

A Temporal Gaze on Work-Life Balance in Academia: Time, Gender, and Transitional Episodes in Bangladeshi Women Faculty Narratives

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Our Focus: Work-Life Balance (WLB) Literature



Purser, 2015

- Privileges outcomes-oriented policy & practice in the Global North and women academics
- Temporality and WLB are under-theorised in the Global South due to absence of WLB policies
- Few studies on South Asian women consider WLB despite studies noting that socio-cultural gender norms shape work-life decisions

Bangladesh, Gender, and Academic Work

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- The world's eighth-most populous country with a fast growing economy and a growing HE system
 - Time adapted for profits and efficiency
 - Women seek employment while their domestic tasks are not seen as “work”
- Women use informal WLB practices
 - 4,472 women faculty of 15,571 academics from middle- or upper-class families
 - Seek temporal autonomy (e.g., junior faculty men; Hossain & Rokis, 2014)
- Women faculty careers vary temporally



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TIMESCAPES

- “Timescapes” – an idea coined by Barbara Adam (1995)
- Timescapes denote a temporal landscape:
 - An assemblage of temporal features
 - Inseparability of time from space or context
 - Encompasses social difference



Clock Time and Timework

- **Clock Time** (Adams, 2004; Roberts, 2008)
 - transnational force of control, linearity, and causality
- **Time Work** (Flaherty, 2020); temporal agency as forms of temporal strategies
 - One's efforts to control, manipulate, or customize one's experience of time, or that of others
 - Chronological re/sequencing; recalibration; allocating
 - Transitional episodes: dilate, stretch, split, & re-stitch



METHODOLOGY ⁶

- We focus on three Bangladeshi women scholars' narratives from a larger study examining the ways in which Bangladeshi faculty make sense of and experience time across various university types. Data collected for the larger study took place between February and March 2020:
 - 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)
 - **Women (9)** and **Men (13)**; **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).
- **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 (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005)

ARGUMENT

- We argue that a temporal lens troubles the outcome (quantitative, clock-oriented) and spatial orientation of WLB practices, as our participants blurred work/home boundaries refracted across social positionality, gendered norms, and relationships.
- We illuminate this by sharing three narratives: Ayesha (a single mother, junior faculty member), Sukanya (a single, junior faculty member), and Hamida (a married retired Professor)

Ayesha: Timework and Synchronicity

- A single-mother, junior faculty in humanities at a private university. Lives with mother, and has a young daughter.
- Overall and daily timescapes
- Workplace as “2nd home”



Ayesha

- Future precarity and gendered constraints
 - Career trajectory
 - Negotiating daughter's time
 - Study abroad

“Legally there are some constraints [with taking my daughter].... And if I don't apply, I'm growing older. So I'm not going to get admission”

- Temporal autonomy because of relationship status
- Ayesha's timework with WLB



Sukanya: Timework as Recalibration to One's Body

- A single-woman, junior faculty in the school of business at a private university. Lives with and cares for parents.
- Daily WLB timescape: clock discipline
- Health as first priority



It is time to let go

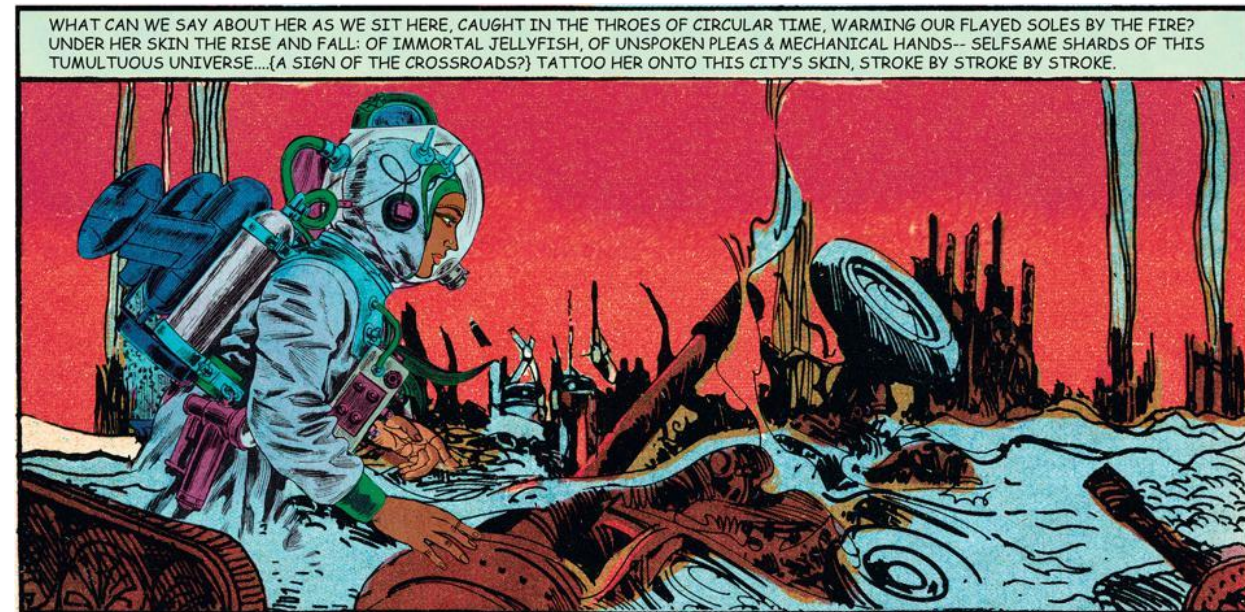
Sukanya

- Transitional bodily episode and job strain constraints
 - “My first priority is my health, my job comes in second.”
 - “I should have a disciplined life, that segregation. That I learnt from them. [Global North residents] are very modern.”
 - “I realised that in any office, you are not an indispensable person. There will always be someone who can replace you.”
- Sukanya's timework: recalibration and academic mobility shaped career shift to academia to create temporal autonomy for health



Hamida: Timework and Recalibration Across the Life-Span

- Professor of applied sciences at a public university, renowned scientist, on the last year of her academic career
- Her present life-
 - Complete segregation of work and personal life
 - Very routined (clock-time bound)
 - Does not take work home
 - Nature of time work: sequencing



Chitra Ganesh, *Her Nuclear Waters*, 2016

Hamida

- In the past-
 - Used to take work home
 - An incident with her daughter- a transitional event
 - This caused her to recalibrate (timework)
- Her WLB is an amalgamation of-
 - Changed timescapes
 - Timework
 - Familial Support
 - Husband
 - Success and recognition in career



CONCLUSION

- **Temporal lens complicates WLB suggesting it's not a fixed entity or outcome**, but a subjective and agentic work-in-progress process
- A temporal lens helps to also **complicate “balance” in WLB** by shifting from **notions of quantity** (i.e. allocation/distribution) to consider **qualities of time** (socio-cultural norms, choices, power laced with individual difference) **negotiated among multiple temporal domains** (e.g. one's life span, transitional periods, and/or other temporal constraints).
- Our Bangladeshi narratives **trouble simplistic representations of ‘Asian Women’** and highlight how faculty around the world **do not enjoy the same temporal architecture privileges** of WLB that their colleagues may experience elsewhere (Sharma, 2014). Instead, Bangladesh women have creative temporal agency **relying on other temporal resources**, such as **relational and social positional support** (e.g., class, education, extended family).

CONCLUSION

Future Directions & Implications

- How do timescapes and time work **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 timescapes and time work look for gendered subjects who cannot/do not take up cis-heteronormative WLB norms in the Global South?
- **Our work has implications for WLB HE policies and practices in the Global South and North** (e.g., individual notions of wellbeing, temporal privileges, local notions of WLB, life-span process).

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