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MIGRANT ACADEMICS' NARRATIVES OF PRECARITY AND RESILIENCE IN EUROPE



EDITED BY
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Introduction: Narrating Migrant Academics' Precarity and Resilience in Europe

Ladan Rahbari and Olga Burlyuk

We started writing this introduction in January 2022, as the world was dealing with ongoing uncertainties caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic. A year before that, in January 2021, we connected with each other in a rather accidental way. We had both published pieces in the *Journal of Narrative Politics*, in which we shared our experiences as migrant academics (Rahbari, 2020; Burlyuk, 2019). It was our shared sense of frustration and the desire to 'tell academic stories'—to tell stories about academics and to tell stories as part of our academic work—that brought us together. Through our conversations, the frustration and a strange sense of familiarity blossomed into something more, and over the course of the following weeks, after we first spoke via email and were restricted by the hurdles of meeting one another under COVID-19 regulations, we met each other online. Our pieces mentioned above on the subject of academic migrants' precarity had by then received a great deal of attention within our academic circles and beyond: not so much academic attention in the form of citations or recognitions, but attention in the form of emotionally inflected emails of support, solidarity, and occasionally of irritation, anger, and curiosity. Through our short autobiographic pieces, we realized we were not only connected to each other but also to a large network of scholars from the 'Global South,' who, in return, shared their stories as migrant academics with us.

This project was thus built on those narratives and has brought together stories by various migrant academics from the 'Global South' who write about their experiences of precarity and resilience in academia in the 'Global North.' From the 'wandering scholar' (Kim, 2009) and 'stuck and sticky' academics (Tzanakou and Henderson, 2021), academics' mobility has been conceptualized in relation to the internationalization and globalization of the academy and the proliferation of the image of the academic as a neoliberal mobile subject. We have benefited from insightful scholarly works such as Anesa Hosein, Namrata Rao, Chloe Shu-Hua Yeh, and Ian M. Kinchin's edited volume (2018), *Academics' International Teaching Journeys: Personal Narratives of Transitions in Higher Education*, which addresses the personal conflicts and challenges that one encounters through being an international academic. Victoria Reyes's *Academic Outsider: Stories of Exclusion and Hope* shows how academic institutions fail academics from marginalized backgrounds and hence create 'outsiders.' What characterizes this book is our focus on the diasporic precarity of mobile/migrant academics while attempting to extend existing work that has drawn on narratives/autoethnographic approaches to academic migration. Within this foci, we aim to contribute to a growing body of work on critical academic mobilities/migrations.

The narratives in this volume recount different forms and levels of precarity, from hiring practices, sexism, and racism to 'culturally accepted' but problematic divisions of labor in academic spaces. The term 'migrant' has been used throughout this volume to refer to 'South-North' migration (and not 'North-North,' 'North-South,' or 'South-South' migration) unless mentioned otherwise. We do not attempt or intend to define the category of 'South-North migrant,' which represents a vast underlying diversity. Whether it is in the academic formulations of 'Global North/Global South' or in studying the topics of migration and gendered, racial, colored, and other embodied/perceived identities, othering has become part of the process of sense-making. By marking certain bodies as mobile/migrant, the often unnamed and undiscussed immobile subjects are rendered 'normal.' These types of othering in their intersectional forms have been part of (sometimes very well-intentioned) academic inquiries.

We do not believe that a single comprehensive definition of the term ‘migrant’ is possible at all; instead, we use it broadly in accordance with the self-identification of contributors. In fact, scrutinizing the discursive definition of ‘migrant’ is one of the objectives of this book. Contributors to the volume have experienced ‘migrancy’ or ‘migranhood’ for various reasons and under different circumstances: from political unrest and war, a lack of political freedom, or because they have sought better working and living conditions than the ones in their countries of birth/stay. Thus, the level of ‘(in)voluntariness’ of the migratory mobility, with all its intricacies, has not impacted the editors’ decision to include/exclude a contribution.

Precarity and resilience

Academia is not the first area that comes to mind when speaking of precarity. It is often considered a space of knowledge production, status, social prestige, and sometimes—but not always—‘progressiveness.’ Despite this privileged access to status, academics are not immune to precarity, as systematic powerlessness is distributed along all social strata, including the academic context (Zheng 2018). Precarity has been presented as a state of being for many and a condition of our times—where we are experiencing the weakening of welfare states, the growth of neoliberal social order and economies, climate change, and the recent pandemic-induced state of precarity.

The academy’s current state is precarious for many reasons, including job insecurity, scarcity of positions, insular community, unpaid work, unhealthy working conditions, the inadequacy of commitment to anti-discrimination, and lack of academic freedom (Urbanaviciute et al., 2021; Ahmed, 2004; Beban and Trueman, 2018; Bosanquet, Mantai, and Fredericks, 2020; Roth and Vatansever, 2020) within a neoliberal context that promotes self-care instead of solidarity, individualizes responsibility, masks inequalities, and pathologizes radical thinking about change (Rahbari, 2021; Barclay, 2021). In addition, Eurocentrism in academia leads to the (re)reproduction of inequalities in the formulation and dissemination of knowledge (Rahbari, 2015). This makes academic conditions particularly precarious for migrant academics (Sang and Calvard, 2019), especially for those with ambiguous (legal) status, as the

loss of previously built social networks and various forms of discrimination and disadvantage impact their lives as *academics* and as *migrants*.

Coupled with the rampant neoliberal and competition-based work culture in academic spheres in the 'Global North,' inequality materializes in diverse forms in academia. Discrimination based on gender, race, ability, and age—among other factors—has been shown to affect everyday life, the physical and mental health of academics, and 'survival' within an academic system that is often characterized by individualism and hierarchical relations (Bhopal, 2018; Vatansever, 2020; Wekker, 2016; Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2009). Academia inherits the flaws of the larger social system in which it is embedded. As Cecilia Ridgeway (2014) puts it, the Western labor market is only 'ostensibly meritocratic.' The narratives in this volume expose the intersectional effects of the discrimination mentioned above on the everyday lives, career paths, mental health, and life course trajectories of migrant academics.

Precarity has already been used to analyze how the current state of affairs in the academy contributes to systematic discrimination and molds academic careers into tools of alienation (Zheng, 2018; Adsit et al., 2015) and to answer the question of whether precarity can serve as a critical concept for challenging social exclusions or forming new political collectivities (Zembylas, 2019). We draw on how (feminist) scholarship has taken up precarity as a concept to illustrate different forms of structurally induced and individually perpetuated and suffered powerlessness (Flores Garrido, 2020; Zembylas, 2019; Shildrick, 2019). We extend this structural and lived experience of powerlessness to the realm of academia by centering on autoethnographic and autobiographic insights, and thereby also proliferating accounts of precarity, creating more dialogue around it. In this collection, we illustrate that precarity is not a set of fixed conditions but a complex and multidimensional state that is context-dependent, relational, relative, material, and embodied.

Resilience refers to strategies of endurance that people adopt to facilitate their day-to-day living but which do not really change the circumstances which make their lives difficult (MacLeavy, Fannin, and Larner, 2021). It can be related to how individuals and societies adapt to externally imposed change. Some argue that, even if we cannot change the world, we can survive better by knowing how to adapt (Joseph, 2013). Resilience is a currently debated concept, especially

because it has expanded to include neoliberal subjectivities through its use within discourses of self-help and self-improvement (Cretney, 2014). Neoliberalism is understood here as a rationality of government performed through regimes of subjectification that extend the logic of the market—and, specifically, the principles of competition and inequality—to all spheres of human activity (Mavelli, 2019). In this view, resilience becomes a normative concept, an ideal type of human agency fit for the neoliberal logic (Chandler, 2016). However, there is a post-neoliberal discourse on resilience as well, which opens up the possibility for resilience to be conceptualized in a way where individuals are not mere targets of top-down or bottom-up frameworks of government, but contextually empowered selves in a constant process of learning (Mavelli, 2019). In the latter view that we adopt, resilience may have the potential to enable survival and help subjects to learn and prepare for uncertainties and challenges in the future.

Resilience is, however, not experienced in the same way by all people, because our individual vulnerabilities constitute our ‘un-freedoms’ or the restrictions—material or ideological—that prevent us from adapting to change (Chandler, 2016). Not everyone is afforded the same level of resilience, and scholarly literature has already revealed the gendered and racial nature of resilience (Jakubowicz et al., 2017; Smyth and Sweetman, 2015). Adapting to change, resisting structural challenges, and preparing for future uncertainties is difficult in the presence of inequality, precarity and the shortage or lack of support systems. Different narratives of this book highlight exactly this: that the capacity to become resilient is not distributed equally.

Why narratives?

We have heard too many times from our students that much of the current teaching and literature on migration takes away the ‘humanity’ of the subjects, sometimes by overtheorizing and other times through what has come to be accepted as ‘conventional’ academic writing, which turns migrants into aliens—otherized and unimaginable entities. Narratives occupy a small part of teaching and research into migration and are more often represented in press and journalistic pieces. Autoethnographic and autobiographic work that has been published on migration, otherness,

and academia (notably, Shahram Khosravi's *The Illegal Traveller*; Yassir Morsi's *Radical Skin, Moderate Masks*; Paul Carter's *Translations, an Autoethnography*; Ellis Hurd's *The Reflexivity of Pain and Privilege*; Nicola Mai's *Mobile Interventions*; Daniel Nettle's *Hanging on to the Edges*) is rare. It is unconventional to use narratives for academic data gathering and analysis, and the 'objectivity' and academic viability of these sources is questioned. Even when diversity, intersectionality, and decolonization are seemingly promoted, and alterity is celebrated, as José Esteban Muñoz argued, non-conventional critical work is not validated in all the aspects of the institutional matrix of the academy (Muñoz, 1996b). In fact, the first proposal for this volume was rejected by an academic publisher partly on the grounds that it was not 'academic' enough. Social scientists working with narratives would relate to our experience of being made to defend storytelling as a method of scientific inquiry.

Nonetheless, biographical methods are useful for challenging (at times tacit) assumptions of research on migration (Erel, 2007). The use of narratives and storytelling is a valuable educational resource in teaching settings, as it encourages critical thinking by facilitating students' knowledge of migration (Svendsen et al., 2021). Critical storytelling is crucial to the study of migration, as it contributes to an anti-racist pedagogy in which the otherized speak for themselves (Aveling, 2001). Like critical theories, critical storytelling does not hide behind a pretense of moral and political neutrality (Barone, 1992). This volume has been co-created precisely to tell political stories on migration; similar to Erwin (2021), our stories aim to complicate, disrupt, and make a mess out of discriminatory hegemonic narratives of migration. We refuse to keep implicit the roles and imagery ascribed to migrant academics from the 'Global South' in the 'Global North' academy.

The chapters of this book are born out of migrant academics' interactions and from our conviction that stories connect readers to each other in intimate and relatable ways. We have, therefore, taken up a methodological focus on narratives and autoethnographic accounts of migration. We aimed for this volume to normalize the 'unconventionality' of storytelling in academic publishing. We do not attempt to represent all accounts of precarity or to make claims about *how* autoethnographic and autobiographic methods should be used in academic writing.

Chapters of this book bring elements of creative and experimental writing and narrative-based approaches into the academic sphere. By

prioritizing accessibility and relatability, we have decided not to centralize the 'literary value' of the narratives and avoid overly formal language. Both editors have had many conversations with students and colleagues about the problem of accessibility of academic texts. We are well aware that this is a topic that divides academics. Many scholars whose work has been globally read and widely appreciated employ academic language that is not necessarily accessible to the non-expert public. We do not intend to problematize the more conventional modes of academic writing, as others have skillfully done before us (PARISS Collective, 2020), yet we too see space and opportunity in exploring creative, innovative, experimental, aesthetic writing as a way to rethink international social sciences and expand our readership. This is why various contributions in this book are written in different and creative narrative, prose, or poetry formats rather than adhering to conventional academic style and jargon. We hope that this makes the volume readable and accessible to a broader audience than usual (i.e., not just academics and policymakers).

Besides the structural, material, and cultural inequalities and different levels of intersectional powerlessness, individually perceived, embodied, felt, and lived experiences are full of insights into context-specific precarity. Intersectionality is useful in understanding the effects of structural and systematic social conditions on individual lives (Crenshaw, 2017), but even for those people who are located at the same crossroads and experiencing the weight of similar axes of social difference, the experiences of precarity and power will not be the same. While we acknowledge the structural nature of inequalities in cultural, social, and material forms, we believe that individual narratives that connect the elements of history, context, and life stories have the potential to give us an in-depth understanding of precarity and resilience. We are, therefore, in agreement with scholars who have argued that getting a sense of precarity requires 'the art of noticing,' driven by curiosity and based on one's commitment to observation, fieldwork, and slowing down (Tsing, 2015). We also agree that using embodied experiences of power as the basis of knowledge requires writing that is 'animated by the everyday' (Ahmed, 2016). And so, in this book, we step away from conventional academic writing and adopt autobiographic and autoethnographic narratives as a core method of scholarly analysis and reasoning.

Decolonization and the 'South-North' binary

The narratives in this book will, without a doubt, be perceived by some as provocative and radical. Decolonization cannot occur without hurting feelings, and it cannot be whitewashed. We aim to decolonize the discourses around academic mobility in this book by highlighting the experiences of precarity, resilience, and care in the academic margins. The chapters do not use the term 'decolonization' in the same way (or at all) nor do they refer to it as a singular way of thinking and working within the academy. Decolonization has been used in different chapters to refer to different aspects of the ongoing debates and efforts. As Mamdani (2016) discusses, decolonization has different aspects: the political aspect entails the independence of colonized societies from external domination and broader transformations of institutions, especially those critical to the reproduction of racial and ethnic subjectivities legally enforced under colonialism; the economic aspect consists of local ownership over local resources and the transformation of internal and external institutions that sustain unequal colonial-type economic relations; and the epistemological aspect takes issue with categorizations that are made, unmade, and remade, and thereby apprehend the world. Decolonization involves delinking from the coloniality of power: the reconstruction and the restitution of silenced histories, repressed subjectivities, subalternized knowledges, and languages (Mignolo, 2007). As Gurminder Bhambra (2014) has argued, the colonial matrix of power in the form of two rhetorics of modernity and coloniality has to be central to any discussion of contemporary global inequalities and the historical basis of their emergence.

There has been a critique of the tokenistic usage of the term and its overly ambitious nature when referring to the institutional response to advancing Indigenous achievement in the academy (Cote-Meek and Moeke-Pickering, 2020). Decolonization is sometimes used as a metaphor and superficially adopted into social sciences to reconcile settler guilt and complicity (Tuck and Yang, 2012). Inspired by Davies et al. (2003), our claim of decolonization of migrant academic narratives is based on our contributors reclaiming the discourse on mobility, migration, and precarity, as well as their narratives questioning the predominant neocolonial, gendered, and racial paradigms. This book

is a space for the voices of (diasporic) scholars who mainly come from formally or informally colonized contexts from the 'Global South.' They come from 'the asshole of the world,' as Larissa Pelúcio (2014) provocatively calls it; they then moved to the head (the brain), where powerful academic institutions are located, in the 'Global North.' This metaphor illustrates geopolitics that transform certain people into suppliers of data and experiences and others into experts and exporters of theories to be applied and reaffirmed (Pereira, 2019; Connell, 2020). The narratives of this book subvert this logic by placing the experiences and theories in one place: the 'asshole.'

By exploring migration narratives, we would like to showcase the multifacetedness and diversity of migrant experiences. The narratives complicate the assumption that mobility is a privileged state by using migrant academics' experiences of hybrid identity, embodied differences, and marginalization. Even from the start, mobility is not a privilege for the people in the 'Global South,' refugees, displaced people, and (self-)exiled academics. Mobility can cause the loss of different forms of capital, deprive individuals of their care networks, burden them with emotional challenges and loneliness, and expose them to discrimination and othering (Rahbari, 2018; Djundeva and Ellwardt, 2020). While not defining migration in a singular way, the chapters of this book explore the effects of migranhood and mobility, and reflect on the questions of 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' mobility from the 'Global South' to the 'Global North' within the academic context. The complexity of the narratives helps us realize an important objective in the study of migration: the bridging of the dichotomous divide between the study of 'voluntary' and 'forced' migration (de Haas, 2021). They reflect on how we understand 'migrant' subjects and 'migrancy' as a state of being, not only by showing various forms of precarity but also by reflecting on the diversity of ways mobility is practiced and experienced, as well as the mobile subjects' resilience, agency, resistance in implicit or explicit forms, and/or activism.

We have so far continuously used quotation marks to refer to the categories of 'Global South' and 'Global North.' Before dropping the quotation marks, we would like to clarify that, like other scholars (e.g., Andrea Wolvers, 2015; Laura Trajber Waisbich et al., 2021), we find these terms at times useful and, at other times, inadequate and

misleading. Choosing terminologies that mark vast geographical locations with different histories is not easy. None of the existing binary formulations—such as center/periphery, West/Orient, rich/poor, and developed/underdeveloped—do justice to the present diversities on each side precisely because of binarization. There are multiple problems with using these concepts, including the connotations of terms used, the inherent binarism in the formulation, and the artificial grouping of multiple and different countries under one category. We decided to leave the terminology choices to the contributors, who have chosen different terminologies to refer to global and international hierarchies in the academy and the world's economic and political order. This decision was based on the diversity of disciplinary backgrounds of the contributors and their consequent preferences for terminologies referring to global geopolitical inequalities.

We, the editors, decided to choose the terms Global South and Global North for ourselves. This is not a perfect choice, but these terms have at least been accepted as non-static concepts with geopolitical shifts, not only concerning the meaning of the terms but also with regard to which countries are considered to be part of the Global South and which the Global North (Wolwers, 2015). South-North migration is defined broadly, not as a strict dichotomy, but as a set of specific cultural, political, or social geographies analytically used to distinguish between forms of migration that entail moving between countries that occupy similar positions in the world's historically created politico-economic hierarchy. This includes movements from countries worldwide (from European peripheries and semi-peripheries) to Western Europe. We aim to address the struggles of these academics who, because of the supposed added prestige of their academic 'upgrade' by moving to the Global North and their relative mobility, may be perceived as more 'privileged' when compared to their fellow academics in the Global South, but always occupy an 'in between' space when it comes to predominantly white academic spaces in the Global North. The volume's contributors problematize the assumptions of 'upward' mobility that rely on the colonial history of knowledge production that imagines the Global North as the core where 'better,' if not 'true,' knowledge is produced (Akena, 2012) and migrant academics are seen as labor migrants of corporate universities.

Yet, while we hope to have attempted to *do* decolonization, we cannot claim to *be* completely decolonized, as we believe that decolonization must be seen as a perpetual project. Besides this, many of us—editors and authors—are currently located in institutions in the Global North, and (either now or throughout our lives) have benefited from the politics of our locations (Rich, 1984) and the consequences of settler colonialism. Some of us are closely connected to geographies of power, wealth, and authority, while others remain deprived of access to powerful affiliations, locations, and institutions.

Ethical considerations

Without any claims of comprehensive coverage or proportional representation of either the Global South or the Global North, it is worth emphasizing that the pool of lived experiences that the authors' narratives tap into and draw from is diverse. This book does not specifically aim to contribute to debates about diversity in the academy or the lack thereof, but it strives to be a diverse space. The volume's contributors represent different geographies and academic spaces, both in terms of their respective 'birth' or 'stay' countries and in terms of the countries/academic institutions in the Global North that have employed them during part of (or throughout) their academic careers. Both of the editors of this volume are migrant academics too (from Iran and Ukraine) and have our own personal experiences with the subject of precarity in academia. We find it ironic that, on the one hand, the promotion of 'diversity' and hiring of people like 'us' is adopted by universities, assuming that previously excluded groups desire to be a part of mainstream institutions and that everyone will benefit from this inclusion (de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015), but on the other hand, when those same people raise problems of racism, sexism, ableism, and structural discrimination at the university, their voices are ignored, if not suppressed. This book is thus a collection of those outcries. And it has been our editorial decision to include a higher number of shorter narratives rather than a smaller number of longer ones, in order to amplify more voices within this volume.

We have aimed to be diverse in contributors' voices in terms of academic disciplines, academic rankings, and countries/regions

academics use to tell their 'origin' stories. To accomplish this, we solicited contributions from scholars representing a wide range of disciplines in social sciences and humanities. Likewise, 'seniority' and academic credentials have not been a criterion for contribution. Our contributors occupy different positions in their respective institutions, ranging from early and nearly finished doctoral candidates to early and mid-career academics. The narratives of this book go further by showing how the normalization of hierarchies in academic institutions can fuel, if not directly cause, discrimination and abuse. They address already known forms of precarity based on race, gender, age, ability, religion, nationality, and other intersectional experiences that do not neatly fit within the already known and more extensively researched identification categories.

We are well aware that while diversity is needed to provide opportunities for racialized and minorized students and academics, without structural change, diversity will not go a long way (Arshad et al., 2021). The precarity that the contributors to this book speak of will not change due to their contributions, and their migrancy and embodied differences will remain pathologized. But with the interdisciplinarity and the diversity of themes centered around this precarity, we hope that the volume will also appeal to those housekeeping and maintaining the Master's House (Lorde, 2003), such as diversity officers, managers, and other key decision-makers in the university who can create change on the structural level.

As we and our contributors constructed or recounted our narratives, many ethical dimensions arose, including anonymity, positionality, and reflections on the limitations of 'precarity' as one framework to capture all the diversities, dimensions, and levels of precariousness. With our contributors, we did our utmost best to protect the identities of others who may be implicated in personal accounts without taking away from the authenticity of the narratives. We have adhered to the principles of decolonial feminist scholarship, which advocate for the indigenization of spaces and approaches to scholarship that naturalize and normalize indigenous perspectives and worldviews within the academy (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) although it is not always easy to step out and away from internalized colonial frameworks of knowledge.

Additionally, from the start of this project, we firmly believed that it was essential that this book be published open access. While open-access

publishing democratizes access to content, academic readers will know the appeal of publishing with ‘prestigious’ academic publishing companies. Academic ‘prestige’ is closely tied to an institution’s symbolic and cultural capital, which in turn often results from economic and political capital. However, some of the publishing practices of these same powerful institutions have led to the perpetuation of unequal access to books and other academic content. We question various structures of power and discrimination in contemporary academia in this book, including the commercial institution of academic publishing as its integral element. Moreover, perhaps the most obvious, immediate, and urgent readership of this book—migrant academics across the globe and across disciplines—is precisely the demographic that often finds itself in precarious situations (including financially) and, therefore, might not be able to afford to buy the book should it be sold commercially. This, in turn, would greatly undermine the spirit of collectivity and solidarity in which this book has been written—and which it aims to strengthen and promote.

The composition of this book

This book is a carefully curated collection of narrative essays divided into six sections, each consisting of different chapters. The narrative chapters/sections are complemented by this introduction and a final reflection chapter. The distribution of narratives is based on some of the central themes the chapters cover, but there is certainly a level of arbitrariness in this distribution: each of the narratives could be situated rightfully within two or more sections. Therefore, we encourage readers to consider our categorization as a merely descriptive and subjective practice, which they should go beyond.

In the first section of the volume, ‘(non)belonging,’ Vera Axyonova, Sanam Roohi, and Mihnea Tănăsescu reflect on different ways they (do not) belong in the European academy. In Chapter 1, Vera Axyonova regards academic precarity as non-belonging and delves into personalized multidimensional non-belonging experiences. Reviewing her journey from her home country, Kazakhstan, to German academia, Vera raises issues of othering and foreignness, asymmetric power relations, and illusory diversity in Global North universities. Sanam Roohi writes about her experience as a first-generation university

graduate from a minority background in India in Chapter 2. Sanam reflects upon her academic trajectory in Amsterdam and in German academia. The chapter contemplates the post-colonial predicament of non-belonging and the embodied negotiations she continues to make as a temporary job-holder and a part of the growing international academic precariat. In Chapter 3, Mihnea Tănăsescu explores how migrant academics are trained to think of their place within the profession and society writ large. The chapter proposes that, despite the academy's proclaimed pledge to diversity and interdisciplinarity, allegiance to one origin and one disciplinary model is routinely requested, performed, and internalized. Consequently, in finding one's own way, one must pass through a continuous process of unlearning.

In the second section, '(in)visible inclusions and exclusions,' Norah Kiereri, Martina Vitáčková, Dragana Stojmenovska, and an anonymous contributor engage with the ways in which borderings and modes of inclusion and exclusion in the academy are rendered (in)visible, and how invisible precarity is ignored and stigmatized. In Chapter 4, Norah Kiereri reflects on the (in)visibility of death in a European city during the COVID-19 pandemic. She recounts her own experience of the painful death of a loved one while working in Europe and the somewhat perplexing reactions (or lack thereof) from her institution and colleagues in the academy. Martina Vitáčková compares the imaginary wall of ice in the *Game of Thrones* (TV series) to the Iron Curtain still dividing Europe in Chapter 5. She argues that it is close to impossible to penetrate this wall, and even once one is in, one is still considered a wildling. Martina traces this dynamic within academia. Dragana Stojmenovska's narrative in Chapter 6 revolves around how academics are expected to be mobile, yet this mobility is expected differently from academics, depending on their academic and social backgrounds. The chapter is about the day Dragana stopped being an immigrant and not the day she stopped being mobile. Dragana discusses how one is in need of 'permission' even to define oneself, let alone to engage with the country one lives in critically. In Chapter 7, the anonymous author gives their perspective on the challenges of navigating Western academia as an immigrant while having mental health condition(s), all the while being subjected to the rather unforgiving culture of continuous assessment in the new workplace and bearing the extra burden posed by mental illness.

In the following section, 'borders, mobility, and academic 'nomadism,' Maryna Shevtsova, Vjosa Musliu, and Tara Asgarilaleh address the consequences, rewards, and challenges of being mobile academics. Maryna Shevtsova explores a hybrid identity of an early-career female researcher in Western academia dealing with internationalization in Chapter 8. Questioning how one's gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and institutional affiliation intersect, this chapter reflects on how identities are constructed and maintained and how uneven distribution of opportunity structures for mobility among geopolitical spaces and social groups impacts one's self-identity and life chances. Vjosa Musliu shows in Chapter 9 how a lack of hospitality is normalized in the visa application procedures of Western European countries. Vjosa shows the impossibility of British hospitality in its visa procedures for nationals of the Global South. Walking the reader through a personal Kafkaesque visa procedure, Vjosa reveals how British hospitality is regulated by governmentality and surveillance. Tara Asgarilaleh's narrative in Chapter 10 addresses the position of a 'migrant academic' who has to deal with visa applications, a sort of bureaucratic madness that affects the most precarious passports. Tara's chapter unravels the precarity inherent in certain passports and how these passports impact mobile academics despite the invisibility of their precariousness.

The next section of the volume, 'the complexities of privilege and precarity,' engages with the complexity of academic experiences at the intersection of multiple categories of difference through chapters by Apostolos Andrikopoulos, Karolina Kluczevska, Bojan Savić, and Alexander Strelkov. In Chapter 11, Apostolos Andrikopoulos's narrative explores his understanding of race throughout his life; and his racialization as 'white' after moving to the Netherlands as an academic. He asks how appropriate it is to apply the category of 'white' to migrant scholars whose pathway to academia started where whiteness had a different meaning or was less significant as a marker of privilege. Karolina Kluczevska's narrative in Chapter 12 revolves around her experience of joining Tajik academia, referring to the issues of mistrust, mutual favors, and the culture of mediocracy. Karolina discusses how, as she was confronted with new academic conventions and practices, Tajik academia made her question her own positionality in the academy of the Global North. Bojan Savić's narrative in Chapter 13 explores the normalization of his own vulnerability and immigrant otherness

through a subjectivity of hope and aspiration. In particular, he embeds the problematization of and ability to cope with precarity in discourses of aspirational temporality and de-territorialized hope for happiness. In Chapter 14, Alexander Strelkov turns to metaphysical explanations to explain why his academic career is so insecure and challenging. The author indulges in an intimate conversation with Saint Precario to reflect upon his own professional and personal Odyssey.

The following three contributions are part of the section 'gendered precarity and sexualization.' In this section, Asli Vatansever, Emanuela Mangiarotti, and Olga Burlyuk reflect on different aspects of gendered precarity. Asli Vatansever reflects on gender inequality, hierarchy, and foreignness as an exiled female researcher in European academia in Chapter 15. Given her own conflicting feelings and actions during and after a sexual assault in an academic context, the author confronts the predicaments of resistance and the discrepancies between the theory and practice of feminist solidarity. Emanuela Mangiarotti's narrative in Chapter 16 centers on how the effort to re-integrate into academia in Italy has been chiefly defined by her identity as a homecoming Italian female researcher and how moving 'back' has made her radically aware of the way gender marks endemic precarity within Italian academia. In Chapter 17, Olga Burlyuk walks down memory lane and recollects her professional interactions at the intersection of gender and ethnicity, spanning fifteen years, offering an elaborate sketch of everyday sexism and gendered racism in academia.

In the final section, 'embodied differences and (non)whiteness,' Lydia Namatende-Sakwa, Atamhi Cawayu, Sama Khosravi Ooryad, and Ladan Rahbari reflect on what it means to navigate the European academy while embodying (visible) differences. In Chapter 18, Lydia Namatende-Sakwa recounts her encounters with racism, interweaved with feelings of guilt for leaving her family, and paints a picture of precariousness informed by identity markers of race, sex, and class. In Chapter 19, Atamhi Cawayu illustrates his experiences as a researcher of color in Belgium committed to anti-racism in majority-white academic spaces. The chapter reflects on the challenges of BIPOC academics to shift the academy towards an anti-racist space. Sama Khosravi Ooryad recounts some exclusionary moments and her positionality in the academy as a 'strategic outsider' in Chapter 20. Sama shares examples from her time as a GEMMA student in the Netherlands to illustrate how

and why she perceives a need to be alert to exclusions and be critical of toxicities encountered within and beyond Western academia. Ladan Rahbari's narrative in Chapter 21 reflects on academics' performative work and microaggressions in conference rooms and other spaces, and the stark differences between those performances and what happens in more private spaces.

The final essay in the volume is one that reflects on and makes sense of the complexity of the narratives within this volume. In this chapter, Umut Erel discusses the value of collecting and validating stories and how narratives make valuable interventions by challenging exclusions and hierarchies in European academia. She also shares experiences of encounters with gendered and racialized discourses in the academy and how she has been inspired by what she calls 'the killjoy work' of scholars such as Sara Ahmed in making visible and challenging the existing power relations.

Final words

As you embark on this reading journey, keep in mind that writing the narratives of this book has been a difficult, emotionally taxing, and demanding practice for some of us and exhilarating, empowering, and healing for others. To paraphrase Sara Ahmed (2016), the academy is something we, migrant academics, work *on* as well as *at*. We thank all the contributors for doing the intellectual, emotional, and political work of sharing their narratives in this volume. The act of documenting critical autoethnography and autobiography from the margins is, in itself, precarious work. At the same time, writing about one's precarity is also an exercise in—and a manifestation of—resilience. One of the contributors to this volume wrote their narrative literally overnight. Another one wrote theirs during sick leave taken to preempt burnout.

This book was conceived and actualized in a world saturated with uncertainties and anxieties, including those caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. As we worked on this collection, Russia launched a full-out war on Ukraine, and the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising arose in Iran, the editors' respective countries. Just like the lives of the contributors to this collection, ours remain entangled with those of people and lands in the Global South. Some of us live with feelings of uprootedness, otherization, longing, and hope, and occupy in-between

spaces in the Global North academy as we deal with anxieties of mobility and belonging. Some authors we invited to contribute to the book, all of whom were migrant academics, had to withdraw their contributions precisely because of their already existing precarity or new challenges they faced due to the pandemic or other social, economic, or political realities. Others kindly declined the invitation to contribute, confessing that writing a truthful autobiographical account would require more openness and publicity than they were ready to offer.

The fact that many of those voices are missing in this book is a reminder that precarity has always been and will continue to be a part of academic work, including this book, and that the decolonization achieved by this collective work is a fraction of a step towards the greater challenge of decolonizing migrant academics' narratives. We hope that the narratives of this book will shed some light on the intersectional lived experiences of migrant academics and their genealogy, and perhaps inspire some to find ways to resist the structural and cultural forces perpetuating them.

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