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ABSTRACT

There has been a considerable growth in the number of international students in Dublin, Ireland. In this paper, we first explore the broader context for this growth, showing the ways in which international student migration to Dublin has been facilitated, and the consequences in terms of the creation of different categories of international student migrants. We then discuss the experiences of international student migrants in Dublin by focusing on precarity and promise. We use Lorey's tripartite understanding of precarity (2015. *States of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*. London: Verso) to show how international student migrants in Dublin experience legal precarisation, economic precarity and personal precariousness. This is, we argue, mitigated by promise (Ahmed 2010. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press), as international student migrants seek to navigate their way through precarity in place. The paper offers important insights into the complexity of international student migration, based on the lived experiences of migrants themselves.

Introduction

The number of international students, defined as 'those who have crossed borders for the purposes of study' (OECD 2013, 1), is significant. In 2011, the OECD estimated that there were around 4.3 million students enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship, with around 40 per cent studying in European countries (OECD 2013, 1–2; European Migration Network 2012, 10–11). These numbers have increased considerably since 2000 (King and Raghuram 2013, 128), driven by the complex interplay between structural forces such as neoliberal reform and globalisation (Beech 2017) and individual migrant aspirations (Carling and Collins 2018).

There is a growing awareness of, and attention to, the recent increase in international student numbers and its broader implications. One broad body of research focuses on the internationalisation of higher education, with institutions of higher education increasingly encouraged to act on a global scale through the recruitment of international students (see Gürüz 2011; Beech 2018; Kehm and Techler 2007). Another body of research emphasises mobility capital, specifically how international students hope to, or actually, benefit from

time spent studying abroad, whether this benefit is academic, economic, social and/or cultural (Brooks and Waters 2013; Findlay et al. 2012; King and Raghuram 2013; Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo 2015; Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Park 2011; Prazeres 2013; Van Mol and Timmerman 2014). Despite this growing attention, there are also recognised gaps in our knowledge of international student migration. There is uneven spatial coverage of the phenomenon, with the situation in some countries (e.g. the UK, the US, Australia and Canada) well documented and analysed, while less attention is paid to other countries. There is no standard global definition of 'international' or 'foreign' student and, consequently, no reliable source for 'statistical data on international flows of foreign students' (Prazeres 2013, 809). Equally, there is no standard definition of 'student', and so the focus of research tends to be on degree or credit mobility (King and Raghuram 2013, 129). This misses out on a range of other types of international student migration, of which migration related to less formalised language education is particularly important. Across all categories of international student migrants, there are gaps in our understanding of people's lived experiences. As Raghuram points out, student migrants are 'not easily categorisable as students alone' (2013, 140–141): they are also workers, family members, activists, locals. The emphasis on study thus serves to minimise other aspects of the lives of international students. It obscures key ways in which international students are embedded in, affected by, and influence, the places where they study and live.

In this paper, our focus is on international students in Dublin, Ireland. From our experiences of living and working in Dublin, we recognised that international student migration to Ireland and Dublin has clearly increased in recent years. This was in part a response to broader governmental and place-based initiatives (Department of Education and Skills 2010, 2016; Gebhardt 2011). The visible effects of international student migration included a growth in the number and size of language schools, an increased international student presence in universities and colleges, and international students working in public-facing sectors such as retail and restaurants. However, while the issue of international student migration has been addressed in policy-related research (see, for example, Finn and O'Connell 2012) and mentioned in more general accounts of migration to Ireland (see, for example, Gilmartin 2015), specific studies of the experiences of international students are limited and tend to focus on university students (Dunne 2009; O'Connor 2017; O'Reilly, Ryan, and Hickey 2010; Sheridan 2011). Our work with Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI), a migrant-focused non-governmental organisation, indicated that international students in Ireland were facing considerable challenges, many of which were not captured in policy or academic research. In particular, MRCI records clearly showed that many international students in Ireland were experiencing difficulties in relation to work and to their migrant status. While the presence of international students was visible in Dublin, their embodied experiences of living and working in the city were mostly hidden.

The main aim of this paper is to make the experiences of international students in Dublin visible, paying particular attention to how international students experience and respond to the difficulties they face. In the first section, we investigate the specific context of Ireland. We analyse the conditions under which international student migration to Ireland increased in recent years, paying particular attention to the different types of migrants and the legal frameworks that enabled and restricted their migration and their

lives. In the second section, we provide a detailed discussion of the lived experiences of international student migrants in Dublin, Ireland. In doing so, we draw from in-depth interviews with international student migrants and associated professionals to discuss their embodied experiences in Dublin, particularly as they negotiated a rapidly changing legal and policy framework. We frame our discussion of embodied experiences through the lens of precarity (Lorey 2015) and promise (Ahmed 2010; Park 2011). Precarity is a defining characteristic of the lives of international student migrants. For international students, precarity extends beyond employment to take three key forms – legal, economic, and personal – that intersect in place in specific ways. In this section, we show how precarity is grounded for international students in Dublin. However, the lives of international students are not just marked by precarity, but also embody promise. We therefore also discuss how promise offers a way of navigating through precarity in place. We conclude with an assessment of the relevance of the embodied experiences of international students in Dublin, Ireland – what we call promising precarity – for our understanding of contemporary migration.

International student migration to Ireland

In 2017, the Irish Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton, launched Ireland's second *International Education Strategy*. This strategy covers the period from 2016 to 2020; the first covered the period from 2010 to 2015. The first strategy had, as its key objective, that Ireland would become a world leader 'in the delivery of high-quality international education' (Department of Education and Skills 2010, 29). By the time the second strategy was published, the objective had become a vision for international education, namely 'to support Ireland to become internationally recognised for the development of global citizens through our internationalised education system and a market leader in attracting international student talent'. In both strategies, increasing the number of international students in Ireland is seen as crucial, in part because of their considerable value to the Irish economy (Department of Education and Skills 2016, 20).

The definition of international student in Ireland requires some consideration. In general, students from other European Economic Area (EEA) countries are not defined as international. Instead, international students are understood as from outside the EEA, studying in Ireland for a period of at least three months. This includes both those who are required to get a student visa in advance of arriving in Ireland (e.g. from China and India) and those who have a visa waiver (e.g. from the US, Malaysia, Canada and Brazil). The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) provides data on annual student visa applications, and these are shown in Table 1. Between 2011

Table 1. Irish Study Visa Applications.

Year	Number of applications	Number granted	Grant rate (%)
2011	5412	4741	87.6
2012	7790	6939	89.1
2013	10,850	9099	83.9
2014	12,348	10,462	84.7
2015	11,882	10,343	87.0
2016	11,984	10,072	84.0

Source: INIS 2013; Personal communication with INIS 2017.

and 2016, there was a 112 per cent increase in the annual number of study visas granted. In 2016, the first year for which this data is available, around 65 per cent of the visas issued were for 'Long Stay D visas', which cover stays of over three months.

The definition of student in Ireland also requires some attention. International students in Ireland generally study in three sectors: higher (tertiary) education; further (post-secondary) education; and (English) language education. The last publicly available audit of international student migrant stock in Ireland dates to March 2009, when it was estimated that there were 34,557 people registered: 38.82 per cent in higher education; 26.01 per cent in further education; and 30.02 per cent in the English language sector (Department of Justice and Equality 2009). An answer to a parliamentary question in 2014 suggested that there were around 36,000 non-EEA students in Ireland: 40 per cent of whom were degree students, and 38 per cent of whom were language students. However, these figures were described as a 'snapshot' and 'not reliable' by the Minister, Frances Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald 2014). The uncertainty over numbers is also visible in the Department of Education and Skills' recent report (2016, 50–57), which relied on a survey to capture data on English language students, and does not distinguish between EEA and non-EEA students. Comprehensive statistics are also not available in relation to where international student migrants live. However, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) calculates that of the 16,169 full-time students enrolled in publicly funded third-level institutions in 2015–2016, 8,455 (52.3 per cent) were in the Dublin region (HEA 2016). Of the 130 institutions that are recognised for the purposes of granting student visas, 78 (60 per cent) are in Dublin (INIS 2017). This clearly shows the concentration of international students in the city of Dublin and its hinterland.

The international student regime in Ireland is managed through a system of legal requirements. At the most basic level, some international students are required to get a student visa in advance of arrival in Ireland, and all international students are required to register with the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) shortly after arrival. In order to get a visa, be allowed into Ireland, and to register with GNIB, a potential international student has to provide a letter of acceptance from a recognised education provider, proof of payment of the entire course fee, evidence of monetary support of between €3000 and €7000 for stays of over 6 months, and evidence of private medical insurance (Finn and O'Connell 2012, 30). At this point, international students are given a Stamp 2 in their passport, which entitles them to work for up to 20 h a week for 7 months of the year, and for up to 40 h a week for 5 months. Their time as Stamp 2 holders does not count for the purposes of citizenship. Additionally, they have no family reunification rights, and they do not have access to public funds.

This straightforward description of the current international student regime in Ireland masks its volatility in recent years. Moves to change the international student regime began in 2010, when an Interdepartmental Committee made suggestions for a 'new immigration regime for full-time non-EEA students' (Department of Justice and Equality 2010). The recommendations of the Interdepartmental Committee were underpinned by a belief that the existing regime was leading to wide-scale abuse by both students and education providers, described as 'disreputable colleges … [and] students who do not attend their classes' (Department of Justice and Equality 2010, 2). Following on from this report, a number of significant changes were introduced. Key changes are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Key changes to the International Student regime in Ireland, 2011–2017.

Date	Change
1 January 2011	New time limits
1 April 2011	New funding requirements on first registration
19 November 2012	Doubled fees for an immigration certificate of registration
January 2015	Changes to Student Work Concession
1 October 2015	Changes to the holiday entitlements of language students
January 2016	New list of eligible programmes
	Reduction in permission for language students (from 1 year to 8 months)
June 2017	Changes to Third-Level Graduate Programme

While these are all significant changes, the January 2015 amendments to the Student Work Concession have created particular difficulties. The so-called Student Work Concession was first introduced in 2001 (Finn and O'Connell 2012, 36) as part of a broader strategy to make Ireland attractive to international students. Initially, students were permitted to work up to 20 h a week during term time, and 40 h a week outside term time. This changed in January 2015, and students are now only permitted to work 40 h a week during specific periods of the year: from May to August, and from 15 December until 15 January. The stated reason for the change was to 'align the work concession with the traditional academic year' (Department of Education and Skills and Department of Justice and Equality 2014, 12). Of course, few international students in Ireland study under these traditional academic structures, so this change has created further difficulties for students in terms of what is legally possible for them in Ireland.

Volatility in relation to international student migration policy has been a feature in many countries in recent years, such as the UK, Australia, Canada and the US (Mavroudi and Warren 2013; Sá and Sabzalieva 2018). In Ireland, language students – over a third of all international student migrants according to the Minister – have been the particular target of these recent changes, with new hierarchies of international students emerging, and favoured treatment for those studying for postgraduate and undergraduate degrees. However, even with these hierarchies, international students in Ireland occupy an uneasy position: encouraged to come to the country but marginalised on arrival. As a consequence, their experiences are often marked by precarity. In the next section, we turn to the issue of precarity in the lives of international students. We begin by developing our understanding of precarity, and then show how precarity offers insights into the lived experiences of international student migrants in Dublin, Ireland.

Precarity and international student migrants

The question of precarity has received considerable attention from social scientists in recent years. Guy Standing defines the 'precariat' as workers who lack access to a range of forms of labour security, such as employment, job and income security (2014, 17–18). Standing clearly states that migrants are a large share of the global precariat (2014, 153–159). Anderson (2010) develops the relationship between precarious work and modern migration, noting that immigration regimes are crucial for creating precarious workers, while Chacko and Price (2021) underscore the fluctuations in precarity experienced by temporary workers over time. Precarity has also been discussed in relation to the specific circumstances of international student migrants. Standing identifies student

mobility as one of the key features of modern migration (2014, 153–159), though he does not address the forms of precarity experienced by international student migrants. In her discussion of international students in Australia, Robertson shows the complex identities of international students and highlights their 'extended precarity' as they seek more permanent forms of status, which in turn leaves them more vulnerable to labour exploitation (Robertson 2013; 2015). Precarity was highlighted by Susan Thomas (2017) in her ethnographic study of indebtedness among Indian students at a US university and by Chacko (2021) in her study of integration and precarity of international students in Singapore. While discussions of international student mobility often highlight experiences at work – particularly the transition from study to work – this can ignore the complexity of international students' subject positions (King and Raghuram 2013), and the multiple ways in which they might experience precarity.

From our perspective, the precarious – broadly defined – offers a productive way to consider the experiences of international students. Our starting point comes from Isabell Lorey, who defines precarity as 'a category of order that denotes social positionings of insecurity and hierarchization' (in Puar 2012, 165). In a later publication, Lorey expands on her understanding of precarity, distinguishing between its three forms: precariousness, precarity, and (governmental) precarisation (Lorey 2015). Precariousness, Lorey writes, is an existential state, the common form of human existence. Precarity creates differentiations and hierarchies in this existential state. As Lorey describes it, 'the precariousness shared with others is hierarchized and judged, and precarious lives are segmented' (Lorey 2015, 21). Precarisation is a form of governance that relies on the destabilisation of employment, and of the conduct of life (Lorey 2015, 13). This approach moves beyond precarity as outcome to focus on the process of precarisation, including its politicisation, thereby offering an alternative approach to considering the lives of international student migrants.

We chose to research the issue of precarisation in Dublin because of the significant concentration of international students in the city. We did so through in-depth qualitative interviews with current and former international students in Dublin and with people who worked in the international student industry. We focused on recruiting participants from four leading countries of origin – China, Brazil, United States and Venezuela – with a range of education experiences (language schools, further education and higher education). Participants were recruited through personal contacts and through gatekeepers, including MRCI. Information about interviewees is provided in Table 3. Additionally,

Table 3. Overview of interviewees.

Code	Name	Country of origin	Gender	Description
01HEChina	Li	China	Male	Student – Higher education
02HELSChina	Mei	China	Female	Student – Higher education and language programme
03LSBrazil	Joao	Brazil	Male	Student – Language programme
04LSBrazil	Adriana	Brazil	Female	Student – Language programme
05LSVenezuela	Sofia	Venezuela	Female	Student – Language programme
06LSBrazil	Paulo	Brazil	Male	Student – Language programme
07FEHEBrazil	Daniel	Brazil	Male	Student – Further education and higher education
08HEUS	Amy	United States	Female	Student – Higher education
01PROFIreland	Patrick	Ireland	Male	International student recruitment
02PROFLSIreland	Alan	Ireland	Male	Teacher – Language programme
03PROFLSIreland	Maria	Ireland	Female	Teacher – Language programme

we sought to interview professionals working in related services. We recruited professionals through personal contacts and through cold-calling companies. The interviews were semi-structured in order to allow interviewees to describe their social worlds, opinions and experiences in their own words, while providing room for them to raise issues and concerns that we might not have otherwise considered. We conducted the interviews in English, in sites chosen by the interviewees, which ranged from office spaces to public cafes. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed and thematically analysed. In total, we interviewed eight current or former students and three professionals, with each interview lasting for a minimum of 90 min.

Through our analysis of the interviews, we identified three key ways in which the precarious is experienced. The first is legal precarisation, relating to immigration status. The second is economic precarity, relating to the cost of studying and living in Dublin, and the difficulties in finding decent work. The third is what we call personal precariousness: the ways in which precarity affects the 'intimate spheres' of people's lives (Robertson 2015, 942), such as relationships, health and wellbeing. We first show how insecurity and hierarchization permeate each of these interconnected aspects of the lives of international students in Dublin, and then offer an alternative reading that focuses on promise and hope.

Legal precarisation

The legal regime in Ireland, particularly its volatility, was a source of considerable anxiety for the students we interviewed. Drawing from Lorey, we describe this as legal precarisation, because it is a form of governance that destabilises the lives of international students in Dublin. The changes to time limits, introduced in January 2011 (Table 2), created considerable difficulties for existing students. These changes drew distinctions between students based on their programme of study. People studying for degrees were permitted to stay in Ireland for a maximum of seven years, while people studying at language schools or on non-degree programmes could stay in Ireland for a maximum of three years. The second changes, introduced in January 2016, reduced the time that language students could remain in Ireland from three years to two years. Joao, from Brazil, told us that laws were changing too quickly and too often. 'I think since I arrived here they must have changed like five times … . That's hard, because you can't plan your future like that', he said. Sofia, a language student from Venezuela, who said that legal changes had made her future uncertain, also raised the issue:

> If you renew before October, you can get one year, but after, not. And … if I would renew it will be February, so after October, it's just for 8 months. That's what I'm not sure if I'm going to stay in Ireland. I'm not sure.

Adriana, from Brazil, also highlighted the legal changes, telling us:

> I'd say like there are lots of girls complaining that they don't know what they are going to do now with the new laws, because they really want to stay, but having only eight months and not being able to work for most of the time is going to be hard for them.

While Joao and Sofia emphasised the time limits on visa for non-degree and language students, Adriana raised another important legal change. When the Student Work

Concession was changed in January 2015, it created difficulties for people who were relying on employment income to fund their studies and living expenses. These significant structural changes to the international student regime have thus created conditions of legal precarity. To an extent, this was recognised in the Student Probationary Extension scheme, which was introduced by the Department of Justice and Equality after the new time limits came into force in January 2011. This scheme allowed students who were affected by the changes in time limits to register for an additional two-year probationary period. However, there were no such concessions in relation to changes to the work concession though, as Adriana pointed out, those changes were also creating significant problems for students living in Ireland.

Adriana, when we met her, was concerned that the recent legal changes would lead to an increase in the number of international students who become undocumented. Certainly, the experience of the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) suggests that this is a pressing issue. In the period between 2013 and 2016, MRCI assisted 956 people who had moved to Ireland as students and subsequently became undocumented. The main countries of origin were Mauritius, Brazil, China, Venezuela and Pakistan, and a considerable proportion were unemployed. While none of the people we interviewed were undocumented at that time, many spoke about their fear of losing their status in the future, or of periods in the past where their status was uncertain. In some instances, these fears were linked to the structural changes to the student regime. In other instances, people were not directly affected by the structural changes, but they expressed profound concerns about their future or recounted stories of previous insecure status. Mei, a Chinese woman, had moved to Dublin to study at a higher education institution. She failed her course, which meant she was no longer eligible for a student visa. Though not legal, she used personal contacts to obtain a student visa for a language course, and managed to get the visa renewed without meeting the attendance requirement. Others spoke about the ways in which they manipulated the attendance requirement for language schools so as to maintain their right to a visa. This included sharing information about schools and teachers who were lax in their approach to attendance, or immigration officials who bent rules, or how to pay for additional language courses in order to appear to meet the requirement (see also Pan 2011). While people told us these stories from the vantage point of a more secure legal status, the fear they experienced was still present, if less immediate. Daniel, for example, told us about his anxiety over the expiry of his GNIB registration before he was able to secure his status on a graduate scheme. His educational institution told him not to worry, that it 'would be fine', but he said he was 'really concerned':

> I was getting distracted, and I was getting sort of, I don't know, I just, I didn't, I barely, I didn't really feel any motivation to work or do anything, so it kind of took over most of my thoughts during those days.

For Daniel, anxiety over his legal status spilled over into all aspects of his everyday life, showing how legal precarisation and economic precarity are closely interconnected.

Economic precarity

There is an extensive literature that links migration and economic precarity. This literature pays particular attention to migrant experiences at work and as workers, through sectoral

concentration, poor pay and conditions, and vulnerability to exploitation (see Anderson 2010; Lewis et al. 2015), often in global cities (Wills et al. 2010). However, despite a recognition of the importance of work in the lives of international students (Raghuram 2013), their experiences as workers are often relegated to their experiences as students. Instead, discussions of work tend to highlight post-study careers, whether these are in the country of study as part of the search for a more secure legal status, or in the country of origin (Collins et al. 2017; Findlay et al. 2012; Van Mol 2014; Waters 2009).

In Dublin, as elsewhere, research that deals specifically with the experiences of international students as workers is limited. The small body of research that focuses explicitly on international students in Ireland is effectively silent on the topic of work (Dunne 2009; O'Connor 2017; O'Reilly, Ryan, and Hickey 2010; Sheridan 2011). A small number of exceptions provide some insights into this aspect of the lives of international students. In her research on workers in low-skilled service industries in Dublin – catering, cleaning and security – McPhee found that many moved to Dublin using student visas (McPhee 2016). Smith's research with au pairs found that many had come to Ireland on student visas and became au pairs 'due to the lack of employment options and the need to finance their studies and stay' (Smith 2015, 173). Pan's ethnographic study with Chinese student migrants in Dublin showed they often worked in service industries with a reputation for exploitation of staff (Pan 2011, 278). Data from MRCI shows that, of the people they assisted in the period from 2013 to 2016 who had first entered Ireland as students, 22.5 per cent worked in the food and accommodation sector, 16.2 per cent in the retail sector, and 9.6 per cent in the care sector (25.8 per cent were unemployed at the time they approached MRCI). These sectors – such as hospitality, retail and care – are particularly open to worker exploitation (see MRCI 2012a, 2012b, 2015a, 2015b). This evidence suggests that 'student-workers' (Collins 2018) in Dublin, like their counterparts in Australia, New Zealand and Denmark, are vulnerable at work and may be taken advantage of (Campbell, Boese, and Tham 2016; Collins 2018; Wilken and Dahlberg 2017).

Difficulties at work in Dublin were a common story among the people we spoke to. Sofia's first job was in a bakery, and she told us:

> [I]t was a really really bad experience, because I didn't know and I didn't sign a contract. And after that, after one month and a half, the place just closed, and I didn't receive any money, any payment.

While she expressed positive sentiments about her next job, which was in the restaurant industry, it was clear from her description of the job that her conditions of employment were not ideal. For example, when asked if she knew her hours of work in advance, she said that her employers did a weekly roster, but 'if the place was busy, they ask you to work more'. She did not get any additional pay for these additional hours, but was just paid at the regular hourly rate. Adriana told us about her cleaning job with an agency. Having worked there for a year, she asked for holidays at Christmas. In response, her employer let her go 'with no further reasons or justifications or anything'. Some people worked illegally: for cash in hand payments, or for more hours than permitted, putting them at risk of contravening their work concession. Most of the people who worked had irregular hours which, if they were attending a language school, made it difficult for them to maintain the required attendance level and hold down their job. When

Joao, from Brazil, started working four hours a day, he had to miss two hours of his class. As he said, 'there was not a lot I could do because I had to work to live here. I had to earn money.' People found ways around not having the required level of attendance (Pan 2011, 269). Overall, though, it is difficult to balance attendance requirements with precarious work, which intensifies the experiences of economic precarity of international students in Dublin.

Economic precarity is related to the types of work available to international students in Dublin, but also to the cost of living in the city, which includes the cost of studying and of legal compliance. When Joao said that he needed to work to live in Ireland, he mentioned why:

> I had to save money to renew the visa, to buy the course, I have to buy insurance, well, insurance comes with the course in the school

At the language school Joao attended, his six-month course cost €800, and he also had to pay another €300 for a new GNIB registration. Adriana also mentioned how the cost of GNIB registration had increased, from €60 when she first arrived in Ireland, to €300 today. For Paulo, also, the cost of studying was a burden. He talked about a rapid increase in fees for a degree course that he started but did not finish: from €3200 in the first year to €3900 in the second year, an increase of almost 22 per cent. The cost of studying and GNIB registration created, in effect, an economic trap for international students in Ireland. Their ability to work depended on having a study visa; the cost of studying meant that they had to work and, in the process, jeopardised their status as students. The cost of living in Dublin, particularly housing, was also an issue for many of the people we met. Migrants are particularly vulnerable in the current housing crisis in Dublin, because they are concentrated in the mostly unregulated private rental sector (Kitchin, Hearne, and O'Callaghan 2015; Gilmartin 2015). This was evident in the stories people told us about their experiences of finding and retaining a place to stay. Living in overcrowded accommodation was common. Mei told us that she shared a two-bedroom apartment with four other people. Joao stayed in a studio apartment that he shared with five other people:

> It was a tiny, tiny place. I paid €180. But there was a condition. There was 1 bed like … a double bed, and I had to sleep two weeks in the double bed and two weeks on the mattress on the floor … . So that's what I did. Just to save some money.

While some students availed of on-campus accommodation, it too was considered expensive. Amy, from the United States, said that it cost over €8,000 a year to stay in a campus apartment, 'and it's only going up'.

While our initial interest was in the experiences of international students at work in Dublin, our research also uncovered another related form of economic precarity. This was experienced by people working in education industries, in particular those involved in English language teaching. It was difficult to find people in the English language industry to talk to us, which we initially thought was connected to the recent exposure of rogue language schools, described by Alan as 'dodgy schools and visa factories'. The small number of professionals who agreed to talk to us showed us that economic precarity was not restricted to international students, but was also experienced by many of those who taught them. Maria, an experienced English language teacher with postgraduate qualifications, said 'security of employment is an absolute joke'. Maria also drew attention to

the different treatment of native and non-native English teachers, describing what she saw as 'definite exploitation' in terms of pay, regardless of skills or ability. While the issue of casualisation in Irish universities has come under critical scrutiny (Courtois and O'Keefe 2015), this has not been the case for the English language industry. Instead, when attention is focused on the English language industry, it tends to be framed as a source of potential reputational damage to broader internationalisation efforts. The extent to which both workers and students in the industry are open to exploitation is conveniently ignored.

Personal precariousness

While legal and economic precarity were clearly present in the embodied experiences of international students and teachers in Dublin, this was not sufficient to capture the range of ways in which people experienced, and articulated, their everyday lives. In our analysis of interview data, we also encountered a third, interlinked form of precarity that we describe as personal. This includes the types of 'intimate' issues identified by Robertson in her discussion of international students in Australia: romantic relationships, having children, and ease of general mobility (Robertson 2015, 942). However, our understanding of personal precariousness is broader, and also includes the 'messy complexity of emotions' experienced and expressed by international student migrants (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015, 76).

Many of the people we spoke to mentioned relationships. In some instances, people had been able to secure their status in Ireland because of a romantic relationship – including marriage and de facto relationships. This caused anxiety, particularly for some of the women we met. Adriana had got married to her Irish husband and, because of this, was granted a Stamp 4 visa. Yet she clearly struggled with the marriage and what this meant for her. She told us:

> It was mixed feelings. It was good for jobs but I remember kind of thinking about him and saying ok, this is strange, everybody will think I got married because of the passport and you know the advantage of working full time. This is bad.

For Adriana, marriage affected her sense of self in two key ways. The first was that it affected her sense of independence. Rather than being fully self-reliant, she was dependent on another person to secure her legal status and to improve her economic status. This is because, as a language student, she had no other clear options for making her immigration status more permanent. The second was that she was very concerned with how her marriage would be perceived by others. In particular, she felt that she would be perceived as dishonest, marrying only for legal status. While she insisted this was not the case, she repeated that she had 'mixed feelings' a number of times during the interview.

Others struggled with relationships, though often individualised this struggle. For example, Li spoke about linguistic and cultural differences that affected his everyday experiences in Ireland, mentioning the 'language barrier' and describing his English as 'too bad' to pick up jokes. Daniel told us that it was hard for him to even try to be in a relationship, for two reasons. The first is that he thought there was a general level of indifference or hostility to people of his nationality, saying 'they are tired of Brazilians and that's obvious'. In his direct experience, this had led to him being rejected because of his nationality, though this contrasts with the Brazilians and Latin Americans

interviewed by Marrow (2013), who commented on favourable treatment in Ireland. The second was that he thought that people would doubt his sincerity and his motives, similar to Adriana's concerns. He said this affected his self-esteem, and how he approached people, making him much more cautious and reticent.

While relationships were an important part of the discussions we had with many international students, the question of the future surfaced in all the interviews, whether with students or professionals. Recent research on international migrants has emphasised the need to use temporal perspectives for the study of migration and mobility (Collins and Shubin 2015; Robertson 2016; Robertson and Ho 2016). Collins and Shubin, for example, caution against understanding migration through a conventional life-course approach, which 'overemphasizes individuals' capacity to manage time as an objective, external entity that leads to particular endpoints' (2015, 103). Certainly, research on international student migration is often concerned with those endpoints: qualifications, social and economic capital, cosmopolitanism (Brooks and Waters 2013). Yet for those involved in international student migration, the future is less certain, and a source of considerable anxiety. Sofia, who was affected by the changes in time limits for language schools, was sure that she did not want to return to Venezuela, saying: 'things there are awful … . It's like in Cuba now'. However, she was very unsure about what her life would bring. She said she wanted to go elsewhere, and when we asked her where, said 'I really would like to go to United States. … I would like but I'm not sure yet … . Or maybe Spain.' Daniel also spoke about this, telling us that 'I don't really know what's going to happen … . So it's just a scary possibility I think'.

Daniel and others expressed their concerns as anxiety and as fear. Lorey suggests that the distinction between the two – between abstract anxiety and concrete fear – is becoming more blurred in an era of increasing precarisation. While personal precariousness is an integral part of the human condition, processes of legal and economic precarisation intensify anxiety and fear. For international students, this is experienced through a lack of ability to plan for or indeed imagine the future. This is also the case for many of those who teach them, since precarisation is not just experienced by students. As Maria said:

> That can be really hard in the short term but also in the long term in terms of making plans and things like that. So it's a real struggle because so many teachers that I know … are happy to do things like extra Masters programmes for professional development, but they're either not given the opportunity or discouraged from doing it.

Like their international students, many teachers also experience precarity, in 'an industry that doesn't seem to take itself seriously and is not taken seriously by anyone else' (Maria).

Promising precarity

The intersections of legal, economic and personal precarisation and precarity lead to challenging embodied experiences for international students in Dublin. In this situation, the uncertainty that results from temporary legal status, and its consequences for other aspects of students' lives, is often explained away in terms of hope and aspirations. Hope and aspirations take many forms (see Carling and Collins 2018). For international students, they could be related to improved educational or professional qualifications – proficiency in English, or postgraduate training, or relevant work experience. They

could also be related to citizenship status, described by Robertson as 'the promise of citizenship' (2015, 942). Hope, in this context, co-exists with anxiety, in what Boccagni and Baldassar describe as an emotional experience for migrants, characterised by 'the simultaneity of attraction and hope for the better life conditions achievable abroad, alongside the anxiety and distress that meeting these expectations entails' (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015, 76).

In our discussion of precarisation and precarity, we have prioritised anxiety and distress. But the embodied experiences of international students encompass positive experiences as well. We want to return to hope and to what Sara Ahmed has called promise. Ahmed focuses on the promise of happiness which also involves 'being intimate with what is not happy' (2010, 31). As Ahmed points out, migrants are often corralled into performing a specific role in order to confirm their belonging. They are, she writes, 'bound by the happiness duty [which] for migrant means telling a certain story about your arrival as good, or the good of your arrival' (2010, 158). We take inspiration from Ahmed's broader characterisation of promise as 'an expression of desire; … an indication of something favourable to come' (2010, 30). While this, like hope, appears to be a future-oriented perspective, it relies also on an orientation towards the past. Inspired by Durkheim, Ahmed insists that 'our history, our arrival, involves moments of fortune and misfortune, [and] hope is an orientation toward such past moments as the relativity of fortune' (2010, 182). Rather than removing anxiety and replacing it with hope or promise, Ahmed argues instead for an intimacy *between* hope and anxiety, a form of 'hopeful anxiety' (2010, 183). This is possible even under conditions of precarisation. As Lorey points out,

> Living and working in precarious conditions, therefore, does not just mean being exposed to the unforeseeable, to insecurity, being able to make long-term plans and being exploitable specifically for this reason. Beyond this, in dealing with contingency, the possibility arises at the same time of being able to leave and start something new: the potentiality of exodus and constituting. (Lorey 2015, 104–105)

The international students we met embodied this potentiality. For some, this was expressed in the good of arrival, as in the case of Joao. As a gay man, he said his decision to move to Dublin was motivated by wanting to be able to fall in love. He said, 'I came to do that, to be able to be a person, the person that I am.' Yet this individualising narrative masks the extent to which Joao relied on communities of solidarity to do this. His move to Dublin was facilitated by financial help from friends and family; he got work in Dublin through Brazilian contacts, and often worked more than permitted hours; he was able to renew his visa despite not having the required level of attendance; and his Irish boyfriend loaned him money so that he could pay for the visa. A few months after we met, he planned to apply for a different visa on the basis of his de facto relationship with his boyfriend, which would allow him to work without restrictions. Therefore, while legal precarisation was creating insecurity for Joao, he was able to constitute alternative experiences through community in place. In fact, for a number of the people we met, the possibility of starting something new was enabled when they were able to change status, most often because of de facto or other relationships.

Another form of potentiality was evident through acts of disobedience (Lorey 2015, 105). These included minor legal transgressions, such as not having the required levels of attendance, working excessive hours, or working informally like Mei, who said

'Chinese people maybe if they have a small job, just need you a couple of hours, they will bring you to there and pay you cash in hand.' For others, precarisation led them to organise and resist. Adriana and Daniel had been working in a voluntary capacity with migrant support organisations. Maria had been working with colleagues in her language school to improve their pay and conditions, and they had just managed to have five paid sick days introduced. When the bakery at which Sofia worked closed without warning, she and her colleagues sought help from other organisations and people, and campaigned for the pay they were owed. As she said, 'It was a bad experience but at the same time it was a good experience because I really met really good people.' The solidarity that emerged through social interaction, both in organising and in everyday lives, led many international students and their teachers to speak with affection for their lives and friends in Dublin. Some people described online communities, for example Facebook groups for Brazilians or Venezuelans in Dublin, as a helpful source of information and support both before and after arrival. Others commented favourably on diversity in Dublin, on the relationships they had been able to develop in the city, and on the ways in which they had been able to make the city navigable. As Paulo told us, 'It's been a great experience to be here.'

Conclusion

International students are an important part of everyday life in Dublin, and their presence has shaped the city in a variety of ways. Despite this, their experiences as residents of Dublin are often obscured. Drawing on in-depth interviews with international students and professionals, and on the work of MRCI, a migrant-supporting NGO, this paper makes the lived experiences of international students in Dublin visible. We found that the concepts of precarisation and precarity – which have legal, economic and personal implications – provide useful insights into the everyday lives of international students in Dublin. We showed the extent of legal precarisation in relation to international student migrants in Ireland, and how this has created hierarchies that range from the more privileged higher education students to the less privileged language students. Data from the MRCI and from our interviews highlighted the embodied effects of legal precarisation on international students in Dublin, and how this translated into economic precarity. The intersection of legal and economic insecurity created difficult conditions, with people caught in the double bind have having to work to pay for study, but needing to study in order to be able to work. This was intensified in Dublin, because of the very high cost of living, particularly housing, in the city. As a consequence, we showed how international students were vulnerable to exploitation – by employers and by landlords. This meant that many worked illegally, in difficult conditions, and often lived in overcrowded accommodation. Paying attention to these experiences shows how everyday life in Dublin rests on the exploitation of vulnerable groups such as international students, who are often forced to tolerate their exploitation out of necessity. This, in turn, affected their sense of personal precariousness. The international students we interviewed expressed this in terms of the barriers they experienced in forming romantic relationships and, more forcefully, in the effects of precarity on their ability to plan or imagine their futures. This is intensified because time spent as a student visa holder does not count towards citizenship in Ireland.

However, we also highlighted the possibilities of precarisation as not just an all-encompassing reality, but also as a site with the promise of 'the small sabotages and resistances of precarious everyday life' (Lorey 2015, 118). We describe this as promising precarity: the lives of international students, as evident in the case of Dublin, are marked by precarity, but these difficulties and anxieties are tempered to some degree by promise, as international students make the city navigable through experiences, relationships and communities. We emphasise precarity because of the specific circumstances that international student migrants encounter, but we recognise how it is co-constituted by promise and/or desire.

Our focus on precarisation, precarity and precariousness – the tripartite division articulated by Lorey – offers an important insight into contemporary migration. Too often, research on migration is fragmented and dichotomised (King 2012). Similarly, research on precarity emphasises work, though the impacts of precarity extend way beyond work to other dimensions of people's lives, shaping their current and future experiences. In this paper, we have considered the everyday lives of international student migrants living in Dublin from the perspective of the precarious. We show the multiscalar intersections of migration and the precarious: specifically the state-level legal and policy changes that frame the process of precarisation; how this leads to economic precarity as an outcome, intensified in the context of Dublin; and how this results in experiences of personal precariousness for migrants living in Dublin, both now and in relation to their future plans. Our emphasis on the precarious, broadly defined, illustrates the complex experiences of international student migrants in Dublin as migrants, as students, as workers, as activists and as social beings, who shape the city by their presence. This complexity also illustrates the possibilities for promise and hopeful anxiety in providing alternatives to governmental precarisation, through the alliances made by those who are framed as merely precarious, but who live alternative, fuller lives.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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