

Title

Precarity, gender and care in the neoliberal academy

Abstract

This article examines the rise in precarious academic employment in Ireland as an outcome of the higher education restructuring following OECD (2004) and government initiatives (2011) and post-crisis austerity. Presenting the narratives of academic women at different career stages, we claim that a focus on care sheds new light on the debate on precarity. A more complete understanding of precarity should take into account not only the contractual security but also the affective lives of employees.

The intersectionality of work and care lives was a dominant theme in our interviews among academic women. In a globalised academic market, premised on the care-free masculinised ideals of competitive performance, 24/7 work and geographical mobility, women who opt out of these norms, suffer labour-led contractual precarity and are over-represented in part-time and fixed-term positions. Women who comply with these organisational commands need to peripheralise their relational lives and experience care-led affective precarity.

Keywords

affective, care, gender, higher education, Ireland, neoliberalism, precarity

Introduction

The concept of precarity has come to designate growing existential and structural uncertainties in an era of advanced capitalism (Butler, 2009; Kalleberg, 2009; Standing, 2011 *inter alia*). In the post-war era when stable working and living conditions became accessible to citizens of wealthy countries engaged in productive work, free from direct dependence or dependents (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008), the academic labour force benefited greatly from job stability and security. The rapid marketization of higher education (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; Marginson and Considine, 2000) has transformed many universities into powerful consumer-oriented corporate networks, where public-interest values are seriously challenged (Ball 2012). In particular, new managerialism as a mode of governance has introduced market principles into public institutions (Clarke et al., 2000; Farrell and Morris, 2003) as the Irish higher education sector (Author B, 2009a; Loxley et al., 2014). Growing pressures for competition and commercialization have also put a high personal and economic price on a successful academic career (Gill, 2009), pushing many into regular migration within and between countries to secure visibility and permanent employment (Stalford 2005; Herschberg et al. 2015). A deep polarization has emerged between elite permanent academics and a reserve army of teaching and research staff with hyper-flexible contracts. While academia is a relatively privileged site of precarity, over the last decades many precarious academics have fallen steadily into the ranks of the working poor (Courtois and O'Keefe, 2015; UCU, 2015).

The price of a successful academic career seems particularly high for women. In Europe women are increasingly dropping out of academic career paths even when qualified to pursue them (ESF, 2009). Across the EU in 2010 women comprised 59% of all graduates but only 44% of lecturers, 37% of senior lecturers and 20% of professors (EC/SHE figures, 2013: 8). In the UK alone – one of the largest academic job markets worldwide – women hold only 39% of full-time positions, and only 36% of permanent full-time positions that involve both teaching and research (Locke, 2014: 12-13; 21). In Ireland, while 59% of university graduates and 43% of full-time academic staff are women, only 19% of the professoriate in the universities are women (HEA, Higher Education Authority, 2016: 31-32).

To date research on gender equality in academia has focused strongly on promotional opportunities for women in academia (Deem, 2003; Morley, 2013; O'Connor, 2014; Fritsch, 2015). Others have explored labour market structures and mobility requirements in relation to parenting and the retention of early career researchers (Stalford, 2005; Ackers and Gill, 2005). There has been relatively little reflection on the gendered aspects of precarity on women in academia. Analysing the gendered aspect of precarity within a polarized labour force (Kalleberg, 2013) with a focus on academia is important for two reasons. Firstly, the focus on precarity allows us to better understand why women are over-represented in part-time and fixed-term appointments. It adds a new layer to the questions as what is “the complexity of gender in the context of women's lived experiences, organizational practices and societal norms” (Ozkazanc-Pan and Clark Muntean, 2018: 380) and “what problem we are trying to solve when we start anew the gender equality project” (Powell et al, 2018: 127) by refocusing the theoretical discussion on women’ relational and caring lives. Secondly, the focus on women links contemporary discussions on precarity with questions of reproductive labour and care. Given the moral imperative on women to care (Bubeck, 1995; O’Brien, 2007), female academics are disproportionately affected by the masculinist care-free norms of geographic mobility and the 24/7 availability of the ‘ideal academic’ (Author B, 2010, 2011; Herschberg, et al. 2015). While employed women are continuously engaged in familial relations as principal carers (Author B, 2008), those in academia are now assessed vis-a-vis the modalities of academic masculinity, the pinnacle of which is career masculinity involving a ‘weak relational commitment’ (O’Connor et al., 2015). Although subordinated masculinities operate in the academy as O’Connor et al. suggest, a hegemonic masculinity model is still dominant (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Author B, 2012).

This article offers an empirically-grounded reflection on the complex interrelations between two profoundly gendered types of precarity in academia: labour-led precarity and care-led affective precarity. By affective we mean productive, materialist human relations that constitute people mentally, emotionally, physically, and socially (Author B, 2009b, 2017). Both labour- and care-led affective precarity require the sacrifice of different aspects of care and self-care. We offer a contribution to the debates on precarity and on gender equality in higher education. We demonstrate how the very material demands on women to be primary carers at home while working under the masculine ‘academic ideal’ - deepens, complexifies, and polarises the types of precarity experienced by women. We go beyond the current debate on precarity by highlighting the phenomenon of the gendered polarization of precarity that affects academic women not only as employees but also as people who have attachments, ties and emotional commitments which are culturally and socially assigned in ways that are different to men (O’Brien, 2007).

We argue that unlike standard labour polarization theories (see Kalleberg, 2013) that analyse workers along the lines of income and career satisfaction, the focus on care places gender on the forefront of debates on labour polarization and precarity alike. We highlight existential choices around care and commitment that rarely arise for men. While both men and women are pressed to seek serial employment through geographic mobility severing intimate, familial, social and professional relations in a given city or country, it is mostly women who need to do in the context of the biological pressures of child-birth and imperatives to be the main carer in families. This gives early career female academics two similarly limiting choices placing them on polar opposite employment tracks yet in similarly precarious existential positions. Those who opt out of transnational mobility often remain trapped into precarious teaching and research arrangements. Those who seek to balance care responsibilities with a career, do so in the context of ever-declining incomes, welfare regimes, and career prospects (Stalford, 2005). Those seeking transnational mobility as the new 'ideal', face a trajectory hostile to the care of dependent others that requires them to sacrifice friends, family, and intimate relations, experiencing loneliness and lack of self-care. Rethinking care as a central activity in human production and reproduction (Federici, 2013), both outside and inside academic labour, allows us to explore potential venues of exploitation and liberation within the predicament of the precarious academy.

Methodology

The article is based on a research project involving 10 higher education institutions in Ireland. A total of 102 semi-structured in-depth interviews were undertaken with higher education workers across the colleges, of which 52% were with women. Half of the women interviewed were employed as academics (n=26). Data was coded over a three months' period and analysed for key themes using NVivo software. Codes were cross-checked between the researchers who blind-coded others' work for verification purposes. Six major themes emerged from the analysis. Care and its relation to precarity, migration, and childcare was a major theme and principal concern for the majority of academic women, while not thematised in academic men's narratives. From all narratives, two patterns emerged that represented two disparate positions for women within the polarized academic labour force, both leading to different forms of precarity not similarly faced by men. The dilemmas and sacrifices required by either track are often faced especially by early-career female academics pressurized to choose between family and career, under biological and social imperatives. As affective relations of love and care were dominant narrative in women's stories of their working lives, we have focused this paper on their preoccupations. That is not to say that men did not do care work, however, they did not have the complex relationship with care than women had, not least as they are not as impelled by society to be primary carers (Hanlon, 2012). To present these topics in their complex interrelation within individual stories, while protecting our informants' anonymity we combined two by two the narratives of six of these women, particularly indicative of the positions described above, into three ethnographic studies. While we have kept the core of the stories, indications of nationality (Irish/non-Irish), age group, types of institutions and urban setting types, we have changed characteristics that would be revealing of the individual cases. We used the method of semi-fictionalized organizational ethnography: "restructuring events occurring within one or more ethnographic investigations into a single narrative" (Humphreys and Watson 2009: 44). This method

allows to protect individuals in particularly vulnerable positions (Ellen 1984), especially in contexts where ‘blanket anonymisation’ methods can be compromised by the limited number of organizations matching the case description and where readers might try to guess the identity of particular research subjects (Humphreys and Watson 2009: 47). The rich ethnographic narration also allows us to reveal details of scene-setting, dialogue, and emotional responses by the interviewer and the interviewees (Rose 1990: 55).

Bringing care into the discussion of academic precarity

While a focus on ‘contractual insecurity’ in paid employment is inevitably central to debates on precarity (Possner, 2015; Standing, 2011), precarity operates differentially, especially in gender terms; it is deeply interwoven into how both the unpaid and paid care economy function (Folbre, 1994, 2001). To bring care work and affective labour into the discussion of precarity, we need to examine working lives and lives outside of work not as separate entities, but as sites of an interconnected gendered system (McDowell, 2004: 147). While the geographical spaces where care takes place are generally separated from places of employment, the two are deeply interconnected financially, emotionally and relationally. Care and employment operate interdependently not least through the materiality of the bodies and minds that occupy these shared spaces.

With the mass entry of women into the labour force in the post-war era, the male ‘breadwinner’ model allegedly gave way to the dual-income family. However, dual-earning meant part-time rather than full-time employment for the majority of women with dependent children (McDowell, 2013: 160). The growing pressure to ‘have it all’ – a good job and a ‘perfect’ family (Raddon, 2002; O’Connor et al., 2015) polarized the female labour force opening a gap between women across the income range (McDowell, 2013: 181). Women remain at a disadvantage in the growing competition to perform the idealised model of personal and occupational success (Smithson et al., 2004). For women to enter the paid labour market, families have relied on paid and unpaid domestic labour for primary care (OECD, 2015). Such care work is almost always undertaken by women and, in the absence of secure publicly-funded child and elder care programmes, it is often delivered by poor women from minority or migrant backgrounds (Anderson, 2010; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). Outsourcing, privatising and commercialising care means that those with lower incomes and no welfare benefits cannot afford professional care services.

Caring operates both as an economy in itself and an enabler of other sectors of the economy. Because of the ways in which primary caring in families is gendered, caring impacts in classed, gendered and racially-specific ways the operation of women’s employment, including on the precarity of that employment.

The precarisation of the university

A hidden doxa of carelessness (Author B, 2010) underpins the framing of the academic career. It is based on a masculine model of ‘the ideal academic’ (Herschberg et al, 2015), comprising a highly productive, career-oriented, mobile life, free from care responsibilities, rooted in the norm of ‘global hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The new managerial governance and the pressures of marketisation of academic knowledge have exacerbated its demands. Universities have embraced core market values and

pressurized faculty and departments to generate surplus in visible, measurable ways (Authors B and A, 2015). The financial crisis inflicted a shift from tax- to student-fees generated core budgets in a number of countries. The recruitment of international fee paying students became a growing priority, pushing universities to achieve ever higher ‘benchmarks’ of fundraising and publication to boost their places in international rankings (Author B, 2014). Participation in geographic mobility and international cooperation also increased academics’ abilities to enhance institutional rankings by securing external grants and thus, time to do research and publish. In the UK, for instance, while a growing number of graduates entered the labour force in administrative positions evaluating and managing funds, even more enter precarious research and teaching positions (Locke, 2014).

The changes in the academic profession are most visible among early-career academics (Honan and Teferra, 2001). While celibate travelling scholars represented the medieval scholastic traditions, neoliberal demands for internationalisation and self-marketisation require a new kind of “monk”, a truly elastic self “with no boundaries in time, space, energy or emotion” (Author B, 2011: 632). Writing and research overtime are combined with extensive research and conferencing travel and relocations to take multiple positions, abandoning care commitments and professional communities (Herschberg et al., 2015; Authors B and A, 2015). Many suffer loneliness and depression while others move their whole families or commute across regional or national borders to make ends meet (Zanou, 2013; Author A, 2015). Unlike research-only fixed-term positions, which allow time for publication and professional visibility, teaching-only positions are seen as an academic *cul-de-sac* (Locke, 2014). Administrative work, answering emails, assessments, preparation work, and pastoral care are not recognized in job competitions (Courtois and O’Keefe, 2015). Precarious research and teaching staff are thus pitted against each other to compete over scarce resources and only a few achieve permanency (Author A, 2016).

Atypical fixed-term part-time academic contracts are proliferating around the world. In the USA the number of tenured faculty with permanent contracts had dropped from 75% in 1970 to 30% in 2007 (Kaplan, 2010). In UK universities in 2012-2013, there were over 74,000 atypical contracts of which 80% entailed teaching-only responsibilities; around 55% of them were fixed-term or part-time, including zero-hour contracts (Locke, 2014: 12-13; 20-21; UCU, 2013, 2017). In Germany temporary faculty numbers have increased over 45% from 2000 to 2012: 80% of the research and 66% of the teaching is now covered by the non-permanent academic staff (Wissenschaftsrat, 2014: 7). In Ireland the majority academic core-funded staff reported by the Higher Education Authority are on permanent full-time contracts (HEA 2016: 32). After the government capped the number of posts in the public sector through the ‘Employment Control Framework’, however, part-time and fixed-term flexible research and teaching contracts proliferated (IFUT, 2015). In 2011 only 20% of all the 5,202 researchers on Irish institutions of higher education were on permanent contract (Loxley et al., 2015: 128). With the expansion of research funding in Ireland (HEA, 2016) and an expectation that academics become involved in fundraising activities, for which recruitment of contractual research staff and teaching buy-outs are the norm, there has been a proliferation of fixed-term contracts. However, part-time temporary teaching posts are recorded in full-time equivalent terms for administrative and funding purposes. This means that there is no accurate record of how many individuals are employed in such posts on a

yearly basis; precarious teaching staff remain invisible in numerical terms (Courtois and O’Keefe, 2015).

The feminization of academic precarity

Given the lack of accessible child care in declining welfare regimes, and the inevitable dissolution of care networks accompanying migration, women who are faced with a limited window of opportunity to become mothers, often face the choice of forfeiting migration or of delaying motherhood (Stalford, 2005). The first choice jeopardizes academic careers and inflicts labour-led precarity by giving up or reducing the amount of visible measurable work, especially research and publications (Courtois and O’Keefe, 2015). A similar process has been observed in other high-skilled workplaces where part-time work jeopardised the opportunity to close the gender pay gap and secure women’s career progression (Smithson et al., 2004). Thus, within the new managerial regime, most women and primary carers in families hit a ‘care ceiling’ as they defy organizational ‘shapes’ (Author B, 2010; O’Connor, 2014). The second choice comes at the expense of cutting familial and intimate relations. Under this hidden gendered doxa of carelessness (Author B, 2010), those who get permanent academic positions are disproportionately care-free individuals. As Bailyn’s (2003: 141) show ‘the ideal worker continues to be seen as one with no interests or responsibilities outside of work’. Women who move, living up to the masculine ideal, risk marginalizing their affective and relational lives, and often have to postpone indeterminably the choice of having a family (Stalford, 2005). This care-led affective form of precarity brings to the fore temporal and spatial concerns around work-related migration. While the ‘mobility power’ (Alberti, 2014) of transnational exit to escape uncertainty is used by academics as a form of resistance, it comes at a double cost. Even if female scientists are more often unmarried and childless than women in general, there is little proof that this gives them greater career opportunities (Bozzon et al, 2017). Yet, in highly individualized professions, as the academic career, migration is even more subject to the migrant weakening of social relations and care networks (Stalford, 2005; Anderson, 2010). The individual capacity to develop relationships of love, care and solidarity is diminished by a constant deficit of time, due to the physical and emotional resources deployed in academic performance.

Thus, feminisation of precarious positions in academia feeds into the gendering of leadership and promotion at the top. In the USA, a country-wide survey of 343 academics in all fields showed that 75% of non-tenured faculty in the humanities, 60% in the social sciences, and 46% in the natural sciences were women (CEW, 2010: 5). Another study of 1300 respondents in the biological sciences throughout the USA showed that while women constitute approximately 45% of the postdoctoral fellows in the biomedical sciences at universities and research institutions, only 29% of women hold tenure track research-only posts, and just 19% hold full faculty positions (Martinez et al., 2007). In the UK where the proportion of faculty on fixed-term contracts has reached 50% in 2014 (HESA, 2014), the majority of atypical teaching-only contracts are taken by women (Locke, 2014: 12-13; 20-21). In Ireland, a HEA survey showed that in universities parity exists at permanent lecturer level where there is a 50:50 gender split, but the gender divide widens among the higher staff grades with men accounting for 65% of senior lecturers, and 81% of professors (HEA, 2016). A study among 314 post-doctoral fellows in Ireland showed that while men and women are equal in number as postdoctoral fellows at the ‘under 30’ age category, twice as many men remain in the 31-40 age group (Loxley et al., 2016: 6). Another study of 277 academics in Irish institutions

found that 62% percent of the hourly paid work was performed by women (Courtois and O’Keefe, 2015).

To understand the gendered aspects of precarity in academia and their relation to childcare in particular, one needs to look into persistent gender differences in overall employment tendencies, coupled with the question of parenting responsibilities, availability and quality of part-time work, welfare benefits and childcare supports. Eurostat (2013) data from across the EU-27 show that parenthood for men is positively associated with employment, while it has a negative association for women (Miani and Hoorens, 2014). Men with children under the age of 12 have higher rates of employment compared to those without any children. Male part-time workers represent only a small share of employed men and fathers are more likely to work full-time than non-parents (Miani and Hoorens, 2014: 9). Only 14% of part-time working fathers reported childcare as their reason to take part-time jobs as opposed to 45% mothers (Miani and Hoorens 2014: 20). Where parental leave was available, only 1% of fathers took it, versus 24% of mothers; more than 40% of mothers and only 2% of fathers interrupted work on top of maternity or parental leave to take care of a child for at least one month (Miani and Hoorens, 2014: 21-22). Women parents had lower employment rates than non-parents and were much more likely to take up part-time work (Miani and Hoorens, 2014: 4; 9). Returning to full-time employment after part-time work usually happens at lower skilled positions than the pre-motherhood full-time job, and with a “pay penalty” (Gregory and Connolly, 2008). The latter increases the gender wage gap, lowers pension benefits because of lower contributions, and raises women’s poverty risk especially among single mothers and mothers of three or more children (Miani and Hoorens, 2014: 13; 17). Thus, despite efforts towards a universal carer model where men and women share childcare, the dominant family model in Europe remains one based on a male bread-winner and female care-giver (Ciccia and Verloo, 2012).

While research on the work and organisations addresses issues of gender and care in considerable detail (reviews in Leuze and Strauss, 2016; Nalvini and Pavolini, 2016) the framing of the relationship between the worlds of care and of that of paid work is largely binary. Care is subsumed under the term of ‘life’ (separate from work in the work-life balance) (Russell et al., 2009) concealing its internal dynamics, emotionality and materiality. Clear boundaries are drawn between the market sphere and the care sphere in the way research questions are framed. Such boundaries exclude some forms of relations from sociological investigation, including informal unpaid care relations (Hatton, 2015). As boundaries between forms of work are situated in relations of power and are forms of exclusion, they need to be contested (Lamont and Molnár, 2002) especially in understanding the care and love-related dimensions of precarity and security.

As the case studies below show women who take up flexible arrangements (i.e. part-time or temporary work) to do caring are at a disadvantage when it comes to taking up the same job they have left and securing permanent employment. An aspect often overlooked by the sociology of work is that engaging in transnational mobility in the pursuit of security impacts on women’s ability to have a family or become part of an affective community of solidarity, care, and love. Unlike men who either experience labour precarity or do not, women experience complex forms of labour- or care-led precarity regardless of their career outcomes.

Labour and affective precarity: three ethnographic studies

Case 1: Róisín: the jam-winner

The interview with Róisín – a part-time coordinator and occasional lecturer at a department of social sciences in a large Irish university – took place in a tiny seminar room in a back corridor of an old university building. Afraid that someone would see us talking, she locked the door behind “just in case”. She told us anticipating the interview made her “think again” in a mixture of fear and anger. During the interview Róisín’s eyes would water, but she would shake off her tears. Róisín had her first child thirteen years ago just after she defended her PhD: “I was very career oriented, was just about to accept a post-doc in the USA. And then I met someone... I stayed and had my first and my second child in the matter of two years”. At that point her priorities changed. She wanted to spend all the possible time with her family: “Coming back to a full-time academic position made little sense”. At the university, however, student numbers were growing while the staff stayed stagnant and she was offered a part-time job as coordinator and some teaching hours:

I have been teaching across modules but never having one on my own. And I have been doing the job of a part-time department coordinator for almost twelve years, coming in two and a half days a week, but I never had a contract.

For a while the flexible arrangement worked for Róisín; she felt valued by her colleagues and the department head. However, five years into the job she had a moment of epiphany “I looked around and realized I had been so stupid – everyone around me was doing a quarter of my work for triple my pay. I decided to fight for my rights to get a permanent pensionable employment”. Her decision coincided with the financial crisis and the public sector freeze in 2009: “A new rector came with his new methods of management. The head of department backed off: those who were looking for permanent arrangements were kindly asked to look for new jobs”. Róisín was devastated. She contacted the trade union and HR, and senior management conceded before the case went to the Labour Court. Only her part-time contract as coordinator became permanent. She had more administrative work and ever less teaching. “And I love teaching so much, it has been my life, I have been doing it almost for free” Róisín frowned, then laughed through tears: “Don’t tell anybody, but I love, love, love this university; it is mine, nobody realizes it is mine!... But it was my fault, I made myself far too available”.

Róisín never depended on income from the university – her husband worked in the private sector and was earning enough for them to live comfortably:

He is the bread-winner, but I am the jam winner – it was crucial for me to take my children from school, drop them to piano and rugby lessons, a lovely routine. My husband sometimes left work on time to pick them up, he helped a lot. But weekends were sacred family time, I couldn’t work.

However, Rosin told us she regretted at times having given up on her research career and put up with precarious teaching arrangements. She felt less valued than while doing a PhD: “And regardless of how much one is self-contained and self-reliant, we’re all subject to the feelings of how we’re viewed by others. I often ask myself: ‘Why am I doing this, again?’”

Case 2: Sarah: the care-less overachiever?

To arrange an interview with Sarah, a woman in her late forties, a professor in the life sciences, we received a number of replies from her in unconventional hours. During our interview, sitting in her ample bright office in a big city university and treating us to sweets bought at an airport *en route* to a conference, she apologized about rescheduling: she had meetings of the numerous committees she attended weekly.

After finishing her PhD at a UK Russell group university, Sarah held two fixed-term positions across Europe, got a lectureship in the UK, and quickly progressed to senior lectureship. In that position a colleague invited her to interview for a Professorship at an Irish university. Sarah's application was successful and she moved. She was soon to join senior management as a Vice-President, a position rarely occupied by a woman at Irish universities.

I was headhunted. If you look at the women who are professors in Irish universities, most were hired at that rank and from abroad. No promotions of women from within. And more has been asked of women in terms of the pastoral care and administrative work, things not valued by the university.

Speaking of her own work as a Vice-President she said it became "a full-time job, with practically no holiday ever, you're always on the ball". Her standard working week entailed endless meetings, "anywhere between two and five meetings a day, sometimes from nine to five, and at times – an evening awards ceremony or other official event sometimes scheduled over weekends". While taking up a leadership position was important, her academic career suffered: "You do your research evenings, at weekends, during vacations, if you take vacations at all. You sleep four hours a night, and you are no longer a student!"

Sarah felt that she was not giving a good example to junior colleagues who saw her overworked; and knew they needed to do the same to advance their careers. "I was overdoing it. When I stepped back as Vice-President I went to conferences in three different continents within a month, I just wanted to compensate". Sarah confessed she had given up on her hobbies, even cooking, "Lunch is a sandwich at the computer. Even away from the office I'm still on email and phone... And now you can read your emails on phone, it becomes an addiction... Frightening!" At this point of our conversation Sarah paused and said with intense emotion:

The feeling is that if you don't have children, you don't have a life. So it is common for single women to be asked to do more, more than single men. Sometimes I stand in for my colleagues who have a family. Fact is, I don't have a child to pick up from school, saying 'No!' would be mean. One could say 'Twenty years an academic, and it was always like this; that's why you didn't have a family' ... But this isn't confession, it's an interview!

Despite her insistence on collegiality and community, Sarah did not feel at home in Ireland. "Before I felt I was at a place just for a period of time for study or teaching... By now, I feel I became a migrant. I would wake up at night thinking 'What am I doing here?'" She felt very isolated at her work: "I never got to discuss my research with any of my colleagues. I came in a managerial position so I was 'the boss'". Still, as her position seemed "God-sent, and she felt she needed to be grateful to the Institution for hiring her, a foreigner, and a woman in a male-dominated field. "Yet, this doesn't mean you are happy," she shrugged. Outside her job,

the sense of isolation continued: “I got to know people, but it’s hard for somebody coming from outside to establish a pool of friends, everybody’s settled in their social networks. Maybe if you come younger... or if you marry in and inherit a family it’s different.”

Sarah made efforts to create a community around her at work, but this was difficult, especially with the crisis. For years she tried to establish a weekly social gathering at the department “...just to create some sense of community, so we don’t feel miserable, overwhelmed, or panicking, more like home ...” Her attempts hit a rock: “In academia socialising turned into ‘networking’. With the cuts you can’t organize dinners or take department members out with seminar speakers.” She kept on trying: “When you spend most time at work, work is your life. If you don’t have a family, you want work to be nice.”

Aoife: at the crossroad

Our interview with Aoife was held at a quiet lobby of a hotel a few bus stops away from the university where she worked as a lecturer, replacing a permanent faculty member on maternity leave. She had an office, but was anxious not to have her colleagues see her being interviewed. Aoife defended her PhD in Languages from a Dublin university. Her partner – an architect – worked for a company in Dublin. The department where she finished her PhD had no position for her, but she continued doing hourly-paid tutorials. “One month it would have been ...eight lectures, twelve tutorials and fifty essays, paid according to the hourly rate for lectures... Basically it was a zero-hour contract...”

The replacement position, advertised as “visiting lecturer” came at Assistant Lecturer rate, a position that does not require PhD qualification. For Aoife “It was a job... I was starting to panic: summer, I had nothing, this would get me through to spring.” Suddenly, Aoife’s teaching load was bigger than that of most other lecturers:

Most colleagues teach three modules per year, but after I accepted the position they asked me to teach four... But, you can’t refuse... it’s an opportunity, you can put on your CV. You don’t build good relations with other colleagues by saying ‘I only do what I’m paid for’?

Aoife was used to doing extra work. During her PhD, she did administrative and teaching work. She ran a tutorial programme, managing seventy classes per week, recruiting and training the tutors, timetabling and budgeting. “I hoped it would pay back to get a permanent position.”

The assistant lecturing post was on the other side of the island, so Aoife commuted. She would go to the university on Tuesday morning and come back Thursday night, staying two nights a week with a relative. The commute took its toll on her health and relationship. “I am exhausted. I read on the bus but there’s only so much you can do when you’re travelling. I had a cold from November until Easter, on and off, because of the stress and travel”. Work-wise she felt guilty: “I should be working more efficiently, I should be doing this or that better...” As she had to work from home on her lectures and unfinished articles, spending quality time with her partner when she was neither tired, sick, or busy was a challenge. A day with him meant less time to prepare teaching and publications. There was no question of her partner commuting “He is in a normal job. It doesn’t make sense to follow me, what I have is so short term, so insecure.” Still, she felt like she was “sacrificing time with people that you

love. It's not sustainable to keep working all the time forever. You have your family and all that". The question of the family brought tears to her eyes:

I don't have children. I'm thirty-five now. We would like to have kids, but we both feel that we shouldn't have children until I have some security. It's not even the money. It's the time, the moving around. I couldn't leave a baby and live in another city or country... Colleagues of mine were asked at interview boards if they planned to have children... [They] stopped wearing their wedding rings.

Aoife also worried if she could have a child if she got another replacement or short-term contract or moved sector. "There are jobs where it's risky to have a child in the first six or twelve months". She previously applied for jobs in England but commuting was hard even within Ireland, "It wouldn't have been a life. My partner says that if I got something like a well-paid permanent job in England, we'd both go, but I'm cautious ...before we really have to make the choice. He has never really wanted to leave Ireland... nor have I".

Discussion and Conclusion

While the cases of Sarah and Róisín show two rather distinct career tracks, Aoife's case is one of a woman who is pressed to make a choice between two equally unappealing alternatives. What all three cases show is how care and gender interface with the precarity and security. Having chosen to prioritise the care life of their children, and living by the gendered moral imperative to be a primary carer (O'Brien, 2007), women in Róisín's position have to give up on their professional development. Consignment to casual employment results in a loss of pay after the economic crisis. They experienced what some of our informants called 'second class citizenship' in academia – the teaching or administrative-only contract labour that never brings professional recognition and renders them invisible to their professional field. In the case of Sarah, the situation has been the reverse. Having put in extra hours of work, travel and self-promotion, she had stayed out of familial arrangements, and her work has become her principal source of identity and recognition. However, in the affective domain, women like Sarah experience affective precarity; she has no personal or family life she can call her own. She exemplifies the position of single women migrating to foreign countries with no time to develop friendships and personal relationships outside of work. Sarah's story reveals ways in which the talk of life-work balance is meaningless when a 24/7 hyper-mobile academic work culture prevails.

The expansion of research funding in Ireland and the EU (HEA, 2016; Locke, 2014) has created a large market of temporary precarious workers doing research or replacing permanent staff on leave to do research. While research-funded contracts (including those funded by the EU through Marie Curie, ERC or the European Commission) actively promote geographic mobility, they are project-led and confined to a limited time frame of up to a few years. Most research programmes do not create permanent posts in Ireland (Loxley et al., 2016) or elsewhere (Ackers and Gill, 2005). Narrating the lived experiences behind these overall trends and how they impact on academic women, the article claims that accounting for care reveals the Janus face of labour precarity: the precarity of care or relational life in a globalised world. The focus on women in leadership positions and promotion at workplaces eclipses the structural constraints on women who stay in permanent full-time employment.

Focusing on labour insecurity without regard to caring conveys the message that women who have cracked the care-free, temporally elastic and globally mobile ideal suffer no forms precarity. However, when in leadership positions, few female academics are able 'to have it all'. The assumption that affective lives are easily left behind and re-established in new places for the purpose of career success ignores the emotional costs of migration. We show that beyond the preoccupation of 'keeping talent' (Ackers and Gill, 2005) universities and further workplaces are constitutive to and constituted by relational and caring lives of workers. We also show that while mobility can be empowering (Alberti, 2014), it also curtails caring and relational lives of those who go through it and can lead to certain affective precarity.

Accounting for issues of care within the discussion of precarity allows us to understand better the gendered and affective aspects of precarity in allegedly privileged workplaces. The data suggests that both contractual and affective precarity operate for women in contemporary academia, each posing significant limitations to a sense of security. While Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations holds true, and work places operate under different statutory and institutional arrangement that accommodate or modify these male-defined organizational norms, depending on the cultural context (Leuze and Strauss, 2016; Nalvini and Pavolini, 2015), the care-free affective assumptions of gendered organisations need more investigation. The affective inequality experienced by women on the top of the academic hierarchy shows that contractual stability is not enough to fix the 24/7 culture of working that has become normalised in neoliberal academia (Author B, 2010). Instead of speaking of work-life balance, a term that presumes boundaries between care work and paid employment, we solicit a more complex understanding of a lifeworld-work continuum, in which secure and stable work should be based on principles of collegiality, community, and care that have been eroded by the competitive culture, lack of contractual security, and recurrent mobility in the neoliberal academia (Author A, 2015; Author A, 2016).

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