



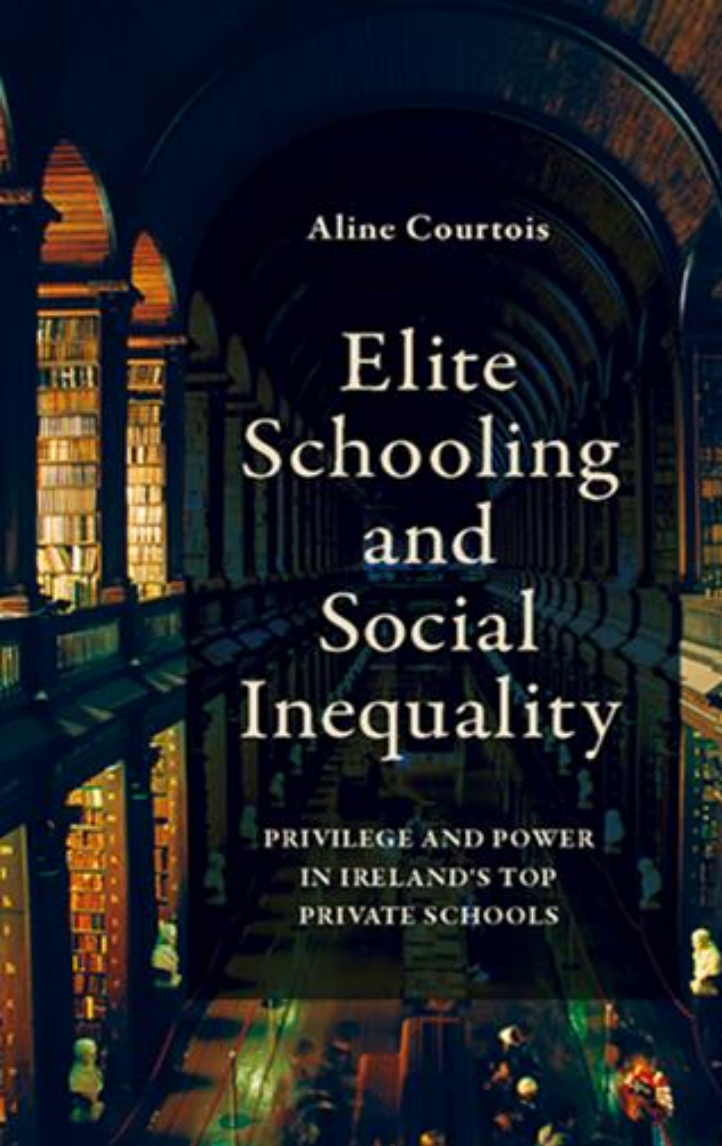
UNIVERSITY OF  
**BATH**

# Unequal academic mobilities: 'Early career researchers' and Brexit

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Aline Courtois

# Elite Schooling and Social Inequality

PRIVILEGE AND POWER  
IN IRELAND'S TOP  
PRIVATE SCHOOLS



## The Significance of International Student Mobility in Students' Strategies at Third Level in Ireland

Dr Aline Courtois

NUI Discussion Paper No. 1



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HIGHER  
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AN ESRC & HEFCE  
INVESTMENT

## Higher education and Brexit: current European perspectives

Edited by **Aline Courtois**, with a foreword by  
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Precarious Work

and

Gender Inequality

Researching  
for Change

in Higher Education

# Research context

News > Education > Education News

## **Brexit exodus: EU academics 'already pulling out' of UK universities, MPs warned**

Brexit could lead to academic 'brain drain'

Universities failing to attract EU workers reportedly

The UK will face an exodus of academics originating from the European Union unless they are given over their post-Brexit futures in the country, a committee of MPs has warned.

## **Brexit: Is Britain Facing A Mass Academic Exodus?**

The world class reputation of British research institutions depends on maintaining excellence in particular fields of research.

Oxford University leaders warn Brexit will cause exodus of academics

## **Science talent to leave UK post-Brexit, survey warns**

media society law scotland wales northern ireland

Brexit fears may see 15% of UK university staff leave, group warns

## ISSUES

- Focus on the figure of the international academic 'star'
- Ignores the temporary workforce and the realities of the 'ECR' job market at EU level and beyond

# The research

- As part of CGHE project on Brexit and HE in Europe
- With **Marie Sautier, UNIL**, researching the Swiss case.
- Semi-structured interviews (45 min to 3+ hours) with 11 non-UK EU (+ 1 non-EU) citizens in 2 UK universities and 12 UK citizens in 2 Swiss universities
- 'ECRs' on temporary contracts, mainly post-doctoral researchers.

## **FOCUS**

- **Intersection of international mobility and academic precarity**
- **Impact on spatial and professional trajectories and strategies**
- **Limitations of mobility discourses; hierarchies and boundaries within the transnational academic space**

# Brexit as disruption / magnifying glass

Changing understandings of citizenship and belonging

Emergence of boundaries and new risks - the end of a privileged relationship to mobility

Remapping strategies and trajectories across time and space

Hierarchised peripheries

Precarity, mobility and inertia

# Emergence of borders and new risks

## For EU citizens in the UK

- **New concerns: emergence of borders in an imagined borderless world:**
  - Access to health insurance when abroad?
  - Possibility for elderly parents to move to UK?
  - Entitlement to child benefit, to NHS, pension rights?
  - In addition to feeling of being rejected, undervalued, ‘uninvited’.
- **Questioning the notion of transnational/borderless scientific space**

*“I mean the difference is it used to be we are among scholars and friends, now it’s only the scholars part ... .. Academia is supposed to be international and borderless but this thing has created some borders that did not exist before”*

# Intersection of precarity and loss of citizenship

- **Prospect of loss of citizenship exacerbates uncertainty related to precarious employment status:**

*“What do you do in the event say that you get sick and you need to leave because of the sickness ... what happens if all of a sudden your grant doesn’t get renewed, and you are unemployed for two months’ time, would that affect your situation?...” (F, Norway)*

*“... I am looking at short-term stuff, which I think is more scary, the fact that it’s so uncertain. If I was in a permanent role, ... I would be less worried ... at least I’d have the consistency of being in a job. You know, as long as I can keep my job they probably wouldn’t have a problem with me because I’d be paying my taxes.” (F, Italy)*

*“The ones who have permanent contracts, they are the ones who didn’t seem that concerned ... not as concerned as the precariat” (M, Romania)*

# Shifts in 'geoscientific imaginaries' and strategic re-composition of borders

## UK citizens in Switzerland

- Temporary position abroad experienced as a safe haven; necessity to stay away from the UK in turbulent times
- UK no longer considered as a stepping stone towards professional integration
- Attempts to re-appropriate the status and rights of EU citizens through various strategies (marriage to EU partner/ Irish citizenship) or new mobility plans

*"The last thing I want to do is go back to England and balance from one-year contract to one-year contract to one-year contract or something like this..."*

*"I know in Switzerland, jobs go to Swiss first, then EU, then everybody else . If UK is not in EU anymore, that would be a big concern of mine ... that would be an incentive for me to consider applying for Swiss citizenship ... To not be at the bottom of the queue basically."*



# Immobility as a pragmatic choice

- Lack of possibilities abroad
- Complicated by country of origin, disciplinary area (incl. prospects in the private sector) and family status (EU/UK partner)
- ‘Staying put’ a pragmatic (but anxious) choice
- Sense that mobility/precarity is not worth investing in – mobility becomes illegitimate
- Shrinking of borders, of inhabitable space

*“They don’t really invest nearly as much as they invest here, so the opportunities are very, very rare...I wouldn’t even know if I would be able to do it, just because I’ve always researched in English” (F, Italy)*

*... Basically in the UK only Oxford and Cambridge and London ... I don’t want to live in places where there’s not much diversity ... because in London again you don’t feel yet, I don’t know what it’s gonna be in ten years, but right now we can live very comfortably without having to be, to feel any form of uneasiness, discrimination etc. (M, Romania)*

# Some conclusions/questions

- Brexit generates a shift in geoscientific imaginaries (emerging borders; re-mapping of trajectories; questioning of centrality of the UK; loss of passport privilege - new concerns, news strategies)
- Prior socialisation to a “cosmopolitan transnational ethos” and prior experience of mobility do not translate into *hypermobility*
- The articulation of Brexit and precarity generates both mobility and stasis
- Contrasted experiences of professional and geographic instability – unequal positions in relation to mobility (“guests”/suplicants; prospects outside HE)
- Preoccupations far from the headlines: academic brexodus of “transnational academic stars” vs concerns for employment and stability