
ARTICLES

THE RETURN OF THE DIASPORA – CRITICAL REACTION ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE MODERN WORLD SYSTEM

Alin Bulumac¹
Ovidiana Bulumac²

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of Romanian emigration is analyzed in this material from the perspective of the creative power of heroic culture (I. Bădescu) in relation to the period generically called transition, which can be understood in terms of a strong anomie (E. Durkheim). This period made it possible to create a societal fracture (R. Baltasiu) between elites and society. At the crossroads of these vectors, the phenomenon of Romanian emigration was born as an individual solution to get out of the national impasse that the entire country was going through. More than 30 years after the Revolution, despite all the predictions of an increasingly bleak future for the Romanians remaining in the country, a historical chance to reconquer the natural is glimpsed, through a phenomenon of the return to the country of those who had once left. It remains to be seen whether the return of the diaspora will be an economic phenomenon of recapturing local economic initiative in order to restore identity rent (academician T. Postolache) or will it re-enter the consumption logic of the modern world economic system (the same trap that initially "chased" them).

Keywords: transition, anomie, emigration, identity rent, fracasomanie, latent potential.

1. THE TRANSITION CRISIS – A PERIOD OF SOCIAL ANOMY

1.1. Anomia

The period of transition from one political system to another, completely different from the previous one, concomitant with the change of the economic system, from a centralized economy to an economic system focused on creating a free, decentralized market, was a step far too big to take all at once for Romania's ruling elites. The magnitude of this transformation was translated into two things: (1) the lack of a prompt reaction to the economic security risks to which the country's economy was subjected (especially in the industrial and banking sectors,

¹ PhD candidate at the School of Advanced Studies of the Romanian Academy – SCOSAAR, Scientific researcher at the European Center for Ethnic Studies, Email: alin.bulumac@gmail.com.

² PhD, scientific researcher III at the European Center for Ethnic Studies, Email: ovidiana.bulumac@gmail.com.

but not only)³ which would pursue the national interest and (2) the lack of organization of work to be compatible with the new economic system. In this rush of events, the country's ruling elites, in turn being overwhelmed by the height of the historical moment, were more concerned with preserving the privileges they held in the old political-economic system and transferring them to the new "democratic" architecture. The historical abandonment of the role of the elites within Romanian society, of organizing and uplifting society, and its replacement with an excessive concern for preserving privileges was understood by the population in the first phase through an inflation rate that increased from 5.1% in 1990, to 170% (1991), 210% (1992), and 256% (1993)⁴.

These things, at a theoretical level, can be translated through the concept of anomie, understood by academician Ilie Bădescu in the following terms:

"Anomia is precisely this moral vacuum, a vacuum of moral authority, a normative void, a socio-moral deficit, of social and professional integration"⁵.

In the absence of an active commitment from the elites to identifying sustainable solutions oriented towards the long-term benefit of the entire nation, the measures adopted predominantly aimed at the immediate exit from the crisis, without implying a structural correction of the underlying causes. The solution of privatizing state institutions with a strategic role in the country's economy, by offering share packages that ended up in the hands of foreigners, meant nothing more than signing one's own sentence to a life dependent on the interests of foreign capital, which aimed exclusively at one's own interests. Among the most representative cases of the handover of institutions with a strategic role in the economy for derisory amounts were that of Petrom, the largest company in Romania and one of the most important integrated oil and gas companies in Central and Eastern Europe at the time, which played a vital role in the national economy, and that of Romanian Commercial Bank, which had an excellent position in the local market and was seen as a launching pad in Central and Eastern Europe for Western groups interested in taking advantage of the expansion of the European Union in this area⁶. Both in the case of Petrom, where

³ ***, „Ce s-a ales de fabricile date pe un leu” [“What happened to the factories given away for one Romanian leu?”], in *Money*, October 23, 2021, Available at: <https://www.money.ro/ce-s-a-ales-de-fabricile-date-pe-un-leu/>, Accessed on September 22, 2025.

⁴ National Statistics Institute, „IPC – serie de date anuală” [“CPI – annual data series”], in *National Statistics Institute*, January 21, 2025, Available at: <https://insse.ro/cms/ro/content/ipc%E2%80%93serie-de-date-anuala>, Accessed on September 22, 2025.

⁵ „Anomia este tocmai acest vid moral, vid de autoritate morală, un gol normativ, un deficit socio-moral, de integrare socială și profesională”, in Ilie Bădescu, *Istoria sociologiei – perioada marilor sisteme. De la A. Comte la M. Weber* [History of sociology – the period of great systems. From A. Comte to M. Weber], Galați, Porto-Franco Publishing House, 1994, p. 437.

⁶ Ionuț Șișu, „2006: Privatizarea BCR – liderul pieței bancare românești” [“2006: Privatization of BCR – the leader of the Romanian banking market”], in *Wall-Street*, April 25, 2019, Available at: www.wall-street.ro/special/30-deanidecapitalism/240554/2006privatizareabcr liderul-pietei-bancare-romanesti.html, Accessed on September 30, 2025.

most of the company's shares were sold to the Austrian company OMV, an insignificant company that gained value precisely through this takeover of the most important actor of this type in southern and eastern Europe⁷, for a negligible amount⁸, and in the case of BCR, with particularly valuable assets on the free market (buildings and land) sold in a proportion of 36.9% also to an Austrian company (Erste Bank), a national security problem was created because decisions that influence the national economy ended up being made abroad, at the expense of Romanians⁹.

1.2. Fracasomania – rebel factors

This dynamic was possible, as previously highlighted, because the dominant concern of the elites was oriented towards preserving individual privileges and consolidating their positions within the political-financial system. This orientation came into contradiction with their socio-economic role of contributing to national development in accordance with the requirements of the historical moment. In this context, the concept of fracasomania, formulated by Albert Hirschman in his studies on Latin America, can be introduced into discussion to understand the similar trend that was registered in post-December Romania:

“Fracasomania (failure complex) is one of the main factors responsible for the prolonged crisis (for decades) that several states are facing – especially in Latin

⁷ Radu Baltasiu and Ovidiana Bulumac, “The PETROM privatization (2004). How a minor company becomes a geopolitical factor in Europe. Case study”, in *Revista Universitară de Sociologie [University Journal of Sociology]*, Year VIII, No. 1 (15)/2011, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, pp. 45–55, Available at: https://sociologiecraiova.ro/pdf/rus-numere/RUS_1_2011.pdf, Accessed on September 30, 2025.

⁸ „Petromul s-a vândut atunci cu 350 de milioane, întrucât nu exista concurență la bani. Semne de întrebare este normal să se nască, având în vedere că vinzi un capital de 10 miliarde, minimum, cu 350 de milioane.” [“Petrom was sold for 350 million at the time, as there was no competition for money. It is normal for questions to arise, considering that you are selling a capital of 10 billion, at least, for 350 million”], in Melania Agiu, „Privatizarea Petrom: Cum a ajuns în mâinile austrieilor de la OMV” [“Petrom privatization: How it ended up in the hands of the Austrians from OMV”], in *Adevărul*, December 14, 2022, Available at: <https://adevarul.ro/economie/privatizareapetromcum-aajunsinmainile2227737.html>, Accessed on September 22, 2025.

⁹ „Când 90% din sistem e deținut de străini, masa monetară din economie depinde de deciziile luate în alte state. În plus, capitalul străin are o volatilitate mai mare decât cel local, iar acest lucru se observă în toate plecările investitorilor din ultima perioadă” [“When 90% of the system is owned by foreigners, the money supply in the economy depends on decisions made in other states. In addition, foreign capital has a higher volatility than local capital, and this is observed in all the recent investor outflows.”], in Sorin Pâslaru and Adelina Mihai, „Topul celor mai mari privatizări ale României. Care au fost cele mai controversate și care au adus statului cei mai mulți bani” [“Top of Romania's largest privatizations. Which were the most controversial and which brought the state the most money”], in *Ziarul Financiar*, October 16, 2014, Available at: <https://www.zf.ro/zf-24/topul-celor-mai-mari-privatizariale-romaniei-care-au-fost-cele-mai-controversate-si-care-au-adus-statului-cei-mai-multi-bani-13096133>, Accessed on September 22, 2025.

America. Responsibility for the exhausting efforts that society is going through, for hyperinflation, acute social polarization and a very high unemployment rate, is attributed by Hirschman to a large extent to the elites ... The elites in question govern from a reduced perspective of immediate interest, in conditions of fierce rivalry with groups competing for power”¹⁰.

In other words, from a moral-uplifting role for the entire society, the elites in Romania have become what academician Tudorel Postolache calls “rebel factors”, who artificially open “open informational loops”, with the role of changing the natural course of a society’s evolution.

“The rebel factor has induced a tension, which takes the form of open loops. Unsolved problems, Bluma Ziegarnik tells us, induce tensions in the form of open loops that the brain seeks to close (solve) in order to overcome their tension. The overexcitation of the amygdala, through the fatal mechanism of open loops, that is, of unresolved problems, can generate specific imbalances of a spiritual nature. Instead of being used to solve the problems specific to the system, ideologies induce loops in relation to the system line and thus divert systemic energy from the search for solutions to support one or more ideologies. Instead of solving the issue, ideologies aggravate it by generating large detours of society pushed into conflicts and ideological wars... The problem is that instead of evolving normally, that is, according to their natural logic, societies are forced to follow the detours induced by these loops caused by the rebel factors of the system”¹¹.

¹⁰ „Fracasomania (complexul eşecului) este unul dintre principalii factori responsabili de criza prelungită (de zeci de ani) cu care o serie de state se confruntă – în special în America Latină. Responsabilitatea pentru eforturile obositoare prin care trece societatea, pentru hiperinflație, polarizare socială acută și o rată foarte ridicată a șomajului, este atribuită de Hirschman în mare măsură elitelor ... Elitele în cauză guvernează din perspectiva redusă a interesului imediat, în condiții de acerbă rivalitate cu grupările concurente pentru putere”, în Radu Baltasiu, *Antropologia globalizării, transformări și curiozități (de)codificate [Anthropology of globalization, transformations and (de)coded curiosities]*, Bucharest, Mica Valahie Publishing House, 2009, p. 72.

¹¹ „Factorul rebel a indus o tensiune, care îmbracă forma buclelor deschise. Problemele nesoluționate, ne spune Bluma Ziegarnik, induc tensiuni sub forma buclelor deschise pe care creierul caută să le închidă (să le rezolve) pentru a depăși tensiunea lor. Supralicitarea amigdalei, prin mecanismul fatal al buclelor deschise, adică al problemelor nerezolvate, poate genera dezechilibre specifice de ordin spiritual. În loc să fie utilizată la rezolvarea problemelor specifice sistemului, ideologiile induc bucle în raport cu linia sistemului și astfel sustrag energia sistemică de la căutarea soluțiilor spre susținerea unei/unor ideologii. În loc să rezolve chestiunea, ideologiile o agravează generând mari ocoluri ale societății împinsă în conflicte și războaie ideologice... Problema este că în loc să evolueze normal, adică după logica lor firească, societățile sunt forțate să urmeze căile ocolite induse de aceste bucle provocate de factorii rebeli ai sistemului”, în Tudorel Postolache *quoted by* Ilie Bădescu and Ciprian Bădescu, *Creație și ruină – economia și lumea, de unde vine declinul? Introducere în teoria crizelor substructale [Creation and Ruin – Economy and the World, Where Does Decline Come From? Introduction to the Theory of Substructural Crises]*, Vol. 3, Bucharest, Mica Valahie Publishing House, 2023, pp. 58–59.

2. THE DAWN OF CRITICAL CULTURE – THE ORIGIN OF THE REASONS FOR EMIGRATION

2.1. THE STATE OF MISERY

The lack of concern for one's neighbor, more precisely the abandonment¹² of the collective destiny in the hands of foreign interests, made possible the emergence of a feeling that, after the Great Union, should have been eradicated from the souls of all Romanians: that of the misery of society, a state theorized in Eminescu's sociology. Probably, if the fate of Romania had been other than the country's entry into the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union after World War II, it would have been possible for the representatives of the Bucharest School of Sociology (and not only) to help eliminate this state of affairs. Instead, society was confronted with the liquidation of its entire elite (political, cultural, economic, and social) and with an aggressive process of forced communization that interrupted the socio-cultural and political-economic processes that could ensure continuity in the pursuit of the national interest and the societal propagation of its own values. In reality, the new changes have completely shaken society, bringing it to a state that can be compared to that state of moral degradation of the 19th century. And here we refer in particular to the way in which capital is managed by the elites:

“Capital generates exploitation, but not misery, in the form of a whole range of processes of social degradation, all supported by economic decay. In the West, the organization based on capital did not lead to economic decay, but on the contrary, and then, says Eminescu, we must seek the true specific cause, the one that first generates economic decay and then, in close dependence on it, moral, religious, cultural degradation and even biological degeneration”¹³.

¹² „Principala caracteristică a societății abandonate este caracterul disfuncțional al statului și administrației, în general. Administrația de stat obține particularități iraționale prin caracterul de pradă al impozitării, deficiențele grave din sistemul judiciar, precum și prin funcția de înapoiere socială care se exercită în raport cu interesele publice. La nivel de sistem politic, una dintre manifestările de abandon al societății de către elite este politicianismul. Acesta reprezintă subordonarea interesului public intereselor personale adiacente funcției. Partidul este un vehicul acceptat de conștiința publică și de «Europa», folosit, totuși, pentru a obține bogăție rapid. Ideea politică, care ar fi trebuit să fie legătura dintre interesele colective și de administrare a puterii în stat, este mult diminuată, dacă nu chiar absentă în întregime” [“The main characteristic of the abandoned society is the dysfunctional character of the state and the administration, in general. The state administration acquires irrational peculiarities through the predatory nature of taxation, the serious deficiencies in the judicial system, as well as through the function of social regression that is exercised in relation to public interests. At the level of the political system, one of the manifestations of the abandonment of society by the elites is politicianism. This represents the subordination of the public interest to personal interests adjacent to the function. The party is a vehicle accepted by the public conscience and by ‘Europe’, used, however, to obtain wealth quickly. The political idea, which should have been the link between collective interests and the administration of power in the state, is much diminished, if not entirely absent”], in *Ibidem*, pp. 104–105.

¹³ „Capitalul generează exploatare, dar nu mizerie, sub forma unei întregi game de procese ale degradării sociale, sprijinite toate pe decăderea economică. În Apus, organizarea bazată pe capital n-a antrenat decăderea economică, ci dimpotrivă, și atunci, spune Eminescu, trebuie căutată adevărata cauză specifică, aceea care generează întâi decăderea economică și apoi, în strânsă dependență de aceasta, degradarea morală, religioasă, culturală și chiar degenerarea biologică”, în Ilie Bădescu, *Sincronism European și cultură critică românească [European synchronism and romanian critical culture]*, Bucharest, 2002, p. 391.

Responsible for managing public wealth resources, the elites, by abandoning their critical role in society, have fallen from the directorial and organizing function of public life to the level of a “social parasite”, which in Mihai Eminescu’s terms is known as a “superimposed blanket”¹⁴. In such a society, devoid of the most important defense bodies against the seductive temptations of foreign capital and with an economic life in a state of flux, collective life becomes totally disorganized, while the most important factor of stability of society, predictability, becomes a chimera that only those connected to the institutions of power manage to approximate. In this context, the intensification of social discontent has determined, over time, millions of Romanians to perceive economic migration as the only viable option. Therefore, the source of the problems that generated this economic exile originates in the lack of work organization, an idea that brings us closer to the corporatist doctrine, a major Manoiilescu’s contribution to the European history of social-economic thought:

“From the organized profession comes a moral life, the corporatist idea tells us, from the disorganized profession comes anomie, anarchy, crisis, unhappiness”¹⁵.

3. CRITICAL CULTURE – THE SAVING APPROACH

Viewed from the perspective of the modern world system (Wallerstein), migration acquires specific valences: after the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, Romanian society placed its hopes not only in the establishment of democracy, but also in the economic and social benefits of a modern organization. Since the institutions responsible for managing the labor market did not create the necessary framework, emigration became the predominant individual strategy for social, economic, and professional advancement. In order to achieve socio-economic recovery (synchronization) with the West, Romanians revealed a latent attitude of vital importance: *the critical attitude*, as the latency of the Romanian critical culture. By critical culture one understands the original pattern of organization to overcome the crisis.

“The Romanian economy had become the ‘place’ of operation of a ‘peripheral capitalism’, predatory and extroverted (based on the theft of surplus product through fiscal and speculative mechanisms, as we will show in this work). Critical culture represents the reaction to this new historical situation, it gives expression to

¹⁴ „Pe deasupra poporului nostru s-a superpus o pătură străină fără tradiții, fără patrie hotărâtă, fără naționalitate hotărâtă, care ne-a escamotat lucrul cel mai scump pe care un popor îl are: simțul său istoric, simțul de dezvoltare continuativă și organică...” [“A foreign blanket without traditions, without a defined homeland, without a defined nationality, has been superimposed on our people, which has taken away from us the most precious thing a people has: its sense of history, its sense of continuous and organic development”], in *Ibidem*, p. 399.

¹⁵ „Din profesiunea organizată se degajă o viață morală, ne spune ideea corporatistă, din profesiunea dezorganizată se degajă anomie, anarhie, criză, nefericire”, in *Ibidem*, p. 429.

the tendencies to elevate the ‘periphery’, to remove it from the state of economic enslavement in which it finds itself”¹⁶.

The phenomenon of migration does not entirely correspond to the definition of critical culture, because a critical reaction is given by the elites of the moment, elites who, in the case of Romania, have fallen into the trap of consumerist economic ideology. However, the momentum and socio-economic successes of the diaspora in the countries where they have settled prove that, at a deeper level, there is still a latent potential that can be exploited for the benefit of the entire Romanian nation.

Therefore, the contemporary purpose of the elites is twofold: first, awareness of the economic situation of the periphery due to attitudes inappropriate to their own social mission among the elites and, secondly, understanding and maximizing the economic and geopolitical potential of the geographical spread of Romanians across the globe. The fact that Romanians are spread in almost all geopolitically relevant countries and are recognized within local communities as “good citizens” offers Romania a series of reasons and arguments in bilateral relations with the respective states.

4. IDENTITY RENT

The current situation of the return phenomenon is too little studied, as the number of those who have chosen to return permanently to the country in the last eight years is just over 200,000 people¹⁷. At a concrete level, this phenomenon can have two directions of development: a first aspect that could be improved with the return of the diaspora would be that of “taming the demographic winter”¹⁸, and the second thing would be the

¹⁶ „Economia românească devenise «locul» de funcționare a unui «capitalism periferial», prădalnic și extravertit (bazat pe furtul de plusprodus prin mecanisme fiscale și speculative, cum o să arătăm în cuprinsul acestei lucrări). Cultura critică reprezintă reacția față de această nouă situație istorică, dă expresie tendințelor de ridicare a «periferiei», de scoatere a ei din starea de aservire economică în care se află”, in *Ibidem*, p. 12.

¹⁷ Maria Ionescu, „Datele oficiale arată o întoarcere a românilor în țară, dar câți rămân, se întreabă un sociolog. El explică de ce numărul vehiculat, de 324.000 de români reveniți, e mult umflat/Fenomenul «banilor făcuți în străinătate, care sunt mai valoroși în țară»” [“Official data shows a return of Romanians to the country, but how many remain, a sociologist wonders. He explains why the reported number of 324,000 Romanians returning is greatly inflated/The phenomenon of ‘money made abroad, which is more valuable in the country’”], in *Hot News*, June 8, 2025, Available at: <https://hotnews.ro/datele-oficiale-arata-o-intoarcere-a-romanilor-in-tara-dar-cati-roman-se-intreaba-un-sociolog-care-explica-de-ce-cifra-vehiculata-de-324-000-de-romani-reveniti-este-mult-umflata-fenomenul1994692#:~:text=Cet%C4%83%C8%9Benii%20rom%C3%A2ni%20reveni%C8%9Bi%20%C3%AEen%20%C8%9Bar%C4%83%20%C8%99i%20Dau%20crescut,%C3%AEen%202023%2C%20spune%20Dumitru%20Sandu%2C%20profesor%20la>, Accessed on September 22, 2025.

¹⁸ Violeta Cincu, „Iarna demografică din România: O criză profundă fără soluții” [“Demographic winter in Romania: A deep crisis without solutions”], in *Radio France International*, August 8, 2025, Available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/ro/rom%C3%A2nia/20250808iarnademografic%C4%83dinrom%C3%A2niaocriz%C4%83profund%C4%83f%C4%83r%C4%83-solu%C8%9Bii>, Accessed on September 22, 2025.

recapture of economic initiative at the local level, in other words, a critical manifestation of the situation in order to restore the identity rent. The importance of this is given by the fact that, once valued, the identity rent creates an economic mechanism in itself that, in turn, drives other economic micro-systems around it.

“‘Identity rent’ defines those intangible assets that are impossible to imitate and that reflect the valorization of the identity position of a national and civilizational economic elite”¹⁹.

The valorization of these assets and their reintegration into the domestic economic circuit can constitute a significant incentive for the entire Romanian economic ecosystem, supporting the updating of existing capacities. In addition, the professional experience gained abroad, the technical skills acquired, and the considerable financial resources accumulated during the economic exile can be exploited to their maximum potential through the transfer of know-how and expertise within national borders.

5. CONCLUSION

The vitality of the Romanian people is once again proven at a historical level by the way in which they understood how to react to the everlasting challenge of transition. Moreover, even if they had individual valences, the challenges that the members of the economic diaspora overcame (and there were not a few) prove the capacity for both organization and adaptation to the new legal and administrative constraints, specific to the place where they chose to settle. This dynamic can be interpreted as indicating the latent presence of a potential for economic and cultural affirmation among the population, a potential that, despite the constraints imposed by the communist regime – such as the expropriation of assets and the inhibition of private initiative – has visibly manifested itself in the context of the current historical crisis.

In this sense, the mission of the future elite in Romania will be to exploit this latent potential in order to remove the country from the consumption logic, specific to the periphery of the modern world economic system, while strengthening geopolitical relations with countries politically and economically relevant for this endeavor, a fact that can be facilitated by the presence of a significant community, appreciated and respected by Romanians in those countries.

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¹⁹ „«Renta de identitate» definește acele active intangibile imposibil de imitat care reflectă valorificarea poziției identitare a unei elite economice naționale și civilizaționale”, în Ilie Bădescu, *quoted work*, 2002, p. 28.

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