what is considered largely alluring acts on primal desires and encourages us to function with our default settings; not really choosing. He suggests that the individual resides within two realms of the ‘finite’ and the ‘infinite’. The finite is what’s real, what is communicable and tangible. The infinite is intangible potential- existing as fantasy, until it is conquered into the realm of the finite. In our context, the potential could be the ocean of opportunities that globalism offers to one’s individual identity class situation. Within the infinite potential is a collection of perceived threats, failures and delusional and impossible scenarios but it also includes (in the same sort of frame of consciousness) possible, achievable goals and various ways to attain them. Thus, anxiety is essentially having to shift between possibilities of failure and overcoming. I called it the

phenomenology of agency, because it is the capacity to exert one's freedom- and the anxiety is simply an experience of this occurrence.

Kierkegaard compares the feeling to standing at the edge of a tall building. The feeling that one experiences is not really a direct fear of falling but the fact that they could choose to fall off on their own- and it would be so easy. Anxiety is that dizziness you get when you have freedom to choose, and some of those choices might not end up favorably.

Relating this to the paper and the aforementioned dialectic of superstructure, the urban anxiety can be paralleled with the finite/infinite distinction. Note how this juggling of identities also has the potential for immense failure and success for the post-colonial native. The failure would be regarded as an *unfit* playing of the dialectics. The success would suggest a synthesis of the two dialectics producing a coherent contextual image.

In the view of the world, Homi Bhabha's point is far superior to Edward Said's in ascribing meaning to post-colonial epistemology. Bhabha's point is critical because- as the colonized have a history of doing- success in urban terms is a certain interplay with the tools of the colonial masters. The urban anxiety is almost a necessary constituent of embracing and competing on global turf. Traditional epistemologies and meta-narratives fail to maintain *meaning* as the market situation evolves. I have talked about how the market influences its consumers to take a stance of perpetual skepticism. Ontologically, however, meaning is intact through practices and rituals- which change, but never really stop. I will do a brief review of the whole study to perhaps outline meaning and purpose in urban life in the following paragraphs:

- i. Anxiety of the individual may be affected by the market they are embedded in and their relationship to this market and consumption. Education institutions function in recreating social classes. Most people in institutions treat it as a social affair- educational life is a social life. This necessitates learning of certain mannerisms and aesthetics- a *taste*. Education leads in part to a commercialization and privatization of certain values that might be in contrast with pre-existing familial values. This causes conflict and anxiety within the structure of the urban family. In urban affluent life, it's a densely coded deal between parents and children. Affluent education is westernized and accounts for global flow of culture.

- ii. Social media and technology have changed life rapidly. New mediums entail that certain cultural norms have changed. A brief detour through the technicalities suggested that social media is as just as much real as our world- both are oversaturated with symbols and abstractions. Rather than create a whole new culture, social media builds on existing cultural values. The *real* of social media is partial; one such issue is that it limits the idea of the *public*, through classed groups- which it creates by design. In representing and informing, social media is interactive and can create a feedback loop where it integrates itself into other aspects of culture. The added layer of maintaining a virtual identity can also make one anxious.
- iii. Entertainment is a part of daily urban life. People report hideous accounts of boredom. Entertainment is also a ritualistic acting out of one's tastes. Taste are also closely linked with one's identity. They become the primary form of encountering stories, which are essential in any form of culture. These stories inform behavior, beliefs and action. Urban life in Dhaka is publicly secular- and religion has seen a strong decline in affluent societies. I was keen to suggest that entertainment has taken a religious role in urban life- with its emphasis heroism and moralism. Urban tastes are reminiscent of global, especially American tastes. Global culture flows through its media and technology, and affluent urban residents act as vectors for this project.
- iv. To encounter the anxiety and boredom, many turn towards substances. The use of substances resemble use of consumption and its cyclical nature. Substance use, as with other consumptions, comes with a traditionally masculine trait- entitlement of individual pleasure. Neoliberal values can overwrite traditional values in certain ways. Whether it works better or worse is unclear, but the underlying rationale- of equating pleasure with consumption- might have its drawbacks.
- v. Dhaka traffic is overcrowded to the point of almost hellish. The experience of development has not been pleasant on the urban dwellers. Many perils arise from this project- and much of its workings are criticized. We also discussed certain state measures that cause insecurity and anxiety for citizens.
- vi. Post-colonial states tend to use coercion and fear to maintain the status quo. This is not to say that progress is all bad. The cosmopolitan urban identity is caught up with two dialectics- a traditional thesis having Bengali Muslim Values and the urban anti-thesis taking up a *global* transnational position. Power is held by the affluent middle class, and remaining embedded in the market situation and its structure might be its strategy to retain power. Dhaka has a big wealth gap and many exploitations, conflicts, state and class struggles. Perhaps the underlying project for post-

colonial nations has been to excel at using the master's tools. One of the primary methods to acquire this power is through mimicry and hybridity.

On creating a narrative of personal identity, Kierkegaard offers some solace to the anxious.

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

In outlining the urban Dhaka identity, one must realize that with its history and progression, it is a particular case borne out of the very actions of all its residents. The narrative of identity is weaved only in retrospect, but it is lived through each moment as if endowed by meaning.

CHAPTER FOUR – REFLECTIONS

The developing nation is rapidly changing, especially in its cosmopolitan centers. This change follows a familiar drive of progress- usually something along the lines of ‘make more, trade more.’ The changing landscape of consumption has effects on how people behave, carry social life and identify themselves. This research has argued that there are certain phenomenological responses to the changing market- namely, an observable pattern of anxiety in the cosmopolitan population. This anxiety is sometimes rooted in consumption of goods- such as education, advertisements and media, new technologies and tends to create cyclical patterns of repetitive use. One’s identity also becomes symbolically attached to their commodities; a cultural commodity fetishism. Taste functions as a signifier of class, similarly to wealth. Thus, one’s aesthetic preference is held up high- if not higher than wealth-related status. Urban identities hold power because they resemble global languages of power. It is essentially a *mimicry* of the colonizers that endows local identity with status. Some of these identities conflict with traditional local identities. With the narrative of progress, introducing this market situation to other locations may result in conflict. If the affluent *winner*s of society’s class game are afflicted with anxiety and dread, one might ask what wealth this is *for* then. I want to problematize the premise of *choice* with the rise of neoliberalism at the turn of the century. It is not clear where the line between aesthetics and morality lie in transnational urban culture. Taste becomes a primary signifier of one’s identity- and uphold what it means to be *them*.

Conclusion

I suggest that in urban life, the aesthetic and the moral become indistinguishable or one in the same. The invisible condition that comes with neoliberalism, individualism and freedom to choose is a burden of choice that now falls completely on the consumers. No wonder Dhaka’s affluent class is anxious- using urban rationale, every choice, which almost by definition is meant to be informed by one’s tastes and preferences, becomes moral questions of right and wrong; and contrary to the claim made by profit seeking businesses, the customer may not always be right. In Dhaka’s urban life, choice creates a heaviness- an anxiety or dread in the affluent middle class’ everyday life while selling itself purely as freedom.

APPENDIX -**References**

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