

## **The mobility of Romanian academic elites to the test of European construction**

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The international movement of students is an object of study both ancient and current, in terms of its scope and policies that are devoted to European and international levels. For a country like Romania, situated on the borders of the European Union, such an object can be viewed from two perspectives. Student mobility, but also professors, is one of the mechanisms of transformation of the education system and beyond, to reproduce or renew the ruling elites. The opportunity to study abroad has appeared at the same time, as a "risk" incentive to emigrate, strengthening centres of attraction for new candidates or by opening new, but also as a possible lever to reduce the gaps between academic institutions and even encourage returns. "Mobility" and "migration" may well be regarded as two sides of the same movement, which intersect in part without confusion. They are subject of contrasting social representations, by their association, in the case of "mobile" to "success", to "dynamism" and to "progress", and in the case of "emigrants", to the stigma of victims, to suffering and impoverishment. If mobility implies a certain continuity in the course, emigration means break and change of identity. Interdependent and yet relatively autonomous, social representations of mobility and migration depend on more or less the ancient country's social history. For Romania, these relations are reversed with respect to current representations, to the extent that emigration was associated, after World War II, to a form of political opposition and an exile that preserves the "real" national values. Despite progress in understanding the different categories of migrants<sup>3</sup> and the success of some programs of mobility and reinsertion, the ambiguous relationship between student mobility and migration have remained little studied in the last twenty years.

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<sup>3</sup> Historians have repeatedly approached the issue of migration in the academic context of modernization of the country from the nineteenth century (Nastasa, 2006). More recently, these migrations are the preferred object of a series of works done as part of "European Studies", analyzing the transfer of values as a process of Europeanisation (Ioana Bursan, 2009; Verena Wagner, 2007). A paradigm shift has marked recent years: an area of debate was set up between the defenders of the thesis of "Brain Drain" and those of the thesis of "Brain Gain" or the "Brain Circulation". Accountable for the human capital theory, these opposing views on the issue of gains and losses determined by the "upward mobility" between developed and underdeveloped countries, the skilled labor force or "brains" (Wagner, 2007).

The first objective of our exploratory study is to analyze the links between "mobility" and "emigration" within the different groups that make up the "academic elite"<sup>4</sup>. To what extent and in what form the movement of teachers and students does it benefit from the various disciplines and from their actors (situation of mobility) or on the contrary does it threaten it (situation of emigration)? What are the conditions and the strategies of accumulation and reconverting specific capital, international or spatial<sup>5</sup>, in career strategies? Can we conclude that there is a variable rate of convertibility of this capital, according to the social and economic circumstances?

To find the answers to these questions, we will analyze several examples of transformations of institutional and individual order related to the experiences of mobility in the social sciences and humanities. We have thus interviewed three categories of actors: university professors who have been able to benefit from "the opening of the system" of the early 1990s and have been directly involved in its transformations; students and PhD students who participate in mobility programs (Erasmus in particular); high level young researchers, who have done training courses in multiple "centres of excellence" in the humanities and social sciences<sup>6</sup>.

### **Some framing elements**

A prior perspective of the Romanian university system and of its recent transformations can be useful. The very low international mobility of teachers as well as Romanian students in the 1980s was the effect of a double insulation of its political regime, in the space of the socialist exchanges and in the international space in the broad sense (Gheorghiu, 1998). In contrast to the situation that existed until 1945 (peregrinatio academica oriented to western and central Europe) and in the 1950s (predominance of studies in the USSR and other socialist countries), the

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<sup>4</sup> Recognizing the heterogeneity of such a category, we specify that it is made primarily by the occupants of the dominant positions of national and university space by the pretenders to the occupation of these positions, the succession struggles and usurpation being the principle of the definition of these elites.

<sup>5</sup> Here we use the two concepts (international capital and spatial capital) in an undifferentiated way, knowing that the notion of international capital is confusing because of the financial homonym and because the spatial capital has already been the subject of a sociological definition: "both places *baggage* (the right to live, work or study, the presence of a social network, knowledge) and competences to manage them (ability to move, to use the premises of saving time and energy, organizing them) (...), spatial capital can be exchanged with social capital, cultural, economic or symbolic (...) according to the objectives of the actor and contexts." (Garneau, 2007)

<sup>6</sup> We conducted twenty interviews. Four young research members of the "excellence centers" were interviewed in order to update the results of an initial investigation into this type of institution: they are the Collegium Budapest, the New Europe College (NEC), the Doctoral School of the EHESS in Bucharest, the Center for Advanced Study Sofia (CAS) (Gheorghiu, 2004). Our thanks to Livia Dumitriu, Head of International Relations Services at the University of Iasi, for the documents submitted.

ability to study abroad had become rare and no longer constituted a decisive criterion in the selection and in the career of intellectuals or political elites, as was the case previously.

The liberalisation from 1990 onwards has taken several forms. The depoliticization, the privatization and the internationalization of higher education have been placed under the sign of the opening: university autonomy and registration in the circuits of international education, appearance of a private education sector, but also "commodification" of a part of public education. Higher education has also been accused of becoming a thriving industry ("factory degree"), in the circumstances in which other industries had collapsed. The posting of links between economy and education has made a constant increase of staff, an "inflation" of titles and a change in the relationship between disciplines and areas possible. Thus, over 18 years (1990-2008), while enrolment in secondary education is declining by about 200,000 students, higher education student numbers have multiplied by 4.5 (nearly one million currently). This increase in university enrolment<sup>7</sup> was performed differentially across domains: law school (240%), economics (150%) in social sciences (+100%) and medicine (50%) experienced the largest increases in enrolment, while the faculties of engineering have lost the privileged position they previously occupied<sup>8</sup>.

Meanwhile, during the same period, there has been an increase in emigration and in student mobility. The early 1990s was characterized by an acceleration of emigration called "discharge" after the opening of the borders. With the lifting of political control of departures from Romania, several measures were taken to separate requests for international academic mobility from emigration. According to the latest estimates (2008), the number of Romanians living as foreigners in the European Union is 1.7 million, this ranks first as a national group migrating within Europe (representing 15% of the total number of foreign nationals of another EU Member State). The first destination countries of Romanian immigrants in Europe are Italy (40%), Spain (18%), Germany (5%) and Hungary (5%)<sup>9</sup>.

Students make up small numbers among these migrants, although the short periods of study are not recorded. The international mobility of students from Romania has grown more slowly than the total numbers of students in Romania. In 2004, 2.4% of Romanian students (a percentage below the European average) were studying in another European country for at least one year, representing two thirds

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<sup>7</sup> The number of foreign students in Romania has also increased, but numbers remain low (from 8639 to 11095). Moreover, higher education has "feminized": the number of female students is higher than that of students since the late 1990s.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. INSSE, *Anuarul Statistic al României*, 2009, accessed at <http://www.insse.ro/cms/rw/pages/index.ro.do>

<sup>9</sup> EUROSTAT, 2009, press release from December 16th 2009, accessed at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_PUBLIC/3-16122009-BP/FR/3-16122009-BP-FR.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-16122009-BP/FR/3-16122009-BP-FR.PDF)

of the total of those studying abroad (16,000 on 23,000). France is the leading destination of Romanian students abroad totalling about 3,816 people in 2008-2009. Nearly one-third is enrolled in Humanities (1,285), other represented disciplines are medicine (690), economics and administration (650), law and political science (638). The number of students in colleges (mostly engineering schools) is also decreasing (479 in 2008-2009 against 613 in 2005-2006). In 2008, 50% of employees were enrolled in a master degree program and 18% in PhD studies<sup>10</sup>.

The example of France shows the different destinations of the "emigrants" and "mobile" people, despite the inability to clearly distinguish the two categories. Academic mobility is part of the international specific logic.

### **Social sciences and humanities mobility: strategies of the "lords"**

To observe the use of the international component in institutions and by their actors in Romania, we will take three categories of examples: professors, their students and "high level" young researchers.

The analysis of the trajectories of five university professors, who hold singular positions in the subspaces of their disciplines, shows a series of common properties associated with their international mobility. They are university professors in Bucharest and Iasi, in letters (German language and literature), political sciences (after starting their career in philosophy), communication sciences (after studying letters), sociology (with passage from research to teaching in the early 1990s), history (with a shift of the research field, from Bucharest urban history to the history of Jews in Romania). They occupy important positions in their disciplines - heads of department, director of the university publishing house, director of the national journal in his/her field, directors of research centers. They studied before 1989 and began their academic career after 1989<sup>11</sup>. Almost all have held administrative positions at their university (dean, department head ...), one of them is a university president and was Secretary of State at the Ministry of Education, another one was ambassador.

One of their common properties is the constant and early accumulation of international capital through the establishment of contacts and relationships of trust of long duration, with frequent exchanges after liberalization and particularly through the conversion of that international capital in social and institutional capital: personal relationships transformed into partnership agreements, private visits followed by visits of official delegations, with welcoming ceremonies, receptions, medal awards, titles of Doctor Honoris Causa, etc<sup>12</sup>. The scarcity of

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<sup>10</sup> Source : [editions.campusfrance.org/pays/2009/roumanie.pdf](http://editions.campusfrance.org/pays/2009/roumanie.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Professions before: researchers (2), journalist, publisher reader.

<sup>12</sup> One should write the history of relations between the University Alexandru Ioan Cuza of Iasi (Romania) and of the University Maximilian de Freiburg in Breisgau (Germany), which celebrated 30 years of official exchanges in 2005, and began with complex

international capital accumulated before 1989 explains its value, but also the devaluation risk exposures on the denunciations of the conditions of its acquisition, under police control. Hence the need to convert it into social and institutional capital, which makes it last.

The continuity in research activity and / or teaching, sometimes associated with work experience in related fields, such as journalism or publishing, is another common property. Thus, a historian, professor nearing retirement, whose scientific career was interrupted several times, restarted his/her career due to exceptional circumstances, international mobility. L. R., director of Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center (University of Tel Aviv), co-director of the Institute of Jewish Studies (University of Bucharest), is among the few "returners", who emigrated before 1989 to come back to work part time in Romania. He divides his time between Bucharest, his hometown, and Tel Aviv, where he settled after his emigration to Israel in 1985. His career, marked by several breaks of course, could serve as a link between places and remote areas of scientific activity; it also facilitates the establishment of exchange networks between the two countries. Historian, author of a thesis on the history of the Bucharest City Hall, he had to change his field of research after his arrival in Israel, including a center specialized in Eastern European countries. Since the end of the Cold War, this sector has shrunk, its chances of reconversion in other areas of research are low, and he felt uncomfortable teaching in the Hebrew language. L.R. returned to Romania from December 1991 with the organization of two conferences on the history of Jews in Romania, which led to the publication of a five-volume work on the subject. In the early 2000s, with the establishment of Centers of Jewish studies in Romania, he began to teach here. His participation in the works of the commission of Israeli-Romanian historians and in the "Wiesel commission", on the Holocaust in Romania, as well as in the foundation of the Research Centre Goldstein-Goren in Bucharest, contributed to a renewed perspective of the non-Jew Romanian historians on a little-known part of the history of their country.

Flexibility in the choice of research topics and adaptation to external demand is another common property of these mobile academics. In passing from the aesthetics of reception to the cultural history of Bukovina, A.H.C. has a very promising theme: seen from Austria, we are interested in rediscovering a distant province of the former empire; seen from Romania, we are interested in the historical and symbolic connections to Central Europe. Becoming a promoter of the rational choice theory (rational choice theory) in political science, such as A. M., or importing the human capital theory and the ideology of the World Bank, as D. S.,

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relationship of a professor of Freiburg, Paul Miron, with Iasi, his hometown. A collection of stories in three languages (Romanian, German, English), illustrated with photos, was published on the occasion of this anniversary: *Marturii despre un exemplar Partnering / Beweise einer ausgezeichneten Partnerschaft, 1975 to 2005, Iasi, May 2005.*

means to ensure a correspondence in the international networks, while benefiting from expert status, especially with the World Bank in Romania.

Finally, these scholars have in common that they associated the experience of cross-border mobility and transdisciplinary organizational strategies. Political science and communication science are probably the best examples. The founding actors of these disciplines in Romania, coming from different disciplines, have invested a field with multiple challenges, political, economic and intellectual ones. Interdependence relationships were established between the new political and administrative structures and the medias on the one hand and faculties and higher schools on the other<sup>13</sup>, which could provide them a constant public.

Summarizing these stories of life and institutions, one is struck by the close association between the pursuit of excellence and the accumulation of international capital. The lack of recognition, highlighted, as discussed later, by the problems of continuity and transmission of the established scientific heritage, reinforces the dependence on the international movement.

### **Renewal of generations: between circulation and reproduction**

Twenty years have passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall. To travel, young people do not have to face the same obstacles as their predecessors; visas have often been removed. The simplification of bureaucratic procedures does not seem to have encouraged greater mobility so far. Thus, students of the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences of Bucharest are described by their dean as highly mobile, particularly through the 24 Erasmus partners of this faculty, half of them in France or Belgium. But most students are not interested in going abroad; less than 20% participate in international mobility programs. Contacts and local networks, in Romania, have priority.

In this faculty, students are mostly middle class; many of them work to pay for tuition. The signs of social success of the first promotions are often highlighted, quoting the positions held in Romania and abroad. At the same time, despite the integration appreciated in the international mobility circuits, shifts continue and have even accentuated. The assessment made by the Dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences is severe: the scientific level is not one he would have liked; his department has managed to establish neither a European master degree nor doctoral degrees in joint supervision. The "intellectual products", the research works, circulate less than students, and the international visibility abroad remains low.

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<sup>13</sup> Faculties of political science and science communication exist in Bucharest at the University, as well as at the National School of Political Science and Administration (SNSPA), also State institution.

A Germanist academic shares the more general ascertainment of the students change in attitude in relation to mobility offers: unlike their counterparts in previous promotions, they have become more reticent and more selective. More reluctant because the financial conditions are discouraging, and they "do not want to appear as a pariah in front of their Western colleagues"; they understand the effort that is asked from them, for the short stays of one semester. The stay in a western university has lost the aura of heroism it had before. Students are also more selective; destinations are prioritized based on their reputation, on the existence or not of networks of compatriots able to assist in their integration (including to find work or settle for the long term). Student preferences for community networks are reducing their availability for scientific activity and move the internal borders abroad.

At the same time, the interest of academics for international mobility opportunities weakens the constraints of everyday life have made them more homebodies. In general, the level of literary studies (Germanistic) is considered down: the best students, even if they received intensive training in foreign languages in high school, choose economics especially or law studies. The character of the "second best" of these studies is confirmed by the choice of the best students, for which studying letters is only a passageway to other studies and professions, where the degree in letters increases their chances of success. Faced with a demand for studies in foreign languages, departments have responded by simplifying the subjects taught in special sections, such as "Translation", thus forming technicians skilled in foreign languages for emigration.

The decline of interest in international mobility could be explained by the reduction of the gap in scientific information, thanks to online journal subscriptions. If this improvement is real, it is so only in part because access to books is still problematic, and translations are considered very poor. For some, the shift increases on the contrary: universities did not benefit from the scheme of gratuities in their favour before EU integration, and the state and universities have invested too little to equip their libraries.

The reproduction of high-level positions in higher education is doubly threatened by a lower level and by emigration. To limit losses, the university authorities have raised the performance standards, encouraged the proliferation of doctorates under joint supervision, which theoretically open opportunities to have a job abroad; foreign professors are invited in the examining boards to elevate the symbolic value of diplomas. But the downside is that the gap is increasing between the levels of different categories of students in the same faculty or the same department, which also raises the frustrations of those who consider themselves to be victims. The violent remarks run by students or former students on the discussion forums of universities websites, in the press or blogs, are the proof of it.

Under these conditions, the specter of brain drain appears, paradoxically, less threatening. Foreign language students are unlikely to compete with the "natives"

and make an academic career in a country that is not theirs. The study of foreign languages open a door to a "modest" emigration, with reconversion in activities without a direct link to the diplomas. The extension of the study trips to look for work abroad has no major risks in relation to the origin university, because it gives grace periods for these prodigal sons, who can stay a few years abroad before returning back to their studies.

As one sociologist interviewed explained, the problem of "brain drain" does not arise immediately: "I confess I have emphasized the need to break out of isolation. I confess that I told my best students who have asked me at the end of their studies what they should do, to stay or go. Seeing how these programs function, I told them to leave, do a high quality masters degree or PhD studies. Before taking into consideration the question of brain drain, we must solve the question of getting out of the wrong area. I say this because in our field, the social sciences, does not put an emphasis on what apartment I live in, in what neighbourhood of Bucharest or on Wall Street, because you can collaborate very well. The problem is not if they stay in Romania or if they leave, the problem is if someone who studied in Romania continues to work in research networks abroad dealing with Romania." The extension of the scientific cooperation networks abroad, thanks in large part to the support of the Romanian diaspora is, on the contrary, a good sign. "I can appeal to my former PhD students who work abroad but keep an eye on what is happening here, and they'll give me a hand. Thus we can get out of methodological nationalism!" (Interview with D.S.)

### **From indetermination to the specialization in the international**

For their part, the international institutions established in the 1990s as "excellence centers" for top young researchers in humanities and social sciences have stabilized and are better recognized; their institutional capital has increased<sup>14</sup>. The CAS of Sofia has just moved its reception area has grown. The NEC of Bucharest has more support from the Romanian state; the regional and national character of funded projects has been strengthened.

The linguistic dualism always separates the English and French lines, although many of their students with a scholarship master both languages: the recommended bibliographies like suggested itineraries highlight the differences throughout the route of high level students. The French branch, represented mainly by the French Doctoral School of Social Sciences from Bucharest University, supported by the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, seems to have cleared recently, while France remained the leading country destination abroad for Romanian students. The Collegium Budapest and Central Europe University are best placed to recruit PhD students and postdocs, constituting a hub between Berlin, Bucharest and Sofia

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<sup>14</sup> For the history and functioning of these « excellence centers » in humanities and social sciences, see Gheorghiu, 2004.



on one side, top American universities on the other. The joint efforts of socialization of scientific elites deployed at Collegium Budapest in view of their transnational integration confirms that strategic position.

The scholarship students know better today the procedures and the priority themes. They have "the culture of the 'grants' research" and benefit from the shared experience of older colleagues. For a part of them, the material conditions for this mobility are not similar with what could have been expected in the early 1990s. The amount of the scholarships is considered to be sufficient, in spite of the differences that persist between the major host institutions<sup>15</sup>. If family support is the most often required during the entire period of mobility, this is due to the short duration of scholarships and to their difficult sequence. The discontinuities of course, the uncertainties about the prospects of continuing the scientific activity, and especially the weak hope of career opportunities at the end are major differences compared to the previous situation. Their predecessors benefited from favourable circumstances, with internal and external mobilities better synchronized, that gave meaning to the general "opening". Today, with the closure inside, following the positions blocking in times of crisis, scholarships and trips abroad are best described as "valves" in order to avoid a dramatic situation or emigration. They prolong a state of indetermination to "stay in the loop", to have access to information, to keep contact with former colleagues, to avoid exclusion.

The insecurity and the relative instability of this fraction, the youngest and most endowed with cultural capital of the new intellectual elite<sup>16</sup> have increased in recent years. The uncertainty of the professional becoming, the addiction to "projects" and to "grants", mainly through international structures, had as a main effect the strong subjective perception of "uprooting". They have strengthened the ties between the members of these cosmopolitan groups, who share the expatriation experience, the reclusive life in the "excellence centers", seminars as parties, and

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<sup>15</sup> At Collegium Budapest, as at the NEC, the teams are composed of young researchers from 15 to 20 people present for periods of three to six months. The amount of the scholarships is significantly different between Budapest (1500 euros, net decreased to 1100 after removing housing costs and maintenance) and Bucharest and Sofia (600 euros, but the accommodation and maintenance are free). With 750 euros a month in Paris, 650 in Bucharest, the Doctoral Francophone School are proportionally lower, but cover longer periods of time (ten months per year for three years). The percentage of *senior scholars* is more important in Budapest, while in the group of scholarship researchers in Bucharest and Sofia, there are only young PhD students and postdocs, the *seniors being* invited occasionally for conferences. In Budapest, projects can last longer, from three to four years, but they are reserved for *seniors* who supervise young people.

<sup>16</sup> It is through their international institutional careers that members of these excellence centers, selected on the basis of their research works, of their linguistic capital (knowledge of at least two foreign languages) and of their international experience, are distinguished from other categories of youth artistic and intellectual elite.

who have an interest in maintaining these ties to survive in the short and medium term while waiting for a turn that brings them stability and recognition. Given the low wages (recently reduced by 25 %) and the poor working conditions of the young researchers and academics in Romanian universities, the recruitment by a national university takes the meaning of a decommissioning from the previous position. The majority of C. C.' colleagues, young researchers in the humanities and social sciences, have not returned to Romania, and those who have chosen to return have encountered major difficulties reintegrating. "Either they continue going back and forth without real hope of finding a suitable position, and fear especially the confinement in a Romanian university or the constrained reconversion to jobs in bank, or publishing houses. There are several who have remained undecided, 'one foot in Romania, one foot abroad', observing the changes of the situation ... " (Interview with C. C.)

The alternative for survival in the indeterminacy is the specialization in the "international" field. Positions were unfilled until recently in the diplomatic services, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the institute specializes in international cultural exchanges (the Romanian Cultural Institute, ICR, organized according to the British Council model). The political renewal promoted by the "liberal democratic" and "liberal" governments, of the center-right, since 2004, has increased the chances of young intellectuals holding positions in these sectors<sup>17</sup>. For some, there were real professional reconversions; others extend the state of indeterminacy while waiting for better opportunities to convert their international capital.

### **Conclusion: mobility between opening and closure**

The mobility of academic elites in Romania, like in other former socialist countries, was ahead and prepared the political process of enlargement of the EU, facilitating the internal reforms, and repositioning the institutions and actors according to the new standards of excellence. Usually studied independently of the

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<sup>17</sup> We can quote the relevant examples of young ministers of foreign affairs of Romania since 2004: Mihai Razvan Ungureanu, historian specialized in Jewish studies, currently Prime Minister of Romania; Adrian Cioroianu, also a historian, former member of the executive committee of the liberal party, professor at the University of Bucharest; Teodor Baconsky, a current minister, studied theology, and is the former ambassador of Romania to the Vatican and France. Not yet Minister, Cristian Preda, professor of political science at the University of Bucharest, Doctor of the EHESS, is currently a member of the European Parliament from the ruling party (PDL) after being an adviser of the President in office, Traian Basescu, and was responsible for organizing the eleventh Francophone Summit in Bucharest in 2006. Among those interviewed, A.C.H. was Ambassador of Romania in Vienna, and C.C. had just been appointed Deputy Director of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Tel Aviv (a position cut shortly after the interview, following the austerity measures).

problem of emigration, student mobility is influenced by migration policies, and its effects should be considered in the long term, with the proper role of diasporas in the construction of national identity, the morphological changes of the university area or the individual strategies of appropriation and exploitation of international capital associated with periods of study abroad.

For countries situated at the periphery of the European university system, such as Romania, the intensification and institutionalization of the international movement took as initial effects of differentiation and expansion of national academic space, a higher dependence of its institutions compared to those of different "centers" of the European system. Secondly, the internationalization of education has contributed to the professionalization of several new or renewed disciplines (political science, communication...) and to the specialization in activities related to international of a fraction of high level young researchers for which mobility was an opportunity for reconversion. Finally, it appears that the differences between "mobility" and "migration" tend to fade with the growing number of situations in-between migrant-mobile practices of round trips of the short and medium term as well as the transformation of emigration "lifestyle" for many families and communities. This equalization of condition is provided, however, at the expense of an increased precariousness insecurity and a weakening of trajectories and social ties, at a time of economic crisis and social closure.

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