RESEARCH ARTICLE

"*Am I a Scholar?*": Time, Knowledge, and Decoloniality

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Abstract

In this article, the author interrogates the question—"*Am I a scholar*?"— by examining how colonial legacies and the standardized colonial concept of clock time shape who is deemed a scholar within universities and colleges across the Global North and South. While existing studies offer valuable insights into the struggles of marginalized scholars in specific national contexts, they often overlook the transnational temporal dimensions of academic labor and the decolonial implications of these time structures. Drawing on personal experiences and decolonial theory, the author explores how colonial histories of clock time intersect with the geopolitics of knowledge, particularly in relation to marginalized scholars and institutions. It expands the conversation beyond psychological and social dynamics to address the broader transnational temporal forces shaping academic recognition. A key focus is the critical role of care as a scholarly practice, emphasizing radical self-care and collective wellbeing as pathways for healing and transformation. The article concludes by urging readers to reimagine a more inclusive academic environment challenging dominant temporal paradigms and honoring diverse ways of knowing and being.

Keywords: Coloniality of time; clock time; Academic labor; Marginalized scholars; Radical self-care; global higher education

Introduction

"*Am I a scholar?*"

Let me share a pivotal moment from my early academic journey prompting this question. As a first-year doctoral student, I submitted my first piece for peer review, eager for feedback. Instead, I received a stark critique: "This paper addresses potentially significant matters, but it has numerous problems. It is at times, incoherently written.

There are many grammatical errors. Paragraphs do not flow easily. Acronyms are used without elaboration. *Overall, the writing is primitive*" (emphasis added).

As someone whose first language was not English, the word "primitive" struck a painful chord, evoking shame, and stirring narratives of not belonging. It sparked a recurring question— "*Am I a scholar?*"—that pushed me to delve into the colonial histories embedded in academic spaces. As I would later learn in an anticolonial thought course, the term primitive is more than a label. Rooted in the European Enlightenment, primitive was a temporal label marking the Other as backward and needing intervention (Mignolo, 2011).

This personal experience morphed into a broader exploration of colonial legacies in academia. I explored how these legacies shape who is recognized as a scholar and whose knowledge is seen as valid. I am not the first to raise the question, "*Am I a scholar?*" Indeed, many explored this question through concepts such as impostor syndrome, academic unwellness, and the marginalization of particular knowledges (Dillard, 2012; Kuzhabekova, 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Muhs et al., 2012; Rendon, 2000; Shahjahan, 2020; Smith & Ulus, 2020; Tran, 2023). Their work highlighted the systemic barriers—related to race, gender, sexuality, ability, and institutional expectations— contributing to feelings of exclusion within academic communities. Such barriers manifest as a lack of mentorship, exclusion from decision-making, and pressure to conform to hegemonic academic standards, causing feelings of inadequacy, stress, and the need to overperform for validation (Menzies & Newson, 2007; Muller, 2014; O'Neill, 2014; Rotenberg & Carlos, 2018; Ylijoki, 2013; Ylijoki & Mantyla, 2003).

While existing studies offer valuable insights into the struggles of marginalized scholars within specific national contexts, they often overlook the temporal dimensions of academic labor and the decolonial implications of these time structures in global higher education. While many scholars have recently explored the intersections of neoliberalism, time, and academic work (e.g., Bosanquet et al., 2020; Poutanen, 2023; Shahjahan, 2020; Valovirta & Mannevuo, 2022; Vostal, 2016; Zembylas, 2024), they often do not address the colonial legacies embedded in clock time. My analysis highlights how colonial histories of clock time shape the validation of knowledge and the legitimacy of scholars, expanding the conversation beyond psychological and social dynamics to consider the broader transnational temporal forces at play.

I aim to address this gap by combining decolonial theory—specifically the geopolitics of knowledge[1]—and coloniality of time—with temporal analysis to explore how colonial legacies of clock time shape who is deemed a scholar. By unpacking the entanglement of clock time with colonial and neoliberal logics, I challenge the

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[1] Here, by "geopolitics of knowledge," I am referring to the power dynamics and knowledge structures shaped by colonial histories, which establish a hierarchical global higher education system. This system elevates certain knowledge traditions, particularly those from Anglo-Euro American regions, as central to academia, while relegating other knowledge systems to the margins (Alatas, 2006; Connell, 2007; Mignolo, 2011; Shahjahan, 2016; Shahjahan & Morgan, 2016). As a result of these unequal knowledge-power relationships, scholars and students in metropolitan regions do not face the same challenges regarding the global mobility of their research, learning, or credentials. In contrast, their counterparts in peripheral regions are often hindered by limited material resources and a lack of symbolic capital (Fahey & Kenway, 2010; Schöpf, 2020).

assumption that clock time in academia is objective. By bridging insights from critical time studies, decolonial thought, and higher education research, I aim to speak to scholars across disciplines and global contexts who are invested in care justice, and onto-epistemic transformation.

I offer an alternative perspective that reimagines the temporal fabric of academia and invites contemplation of who gets to produce knowledge and be considered a scholar. Through exploring the question—"*Am I a scholar?*"—I reveal the systemic forces shaping scholarly ways of being and propose pathways for healing and transformation. This exploration invites marginalized scholars to embrace self-compassion, reclaim their place in the academy, and reconnect with the needs of their bodies and communities. I suggest moving beyond shame, stress, and anxiety defining academic life, and reimagining a more inclusive and ontologically just future for scholarship. By "scholar," I am referring to faculty, graduate students, and academic staff working/learning in higher education institutions.

When I refer to clock time, I mean the tradition rooted in the Western[2] mechanical clock, developed in medieval and early modern Europe. Unlike timekeeping systems grounded in ecological or celestial rhythms—such as Jewish zmanim, Christian canonical hours, Edo-period Japanese clocks, or Hindu and Chinese cosmologies—mechanical clock time introduced a standardized, linear, and secular framework (Birth, 2016). It emphasized precision and abstraction, operating independently from social or natural cycles (Birth, 2016; Landes, 2000). As I elaborate later, this system became dominant not through universality, but through colonial and capitalist imposition.

This standardized time infrastructure underpins global higher education today. The idea of the "global" is directly tied to the establishment of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) in the 19th century (Nanni, 2012). GMT enabled the precise coordination of railway schedules, telegraph systems, and British imperial administration across multiple territories. Nanni (2012, p. 221) describes GMT as functioning like a "global language, currency, and government all wrapped into one." GMT evolved into Coordinated Universal Time (UTC), a mathematical standard based on the SI second, now used to define the 24-hour day and the Gregorian calendar (Birth, 2012). This shift means our daily timekeeping no longer reflects Earth's rotation, but a hyper-precise, abstract standard. Although diverse cultural temporal logics persist, mechanical clock time still structures academic and bureaucratic systems through control and uniformity. My goal here is to critique these hegemonic structures of academic time, not to flatten the diversity of academic experience in either the Global North or South.[3]

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[2] When I use the term "West" or "Western," I am referring not merely to a geographical location, but to a historical and ideological concept. As Stuart Hall explains, "the West" denotes a type of society that is industrialized, capitalist, secular, and modern—characteristics that first developed in Western Europe but are no longer confined to it (Hall, 1992).

[3] I use the terms "Global South" and "Global North" as geopolitical heuristics, not as geographical or cultural absolutes. The Global South refers to nations, communities, and institutions historically impacted by colonialism and uneven development, leading to disparities in resources and knowledge production (Dados & Connell, 2012)—including minoritized groups and underfunded institutions within wealthy countries. Likewise, Global North elites may reside in the geographic South, complicating traditional

I organize this article into three parts to explore the question—"*Am I a scholar?*"—a question shaped not only by personal reflection but by dominant academic temporalities rooted in Western mechanical clock time. First, I trace how this standardized, colonial conception of time, which was developed to serve industrialization and empire, structures contemporary ideas of productivity and legitimacy in higher education. These temporal logics produce pressures that lead many, especially those whose practices fall outside normative academic rhythms, to question their scholarly belonging. My critique focuses on how clock time informs global academic structures and intersects with power, marginalization, and the need for radical self-care as a response. Rather than relying on a rigid East/West or North/South binary, I target the hegemonic temporal framework itself.

In the second section, I draw on scholarship and my experiences across Global North and South contexts to examine how the colonial legacies of clock time continue to shape academic value and productivity, thus moving beyond abstract critique. Following Sidhu (2006), I situate myself within this discourse by reflecting on my complex academic positionality and identity. As a racially minoritized scholar in the Global North and a tenured, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied academic, my position both constrains and enables my relationship to academic time.

Finally, in the concluding section, I propose radical self-care as both a personal and political antidote to colonial temporalities. This approach offers a different rhythm for academic life, grounded in care, refusal, and the reclamation of time. I raise speculative questions about how reimagining our relationship with time, especially through radical self-care practices, might disrupt the productivity-driven culture based on clock time. By challenging these entrenched temporal frameworks, I suggest cultivating more inclusive, compassionate, and ontologically just scholarly environments.

The Colonial Legacy of Clock Time

First, we need to address the broader temporal landscape shaping our academic lives across global contexts. As a global force, clock time binds us together (Aveni, 2002; Nanni, 2012)—regulating meetings, deadlines, productivity metrics, and scholarly expectations. But how did this come to be? Whose time maps are guiding our academic work? And is this the only way to understand time?

What we now take for granted as "clock time" has a deep, entangled history rooted in industrialization, capitalism, and colonial expansion. Far from being a neutral or universal standard, it is a socially constructed system that has come to dominate the rhythms of academic life worldwide. Understanding how this happened is key to rethinking not only how we work, but what it means to be a scholar today.

Mechanical Clocks and Perceptions of Time

Many forms of man-made clocks were used throughout human history and across cultures, such as sundials, water clocks, astrolabes, hourglasses, and candle clocks; thus, there were many "clock times" (see Mondschein, 2020; Rooney, 2021). However, the use

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distinctions. These terms reflect positions within global power and knowledge systems, rather than fixed locations.

of mechanical clocks profoundly transformed our understanding of time. For instance, the term "clock" comes from the Flemish word clokke and the German Glocke, meaning "bell timer" (Mondschein, 2020). Early clock towers were used to regulate the lives of monastic communities, marking the start and end of prayer, work, and rest (West-Pavlov, 2013).

With the growing use of mechanical clocks in the 17th and 18th centuries, time began to be measured more precisely and became standardized. The coiled spring and escapement system allowed mechanical clocks to shrink in size, shifting time measurement from hours to minutes and seconds. Pendulum-based mechanical clocks detached time from natural processes, creating a context-independent concept central to European subjectivity as clocks shrank in size, shifting from public spaces like cathedrals to private homes and even personal clothing (Mondschein, 2020; West-Pavlov, 2013). For instance, the small pockets in jeans, originally designed for personal pocket watches, demonstrate how time became increasingly personal. This shift in reckoning time reshaped how we understood time. Time was no longer seen as something flowing naturally, governed by sunrise and sunset, or the lunar cycle, or the changing seasons. Mechanical clocks transformed time from something cyclical and fluid—as understood in many pre-industrial societies—into a linear and precise entity. Instead of being measured by natural rhythms, time became uniform units irrespective of context: hours, minutes, and seconds (i.e., mean time).

Time was now regulated to meet the demands of industrialization and capitalism, as it was standardized, divided, and controlled, much like labor or land. Time could now be "spent" or "wasted," with efficiency becoming the ideal (Adam, 2004). This temporal shift was crucial to the Industrial Revolution, which required coordinating labor. Urbanization, driven by the Industrial Revolution, saw European cities and towns experience population growth and land enclosure (where landlords took over agricultural land for personal profit). Factory and city life assimilated rural dwellers into new temporal regimes, exposing them to industrial timekeeping and a time-work discipline dictated by the clock. Rural laborers could no longer work at their own pace; instead, they were constantly monitored and under time surveillance (Mondschein, 2020; Nanni, 2012).

The rise of Christian faiths, such as Calvinism and Methodism, further linked the "wastage of time" to sin, framing productivity as a moral imperative. The proliferation of mechanical clocks reinforced this connection by intertwining Christian moral codes with time management. Christianity's temporal message—life on earth is brief while heaven's eternity is infinite—tied worldly success to salvation (Mondschein, 2020). As Mondschein (2020) put it, "Christianity has an inherent temporal message: your time on earth is short, but the kingdom of heaven is eternal… Using one's time wisely and productively, on the contrary, became a sign of industry and therefore of godliness" (p. 128). As Nanni (2012) noted, Evangelical Christians shaped notions of civility and time discipline to demarcate the "other" (e.g., the working classes) and incorporate them into a structured, time-oriented framework.

The Colonial Dimension of Clock Time

Clock time was not a neutral measure; it became a central tool in the expansion of European colonial powers. Colonization not only extracted land and resources, but it also

imposed a specific time worldview (Nanni, 2012). According to Thu Nguyen, the "conquest of space" was closely linked to the "mastery of time" (cited in Nanni, 2012, p. 29), a process facilitated by the clock. This included imposing a standardized, mechanistic view of time. As certain European imperial powers—such as the British, French, Dutch, Portuguese, and German—expanded their empires, they worked to standardize time across colonies, often displacing or subordinating diverse local temporalities, to extract labor, resources, and land (Ogle, 2015). Many cultures, including those within Europe, organized time around natural, seasonal, or spiritual rhythms—such as the movement of the sun, the phases of the moon, agricultural cycles, or communal ceremonies (i.e., event-based) (Aveni, 2002; Birth, 2016; Nanni, 2012). These practices were deeply tied to the land and community. However, under colonial rule, these systems were often portrayed by colonizers as irregular, inefficient, or unintelligible.

The Aboriginal "walkabout" provides a clear example of how colonial time mischaracterized Indigenous peoples' relationships with time. The walkabout, a rite of passage for young Aboriginal men, was traditionally a spiritual journey connecting the individual to the land. In Australia, British colonial discourse mischaracterized the walkabout as a "waste of time" or aimless wandering. The term "walkabout" was introduced in 1828 by British colonizers to describe Aboriginal people's movements outside the rigid structures of European clock time, implying aimlessness and irregularity (Perkins, cited in Nanni, 2012). The term evoked the colonial belief that Indigenous life lacked the order dictated by Western time systems, reinforcing the idea that Aboriginal culture was "untimed." This misrepresentation reveals a deeper colonial anxiety about non-linear, nomadic, and relational approaches to time, which were seen as incompatible with the industrial and administrative logics of empire (Nanni, 2012).

European colonizers used precise clocks as a symbol of their civilization, rationality, and control, facilitating their domination and conquest. Clocks were symbolic and psychological instruments of colonialism, helping mark the inferior Other, while attempting to reform the latter according to their European temporal standards. Colonizers saw societies without mechanical clocks as "clock-less," believing they followed unpredictable, nature-based time rhythms (Nanni, 2012, p. 30). For colonizers, accurate timekeeping symbolized not only technological superiority but also moral superiority. As Nanni (2012) noted, "Even more influential than the clock, however, was the idea of time that accompanied Europeans to distant lands: the concept of how time ought to be 'kept, counted, and accounted for'—both in a moral and mathematical sense" (p. 30, emphasis in original).

Colonizers sought to impose their mechanical, clock-driven time concepts on the colonized, extending beyond the seven-day week or Christian calendar to facilitate land and labor extraction (Nanni, 2012). In places like sugar plantations in Natal and the Caribbean, rubber plantations in Southeast Asia, and African mines, harsh time regimes were enforced (Ogle, 2015). Resistance was often labeled as "laziness" and punished (Ogle, 2015, p. 93). Missionary outposts and schools, such as Lovedale in South Africa, were key in imposing time-discipline. At Lovedale, the Xhosa were forced to abandon their flexible, seasonal work rhythms, or "irregularity of African work rhythms," in favor of a continuous, year-round schedule (Nanni, 2012, p. 202).

However, as I mentioned before, the imposition of clock time was not uniform, even within Europe, where industrial time regimes were imposed on the working class through coercive labor and schooling systems. In colonial and settler contexts, clock time took on an explicitly racialized dimension. Colonizers used clock time as a technology of governance to regulate colonized and enslaved bodies. This system justified exploitation and upheld hierarchies of personhood under the guise of civilizing progress. In the U.S. white settler context, similar logics governed antebellum slavery. Slaveholders imposed rigid time structures on plantations. Clocks monitored work from dawn until dusk with little rest. Like in the colonies, any departure from plantation schedules was cast as deviant or lazy (Phillips, 2025; Smith, 1997). In short, colonizers and their white-settler counterparts viewed time as valuable only when spent on labor, trade, or empire expansion, dismissing other temporal practices as unproductive.

Colonial clock time was further reinforced during the 19th century, when European powers, especially the British, Dutch, Germans, French, and Portuguese, established time signaling stations (Rooney, 2021). For instance, the British set up over 200 time signal stations across their colonies. These stations not only measured time—they helped control time, ensuring that global trade, military activity, and colonial exploitation operated according to similar European standards (Rooney, 2021). These projects involved legal land acquisitions, labor recruitment, maintenance, record-keeping, and astronomical observations (Rooney, 2021). The tradition of the "time ball," used in these stations, symbolized by the New Year's Eve ball drop in Times Square, dates back to 1833 when the first "time ball" was installed at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, England. The ball dropped every afternoon at 1:00 PM, helping nearby ship captains set their chronometers accurately for navigation (Rooney, 2021).

Greenwich Mean Time and the Colonial Legacy

The establishment of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) was a powerful symbol of colonial clock time imposition. In 1884, the International Meridian Conference declared GMT the global standard, with the Greenwich Observatory in England as the prime meridian (Nanni, 2012; Rooney, 2021). The establishment of GMT was driven by U.S. white settlers—such as scientists, railway officials, and government actors—who recognized the need for national and international coordination (Ogle, 2015). Their efforts were instrumental in shaping global time standards, culminating in the 1884 Prime Meridian Conference in Washington, D.C., where delegates from 26 countries, invited by President Chester Arthur, voted to adopt Greenwich as the prime meridian and to implement a 24-hour time zone system (Ogle, 2015).

GMT became the temporal center for global trade, navigation, and communication, centralizing time around Western Europe, particularly Britain, and positioning London as the hub of global economic activity (Rooney, 2021).The emergence of GMT facilitated an ontological shift, as the planet could be now reconceptualized as "a giant man-made clock" divided into twenty-four time zones, each spanning fifteen degrees of longitude, starting from the Prime Meridian (Nanni, 2012, p. 221). This global standardization of time perpetuated the colonial project, facilitating trade and resource extraction while marginalizing local, often Indigenous, time systems. By imposing GMT as the global standard, colonial powers reinforced their dominance by creating a single,

linear framework of time reflecting the economic and political interests of the colonizers. It was not just about synchronization—it was about control (Nanni, 2012).

Aligned with clock time, the concept of zone-based mean time (i.e., regional standard time) spread across nation-states during the 19th and 20th centuries (Ogle, 2015), though its adoption was uneven. As many nation-states asserted their national identities, clock time became as symbolic as flags and national anthems in defining their uniqueness. Furthermore, middle-class and academic societies, especially scientific associations, sought to synchronize with GMT to signal their modernity, aspiring to be seen as contemporary and global. Elites, fascinated by watches, also internalized the notion that owning clocks and watches was a marker of modernity. Thus, clock time, beyond simply being a tool of coercion during the colonial era, became something more. In colonized and non-Western contexts, clock time was adopted and adapted to assert national, modern, or middle-class identities, ultimately transforming it into a universally hegemonic concept of time (Ogle, 2015).

Today, we continue to live within the legacy of this colonial framework. Clock time—rooted in Western, colonial experiences—governs almost every aspect of our lives. We are governed by a digital regime of time, regulated by atomic clocks and computers synchronizing everything from global financial markets to personal work schedules (Rooney, 2021; Mondschein, 2020). Modern systems like GPS, the internet, and satellite communications rely on atomic time, ensuring everything operates according to the same global temporal grid (Rooney, 2021). This system, designed centuries ago, continues to shape not just how we organize our work and labor but also how we live our daily lives, all within a structure designed for efficiency and control.

So, whose time maps are guiding our academic work? Western European colonial powers, and later U.S. imperial forces, imposed clock time, making it central to global daily life. This imposition shaped historical development and continues to structure how people experience time in everyday routines. From the efficiency-driven logic of industrialization to the digital synchronization of modern society, time is no longer experienced as something organic, rooted in the rhythms of nature, community, or our bodies. Instead, it has become a standardized global system, dictating how we work, when we work, and how we measure even the most intimate aspects of our lives.

The time map we inherited, though not shaped by all of Europe equally, is rooted in a Western European and U.S. imperial legacy that embeds specific ideas and philosophies of time in three key ways. First, time became something that could be measured precisely, abstracted from its context, and applied universally. This logic was not only exported to colonized regions but also imposed on industrial laborers within Europe itself. Over time, it became tied to notions of moral worth and productivity, justifying the imposition of time-discipline both in and outside of Europe. Second, the view of time as a finite economic resource, something that can be bought, sold, or optimized, led to its commodification. Time was reduced to a transactional asset, such as labor, wages, or efficiency, which helped shape societies around economic output and profitability. Third, time also became a tool for othering, used to mark communities or bodies still tied to ecological cycles as backward or inferior. This temporal hierarchy marginalized those who did not conform to dominant norms, reinforcing colonial and

capitalist structures. Not all European societies were colonizers. Many, including parts of Eastern and Southern Europe and post-Soviet regions, experienced colonization or internal marginalization. Despite this diversity, the dominance of Western clock time remains historically tied to European imperial expansion and control. The colonial legacy embedded in clock time continues to shape our world today, influencing not only labor and economics but also how we relate to time through our bodies, communities, and institutions.

Colonial Legacies of Time and Academic Work

Clock time continues to govern our lives, shaping not only labor but also our most intimate daily experiences. This prompts a crucial question: "*Am I a scholar?*" operating within this rigid framework, or do I resist its legacy? Perhaps we must begin to question the very rhythms that define our work, our productivity, and our understanding of time itself. Such questions become more pressing when we consider how colonial legacies of time have infiltrated academic spaces, shaping how we perceive productivity and precariousness in the global dynamics of scholarly work.

Temporal Diversity and the Colonial Legacy of Time

In academia, the phrase "I am busy" has become both a common refrain and a moral imperative, reflecting a culture where productivity signals legitimacy. When we are not busy, we may even question our worth, a pressure fueled by institutional demands and neoliberal ideals that prioritize constant output and efficiency (Shahjahan, 2020). For many, the concept of being "busy" is deeply connected to a shared experience of workload and stress—often revolving around rigid deadlines and timelines, tied to an arbitrary, universal time measure: clock time. Clock time became increasingly salient for me, when I coached faculty across disciplines for the National Center of Faculty Diversity and Development (NCFDD), particularly early career and mid-level scholars—cisgender women, queer individuals, and people of color. In the conversations I facilitated, the doubts scholars faced about their work and their worth as beings within academia were largely tied to the pressures of clock time—how it structured their work, dictated productivity, and intersected with their social positionalities, shaping their sense of legitimacy within academic spaces.

But what does it mean to be busy? And why is being "busy" so often tied to productivity? The answer, when we take a closer look, lies in how we structure and understand time itself. As I have demonstrated earlier, the concept of time in academia is shaped not only by individual circumstances but also by broader social and institutional structures—temporal frameworks reflecting deeper historical processes, including colonialism. The role of clock time was especially significant in European medieval universities, where the clock was central to daily life. As Mondschien (2020) noted,

> Much as today, running a medieval university required a great deal of coordination. Scheduling faculty meetings, examinations, and lectures was as necessary then as now... Thus, by the nature of their daily routines, the members

of the university tended to be more conscious of time—and at an earlier date—than other segments of society (pp. 65-66).

In other words, medieval universities, compared to many other segments of European society, pioneered the fostering of clock time consciousness. The academic institutions we inherited today embody this clock time legacy. The imposition and acceptance of clock time—emphasizing linearity, productivity, and control—has become deeply ingrained in academic life. But is this the only way to understand and experience time?

Varying temporal experiences delineate our academic life today. The "busy" academic is often someone struggling to meet external demands. But these temporal experiences vary greatly depending on the disciplines we work in, institutional contexts, academic rank, and our social identities like race, ability, ethnicity, class, gender, and nationality (Shahjahan, 2020; Vostal, 2016). For example, consider the difference in temporal experiences between myself, a tenured professor at a research university in the Global North, where my time is relatively self-directed, and a contingent faculty member, whose job security is precarious and whose workday is shaped by contract renewals and the constant pressure to maintain research or teaching performance (Shahjahan, 2020). That said, some faculty, especially those in privileged positions across disciplines, experience benefits from academic acceleration, such as personal enjoyment of a faster pace, competitive advantages, quick task execution and decision-making, and a preference for rapid, electronically mediated communication (see Vostal, 2016). Is it any wonder, then, that minoritized faculty often experience shame when they fail to meet externally imposed deadlines or expectations (Shahjahan, 2020)? This sense of failure is not personal, but rather a reflection of societal pressure to conform to a rigid, linear understanding of time—one prioritizing efficiency and productivity over holistic wellbeing, a status quo reinforced by established academics, whose security might come at the expense of other academics' insecurity.

This rigid view of time, prioritizing future-oriented goals, is deeply embedded in capitalist logics and the colonial experience. The push to "achieve" and meet deadlines forces individuals to shape their identities around future success, often at the expense of present wellbeing (see Shahjahan, 2015). What does it mean to be "productive"? And why do we constantly defer our sense of worthiness to some future self, as if time today were a finite resource to be spent wisely? The pressure to meet deadlines and anticipate future success creates an environment where minoritized scholars are forced to view themselves through a lens of inadequacy, engaging in anticipatory acceleration as they constantly strive to "earn" their place within academic systems prioritizing speed and output over holistic engagement (Shahjahan, 2020). While the forces of neoliberal higher education, power dynamics, academic hierarchies, and insecurity certainly shape these struggles, they are all facilitated and mediated by the concept of clock time, which creates the illusion of time as universal and equally available. This idea of time suggests that our problems with time stem from how we manage it (Bennett & Burke, 2018). However, this view ignores that clock time, an arbitrary construct shaped by larger transnational processes, has entrenched itself as the hegemonic framework that underpins and perpetuates these very forces, shaping our everyday academic lives.

This clock time framing is significant when we examine the intersection of productivity and precarity in academia. The relentless pressure to be productive, albeit felt differently depending on our social positionality—driven by tight timelines, grant deadlines, and publication cycles—forces academics into a perpetual race against time (Muller, 2014; O'Neill, 2014; Ylijoki, 2013). This linear view of time clashes with other temporal logics and frameworks, particularly in contexts marked by precarity and structural inequality. In our recent research, we observed how academic work in the Bangladeshi context is shaped by a complex set of temporal experiences, which we have termed *shomoyscapes* (Shahjahan et al., 2022). This concept underscores the relational and precarious nature of time: it is not merely about individual control or managing schedules, but about how social hierarchies and cultural logics shape our engagement with the world. A *shomoyscape* also represents a landscape of multiple temporalities—where institutional, modern, and often linear clock time interacts with context-specific, relational, or cyclical temporalities. It reflects how individuals navigate constraints, exert agency, and move through hybrid rhythms of life and labor across academic and cultural settings. This intersection complicates our understanding of productivity and, more fundamentally, raises the question: *"Am I a scholar? Do I truly belong in academia?"*

In many global contexts, academic work is shaped by growing precarity, including job insecurity, low wages, and limited resources. In regions affected by war or conflict, navigating these conditions becomes a creative and urgent struggle over time and survival. The colonial imposition of linear clock time exacerbates these challenges and results in temporal agencies. While precarity is increasingly experienced across global higher education systems, its intensity and consequences vary depending on social infrastructure, economic stability, and one's positionality within these systems. For example, scholars navigating structurally under-resourced systems find themselves working within a global knowledge economy that devalues their time and forces them to adapt to linear clock time academic schedules driven by fast-paced production cycles (Marchais et al., 2020; Tilley & Kalina, 2021). This dynamic is particularly acute in contexts marked by conflict, economic austerity, or institutional breakdown. How can scholars from regions marked by socio-political instability and precarity compete on a global scale when their perceptions and experiences of time are shaped by rhythms that differ from the linear, clock-driven model—rhythms that are relational, cyclical, or influenced by the non-linear, conflict-ridden realities of their communities, such as those in Myanmar, Palestine, or Ukraine, to name just a few (Htut et al, 2022; Jebril, 2024; Oleksiyenko & Terepyshchyi, 2024)?

At the same time, regions like the UK and the USA are also facing political and financial instability in higher education systems. In the UK, neoliberal restructuring, austerity policies, and university closures have significantly disrupted academic institutions (Adams, 2025). In the USA, rising right-wing populism has led to funding cuts, attacks on DEI programs, book bans, and legislative interference (Conroy, 2025). These shifts reveal how uneven development and political pressures are actively reshaping academic temporalities across different global contexts.

The reality is today's clock time is a historically colonial construct, shaped by global power dynamics, that has a long history of marginalizing local ways of knowing and being (Nanni, 2012; Ogle, 2015). Hence, the question *"Am I a scholar?"* is intertwined

with rigid, colonial, and capitalist time structures in academia shaping who is considered a "real scholar" by linking productivity and busyness to moral worth. Such temporal frameworks, rooted in clock time, influence our scholarly ways of being, often marginalizing those from minoritized backgrounds or contexts where alternative temporal experiences and ways of knowing—such as relational or cyclical understandings of time—may not align with dominant, linear models. Furthermore, the pressure to conform to externally imposed deadlines and expectations raises the question, "*Am I a scholar?*" by highlighting how academic worth is tied to one's ability to meet these time structures, regardless of one's geographic or institutional location. While the dominance of clock time is unevenly felt, it shapes academic legitimacy in ways that can exclude those whose rhythms or conditions of life challenge its assumptions.

The Global Dynamics of Time and Its Colonial Legacies

We must consider the role that global policies play in shaping academic temporalities. When global policies—such as the push for internationalization, improving one's institution in university rankings, or academic mobility (Marginson, 2023)—create new temporal pressures, how do scholars from such regions adjust their rhythms without losing sight of local priorities? Rankings, internationalization efforts, and the drive to publish in high-impact journals, to name a few, have created a global academic system where local temporal rhythms are increasingly dictated by external forces. Across global higher education, national and transnational policies aimed at internationalization and accumulating global knowledge capital place academic labor at the forefront of implementation. These policies have a tremendous impact on the temporal rhythms of scholars' lives. For instance, policies requiring universities to adopt standardized systems for measuring research output and teaching effectiveness have led to the imposition of clock-oriented timelines on academic work. The pressure to be globally competitive can lead institutions to adopt practices—such as reformed degree cycles and rapid research mobilization—that often misalign with the local rhythms of teaching, learning, or research (see Rotenberg & Carlos, 2018; Tilak, 2023; Vostal, 2016).

Many of my personal encounters with colleagues around the world highlight these temporal tensions. For instance, during a recent visit to colleagues in India, I spoke with faculty at a minority-serving institution (an Islamic-majority university). They shared how many of their colleagues were caught in endless meetings to realign their curriculum cycles with government mandates tied to the new National Education Policies (NEP), which are instituting four-year degree programs. I also met and encountered colleagues from Kazakhstan and Hong Kong who highlighted the external pressure to publish in Scopus-indexed or Social Science Citation Indexed journals while also striving to improve enrollment and retention rates. My visits took up a significant amount of their time, as they generously hosted me and my students despite their busy schedules. However, to some extent, this hospitality was also expected as part of their efforts to assert their global or internationalization goals. As a result, scholars in these regions face competing expectations from both local and global systems, creating a kind of temporal dissonance. How can scholars be expected to succeed in an academic world demanding universal alignment when their clock time, or ideas of time (i.e., temporality), are not even recognized as valuable? This imposition of global policies raises the question of who gets

to decide what "scholarship" looks like. Minoritized scholars from the Global North or South are expected to adapt to Western clock time structures, leading them to question if their own ways of knowing and working are valued in the global academic system. The question "*Am I a scholar?*" becomes entangled with whether one's scholarly practices fit within these externally imposed temporal frameworks.

The tension between academic time, mobility, and the geopolitics of knowledge underscores the colonial dynamics shaping global higher education. Due to the geopolitics of knowledge, credentials, knowledge, and/or experiences from the Global North are privileged in the global labor market (e.g., Mignolo, 2011; Schöpf, 2020). Scholars from the Global South must invest considerable time and resources to gain recognition in the Global North, often navigating cultural and linguistic borders to validate their work (Schöpf, 2020). Due to the geopolitics of knowledge, many seek Global North degrees to improve their future career opportunities, prestige, and/or skills (Schöpf, 2020; Yamin & Luna, 2016). This academic mobility reflects deeper colonial logics, where metropolitan centers, primarily Anglo-Euro American contexts, dominate knowledge production and validate academic credentials, leaving peripheral scholars to adapt to the temporal rhythms of the Global North (Schöpf, 2020; Shahjahan, 2023). These scholars face embodied consequences as they shift their schedules and compromise local engagements, further deepening the inequities in academic mobility (Schöpf, 2020).

In Bangladesh, for instance, aspirations for study abroad reflect both career and personal motivations, with scholars seeking better opportunities but also navigating systemic challenges, such as low salaries and lack of institutional transparency (Shahjahan, 2023). Significant inequalities shape who can access the resources needed for academic travel, including funding, visas, time off, and accommodations. For example, a Bangladeshi researcher must navigate not only the academic schedules and expectations of their university but also the time-consuming processes of visa applications, which involve dealing with local passport offices, notary centers, and legal organizations, ultimately consuming valuable time from both personal and professional spheres. Our research on Bangladeshi academic mobility highlights how family responsibilities and dynamics can further limit the ability to travel abroad, influencing the timing and feasibility of international academic opportunities (Shahjahan, 2023; Shahjahan et al., 2023). Academic mobility thus intertwines with relational goals, precarity, and aspirations for the future, highlighting how colonial temporalities shape whose time and knowledge are valued in academia. This raises the question: "*Am I a scholar?*" as scholars from marginalized contexts wrestle with the pressures of conforming to the global academic time frame.

The geopolitics of knowledge, clock time, and academic collaborations are intricately linked, with scholars from the Global South often facing exploitation due to rigid timelines imposed by Global North counterparts (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2019; Tilley and Kalina, 2021; Walker & Martinez-Vargas, 2022) which disregard local conceptions of time and marginalize non-Western knowledge systems (Shahjahan et al., 2023; Schöpf, 2020). Academic collaborations are marked by unequal expectations, as Global South scholars often lack the resources to meet externally imposed deadlines, and institutional responsibilities influence time allocation (Canché et al., 2024; Marchais et al., 2020). For

example, in my collaboration with Indian colleagues on a U.S. grant, synchronizing workloads and schedules was critical to submitting the proposal on time to our funders. Additionally, digital infrastructures exacerbate inequalities, with uneven access to reliable internet, electricity, and data centers disrupting collaborations (Ali et al., 2023; Marchais et al., 2020). In my own experience, virtual meetings with colleagues in Bangladesh were hindered by slow internet traffic, and power outages in India and South Africa interrupted our work. Countries like Bangladesh, with only 19 data centers (Corner, 2022), face significant infrastructure challenges. Finally, digital collaborations are shaped by racial, gender, and class-based temporal constraints, highlighting the unequal distribution of digital and temporal resources influencing the pace of academic work and raise important questions about whose time matters in global academic spaces (Canché et al., 2024; Marchais et al., 2020; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2019; Tilley & Kalina, 2021).

In sum, the concept of time in academia is not neutral. It is shaped by colonial legacies, where linear, standardized time has become the norm, marginalizing non-linear temporalities and imposing rigid expectations of productivity, efficiency, and future-oriented achievement. These colonial constructs burden marginalized scholars, raising the question not just of how we experience time, but who gets to decide whose time matters.

Global academic structures, shaped by colonial histories and strict time regimes, force marginalized scholars—especially those whose ways of knowing or working differ from dominant norms—to confront a painful question: "*Am I a scholar?*" While this question may be especially acute in Global South contexts due to institutional, economic, and geopolitical inequalities, it is not exclusive to them; even scholars in economically wealthy nations like the U.K. are experiencing growing precarity through institutional shutdowns and job losses (Adams, 2025), while well-resourced U.S. institutions now face visa revocations, job insecurity, lack of academic freedom, and structural marginalization amid the rise of right-wing populism (Conroy, 2025). This tension exists within a system demanding conformity to externally imposed time frames, undermining scholars' local knowledge systems and life/embodied rhythms. The central question—"*Am I a scholar?*"—is not merely a local, everyday concern but a transnational one, emerging wherever temporal and structural conditions make scholars feel devalued, invisible, or unrecognized. At its core, it questions the legitimacy of scholars whose experiences and practices fall outside the hegemonic, colonial time structures imposed by global academia. Until we challenge and redefine our understanding of time, one rooted in colonial histories, issues of productivity, precarity, and worthiness will remain unresolved, continuously prompting the question, *"Am I a scholar?"*

Radical Self-Care as a Scholarly Practice

The question "*Am I a scholar?*" is deeply connected to the notion of radical self-care as both a scholarly practice and a political act. Radical self-care is a transformative practice that challenges oppressive hierarchies and promotes wellbeing for minoritized bodies by engaging in the everyday, often difficult work of caring for oneself and others

(Badr, 2022). This notion of care ultimately asserts that "I matter, we matter" (Ahmed, 2014, last para). Radical self-care, as a scholarly practice, challenges the neoliberal and colonial frameworks dominating academia by reimagining the relationship between productivity, wellbeing, and knowledge creation. Scholars are often measured by their output—publications, grants, teaching evaluations, and job security—dictated by linear, colonial time structures prioritizing constant productivity over holistic wellbeing. In contrast, I would suggest radical self-care calls for a redefinition of scholarship incorporating care for oneself, community, and the larger ecosystems of knowledge.

Radical self-care redefines scholarship by prompting the question, "Can I be a scholar if I am constantly sacrificing my health, my community, and my personal wellbeing?" Rather than just taking breaks or indulging in self-care, radical self-care challenges a system demanding scholars sacrifice their bodies, minds, and spirits for productivity, all facilitated by clock time. Influential thinkers like Audre Lorde, who asserts, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde, 1988, p. 205), Gloria Anzaldúa, particularly in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (2015), and Vandana Shiva (2005), who introduces the concept of Earth Democracy, offer valuable perspectives framing care as a political act necessary for survival in oppressive environments. Their work highlights the importance of community care, spiritual activism, and interconnected wellbeing. Radical self-care challenges grind culture's harmful view of bodies as disposable and productivity as worth (Hersey, 2022), emphasizing individual care and collective wellbeing while urging scholars to resist the pressure to equate value with constant output. This is especially crucial for marginalized scholars, facing heightened emotional labor in navigating academic systems, devaluing their contributions. Many scholars expand on this notion of self-care, emphasizing how collective care practices rooted in cultural and indigenous knowledge systems can transform academic spaces (Chilisa, 2019). However, as noted earlier, due to the temporal diversity in academia, radical self-care will look different depending on context—such as discipline, institutional environment, academic rank, and social positionalities like race, ability, ethnicity, class, gender, and nationality. In short, radical self-care acknowledges that unequal time structures can negatively impact wellbeing, especially for scholars facing multiple pressures and intersecting conditions.

Radical self-care also calls for reconceptualizing time itself. Rather than viewing time as a finite resource to be maximized, it encourages scholars to honor rest, pause, and pleasure as vital components of scholarly work (Shahjahan, in press). Such self-care would recognize and honor the time cycles marginalized during colonial histories—those tied to the natural rhythms of the world, such as our bodies, the seasons, and our communities. This shift in understanding time disrupts the colonial legacy of clock time and challenges the idea that scholarly worth is tied to measurable output, fostering environments prioritizing care, reflection, and renewal. Integrating rest and care into academic life is essential in counteracting the exhaustion of grind culture (Hersey, 2022), allowing scholars to reclaim their time as something to be honored rather than spent.

Across global academic contexts, scholars experience pressures tied to clock time, but the ability to resist or reimagine these temporal demands is shaped by uneven access to institutional protections, social welfare policies, and economic security. While some countries with greater power and economic hegemony have shaped the dominant

frameworks of clock time, it is important to recognize that not all scholars conform to or are satisfied with these imposed temporal structures. In fact, scholars across contexts actively negotiate, challenge, and reimagine the demands of clock time. In many Global South contexts, where support structures may be more limited, scholars navigate these temporal pressures while simultaneously finding ways to prioritize local needs and care practices within their own systems of knowledge and engagement. Furthermore, academic environments often fail to provide the necessary resources for radical self-care practices, particularly for scholars in precarious conditions who must balance local and global demands while maintaining their wellbeing (see Shahjahan et al., 2023).

Finally, radical self-care promotes an ontological shift in how scholars understand their existence within academia. By rejecting productivity-driven models that prioritize external markers of success, scholars can reclaim their worth through self-compassion, collective wellbeing, and respect for diverse epistemologies. This shift is particularly significant for scholars in Global South contexts, who navigate the complexities of colonial and neoliberal systems within academia while maintaining and enriching their cultural and intellectual traditions. For these scholars, radical self-care becomes a powerful act of resistance, challenging academic structures that marginalize their ways of knowing. At the same time, this call for care takes on new urgency amid the rise of right-wing populism across the globe, which has intensified the precarity faced by many scholars—especially those from marginalized, racialized, and politically dissident communities. As academic freedoms erode and critical inquiry is increasingly surveilled or suppressed, radical self-care is not just a personal practice but a political stance: a refusal to allow fear, censorship, or hyper-productivity to dictate the terms of scholarly life. Dismantling colonial logics in academia and embracing frameworks centered on care, empathy, and collaboration is essential. As I noted elsewhere (Shahjahan, 2020), neoliberal time reinforces a transactional view of knowledge, where productivity becomes the measure of worth, perpetuating cycles of inadequacy. Radical self-care calls for frameworks that celebrate holistic engagement with our bodies, minds, and spirits, honoring the process of knowledge production.

Process-oriented reflection in academia invites us to value the intellectual journey, relational dynamics, and non-linear paths of knowledge, rather than focusing solely on polished outcomes. This shift from product to process can foster a more inclusive, humane, and equitable scholarly environment. Process-oriented reflection in academia can be applied beyond dissertation defenses, peer review, teaching, publishing, conferences, and mentorship by valuing the intellectual journey, relational dynamics, and non-linear paths of knowledge. For example, at a collegial talk or dissertation defense, rather than focusing solely on findings and theories, can we also take time to celebrate the triumphs and struggles of the journey during the defense or talk itself, not just afterward? Embracing this approach allows scholars to nurture diverse ways of knowing and relating. Moreover, diverse cultural understandings of time, often found across various communities, foreground relationality and collective wellbeing in ways that offer valuable lessons for rethinking academic structures globally (see Shahjahan et al., 2022; Shahjahan et al., 2023).

As we consider these ideas, I offer the following questions for reflection, recognizing there is no universal solution, as that would simply reproduce colonial logics

of modernity: What does it mean to be a scholar in a global context where diverse ways of being intersect? How do colonial and neoliberal temporalities shape our understanding of productivity and success? In what ways can we decolonize our practices, revaluing knowledge produced outside traditional academic frameworks? How can we foster a culture of care, embracing diverse scholarly ways of knowing and being? How can our digital practices reflect or challenge colonial temporalities in academic discourse?

By integrating radical self-care into scholarship, the question "*Am I a scholar?*" is transformed from a query based on external validation to a personal and collective exploration of identity, wellbeing, and knowledge production. Through this lens, being a scholar becomes an act of self-preservation, communal care, and resistance to oppressive academic systems—redefining what it means to truly engage with the world of ideas, our bodies, and communities. I hope this article reinforces the idea that our scholarly ways of being can be multifaceted and that diverse contributions should be valued, helping to ease anxieties about legitimacy. Peace.

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