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LIVING AND WORKING RESEARCH POLICIES: THE CASE OF INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARS IN LATVIA

ABSTRACT

The article examines the incorporation of international scholars into the Latvian higher education and research system from the perspective of labour. Whilst recent research policies in the country are aimed at increasing international cooperation to situate Latvia within the global regimes of knowledge production, the number of international researchers in Latvia remains low. Based on ethnographic research, I suggest that this is at least partially because of the largely invisible work that both international researchers in the country and their local counterparts have to perform to bridge the gap between policy dreams and structural realities. In conversation with scholarship on academic precarity and through the lens of interpretive and infrastructural labour, this article shows how the task of 'internationalising' knowledge production in Latvia is entrusted to individual local researchers, whilst international scholars face a multitude of uncertainties regarding their work lives and their presence in the country in general.

INTRODUCTION

As the social distancing rules imposed by the Latvian government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were starting to somewhat ease in Latvia in the late spring of 2020, I was excited and ready to embark on in-person meetings and interviews for my postdoctoral research project on the experiences of international scholars in Latvia. I had arranged to meet a researcher who, I gathered, had not been in the country long, but was quite excited to meet for a conversation. When we met at a coffee shop terrace on a sunny May day, I quickly realised that one of the reasons he had decided to talk to me was the fact that he had looked me up online and

realised that I may know something about the Latvian government-managed funding scheme through which his research project was funded. That is, he saw meeting me as an opportunity to find out details about his funding, the bureaucratic expectations of it, his status at the institution where he was employed, the tax system in Latvia, and, among many other questions and much to my surprise, his salary. He was not sure what his salary would be, he confessed, because the agency website had listed one number, but his contract specified a lower one, and he had no idea what he might expect in his bank account after his first month at work. I was caught off guard. At the time, I could not explain the discrepancy and encouraged

him to talk to the higher-ups at his institution. As baffled as I was, I wrote off this part of our conversation as resulting from the strict social distancing rules that had been in place in Latvia. After all, I thought, this researcher probably had not had the opportunity to talk to the leading researcher with whom he was set to work or the administrative staff at his new institution in detail.

In late spring 2021, however, I had an almost *deja vu*–like conversation with a different researcher. She had arrived in Latvia on a contract similar to that of my first interlocutor. Like him, she was unsure as to what constituted her salary, how the taxes would be paid and how much, and, as she put it, what the research system in Latvia was in general. What were her options in Latvia after her current research project period was over? What did the academic career ladder look like in the country, and would she be in a position to climb it? Unlike the year before, I was better equipped to answer some of her more general questions, but, again, urged her to talk to her supervisor and the other involved parties at her institution.

While the year before I may have chalked up the uncertainties my interlocutor expressed to his individual situation, exacerbated by interrupted communication flows due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this time around I knew that the confusion these international researchers in Latvia faced was systemic rather than the result of individual circumstances. That is, I had realised that the uncertainty permeating the narratives of the two scholars in my short vignette was built into Latvian research infrastructures—or, put differently, shed light on the gaps within them. What I aim to show in this article is that international researchers working in Latvian higher education and research institutions, and, importantly, their local counterparts invest labour into bridging

these gaps. Interestingly, the invisibility of this labour contributes directly to a growing policy concern in Latvia: the lack of research workers in the country.

With this article, I join the conversation on the various faces and facets of contemporary academic precarity. Anthropologists and other social scientists have increasingly highlighted and investigated the structural and systemic ways that contemporary academic knowledge production systems around the world—conceived and enacted as state-endorsed neoliberal projects—contribute to the precarisation of increasing numbers of research workers. As the distribution of research funding becomes more and more project-based, with, on the one hand, short-term positions turning into an unavoidable reality for most research workers in various national contexts, and, on the other hand, research assessment taking increasingly quantifiable, fast-paced, and competitive forms, social scientists have turned to the examination of the effects these systemic processes have on the lives of research employees, as well as their experience of the uncertainties and inequalities built into the current knowledge production regimes.

Scholars have investigated how anxiety and uncertainty are now an unwritten part of the knowledge production process and one's employment conditions in the neoliberal academy (Berg et al. 2016; Gill 2009; Ivancheva 2015; Lucas 2017), exacerbated by the 'audit cultures' within and outside research and higher education institutions (Nash 2018; Shore 2008; Shore and Wright 2017; Strathern 2000). They have described how factors such as the gender, class, and ethnicity of research workers shape the (un)ease and extent to which they can navigate existing academic structures (Bataille et al. 2017; Bourabain 2020; Pereira 2017; Murgia and Poggio 2018; Nikunen and Lempiäinen 2020;

Taylore and Lahad 2018), leading to the erasure of care (Lynch 2010) and the invisibility of caring responsibilities in the neoliberal academy (Hughes 2021; Ivancheva et al. 2019). Social scientific research has also made it clear that early career researchers occupy a particularly precarious position within contemporary regimes of knowledge production (Herschberg et al. 2018a), even though the specific forms this precarity takes and the ways in which it is understood by research workers themselves depend upon national and institutional contexts (Fochler et al. 2016; Gallas 2018; Hawkins et al. 2014; Ivancheva and O'Flynn 2016; Lempiäinen 2015; Lorenz-Meyer 2018; Müller 2014; Peacock 2016; Puzo 2016).

Transnational movements of research workers constitute another dimension of the systemic uncertainties faced by early career scholars. Due to the precarisation of the academic labour market (Ivancheva 2015) and the increasing structural incorporation of cross-border mobility in national and regional research policies (Fahey and Kenway 2010; Kim 2009, 2010), mobility across borders has become envisioned as a value by policy- and other decision-makers (Herschberg et al. 2018b). At the same time, it is often experienced as an uncertainty-inducing necessity rather than an opportunity by transnationally mobile researchers themselves (Carrozza and Minucci 2014; Carrozza et al. 2017; Manzi et al. 2019; Pustelnikovaite 2020; Vatansever 2018).

In this article, I illustrate the composite and compounded forms the anxiety already embedded in the contemporary academic labour regimes in general and cross-border movements in particular take in such 'peripheral' or non-hegemonic (Marginson and Xu 2021) contexts of knowledge production such as that in Latvia—both among international scholars in the country and their local counterparts. Whilst

I elaborate on the specific peripheral positionality of Latvia in a later section of the article, it is first important to acknowledge that asymmetries of knowledge production do indeed exist, with various contradictions built into working from and within the periphery (Martinez 2019). At the same time, residing in the periphery of knowledge production, along with quite material realities, also implies 'a symbolic or performative position vis-à-vis global policy or core locations that become invoked to justify agendas to implement specific policy reforms' (Ivancheva and Syndicus 2019: 2; see also Trifuljesko 2019). It is in this intersection—between the material and symbolic peripheral positionality of the Latvian knowledge production system—that I situate my intervention and examine the lived realities of research policies from the perspective of labour. In particular, I rely on the notions of infrastructural labour, or background work (Star and Strauss 1999), and interpretive labour (Graeber 2012) to examine the seemingly mundane forms of work that international scholars in the country as well as their local counterparts perform, highlighting the ways this labour intersects and colludes with policy visions.

The article has the following structure: in the next section of the text, I explain my methodological approach; then, I offer a brief overview and analysis of some of the policies that shape the Latvian research system, focusing on the 'internationalisation' narrative and the paradoxes built into it. This is followed by a discussion of the chosen theoretical approach and the main ethnographic sections where, through the lens of the interpretive and infrastructural labour concepts and the voices of my research participants, I examine the individual efforts aimed at filling the gaps in the Latvian research system.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The beginning of the data collection for this article coincided with the first COVID-19 pandemic scares, lockdowns, and social distancing regulations in Latvia in the spring of 2020. As a result, the ethnographic and interview data presented here were obtained through the methodological approach Günel et al. (2020) labelled 'patchwork ethnography': an approach to data collection and analysis that maintains 'the long-term commitments, language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking that characterises so-called traditional fieldwork', while acknowledging and taking into account the larger context surrounding knowledge production, as well as the researcher's personal circumstances against this background. Even though the notion of patchwork ethnography does not necessarily equal 'pandemic ethnography', it is a particularly useful conceptual approach in pandemic circumstances when the embeddedness of knowledge creation in the researcher's life and work commitments has become more visible.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with international scholars in Latvia as well as their local counterparts, government officials, and university administrators. These conversations took place in English and Latvian. Due to the restrictions imposed during various stages of the pandemic, as well as health concerns both of my own and among my interlocutors, most of the interviews took place online via Zoom. At the same time, this approach, through snowball sampling, opened a path to interviews with scholars who were no longer—temporarily or permanently—in Latvia, adding yet another layer of perspectives to the collected data.

Similarly, many of the events that I had intended to attend for observation or participant observation were cancelled, and the locations where I had envisioned spending time were closed or had restricted access. Concurrently, there was a boom in online events and meetings pertaining to Latvia's research infrastructure, science policies and funding, and visions for the future—events that would have been closed to me in other circumstances, but which I was suddenly able to join due to their format. As a result, I was able to supplement my data with contextual insights from these discussions, conversations, and presentations. In addition, my positionality both as an early career researcher myself who was at times in the position of being tasked with and committed to making things smoother for international colleagues at my institution provided me with first-hand experience of the 'documentary nexus' (Brenneis 2006: 42) that my interlocutors described in their stories. Having filled out the same forms and despaired over similar issues allowed me to bring to the fore the seemingly boring, yet at times suffocating, details of the knowledge production process that often remain hidden.

My international interlocutors hail from places close to and far from Latvia, and they represent various disciplines, age groups, institutions, work histories, employment contract types, personal ties, and time spent in Latvia. What unites them is the fact that they are—or were in the past—employed by a higher education or research institution in Latvia. In order to protect the anonymity of my research participants, I remain vague on the personal stories and life trajectories of the people whose voices I highlight in this article. For this reason, at times I also use 'they' as a generic third-person singular pronoun. In a similar vein, I do not name specific research and higher education institutions, agencies, or grant programmes, as

I do not want to suggest that they—or individual actors within them—are the source of the gaps that I discuss. Rather, I aim to highlight the wider challenges faced by international scholars in Latvia and their local counterparts, positing that the specific instances that I examine are merely indicative of larger issues rather than the root of them.

My initial starting point was scholars who are now most often referred to as early career researchers, as it is this group that, on the whole, suffers most from precarious and exploitative work conditions (Herschberg 2018a). However, with baseline salaries being comparatively low and project-based funding becoming increasingly prevalent and normalised, uncertainty may plague scholars at every career stage in Latvia. There is no tenure system in place at Latvian higher education and research institutions, and, as the system is quite fragmented and funding unpredictable, it is difficult to plan one's academic career path.[1] Whilst local academics, as one of my interlocutors put it, may be used to the ambiguities built into the current model and institutional interpretations of it, people entering the system anew find it particularly difficult to navigate. For some, it takes years to figure out the details pertaining to their terms of employment, which may also change over time along with funding sources or a lack thereof. As the ethnographic vignette in the beginning of the article highlighted, international scholars in Latvia experience a multitude of country-specific unknowns on top of the uncertainties built into contemporary academic life in general. For this reason, scholars in various age groups and at career stages were invited to become my research participants.

SITUATING INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARS WITHIN LATVIA'S RESEARCH POLICIES

Latvia, a country in the European East with a population of approximately 1.9 million people, regained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. In the sphere of scientific production, this meant that the country 'ceased to be part of a "science centre" (the Soviet Union)' and took on a more peripheral role, looking for 'a new centre as a source of models of research policy and governance' (Ozoliņa forthcoming). Ozoliņa (forthcoming) outlines how, in this historical context, the dominant narratives regarding the future of the Latvian research system and the reforms inspired by these discourses have undergone certain shifts over time: from a focus on democratisation and Westernisation in the 1990s, to neoliberal discourses of the knowledge economy in the early 2000s, followed by aiming to increase the global competitiveness of Latvian academic and research institutions. At the policy level, Latvia desires to be part of the higher education and research enterprise on a global scale, with various policy changes in recent years reflecting this direction.

Yet, as Chankseliani et al. succinctly put it in their discussion of the academic publishing successes of post-Soviet countries, 'the investments in R[esearch] and D[evelopment] are not aligned with the aspirations' (2021: 8703). In 2020, only 0.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) went towards research and development, with the expectation that the share would increase to 1.5% by 2027 (Ministry of Education and Science 2020c: 12). To make up for the lack of public funding, the implementation of Latvian research programmes greatly relies on European Structural Funds (Ozoliņa forthcoming), which

means that there are no predictable—in the long term—funding schemes in place. Since 2014, the so-called 'smart specialisation strategy' has been employed as the guiding light in allocating scarce resources. According to this strategy, the national research and innovation priorities are focused on 'economic transformation towards higher added value and [the] more efficient use of resources' (Ministry of Education and Science 2020b), with specific 'knowledge specialisation areas' as the focus of public research and development spending.

I set these insights into Latvia's higher education and research sector as the background for a paradox that I aim to untangle in this paper. One side of this paradox is the fact that 'internationally' oriented research excellence and 'international cooperation' are on the lips of every research policymaker. There is a desire to be part of the global regimes of knowledge production, and enhancing 'international' ties is seen as one form of attaining that goal. The National Development Plan 2021–2027 (Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre 2020) states that, for instance, 'international cooperation and engagement in European science networks is a prerequisite for future growth' (2020: 8) and that '[i]nternational cooperation and participation in global science and innovation processes is a precondition for Latvian scientific excellence' (2020: 28). The plan also suggests that the 'academic environment' in Latvia should attract 'foreign academic personnel and students' (2020: 8). Another relevant document, the Basic Principles of Science, Technology Development, and Innovation 2021–2027, espouses the same stance. International this-or-that is mentioned 68 times in that 35-page document. For instance, the document states that '[i]t is crucial to promote the creation of ever more purposeful and permanent international collaborations, by getting involved in various research networks,

research projects and (…) mobility activities, as well as to attract outstanding academic and research personnel from other countries (…)' (Ministry of Education and Science 2020c: 16; see Ozoliņa forthcoming for a discussion on the 'internationalisation' language in other Latvian policy documents). Efforts to 'internationalise' the academic environment in Latvia are visible in the current Law on Higher Education Institutions as well: one of its articles states that at least five percent of academic staff at higher education institutions should be visiting instructors from the European Union (EU) or Organisation for Economic and Cooperation Development (OECD) countries.

The other side of the same paradox lies in the fact that, at the policy level—and in popular discourses amongst researchers themselves—there is significant concern about the dwindling number of scientists, that is, doctoral degree holders working in academia, in Latvia. First, there are worries—again, both at the policy level and amongst more established scholars—about young people leaving the country to pursue research careers abroad. Several of my interlocutors, especially those occupying administrative positions, lamented this fact as well. For this reason, the 'internationalisation' narratives of Latvian policymakers tend to hold out hope for (re)establishing ties with Latvian academics[2] abroad—more so than inviting researchers from other countries. Second, the Ministry of Education and Science is concerned about large numbers of doctoral students quitting their programmes without obtaining doctoral degrees and about Latvia having the lowest number of new doctoral degree holders per capita in the EU (Ministry of Education and Science 2020a). That is, according to Latvian policymakers and higher-ups at academic and research institutions, there is a lack of people who might participate in academic knowledge

production. Whilst there are policy initiatives aimed at changing the tide of this process, for instance, by partially updating the way doctoral studies are financed, deliberating on the introduction of a new academic career model, and gradually increasing public funding for research, this process is slow to implement.

The crux of the paradox that I have highlighted here lies in the fact that, despite, on the one hand, concerns about the impending lack of research workers and, on the other hand, an increasing focus on international cooperation, there are few international scholars working in Latvian research institutions. In 2020, only 3.2% of the research personnel in elected positions were citizens of countries other than Latvia.[3] Due to the ambiguities built into the way this percentage is calculated, it is difficult to say how many of these scholars hold full-time research positions and how many also have teaching obligations or other jobs.[4] When it comes to attempts to 'internationalise' the academic environment in Latvia, more attention—and with some success—has undoubtedly been paid to attracting international students, since these efforts are 'stimulated by the demographic calculus and driven by the economic rationale' (Chankseliani and Wells 2019: 639).

Considering the complexities of attracting international scholars to Latvia, in this article, I explore the lived reality of this paradox. Shore and Wright (2011: 8) have persuasively argued that the anthropological approach is crucial to investigating 'the messiness and complexity of policy processes,' as well as 'the ambiguous and often contested manner in which policies are simultaneously enacted by different people in diverse situations'. In line with this approach, I ask: Who does what kind of work to make international cooperation happen and incorporate international scholars in the national and institutional research systems in Latvia? And, how does this process take place in their day to day lives, tasks, and interactions? The answer to these questions—and the paradox outlined above—is twofold: due to gaps in the structural and systemic mechanisms aimed at incorporating international scholars into Latvian research structures and infrastructures, the task of 'internationalising' knowledge production in the country is placed on the shoulders of individual local researchers, whilst international scholars face a multitude of uncertainties regarding their work lives and presence in the country in general.

Before I turn to the exploration of these questions through the voices of my interlocutors, several additional policy-related factors need to be mentioned. Research policymaking and nation-building are intertwined in Latvia (Ozoliņa forthcoming), and, at times, nation-building takes precedence in quite mundane ways that have unintended consequences in the implementation of research policies. To begin with, in Latvia, most research work takes place in public academic and research institutions—mainly universities and research institutes affiliated with universities. According to the Official Language Law, the document flow and official correspondence in and between public institutions must take place in Latvian as the official language. In addition, there is a government regulation stipulating that academic staff—from the level of assistant to professor—at higher education institutions need to have C2, that is, the highest level proficiency, in the Latvian language, unless the study programme where they teach is implemented in English. Whilst the Latvian language proficiency rule does not apply to visiting instructors, 'elected' faculty in English-language programmes, or scholars in full-time research positions, both institutions and individual scholars perceive the weight of these regulations as heavy. For

instance, when applying for a position or a government-managed research grant, a scholar may be asked to provide a Latvian translation of their education credentials and other supplementary documents. The other side of the same coin means that employment contracts must be in the Latvian language. One of my interlocutors had not even seen the English translation of their contract and said that they were not sure what the exact terms of their employment were.

The other major factor is Latvia's immigration policies, which are particularly restrictive to people from states outside the EU and other associated countries. Acquiring a visa to enter the country, gaining the 'right to employment,' and securing a residence permit are no easy tasks for so-called 'third-country nationals', including academic workers. One early career scholar, recounting their experience with a Latvian consulate, bitterly told me that they would not have even tried to come to Latvia had they known the bureaucratic toll it would take for them to even enter the country. Another laughed, having received an appointment reminder from the Latvian Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs in Latvian language only—and later getting confusing directions as to how to pay a processing fee. Residence permits must be renewed annually, and a Latvian interlocutor described waiting anxiously to hear back from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, hoping that the documents prepared by their workplace for international colleagues would prove sufficient, and the scholars would not get their permits revoked and deported.

Of course, this does not mean that everyone is in the position of vulnerability and uncertainty, and I interviewed several international scholars who were well-informed about their employment status

and knowledgeable about, for instance, their rights as employees and taxpayers in Latvia. However, what I aim to bring to the fore in the next section of this article is the question of how these various regulations play out in the lives of my research participants, the labour it takes to figure out and manage them, and the implications for the paradox highlighted in this section.

THE INTERPRETIVE AND INFRASTRUCTURAL LABOUR OF RESEARCHERS

Based on my ethnographic research, I suggest that international scholars engage in various forms of interpretive labour in order to navigate meagre structural support systems, whilst their local counterparts do infrastructural labour to fill the gaps in these systems. Here, I use David Graeber's (2012: 105) notion of interpretive labour as the 'imaginative identification' done by the powerless to 'allow the powerful to operate oblivious to much of what is going on around them'. Describing imaginative identification as a 'form of knowledge', Graeber (2012: 118) centres the fact that 'it is generally the subordinates who are effectively relegated the work of understanding how the social relations in question really work'. His discussion highlights how interpretive labour functions in the context of structural inequality or structural violence (2012: 119), often enacted through such bureaucratic forms of power as, for instance, paperwork.

In turn, by infrastructural labour I mean what Star and Strauss (1999: 15) in their discussion on the relationship between visible and invisible work referred to as background work: 'where the workers themselves are quite visible, yet the work they perform is invisible

or relegated to a background of expectation'. Following Poster et al. (2016), I focus on the invisibility of work that occurs in the context of paid employment and is expected by the employer, yet simultaneously remains devalued. When discussing the infrastructural labour performed by researchers, I aim to show that the acknowledgment—for instance, by policymakers—of this work does not mean that it is valued in any sense that would be meaningful to the researchers themselves. Poster at al. (2016: 11) refer to this kind of acknowledgment as 'semivisibility' or 'invisibility within visibility'. That is, whilst the work may be remarked upon, it does not gain formal visibility in the shape of updated employment contracts or policy changes that would benefit the worker.

To borrow Joan Fujimura's (1987: 258) terms, scientific research requires both 'production work' and the seemingly mundane 'articulation work', which consists of 'pulling together everything that is needed to carry out production tasks'. The second kind of work is often overlooked, especially in the current regimes of knowledge production, which focus on evaluating a researcher's worth through specific and highly individualised metrics. What also tends to be dismissed is the importance of this kind of work in creating and maintaining academic communities through practices and networks of care. Feminist scholarship that centres the difficulty of maintaining a caring, engaged, and connected community in neoliberal academia movingly reveals the extent and importance of this labour—and the exhaustion of those performing it (Lynch 2010; Mountz et al. 2015; Pereira 2019). Whilst feminist perspectives are not the focus of this article, they have informed and shaped my approach.

I use the concepts of interpretive and infrastructural labour as lenses through which to illustrate the lived realities of research policies. In doing so, I show how seemingly mundane processes and bureaucratic details as well as, importantly, particular understandings of them shape knowledge production and, in the case of Latvia, affect the country's aspirations to align itself with the perceived science core. Crucially, I want to suggest that the labour both international researchers as well as their local counterparts invest in making internationally oriented research competitiveness happen retains an invisibility within its visibility (Poster et al. 2016: 11). As such, it remains undervalued when it comes to the contemporary criteria used to evaluate research excellence and the accomplishments of individual researchers. Taking a step further, I suggest that this is one of the reasons why the number of international scholars in Latvia remains low: it simply does not pay off to invest labour in making policy dreams happen.

LABOURING THROUGH POLICIES: INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARS' PERSPECTIVES

I take the engagement with a particular technology as an entry point into a discussion about the forms of labour performed within the larger research system in Latvia. The technology in question is a grant application and management system employed by Latvian state agencies that distribute research funding under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education and Science and other line ministries. The system operates mainly in Latvian. In addition, the funding schemes organised by line ministries and their agencies require several sets of documentation: some information is to be submitted only in English, other documents are to be submitted in English and Latvian, and some more paperwork is to

be submitted only in Latvian, in compliance with the Official Language Law. That is, some parts of the application—those considered most important by the researchers themselves—are to be read by international reviewers and should, therefore, be prepared in English, whilst others are reviewed by local bureaucrats. What this set-up consequently means is that proficiency in the Latvian language is required to operate the grant submission system and, in the case of a successful grant application, to submit various reports, file reimbursement claims, and solve any issues that may come up during the funded project. When an international scholar applies for a grant managed through this system, someone from the Latvian institution where the researcher aims to work needs to translate parts of their application into Latvian, add other required details, and make sure that supplementary documents have Latvian translations. What do these requirements and engagement with the particular technology look like in practice, and what are the broader implications of these encounters? Whilst I take the ubiquity of the Official Language Law as a starting point for this discussion, I aim to show how the emphasis on Latvian language use is tied to other forms of systemic ambiguities built into academic knowledge production in Latvia. I focus on two perspectives: those of international scholars and their local counterparts. I complement these perspectives with views from Latvian government officials, pointing out the ways in which some of the work that researchers perform remains invisible despite the visibility of the workers themselves.

To highlight the first perspective—that of international scholars—I share the story of Annette, a researcher who has been living and working in Latvia for several years. She has remained affiliated with the same institution and research group, but in different capacities over time. Her current project is managed through the grant management system briefly described in the previous paragraph. Whilst not a focus of this article, as a citizen of a country outside the EU, Annette has had her fair share of engagements with 'migration control technologies and infrastructures' (Amelung et al. 2020: 8). As she laughingly put it, the last time she had been at the local Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs to reapply for her residence permit, her file had been span-thick; most of it, she reasoned but was not quite sure, must have been her project descriptions, articles, and other research-related documents prepared by her institution and submitted to the office. When I asked Annette what her main challenges at her institution were, she immediately responded with 'bureaucracy and language'. She wanted to learn Latvian, she said, mainly for her work. Annette explained that she had needed Latvian language skills to apply for her current project and, at the time of application, she had 'asked for official translations' of the necessary documents. But, Annette continued, now she needed Latvian 'for doing all these reports and everything', and it was 'always trouble' because she had to ask someone for help. When I asked her who helped her with these issues, Annette responded:

> Sometimes I ask my colleagues. Yes, they also have the same project, so they are also doing these reports, so they know what to do. And, I also get help from the [institution's] secretaries, they help me. The person who is responsible for this project at the [institution]. They are submitting all these reports, so they help me fill all of this, all the forms and everything. And, also, Google Translate helps.

She continued:

> Also, okay, I ask [an acquaintance] who is a part-time translator, so I ask her for some help (…) and also I need to ask my colleagues for help, because there are terms, scientific terms, which, uh.. for a normal person who doesn't work in the field, they don't know which is the correct term in Latvian. So I need to ask my colleagues, and, (laughter) yeah, they help me with that.

What emerges in Annette's response is the multitude of professional and personal resources upon which she must rely to enter the necessary information into the grant management system: her colleagues, administrative staff at her institution, acquaintances, professional translators, and even technological solutions such as Google Translate. As Annette's narrative also shows, there tend to be project managers or administrators at higher education and research institutions whose job it is to assist scholars with the required paperwork, and the work they do should by no means be underestimated. At the same time, their support falls short many times, simply because of the intricacies of specific research projects and disciplines and the difficulty in translating and explaining these particulars into Latvian—this is where the support and assistance of one's colleagues becomes crucial.

Katrina's narrative complements this view. Katrina has also been living in Latvia for several years. Like many other scholars in Latvian higher education and research institutions, she is on the look-out for grant opportunities to supplement her baseline salary. She has been applying for grants funded and managed by Latvian government institutions as well. Like most international researchers in the country, Katrina speaks several languages, including some Latvian; but, her Latvian language skills are no match for the grant application system. When discussing this topic, Katrina told me:

> You have to fill in some forms online in Latvian. But, again, I get a lot of help from my colleagues in my group. I'm sending to them things in English, and they translate them into Latvian, or I'm trying to translate into Latvian and then they correct my mistakes, so, yeah. (…) The forms are in English, but the online form, there is something in Latvian, like, an abstract, or, like, how this project is going to affect Latvia, why it is good for the country. All this stuff is in Latvian. And the form itself is in Latvian. So, for example, the financial part, you have to know where to put what, and also I'm getting a lot of help from my colleagues, because, again, I have no clue. .. I know that the evaluators are foreigners, so obviously they need everything in English, but why we need this part in Latvian, I don't know. I mean, as long as I have somebody to help me, then it's okay.

Katrina's snippet illustrates that the labour required goes beyond linguistic translation work. The Latvian part of the project application is a specific rendering of the English document— it needs to be couched in terms that address not only the scientific merits of the proposed research, but also the ways in which the project would meet the national research and innovation priorities. Specific wording needs to be employed, references to policy goals made, particular institutional knowledge imparted, and calculations done in a particular way in this part of the application document—nuances that need to be learned and employed strategically and which go beyond the Latvian language requirement.

In his discussion of interpretive labour, highlighting the structural violence of bureaucratic processes, Graeber (2012: 118) writes that '[i]t's those who do not have the power to hire and fire who are left with the work of figuring out what actually did go wrong so as to make sure it doesn't happen again'. We see this work in Annette's and Katrina's narratives, in their investments in finding resources to fill out documentation correctly, to match their interpretations with the requirements built into the grant management system. And, undeniably, this labour needs to be situated both within the Latvia-specific systemic ambiguities, as well as the uncertainties built into the current grant-cycle modes of academic knowledge production in general: after all, one's livelihood may be at stake if the rules and requirements are interpreted incorrectly.

We also see this labour, as well as the anxiety produced along the way (Berg et al. 2016; see also Gill 2009; Lucas 2017) in Peter's story. Peter had arrived in Latvia on a fixed-term contract. Having previously been employed at various research institutions across Europe, at the time of applying for a grant and position in Latvia, Peter was also hoping to get a more permanent position at a university elsewhere. For this reason, during the application period, Peter had prepared the project proposal in English, submitted other required documents and did not know much about the other parts of the project application—those were completed by his future colleagues and the institution's project management department. Whilst his bid for a permanent position was unsuccessful, his Latvian grant application succeeded. Peter arrived in Latvia, and, like the interlocutors whose stories I mention in the beginning of this article, he found his salary to be lower than imagined, whilst the administrative expectations much higher than at any of his

former workplaces. Peter realised that, for every work-related step he wanted to take, he needed to submit form upon form, explanation upon explanation; he needed to learn to navigate a new institution, a new set of rules and systems governing the research process, and, above all, adjust to new life circumstances. Peter found out that certain research steps, taken for granted in his discipline in other institutional contexts familiar to him, were difficult to carry out within the bureaucratic framework of his Latvian institution. He was frustrated and unsure as to where the crux of his difficulties lay—that is, which precise institution was responsible for making the rules governing his work. Peter gradually learned to navigate the system, or, as he put it, 'started thinking like a bureaucrat'; but, this process involved interpretive labour at every step. Importantly, it also led to the loss of a sense of happiness he had had whilst working at the previous institution. After all, returning to Graeber, it was always the international scholars who needed to learn to interpret the new, unfamiliar rules, the source of which they often could not locate and that, at times, seemed illogical or unreasonable; it was never the people making the systems and enacting the regulations that had such an anxiety-producing power.

THE (INVISIBLE) HELPING HAND: LOCAL SCHOLARS' PERSPECTIVES

I now turn to the other side of this interpretive labour coin: the infrastructural labour carried out by local scholars to assist their international colleagues. When we met for our conversation, Andrejs, principal investigator of his own research group at a large institution, was in the midst of helping prepare early career research grant applications that would later be submitted through the Latvian grant management

system. If the applications were successful, the early career scholars would become part of his research group. Andrejs was simultaneously tired and incensed, since he had been both reviewing the research content of each application and managing the preparation of supplementary documents. He outlined: 'I went through the structure of the English version [of the grant proposal], edited, worked on it, fine-tuned it for months. Later, my colleague joined in (…) and translated the documents. It's an immense amount of work.' Andrejs was excited about the prospect of working with the scholars who had decided to apply for the grant; but, as he put it, 'it has been nerve-wrecking'. He continued:

> I have applicants every year, but I think that, overall, the attitude towards them is very hypocritical. Although we are told that we need international [early career researchers], in reality, they simply become a hassle for the receiving institution. I don't know a single colleague who has had an easy, successful experience attracting international [early career researchers]. (…) If I remember correctly, three out of ten documents can be in English, the rest is in Latvian, but keep in mind that there is also parallel, university-level documentation that is in Latvian only. Basically, it means that we need human resources for translating, handling all of this. Naturally, this work is not compensated.

Andrejs was thankful for the project management department at his institution, which offered assistance in preparing applications. He also deeply appreciated the support of his own department. For instance, the department had, without any questions, covered the state fee for the official recognition of the international applicants' PhD diplomas—also

required as part of the application process. At the same time, Andrejs was acutely aware of the infrastructural labour demanded from him and other colleagues. As he put it, 'So, we need citable articles. How can I write citable articles when I'm translating [other researchers'] documents?' The infrastructural labour, including translation work, that researchers perform, is not recognised within the quantification-oriented research performance evaluation structure in Latvia, which tends to focus on increasing the number of peer-reviewed articles listed in specific databases.

Daina, a director of a research unit, was deeply invested in employing international scholars at her institution. Energetic and enthusiastic, she was rooting for every employee under her wing. Importantly, Daina actively worked towards fostering a work environment where international scholars felt welcome and included. For instance, she organised weekly group coffee breaks, as well as small parties around national holidays. Given that Daina experienced the lack of research workers at her institution, she had made a conscious decision to look beyond Latvia's borders for potential employees. She had soon realised that her organisation was 'not interesting to the "old" Europe at all'. As Daina put it, '[n]o matter how competitive we are, no matter that we clearly have the premises, the environment, the science, our remuneration is not competitive enough for them to be able to replace their environment for ours'. Instead, Daina said, her institute had been successful at attracting researchers from countries 'on a similar level as Latvia'. But, she continued,

> We have also realised that the Latvian funds, Latvian projects, are not easily accessible to foreigners. It is what it is. .. The entire administrative part is in Latvian.

We fought very hard to show that that part is completely irrelevant. (…) Someone has to work with them [the international scholars], check what they have entered into the [grant management] portal. It's complete nonsense, because they use Google Translate. They do what they can. It means that additional effort and resources are required of me if I want to uphold high standards and prove that we can do it together.

Like Andrejs, Daina was highly aware of the labour that needed to be invested in preparing project information for the grant management system. She also understood that Google Translate did not cut it; as much as international scholars rely on it (as my interlocutors also stressed), somebody still has to check the translations and make the texts legible for the bureaucratic gaze reviewing them. Daina also acknowledged the toll that the Latvian language documentation may take on international scholars and the anxiety it may cause:

[On top of the Latvian grants], all of the [institution's] internal regulations are in Latvian. Forms for applying for business trips or vacations are in Latvian. No other format is accepted. We must acknowledge that more resources should be allocated. (…) Foreigners simply cannot do it because of the language barrier. They are confused, afraid.

As Daina's statement suggests, the challenges faced by international scholars go beyond the grant management system—they permeate every aspect of their work lives. Daina had partially solved the issue by hiring a part-time employee to assist international researchers. Importantly, the assistance this person provides goes beyond

dealing with the grant management system. Apparently, she accompanies international colleagues to various departments at their research institution and various government offices, she helps them find a primary care doctor, and she helps them understand their social benefits. After all, as Daina put it, there is only so much you can find online; one wants to 'talk to a human about their social options, taxes, exemptions'. Daina's narrative reveals the nitty-gritty details of the 'socio-political production of legal legibility' (Reeves 2019: 25) that is required to incorporate international scholars in the existing research structures and infrastructures—realities that tend to be glossed over in national-level research policy as well as institutional strategy documents.

Importantly, by hiring an employee to specifically assist international colleagues, Daina has made the infrastructural labour more visible. She also acknowledged the anxiety-inducing potential that the current research infrastructures, highlighted by but not limited to the grant management system, may have on international scholars. However, her position was rare, and often the interpretive labour performed by international scholars goes largely unremarked upon and the infrastructural labour done by local scholars is camouflaged in the language of 'help'. As a staff member of a major institution told me in passing when I inquired about the institution's procedures for employing international scholars, 'there needs to be somebody who cares' and 'no process description can replace the human factor'.

Whilst infrastructural work is often rendered invisible (Star and Strauss 1999), we must ask: What prevents people from truly seeing and recognising the work that is being done (Poster et al. 2016: 3)? The perspective of Latvian government officials on the grant management system and the larger research

infrastructure in which it is embedded may offer additional answers. In the fall of 2020, I attended a Zoom presentation of the draft version of a new research policy document. During the meeting, the presenter—a Latvian government official—outlined the goals of the new document, noting the room for improvement in the current research and development system in the country. Having highlighted the importance of international cooperation, they moved on to the topics of 'human capital' and the need to increase public investment in research. In the midst of this narrative, the presenter briefly mentioned that there was a 'dose of unpaid enthusiasm' in Latvian science—and moved on to the next slide in the presentation.

A recognition of this 'dose of unpaid enthusiasm' is also present in policymakers' views on the interpretive labour of international scholars and the infrastructural labour of their local counterparts. Baiba, one of the officials I interviewed, was quick to state in the beginning of our conversation that 'international cooperation is not for its own sake, but to achieve excellence', thereby echoing the dominant policy narratives. She is keenly aware of the necessity to improve the country's research infrastructure, with international cooperation as 'an integral part' of it, or, as she put it, 'a matter of hygiene'. At the same time, as Baiba envisioned it, international scholars themselves are the responsibility of individual institutions. Her position may be summed up in the following quote: 'Of course, the system is not particularly friendly towards foreign scientists. Well, they can apply. There are no restrictions here.' Whilst the 'unfriendliness' built into the system is acknowledged in this remark, the absence of explicit restrictions implies openness. Thus, the task of ensuring 'friendliness' is delegated to individual institutions, which, in turn, rely on the infrastructural labour of individual scholars.

In a very direct sense, policymakers see the labour that involved scholars invest. It was Baiba herself who said:

> [T]here are also numerous administrative issues at play to ensure that they [international researchers] can conduct their research undisturbed. Practical issues, I mean. These are valid concerns. We cannot ignore them. It takes people's time. As far as we know, as soon as academic staff arrive here, they have to go to the State Revenue Service and take care of everything. And they need explanations as to when and where to go, and how to get there. We know that our local academic personnel are wandering university corridors trying to figure out which document goes where. As soon as all the management matters are in order, we see that the international colleagues find it much more pleasant and easier being here. They can focus and dedicate time to their research.

A similar perspective was offered by Guna, an employee of a state agency overseeing the disbursement of one of the Latvian government grants. Commenting on the fact that the institution accepting an international researcher would indeed be responsible for translating and preparing the respective scholar's documentation in Latvian, she said:

> It means that there has to be staff or an assistant at the institution to help the researcher integrate. This may also lead to additional costs. ... If it is an English speaker, they need much greater administrative support both when submitting the application and when administrating it and preparing reports. (…) It is up to the institution to evaluate whether they have

the necessary resources, whether attracting international scholars is a priority. In this programme, it can be a problem if the researcher does not have a close connection to the particular institution or if the institution is not highly committed to this researcher and thus willing to spend time and resources preparing and later also monitoring the application.

Both Baiba and Guna recognise the interpretive labour of international scholars and the infrastructural labour of local researchers. Baiba acknowledges that the 'practical issues' do indeed take a toll on everyone involved in solving them. Guna notes that institutions have to make the decision to invest time and effort into incorporating international scholars, and she recognises the work it takes to do so. As individuals, they see the labour done and are sympathetic to it. Structurally, however, the work remains invisible in any sense that would benefit the researchers performing it. This work, whilst crucial, does not appear in policy considerations, anyone's employment contract, or when it comes to work evaluation. As this labour is rendered unvalued, it becomes a source of contention

Andrejs, the researcher whose voice I highlighted earlier, referred to the policymakers' stance as hypocrisy; at the same time, he also found it difficult to pinpoint the root of the challenges that he and his colleagues encounter when trying to include international colleagues in their groups. International scholars, plagued by various uncertainties— including uncertainties about their careers and their future in a highly competitive and precarious global labour market—also do not find it easy to locate the source of their everyday bureaucratic conundrums. After all, they have to

invest time and effort just to understand what kind of research system and infrastructure they have entered—and, more recently, they have had to do so in circumstances surrounding the pandemic as well. What everyone involved is left with is anxiety produced along the translated documents and filled out forms, on top of the uncertainties built into contemporary knowledge production regimes globally.

CONCLUSIONS

In many a policy discussion, I often noticed a similar sentiment repeated: if only research was better funded, there would be more international scholars in Latvia. In more informal settings, this view was complemented by the perspective that the 'closed circles' of Latvian higher education and research institutions were at fault. By no means am I denying the necessity of adequate financing for academic endeavours or the importance of doing scholarship in connected ways beyond national borders. During my research, I also encountered stories of great financial vulnerability and tales of hurtful exclusion. The focus of this article, however, has been on a much less discussed aspect of the Latvian context—that of the labour of research workers. I have shown how, despite the desire of policymakers to 'internationalise' Latvian science and become more competitive in the global arena through this process, the research systems in place rely on the labour of individual researchers to make this dream happen. To sum it up, it takes interpretive labour on behalf of international researchers in the country as well as the infrastructural labour of their local counterparts to navigate the systems that are available and fill the gaps within them. At the same time, this labour is rendered invisible in any formal sense, since it takes away from the

metric-oriented quantifiable work that is being valued by the same institutions that promote international cooperation.

I have attempted here to draw attention to the issue of what constitutes the work of a researcher in contemporary systems of knowledge production, zooming in on the forms this labour takes in national contexts that tend to be considered peripheral or non-hegemonic—and are experienced as such by those working within them. Whilst research workers tend to gravitate towards the often Euro-American centres of scientific production, research policies and forms of research management move in the opposite direction. Policies that seem to be working (at the managerial level, it is important to add) in hegemonic settings are emulated in peripheral contexts. What the focus on labour reveals, however, is that the borrowing of research policies may also leave various gaps open. Support infrastructures may be lacking, whilst career paths remain unpredictable and reliance upon grant funding—also uncertain—becomes increasingly normalised. The social science literature, some of which I highlighted in the introduction to this article, shows that uncertainty is part of the lives of increasingly large numbers of research workers around the world and is experienced in a variety of ways. In this article, I have shown how this insecurity may be compounded in peripheral contexts. Whilst researchers in Latvia do not experience infrastructural failures physically on their bodies, like, for instance, Ugandan scholars in Calkins' study (2021), they nevertheless carry the burden of infrastructural and systemic gaps, and they experience great anxiety in doing so.

This anxiety represents the less visible side of research policies and the managerial politics of their implementation. It is experienced at the individual level and, as Pereira (2019) shows in the Portuguese context, as collective exhaustion as well. Graeber (2012) has argued that bureaucratic procedures constitute a form of structural violence and that the powerless invest labour in trying to understand the power. The source of it, however, as the stories of my interlocutors show, whilst happiness-reducing and anxiety-inducing, may be quite elusive. Structural violence may be distributed amongst supranational and national institutions, global discourses and their local variants, conflicting policies and offices enforcing them, and the language of care. The moment one tries to pinpoint the source of their difficulties—for instance, in a particular law or technology—new layers, fragments, and ambiguities are revealed. There are no simple answers or solutions. What we can do, however, is to keep making the structural violence visible, along with the labour invested in understanding it. We can keep showing the lived realities of research policies and management, highlighting the ironies and paradoxes that are often embedded within them. We can keep asking questions about the conditions under which ideals such as, for instance, innovation, excellence, and global competitiveness are supposed to come alive.

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NOTES

1 At the time of writing this article, policymakers and other stakeholders are discussing the introduction of a new academic career model in Latvia.
2 In Latvia, 63% of the population are ethnic Latvians and 24% are Russians, with other ethnic groups (such as Belarusians, Ukrainians, etc.) making up the rest of the population (Central Statistical Bureau 2021). Amongst those holding doctoral degrees in Latvia in 2017, 71.3% were ethnic Latvians and 20.7% were ethnic Russians (Central Statistical Bureau 2018: 9).
3 Information from the Latvian National Scientific Activity Information System (NZDIS), relayed by the Ministry of Education and Science in an email exchange.
4 In 2018, only 25% of all the people in research positions in Latvia were employed as full-time researchers—most are employed part-time (Ministry of Education and Science 2020c: 13).

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