

Navigating Timescapes And Faculty Life in the Urban Global South: Bangladeshi Faculty Perspectives

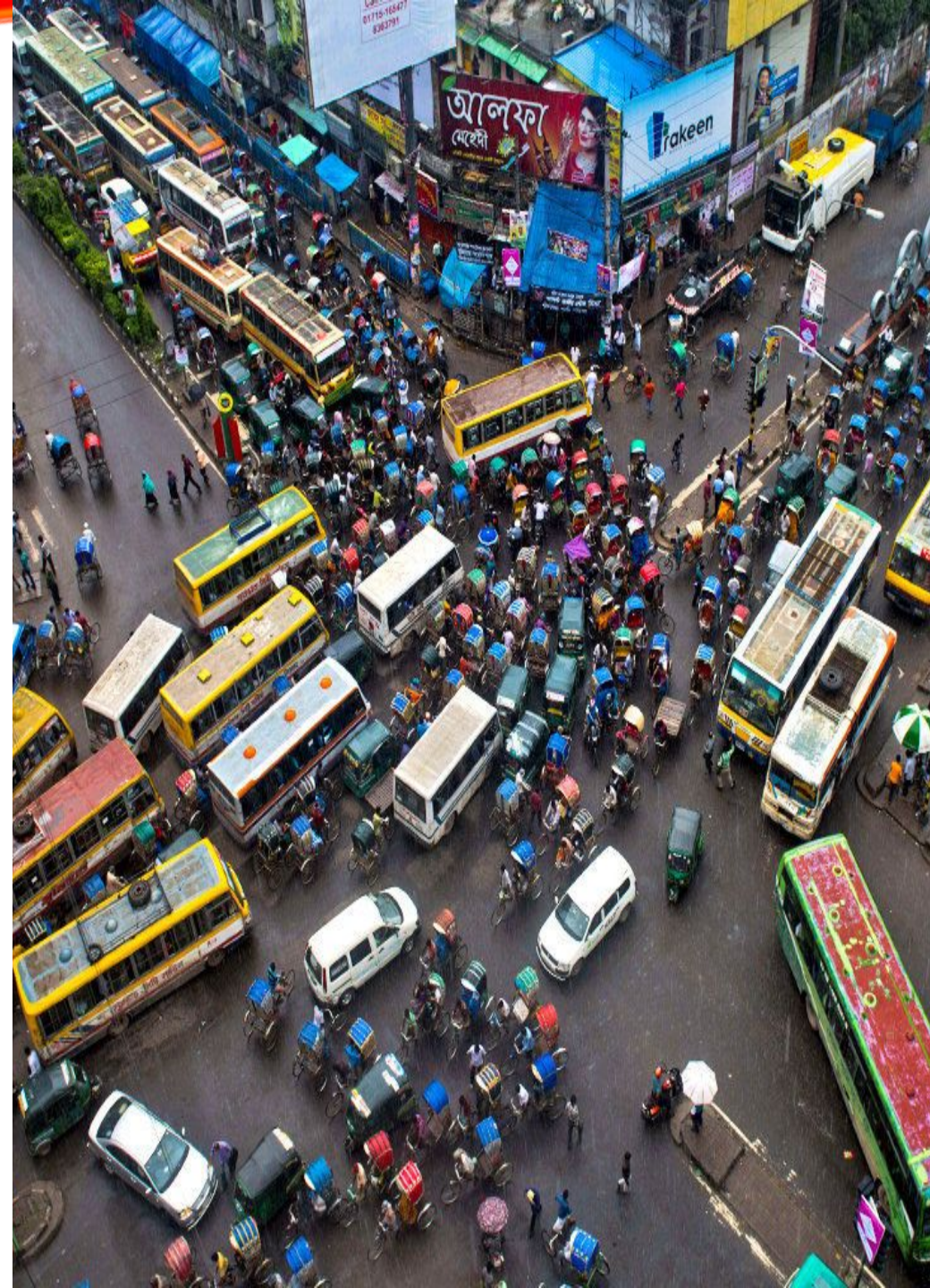
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Well, I used to plan before. But then I realized that in our situation [In Bangladesh], plans [don't work]. Suppose, I got out into the road thinking that I will reach my destination in an hour, but I can't even reach there in 3 hours, as it turns out. **So I have given up planning. Now I adapt to the situation.... I mean, nothing is very predictable. Unpredictability is very high.** [Because of people?] **You know, because of culture also.... The situation becomes something that is out of my control. In [Global North city], everything was under my control. But here, you never know what happens when. An uncertainty.** (Sabuj, Professor in Social Sciences in Public University)

- Where are such Global South perspectives in time studies in HE literature?



BANGLADESH

- The world's eighth-most populous country
- One of the fastest growing economies in the South Asian context (World Bank, 2020)
 - Rapid urbanization, overcrowding, pollution, and large inequities
- Shifted *bela* to modern clock time and *Bangla bochor* to a gregorian calendar
 - New timescapes: not fully modern, not fully local/traditional
- The two major ruling parties entrench their temporal changes
 - Allocating events to establish historical narratives of their party



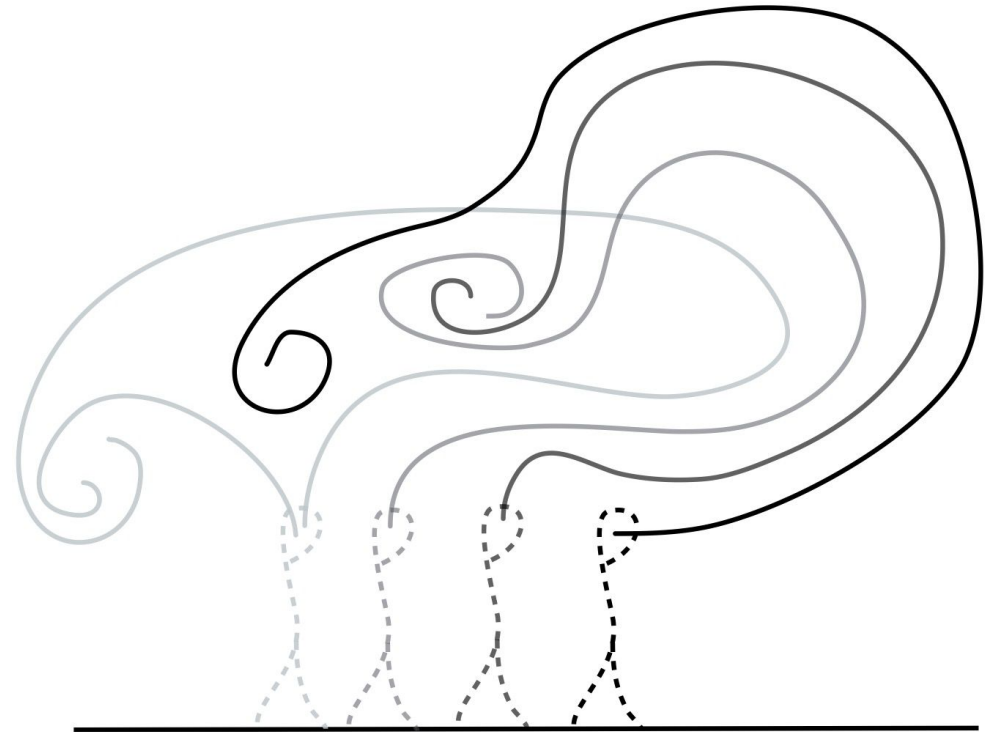
BANGLADESHI HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

- **Overlapping timescapes in Bangladeshi HE** with roots in British colonialism
 - Public institutions are derivatives of British HE (currently 49)
 - Private institutions introduced in 1990s, American models (currently 107)
- **Temporal differences between public and private higher education** in Bangladesh
 - Examples: state politics, accountability, hiring, and research funding
- **We focus on urban universities in the greater region of Dhaka**
 - Capital of and largest city in Bangladesh--over 21 million, 23,234 people per square kilometer within a total area of 300 square kilometers.
 - HE hub in Bangladesh: 55 private and 11 public HE institutions (numerous affiliated colleges under two universities)
 - Diversity based on gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic class, given people converge from different regions of the country



SHOMOYSCAPES AND LIFE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

- Built on Adam's (1995) idea of timescapes to introduce a culturally sustaining concept of *shomoyscapes*
 - Bengali word 'shomoy' = time; it goes beyond clock time
- Similar to timescapes
 - An assemblage of temporal features
 - Inseparability of time from space or context
 - Encompasses social difference



SHOMOYSCAPES AND LIFE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

- Different from timescapes
 - Collective nature of temporality, precarity, social hierarchy
 - Presence of both non-linear and linear time
 - Modern and Bengali notions of temporality are intertwined and in contestation (e.g., traditional family structures)



METHODOLOGY

- Semi-structured interviews with **22 Bangladeshi academics, campus visits, and observations** across **4 different universities** located in Dhaka, Bangladesh
 - **2 public research universities**, and **2 private universities** (small teaching and 1 research-intensive university)
 - **Female (9)** and **Male (12)**; **11 senior** (full professor, professor emeritus, and associate professor) and **11 junior academics** (lecturer, senior lecturer, assistant professor).
 - Bengali Muslims (19), Bengali Hindu (2), and ethnic minority (1).
 - Fields ranging from **hard sciences** (e.g. Physics), **biomedical sciences** (e.g. Genetics), to **social sciences** (Business, Environmental Science, General education, Political Science, Archaeology), **humanities** (English) and **fine arts** (Art, Graphic design).
- **60-80 minute semi-structured interviews** (either in Bengali or English) covering different aspects of academic life (**roles and tasks, trajectory, academic career and work/family balance**), including their **perceptions of time**, their **relationships and dilemmas with time** in their academic work, and the **role of affect** within such temporal contexts.
- Data analysis--open coding, writing as a method of inquiry

ARGUMENT

- We argue that Bangladeshi faculty negotiate their shomoyscapes by subjectively responding to the external precarity (and temporal constraints) evoked by larger spatial, structural or cultural temporal forces.
- We illuminate how *shomoyscapes* manifest through various temporal forces such as: a) traffic, b) party-based university politics, and c) the future of others.

TRAFFIC: SHOMOYSCAPES, SPACE, DISPLACEMENT

- Traffic “jam”
 - Deters mobility
 - Causes spatio-temporal discontinuity
- Non-negotiable
 - As one cannot negotiate traffic, they negotiate various temporal categories to fit around traffic.
- A temporal force that **displaces** various temporal categories
 - Attempting to avoid traffic
 - Instrumentalize traffic time
 - Collective social time



Image Source:

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/the-heavy-cost-of-traffic-congestion-1560528623>

TRAFFIC

“Where do I have less time in my hand? That’s the traffic. So what we are doing is **we are making use of this traffic jam**. [really?] Yes, for example, I get in my car and **the first thing I do is do all the calls, everyone and everywhere I need to call**. I do all these sitting in my car. And before going to class, **I might need to take a little preparation, I do that**. In the car, on the way.”

(Isha, Professor of Business in a Public University)



Image Source: <https://www.booking.com/hotel/bd/victory.en-gb.html>

TRAFFIC

“I don't have any friendly life- social life now. The friends I used to have- I can't see them or even talk to them that much now. So this is how I made this compromise- since I don't get to talk to them, **I developed a social circle with my colleague from the bus of [my neighborhood].** [...] We all chat and hang out together. Ratul sir (another respondent) also uses the [same] bus. **He and I are doing a collaborative project now. [It happened] Yes, from the bus.** [We didn't know each other before.] It happened on the bus. Well, we met each other on the bus and now we are doing this together.”

(Neela, Associate Professor of Natural Sciences in a Public University)



Image Source:

<https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/unwanted-obstruction-1872115>

UNIVERSITY POLITICS: SHOMOYSCAPES, STRUCTURE, DEMAND

- **Party-based politics**
not 'departmental' or 'internal' politics, but mobilised by national, political party-based factions.
- **Structural spatiotemporal phenomenon**
Public universities were involved in major political upsurges
- **University politics 'demands' time** from the respondents' shomoyscape and thus manifests:
 - **Precarity regarding career trajectory**
 - **Restriction of timeless time**
 - **Momentary precarity**



image retrieved from <https://www.observerbd.com/news.php?id=119266>

UNIVERSITY POLITICS

“Suppose, I need a specific number of publications. But **if I am politically connected, these are not any issues. Without publishing anything, you can be a professor.** But since I am a renegade, an anti-establishment, if they find **any fault with me, I can't even say what they would do** to me....Well, there are externals, but they used to be from foreign universities. But the externals are from outside of [the] university- in our case, from the Foreign Ministry. Although, interestingly they are not academics. Foreign Secretary, Ex-Foreign Secretary were the externals of our board. There is a reason for this. This is actually a **political linkage.**”

(Sabuj, social sciences professor, public university)

Resources in the university e.g. jobs, promotions, contracts etc. are controlled by government politicians in Bangladesh (Andersen, 2016).



image retrieved from www.channelionline.com/জাবিতে-কোটা-সংস্কারের-দা/

UNIVERSITY POLITICS

“If I want to be a good professional lady or professional man, then what I have to do is I have to forget all the **problems in my profession**. So when I heard yesterday that it is the [celebration event] for our VC, I have to come here and **I have to visit with my honorable VC to say [greetings]**. Then I **forget that today my kid has three exams**. I called over the phone to people, “Please, come over to my home. And you will bring my baby to school or not. So please, help me.”

(Zerin, associate professor, chair of the department, public university)

National party politics in Bangladesh is so pervasive that the higher positions of a university, i.e. Vice-chancellor and Pro-vice-chancellor can be considered as ‘political posts’ rather than as administrative positions (Schulz, 2019).



image retrieved from www.channelionline.com/জাবিতে-কোটা-সংস্কারের-দা/

FUTURE OF OTHERS: SHOMOYSCAPES, CULTURE, ENTANGLEMENT

15

- Shaped by collective culture
- One's shomoyscape overlaps with the future of others (relational time), that are also entangled with the past
- Futurity and well-being of one's parents, children, and/or family (Shahjahan, 2020)
- Future of others--dominant concern among faculty as they shared their career aspirations, trajectories and daily temporal rhythms
 - informing their current career aspirations
 - informing their daily temporality
 - family property, childcare, elderly care



FUTURE OF OTHERS

- **“If my family members are upset, I cannot do anything. So that’s my first priority to take care of....** we have some land properties back in [village]. The government is taking that land.... **Because the government is going to make a rail line or platform or something like that. They are acquiring lands. Now my mother is very upset because this land is given by her mother....** Doesn’t matter how much money, she doesn’t want to let it go. **So she is upset and if she is upset, I know that I cannot do anything”**.

He had to get involved **“with the local government staff,” “the local *gunda-panda* (thugs),” “the local politicians,” “financial matters,” and the “police station”** to deal with such family property issues.

(Mahmood, Associate Professor in the social sciences at a private university)



FUTURE OF OTHERS

“Their [Swedish] childcare facilities are very good. The schooling facilities are very good.... **For an extracurricular activity of my son, we have to go to a different school. We have to go to art classes, recitation classes. But they can complete these in their [Swedish] schools....** Secondly, their children are very independent. **Because of my social condition, the condition of Dhaka city, I can't let him travel alone. He is not independent....** But the Swedish- for them, the weekend is the weekend... **But here in Dhaka, even if I am free, I can't do this because my child is not free. He's going to school on Saturdays. So I can't**

[Neela, female Associate Professor in the natural science, public university)



Image Source:

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2020/09/29/dhaka-schools-to-open-or-not-to-open>

CONCLUSION

- There are **no autonomous or discrete temporal boundaries**, as **temporal categories are implicated in each other**, and **entangled with others**. Furthermore, these three temporal forces to varying degrees **displaced, demanded, or entangled** one's timescape.
- **Larger precarity within a global South urban context**, due to rapid urbanization, social and infrastructural precarity introduced via rapid economic growth, **creates multifaceted temporal constraints**, and **introduces complex shomoyscapes** in our faculty lives.
- **Temporal autonomy is not individualistic**, for our participants rather its collective, and responding to the needs of others is **not a will** here, but **simply a responsibility**
- The Bangladeshi case study highlights that **precarity seems to be salient**, in **not the conditions within the halls of the universities**, but more importantly the **larger precarity in society that has larger repercussions on faculty lives**.

CONCLUSION

Future research directions

- How do shomoyscapes **converge or vary across institutional types, or regions of Bangladesh?**
- How does shomoyscapes **look similar or vary in other rapidly developing economies**, like Central Asia, or Central America, or Vietnam, aspiring to become middle-income countries?
- How do we **revisit the scholarship of academic temporality from Global South (across lower-income to middle-income) perspectives**, and **what new questions can we ask?**
- How does shomoyscapes **vary for global South faculty** who **experienced academic mobility?**

Thank you
Questions/Comments