Article

Peripheral Contingencies: Experiences of International Scholars in Latvia

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Abstract
This article examines the notion of the academic life course from the perspective of international scholars in Latvia—a research system characterised by "projectarisation," yet also by aspirations of increased international competitiveness. In conversation with literature on academic precarity and mobility justice, I investigate the contingencies and non-linearities embedded in the transnational movements of research workers. In the academic life course, mobility across borders is supposed to lead to a permanent job in the future, yet often turns into an indefinite process of moving from one country and institution to the next. Based on semi-structured interviews with 29 international scholars in Latvia, as well as other qualitative data, I examine how this contradiction is experienced in more peripheral contexts of academic knowledge production. I suggest that international scholars in Latvia experience heightened job insecurity while simultaneously making use of professional and personal opportunities.

1. Introduction

Robert and I met at a coffee shop in downtown Riga, the capital of Latvia, for a conversation on a cold winter evening. Having told Robert all the necessary details about my research project on the experiences of international scholars in the country, I started the conversation the way I usually did—by asking him to briefly tell me about his education and work history. Robert laughed a bit and said: "It will take some time because it's very….It's not linear, and I think it's not even common, which doesn't make it interesting." Robert's remark encapsulates the tensions embedded in the contemporary regimes of knowledge production: While linearity may be expected and hoped for in one's academic career, it is not necessarily common. Simultaneously, an "uncommon" career path is not "interesting"—precisely because it is more common than the often-coveted linear career path. That is, there is a tension between the supposed linearity of the academic career and the non-linearity as

the reality for increasing numbers of research workers all over the world.

How, then, does the academic life course play out in practice in the contemporary regimes of knowledge production? What shapes does it take in national research contexts that tend to be considered peripheral in the larger networks of scientific production? Here, I approach these questions from a very specific angle—that of the experiences of international researchers in Latvia. In conversation with literature on academic precarity and through the lens of mobility justice, I shed light on how the academic life course may play out in peripheral locales of knowledge production. I argue that, in the contemporary academic labour market, research work in Latvia has contradictory effects on the international scholars in the country: While they experience heightened job insecurity, they also find and embrace professional and personal opportunities that may not be available elsewhere.

2. Academic Precarity, Peripherality, and Mobility Justice

As social science literature has shown, the neoliberalisation of academia (Nash, 2018; Shore, 2010; Wright & Shore, 2017) leads to a precarious existence for academic workers (Ivancheva, 2015). Spearheaded by the proliferation of fixed-term contracts and the "projectarisation" of research work (Brković, 2020), it takes various forms in different national contexts (Davies & Bendix Petersen, 2005; Gallas, 2018; Heatherington & Zerilli, 2016; Ivancheva & O'Flynn, 2016; Lempiäinen, 2015; Peacock, 2016; Pereira, 2019). Through precarious employment, the non-linearity of the academic life course is thus embedded in the contemporary regimes of knowledge production.

Research workers' movements across borders are a particularly poignant entry point into the discussion about the (in)justices embedded in the academic life course. Nowadays, mobility across borders is considered an obvious part of a researcher's life course (Morley et al., 2018). Early career researchers are particularly expected to embrace shorter- or longer-term employment opportunities in countries and institutions outside their own and are evaluated in the academic job market based on their "internationalisation" (Herschberg et al., 2018). At the same time, while these research positions are posited as part of the academic life course that would lead to a permanent position in the future, the only type of academic positions increasing in numbers are fixed-term ones. This leads to what Ferreira (2017) has termed "indefinite mobility" and Vatansever (2018) refers to as "academic nomadism." These movements may be experienced by scholars themselves—and early career researchers in particular—as forced and exhausting (Carrozza & Minucci, 2014; Manzi et al., 2019; Sautier, 2021; Schaer, 2021).

In this article, I join an emerging set of literature on the movements of scholars to peripheral contexts (Lee & Kuzhabekova, 2018; Luczaj, 2019; Luczaj & Holy-Luczaj, 2022), intensified, I suggest, by the tightening academic labour market across the globe. While I do not engage in the theorisation of the concept of periphery in general or the periphery of knowledge production specifically, in the context of this text I rely on Luczaj and Holy-Luczaj's (2022, p. 4) positioning of the periphery of knowledge production "as countries with a low overall epistemic impact on global science even though they might have outstanding individual institutions or advanced industrial research centers." I add two caveats, though. First, I follow Ivancheva and Syndicus (2019, pp. 2–3) in their argument that peripherality "connotes not only a structural or material position…but also a symbolic or performative position vis-à-vis global policy or core locations that become invoked to justify agendas to implement specific policy reforms," which then results "in self-peripheralizing practices." Second, I concur with Kojanić's (2020, p. 50) position that "centers and peripheries, and relationships between them, are constantly made and unmade through political-economic processes that operate on multiple spatial and temporal scales, and which can be studied ethnographically." To sum it up, peripherality in academic knowledge production is both material and symbolic, it is relational and far from static, and it deserves careful engagement.

In this intervention, I also aim to think of the transnational movements of research workers—both those who have found themselves in Latvia and also more conceptually—through the lens of what Sheller (2018) refers to as "mobility justice." Sheller posits that mobility justice "is an overarching concept for thinking about how power and inequality inform governance and control of movement, shaping the patterns of unequal mobility and immobility in the circulation of people, resources, and information." Her departure for treating justice as situational and embedded in movements stems from the perspective that "most theories of justice have been sedentary, meaning that they treat their object as an ontologically stable or pre-existing thing, which stands still before it is put into motion." Sheller thus argues for the necessity to focus, in social analysis, on "the relations, resonances, connections, continuities, and disruptions that organise the world into ongoing yet temporary mobile formations." For her, mobility (in)justice may occur on any scale and move "across scales and realms," with various forms of (in)justices being interrelated and constitutive of each other. While, in literature, transnational movements of research workers from one fixed-term position to another do not tend to be approached explicitly from the perspective of justice (but see Morley et al., 2018), I suggest that, in the context of the neoliberalisation and projectarisation of knowledge production, a focus on justice may prove crucial in understanding movements across borders as part of the non-linear academic life course.

3. Situating International Scholars in the Latvian Research Context

In their meta-analysis of international academics in peripheral contexts, Luczaj and Holy-Luczaj (2022, p. 4) operationalise academic periphery as a system that is "characterised by at least one of the four following, relatively easy to measure, indicators: uncompetitive salaries, low research allowances…language barrier, and cultural clash between national academic culture and global academia." Latvia, a country of 1.9 million people in the European East, matches this description. In addition, its research system is also characterised by fragmented academic careers, leading to "a succession of individual jobs, which makes career planning difficult and academic careers less attractive" (Ambasz et al., 2022, p. 12).

As Ozoliņa (in press) posits, since regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Latvia has undergone several phases in trying to find its place in the global hierarchies of knowledge production: from narratives of democratisation and Westernisation to those of

knowledge economy and innovation, and, more recently, to an emphasis on internationalisation and global excellence. Due to various structural reforms, higher education and research have become increasingly integrated, with quantifiable research output posited as a measure for evaluating the worth of both research institutions and employees (Ozoliņa, in press). At the same time, in 2020, only 0.7% of the country's GDP was allocated to research and development (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, 2020). In comparison, the European Union average in 2020 was 2.3%, with Latvia being one of only six EU countries where the research and development expenditure was less than 1% of its GDP (Eurostat, 2021). While this expenditure is expected to gradually rise to 1.5% by 2027 (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, 2020, p. 12), and there are ongoing efforts to increase base salaries for academic workers and restructure the academic career model, recent years have witnessed a strong discursive emphasis on the necessity for research institutions and research workers to attract research grant funding, epitomised by, but not limited to, funding offered by the European Union.

This means that academic knowledge production in Latvia is defined by what Brković (2020) calls "projectarisation." Projectarisation, Brković (2020, p. 46) suggests, is "the process of organising the production of scientific knowledge through project cycles that generate 'projectariat'—an increasing number of precariously employed scholars who are also privileged due to their relatively high salaries." In the case of Latvia, projectarisation plays out as the necessity for research workers to remain constantly vigilant for grant funding opportunities. In the Latvian context, where base salaries are low, one's livelihood may quite literally depend on whether a project application is successful or not: the division between grant funding cycle "winners" and "losers" (Berg et al., 2016, p. 170) is particularly stark.

In recent years, the knowledge production system in Latvia has also been characterised by policymaker concerns about the lack of research workers in the country and the low numbers of new PhD holders. Yet again, these concerns need to be situated within the larger context of the projectarisation of knowledge production in Latvia: For instance, most doctoral students in the country do not have structured and predictable funding to support them throughout their studies. At the same time, the lack of workers for longer or shorter fixed-term positions, funded by acquired research grants, means that international scholars have entry points into the Latvian research system, which, in line with other peripheral contexts (Luczaj & Holy-Luczaj, 2022), only has around 3.2% international employees. I now turn to the article's methodological approach and the examination of the experiences of international scholars working in Latvia.

4. Methodological Approach

This contribution, deeply inspired by the ethnographic approach and my training as an anthropologist, is based on an analysis of qualitative semi-structured interviews with 29 international scholars who currently work or used to live in Latvia. To access potential research participants, I first relied on introductions from colleagues at the university where I work, cold-emailing scholars who had appeared in Latvian media, as well as on a more formal invitation to participate in my research project shared by the state agency funding the research from which this intervention has emerged. After that, I employed snowball sampling to access further research participants, relying on the local networks of my interlocutors who were kind to introduce me to their friends and colleagues. I invited scholars working—or having worked in the past—in various fields and at various academic institutions in the country to participate in my project. I do not discuss the experiences of academics with primary, comparatively stable employment in a different country who were in Latvia as part of shorter or longer-term teaching contracts (for instance, as part of Erasmus+, Fulbright, or other programmes).

While the Covid-19 pandemic made in-person meetings and conversations difficult or at times impossible, in the spirit of "patchwork ethnography," I have relied here on "fragmentary yet rigorous data" (Günel et al., 2020) that emerged both from the formal interviews with my interlocutors as well as the more informal conversations and encounters that followed these initial meetings or emerged in other research settings. The interviews were conducted in English or Latvian, lasted from one to two and a half hours, and took place in person or via Zoom. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The informal conversations took place over coffee, via email or on various online messengers, with me catching up and hanging out with my interlocutors, sharing information they may find useful, or responding to their questions and queries about various aspects of employment in Latvian research institutions. While in this article I have mostly focused on the data from the semi-structured interviews, the informal conversations and the furthered acquaintance with some of my interlocutors provided additional perspectives and the continuation of the stories that they shared during the interviews.

The discussion in this article is also informed by the voices of Latvian researchers, university administrators and policymakers. While I do not offer their perspectives in this article directly, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with them, as well as observations made in public online discussions organised by, for instance, the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia, have shaped my understanding of the research context I discuss. My own experiences as an early career academic on a fixed-term contract and an employee of a research-oriented university in Latvia also contribute to the perspectives posited in this article.

The names of my interlocutors are anonymised. To protect the anonymity of the research participants, I also do not discuss too many details of their lives

and circumstances, including their research fields or institutions. While most of my interlocutors have doctoral degrees, very few of them have had what may be considered a linear career path. Their work histories had fascinating twists and turns, shaped by the dominant modes of knowledge production and their personal responses to such demands. In this article, I focus on their narratives, and, through their voices, I shed light on the larger conceptual issues embedded in both the governance and experience of research workers' movements across borders.

5. Living and Working Academic Precarity in the Periphery

5.1. Situating the Contingencies of Research Work in Latvia

In previous sections, I have touched upon the notions of peripherality and projectarisation—both as theoretical concepts in the context of academic knowledge production and their specific local iterations—to situate the presence of international scholars in Latvia. I also proposed Sheller's concept of mobility justice as a useful lens through which to analyse the transnational movements of research workers. Mobility justice with its focus on relations, situationality and understanding that "everything, including movement, is contingent on other moves" (Sheller, 2018), provides a helpful framework for examining the lived realities of two mutually constitutive contemporary processes: the academic career non-linearities and the transnational movements of research workers. For this reason, I focus on what may be referred to as the experience of contingency, by which, in the context of this article, I mean the ways international scholars in Latvia make sense of their positionality in Latvian higher education and research institutions. While not necessarily described as such, contingency emerges in my research participants' stories of their presence and employment in Latvia—a pattern shared by international scholars in other peripheral contexts of knowledge production (Luczaj & Holy-Luczaj, 2022). My interlocutors listed various key moments and elements in their arrival and work at Latvian institutions: from professional networks to personal relationships, from lucky encounters with future bosses at international conferences to fruitful exchanges started by cold-emailing and formal job applications, from developing a close relationship with someone from Latvia to one's partner's job transfer. While each person's path is highly individual and personal, as are their aspirations and values, it is crucial to keep in mind that they nevertheless occur against the background of a tight global academic job market. For most of my interlocutors, their positions in Latvian higher education and research institutions were not their first post-PhD contracts. Many had worked in several institutions—on fixed-term contracts in various parts of the world—before moving to Latvia and taking up jobs there.

My focus in this discussion, then, is on the international scholars' experience of the contingency of research work in Latvia, positing an overarching question: How can the mobility justice perspective inform our understanding of the non-linearities of the academic life course in the contemporary world? To consider this question, I turn to the narratives of several of my interlocutors whose voices bring to the fore the contradictory experiences of international scholars in Latvia. By doing so, I highlight how a move to, and life in, a more peripheral locale of knowledge production may both limit and expand one's professional and personal opportunities. Here, I make a distinction between three loosely defined and intersecting groups of scholars: those who arrived in the country in the mid- to late-2000s, those who followed grant funding, and those primarily driven by kin and other personal ties.

5.2. "The Opportunities Were Real"

I now return to Robert—the scholar mentioned in the ethnographic vignette at the very beginning of this text. Robert has been living in Latvia for more than fifteen years. His arrival in the country and his first short-term contract at a higher education institution there had come about as a result of a combination of two main factors: his interest in the region and a responsive person at one of the institutions he had contacted. Over time, Robert created networks with other like-minded scholars in Latvia and, at some point, joined the department in his field at a larger research institution. His contract since then, however, has always been part-time and dependent on the successes and failures of local and international grant applications. As he put it:

> There has always been this feeling that resources are gained day by day. That the basic allocation of resources for the salaries, for research, is extremely low and very much depends on being successful, on winning, basically, projects….Since so much depends on unpredictable resources, when you win the project, you're officially contracted. The problem is that it doesn't really depend on your experience, your results. It depends on these sorts of external circumstances mostly.

Despite these insecurities, Robert considers that living and working in Latvia provides him with "an additional angle and additional edge" when it comes to his research, in comparison to scholars working on similar topics but only visiting the region sporadically. In addition, Robert thinks of Latvia as "a border country" in the sense that it is a place where "Western" discourses may meet and engage with those of the so-called "third countries." For Robert, these opportunities for unique conversations, of a more profound understanding of the region, surpass the insecurities embedded in the terms of his employment.

A similar stance emerges in Gabriel's narrative. Gabriel first arrived in Latvia in the mid-2000s as a doctoral student due to a chance email exchange with a member of the Latvian government at the time. After that, he worked in different locations across the world for several years, but at one point decided to build his professional life in Latvia. While Gabriel's initial arrival, like that of Robert's and most of my research participants, was a matter of contingency, his decision to live and work in Latvia was quite conscious. After all, it involved, as he put it, building extensive local networks—people on whom he may rely if an employment contract did not work out. Gabriel was aware that his former colleagues outside Latvia did not quite understand his decision, but, as he put it, he had "privileged" his quality of life over his "professional career"—as imagined in the linear academic career model that also presupposes the desire to move to the centres of academic knowledge production rather than the peripheries. Gabriel felt that there was a certain openness to "professional opportunities" in Latvia that allowed him to focus not only on the production of peer-reviewed articles but also on societal impact through various public initiatives. He also thought that the potential for a more egalitarian society—in comparison to the contexts where he had worked before—was present in Latvia, and this potentiality strongly appealed to him.

The experiences of Robert and Gabriel reflect those of the scholars who have had ties with Latvia since the first decade of the 2000s. They had arrived in the country during a period when Latvia was trying to "catch up with the West" and "Europeanise" itself in various spheres of life, including the higher education and research sectors (Ozoliņa, 2009, in press). The desire to align the country's development with that of "Europe" also provided scholars like Robert and Gabriel, both with degrees from universities in "the West," with the opportunity to enter the academic labour market in Latvia at the time and also assume the role of experts and public intellectuals.

As put by Martin, another researcher who, as a comparatively freshly minted PhD had been first invited as a visiting lecturer and then asked to assume much greater responsibilities at a Latvian institution in the mid-2000s, "the opportunities were real…and I took the opportunities." Martin even referred to this move as a kind of "rebirth": Despite the multitude of issues he encountered later over the years trying to decipher his work contracts, relationships with colleagues and higher-ups, as well as his place in the Latvian academic system in general, Martin felt that his initial decision to work in Latvia opened up professional opportunities and networks—internationally, not just locally—that may have remained closed to him otherwise. In Latvia, he was invited to "build something new" and represent his institution in professional organisations—he was no longer "zero point something percent" in the hierarchies of his discipline internationally.

Here, I have highlighted the perspectives of scholars who arrived in Latvia during the first decade of the 2000s.

As participants in the global academic labour market and, at the same time, highly aware of the fragmented and unpredictable research context in Latvia, they nevertheless saw the Latvian academic setting as a space for opportunities broadly defined. For them, there was a notion that work in Latvia provided favourable circumstances to do and experience things—within and outside the confines of academia—that were unavailable elsewhere. At the same time, while degrees from "the West" helped these scholars gain visibility in the Latvian context, this visibility does not necessarily translate into predictable income—for several of my interlocutors in this group, it remains fragmented and unpredictable.

5.3. Following the Money

Along with the shift in Latvian research policies towards "internationalisation," "global competitiveness," and quantifiable research assessment (Ozoliņa, in press) from the 2010s onwards, the entrance of international scholars in Latvia has started to take a different, more structured shape, based on the availability of international and local grant funding and with an eye on increasing publication metrics. Employment offers tend to be contingent upon grant funding, at least for the initial fixed-term positions available to international scholars. The contingent non-linearities here are different than those of the scholars who had arrived in Latvia in the mid-2000s, but they are present nonetheless: The early career researchers in, again, an increasingly tight global academic labour market, take the opportunities available to them. The stance of both the receiving institutions and the international scholars hired is more calculated, with institutions aiming to secure labour to meet specific research (or less often teaching) goals, assisted by external funding, and with early career researchers navigating these circumstances to meet their own needs within a precarious labour market.

Thus, for instance, Astrid was happy when her former mentor introduced her to his colleagues in Latvia and suggested she apply for a grant to carry out her research project in Latvia. Having previously worked on fixed-term contracts in different parts of the world, Astrid was quite excited to get the grant and a job in Latvia, which had two major advantages: it was closer to her home country and had a longer contract than her previous positions. Being closer to home meant that it was easier for her to maintain kin ties and take care of parenting responsibilities together with her partner who had not accompanied her to Latvia. Having a contract for several years instead of months meant a "better sense of security and stability….It's good for your career, so you don't have to think about what will happen in six months, or something." While aware of some shortcomings at her Latvian institution and the fact that, for the institution, her work was a means to reach their own goals within the country's research landscape, Astrid was quite content because her position provided her with the

opportunity to achieve both her professional and personal objectives.

An insight into the opportunities international early career researchers may find in Latvia can also be glimpsed from Ivan's narrative. Having received his doctoral degree in his home country in Europe, Ivan had decided to apply for an EU-wide research grant to carry out a research project in a different country. He felt that, at home, due to "quite strict" research hierarchies, it was not easy to establish oneself as a scientist. Ivan had contacted several institutions in Europe to list as his collaborators for the grant and liked the "enthusiasm" of the potential colleagues in Latvia the most. The grant application was successful—and he attributed this success precisely to the fact that he had applied to work with a Latvian institution. Ivan said:

My colleague who applied in the same year for a Western university, I think, their idea, their application, their names—everything was better than ours. But the reviewer objected—why does this institution need you?…For us, that was super easy to point out, because I needed something, you know, like, the environment where I can realise some new ideas, and, of course, in Latvia, institutions are not as rich as in Germany or the States, so combining some new things, trying something new, usually it's quite a good way to achieve competitiveness…because here the institution cannot just afford to buy 100k in equipment like in the States. So, we need to improvise [laughter].

For Ivan, thus, the professional opportunities offered by work in Latvia lie precisely in the peripherality of the country's system of knowledge production. As he put it, "it's much easier to start something" in Latvia because of the necessity to "fight a bit more," to be creative and collaborative in a context where resources are not easily available. While Ivan's continued work in Latvia is both enabled and made precarious by the projectarisation of knowledge production, he sees the comparatively fragile research infrastructure in the country as an opportunity to build his career—and do so in collaborative and innovative ways.

At the same time, it is crucial to remember that, despite the places and opportunities that researchers carve for themselves in the country, the broader context of the precarious academic labour market is what may drive researchers to accept positions in such peripheral contexts of knowledge production as Latvia in the first place. Ruslan's story highlights this factor. Upon meeting his future boss at a conference, Ruslan accepted a postdoctoral research position in Latvia soon after graduating from his doctoral programme in another European country. At the time, he had no plans to stay in Latvia, and, once the contract ended, he acquired another fixed-term contract—on a different continent. As Ruslan put it: "I thought I would never come back." However, once

the contract ended and other job applications did not work out, he got in touch with his former supervisor in Latvia and rejoined the research group—because the supervisor had grant funding for another team member. While Ruslan now, a few years later, has a comparatively secure position at his institution in Latvia as well as his own research funding and opportunities to do work he considers important, looking back at his return to the country he said: "I decided to stay [in Latvia] because I couldn't find a job. Otherwise, my plan wasn't to stay in Latvia."

The voices I have highlighted here represent a group of scholars whose arrival and work in Latvia are a direct result of the projectarisation of the country's research system and awareness in Latvian research institutions about the dwindling numbers of local researchers. It is precisely grant funding that made it possible for these research workers to find jobs—fixed-term ones in most cases—in Latvia. Unlike the scholars described in the previous section, this group of interlocutors tend to equate opportunities with comparative (on a sliding scale) financial security and, in most cases, do not see themselves tied to the country to the same extent as the academics described in the previous and next sections.

5.4. Following the Heart

The experiences of scholars with personal ties, such as partners, in Latvia, provide another insight into the specific shapes that the contingencies of the academic life course may take in peripheral contexts. Being "rooted" in a country (Pustelnikovaite, 2020) is not compatible with the "academic nomadism" (Vatansever, 2018) expected in contemporary regimes of knowledge production. It is also important to keep in mind that, while not the focus of this article, care responsibilities and kin ties—as gendered processes—are equally incompatible with the precarity embedded in these regimes (Hughes, 2021; Ivancheva et al., 2019; Murgia & Poggio, 2019; Vohlídalová, 2021). For research workers, following one's heart is not an easy feat. Like Carrozza et al.'s (2017) research participants with "living apart relationships," there were people among my interlocutors whose partners resided in different countries; for instance, such was the case of Astrid whose story was highlighted in the previous section of this text. However, there were also researchers among my interlocutors who had made the conscious decision to be together In Latvia. Deciding to live in Latvia for personal reasons and trying to find one's place within the country's research system also highlights the serendipities and contingencies involved in building one's academic life course. Of course, it is important to keep in mind that my interlocutors were people who had been able to make it happen—who had found employment at higher education and research institutions in Latvia even as they had entered the country to join their partners (or following other kin obligations or aspirations), rather than following grant funding.

Take, for instance, the story of Diego. Diego had arrived in Latvia as a tourist while on a break from his fixed-term research position in a neighbouring country. During this visit, he met the person who later became his partner. Diego decided to move to Latvia to be with this person and, for the first few months of his residence in the country, he did not have a paid research or teaching job. Rather, he assisted his partner with their business and, because the specifics of his research field allowed it, continued to work on his personal research project without an institutional affiliation. After a while, an acquaintance of his partner told him that one of the institutions in Latvia was hiring in his field. Diego applied for the job, got it and was encouraged and supported to apply for additional grant money to fund his position. While he was able to secure a research job in the end, it had not been an easy process: He had contacted other institutions in Latvia but had either received no reply—a common occurrence among many of my interlocutors—or been told that he would have to be proficient in the Latvian language to be hired.

For Sara, the entry into her current research job in Latvia was, to some extent, facilitated by her partner. Sara had met her partner at a research institution where she used to work and the partner happened to visit. Having travelled to Latvia during their courtship, Sara decided that she would enjoy living in the country as it was different from the highly urban environment that had surrounded her before. Following her move to Latvia, Sara was able to continue her work remotely for some time until her organisation was restructured and her position eliminated. Then it was her partner who was able to provide her with some useful tips to apply for a job at a higher education and research institution in Latvia—first as a part-time lecturer and then as a researcher as well. For Sara, then, it was a combination of factors that opened up the opportunity for her to teach in English and then join a research team at the same institution: her partner's knowledge of the academic and research system in Latvia, the internationalisation of higher education in Latvia, that is, the welcome influx of international students in the country (Chankseliani & Wells, 2019), as well as a local need for qualified experts in her field.

English language study programmes also eased Olga's entry into the Latvian research system. Olga arrived in the country with her partner, who had been transferred to a position in Latvia. As Olga and her partner had small children at the time of their arrival in the country, she was only looking for part-time teaching positions. While her professional identity and accomplishments were very important to Olga, due to her partner's job, she did not face financial insecurity. For her, the opportunity to work part-time, at least in the beginning, was a bonus, not an obstacle—and she was able to turn the position into a secure full-time one over time, with the support of her institution in navigating the bureaucratic labyrinths of the process. Overall, Olga thought, aside from administrative obstacles and uncertainties, it

was easier—mainly in terms of publishing criteria—to reach her current career stage in Latvia "compared at least to Western countries," epitomised in her view by the United States.

While the scholars whose stories I have highlighted in this section also participate in the same academic and research system as the two other groups mentioned earlier, their main reasons for entering the country were personal and kin ties. It is precisely these ties that, on the one hand, limited their career opportunities to one national context but, on the other hand, also facilitated their job search or, over time, made visible context-specific opportunities less accessible elsewhere.

6. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The peripherality of Latvian academic knowledge production is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it exacerbates the uncertainties and insecurities embedded in academic knowledge production globally—especially for those who may lack social capital in the country and its research system. On the other hand, it may open up opportunities to advance one's career, reimagine one's professional identity in novel ways, or strategically navigate the projectarisation of research work. As put by Martínez (2019, p. 184) in his discussion on the peripherality of the Estonian research context, "to be at the margins is a circumstantial condition that requires particular *muscles*, such as openness to risks and collaborations with unexpected epistemic partners, and also ability to resist and adapt to rapid changes and ruptures."

Through the experiences of my interlocutors, I have shown a specific configuration the projectarisation of knowledge production may take in peripheral research contexts. Positing that there is a discrepancy between the ideal and practice of the academic life course, my intervention inquired into how it is experienced by international scholars in Latvia. These researchers are workers in an increasingly competitive academic labour market globally and, at the same time, participants in a peripheral research system locally. Due to this positionality, they encounter both global and country-specific insecurities when it comes to finding and retaining jobs, which they then counter through, for instance, network-building and investments of personal resources in attaining research goals. At the same time, through work in Latvia, they also find both professional and personal opportunities. Depending on the time and conditions of their arrival in Latvia, the opportunities may take different forms—from a chance to take up the visible role of a public intellectual to strategic grant acquisition and career planning, from geographical considerations to finding an acceptable balance between one's professional and personal life.

How can Sheller's (2018) notion of mobility justice, then, help us further understand this process? Sheller (2018) writes that "mobility injustices are not an occurrence that happens after entities 'enter' a space…but

are the process through which unequal spatial conditions and different subjects are made." In this article, I have not discussed the most visible and quite real mobility injustices—for instance, Latvia's mobility regime that has an exhausting effect on researchers who are "third country nationals," especially those from the Global East or Global South. I have also not focused on the equally important gender dimension of the research mobility imperative or the ways the Covid-19 pandemic reconfigured the (im)mobile subject. And, unlike research participants in Vatansever's (2022) study of academic labour activists in Germany, my interlocutors did not frame their experiences in terms of (in)justice either. At the same time, it is useful to think of their movements to Latvia—as well as the migration for mainly fixed-term positions of thousands of other researchers in Europe and elsewhere—from the perspective of mobility justice. That is, a focus on mobility justice makes us ask: How just is the insistence of the contemporary regional and global regimes of academic knowledge production for research workers to keep moving? What kind of subjects and what kind of researchers are created through the terms of employment available to most scholars? What uncertainties are exacerbated and, vice versa, what opportunities come to life through various forms of the governance of research work and the governance of movements?

My intervention provides one country-specific glimpse into these questions. It is important to keep in mind that, as Sheller (2018) also reminds us, "mobility justice is as much about how, when, and where we dwell as how, when, and where we move." It is precisely this relationship between moving and dwelling that I have attempted to capture in this article, positing that dwelling—residing in one place more or less permanently—is not something that transnationally mobile research workers can take for granted. In this sense, the mobility (in)justice that I have emphasised here is profoundly tied to the projectarisation of knowledge production. Brković (2020, p. 38) suggests that the projectarisation of research means that "many researchers who pursue careers throughout Europe may find themselves in the gaps of the fractured and uneven space of European academia." While Brković's discussion focuses on anthropologists working in Europe, her argument can be applied to researchers working in other disciplines as well: That is, the non-linearity of one's academic career, characterised by fixed-term contracts and "indefinite mobility" (Ferreira, 2017), may cause researchers to end up in gaps—created also by particular forms of governance of movement. Investing various professional and personal resources and networks, my interlocutors learn to navigate academic expectations at various scales—all in order not to fall into the gaps that Brković talks about. They may be highly successful in this venture, and to some extent, paradoxically, this success may even be enabled by the peripherality of the Latvian research context. At the same time, the question

remains as to how fair—that is, how just—the demands placed on the shoulders of research workers are.

The academic life course—and the experience of non-linearity as part of it—is profoundly intertwined with policy dreams and aspirations. Both the voices of my interlocutors, as well as my brief overview of the Latvian research context highlight that. The movements, and, of course, lack thereof, of research workers are enabled and shaped by regimes of governance, mobility, and mobility governance. It is crucial to keep asking whether the movements enabled by specific mobility regimes are just for various groups of research workers, rather than the highly individualised 'ideal type'—and what may be done to make them more so. Approaching the labour and movements of research workers from the perspective of mobility justice may push research institutions, foundations offering research funding, national governments, international organisations, and other actors to work towards prioritising more fair, stable and secure terms of research employment.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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