

# Private Stories, Public Issues: Representations of Migration in Angus Macqueen's *The Last Peasants. Journeys*

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## Abstract

The documentary trilogy *The Last Peasants* (2003), directed and produced by Angus Macqueen, seeks to reveal the 'private stories' behind Romanians' illegal migration to Western Europe against the background of major transformations in the post-Communist Romanian society still in transition at the turn of the twenty-first century. The paper focuses on one of the films of the trilogy, *Journeys*, which is the most explicit in its representation of the dangers that Romanian migrants had to face, prior to Romania's joining the European Union, while crossing borders to 'go West' in hope of living their 'Western European dream'. The exploration of the rhetorical and narrative strategies employed by the British director in this filmic text aims, therefore, at casting light on how images of the sending Romanian society, the Western European hosts and the Romanian diaspora are constructed, in an attempt to challenge the audiences and to raise their awareness of the need for a better understanding of such a complex social phenomenon as migration, as well as for the change in attitudes in host-migrant interactions.

**Key words:** documentary, illegal migration, Home/West, identity, imagology.

## Introduction

In 2004, the Astra Film Festival organised in Sibiu granted a "Special Jury Prize" to Angus Macqueen's documentary trilogy *The Last Peasants* (*Temptation; Journeys; A Good Wife*). Another special prize, this time granted by the *Formula AS* Romanian magazine (Longin Popescu 2004), followed. That confirmed that the British director's filmic representations of life in the village of Budești, Maramureș, subject to major transformations in the years coming after the 1989 Revolution, and in the Romanian diaspora, whose ranks had grown considerably in the 1990s owing to the 'irresistible lure' of the West, appealed to the Romanian audiences by their addressing a

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poignant aspect of social life in post-Communist Romania, as well as by their blending of rhetorical and aesthetic strategies meant to “make the stuff of social reality visible and audible in a distinctive way” (Nichols 2001: 1).

Released in early 2003 on Channel 4 in an attempt to show something different that would make especially “young people” stop “zap[ping] between six different channels at once because everything looks roughly the same” (Macqueen qtd. in Adams 2003) and to draw their attention to “a vision that looks a lot like [Britain’s] past, but which tells (...) a great deal about our present” (Adams 2003), Macqueen’s documentary series had also been well received at least in the specialised circles in Europe, being granted, in 2003 and early 2004, various prizes<sup>1</sup>. Its impact at the level of the public at large in the UK, Romania and elsewhere in Europe at the beginning of the new millennium is, however, relatively difficult to assess.

Yet it is clear that, despite its having come out fifteen years ago, Macqueen’s documentary trilogy has not lost its topicality, as migration has remained one of the most sensitive social problems for many of the European countries, be they destinations or still sources (like Romania) of migrant flows. The present exploration of *Journeys*, one of the three films of *The Last Peasants*, aims, therefore, to demonstrate that, even if migration trends and migration-related historical circumstances, attitudes, policies, legal and institutional practices have changed in the new context of reception of Macqueen’s production, it still successfully promotes a valid lesson for the present-day audiences.

In order to fully understand such a complex social phenomenon as migration and to overcome national prejudice and the tendency to negatively stereotyping the migrant other, the viewers, particularly those belonging to the receiving societies, must be encouraged to develop their analytical impulse, to discover the private stories behind major public issues, so that they could ultimately become active participants in the process of migration-related public policy-making and in the migrant-host cross-cultural encounters. And as “the usual means of doing this is by recourse to techniques of rhetoric”, which “may readily make use of poetic, narrative, or logical elements” (Nichols 2001: 16) lending expressivity to the filmic text (Renov 1993: 30), due attention is here paid to how the British “spectant” constructs the images of the “spected” Romanian other (Leerssen 2007: 27 and 2017: 8) as seen throughout a difficult identity-reshaping process.

### **Contextualising *The Last Peasants***

In defining documentary film as “an instrument of information, education and propaganda as well as a creative treatment of reality” (Hayward 2006: 106), John Grierson managed to capture the paradoxical nature of this type of filmic text as “the site of an irreconcilable union between invention on the one hand and mechanical reproduction on the other” (Renov 1993: 33). Angus Macqueen’s *The Last Peasants* trilogy definitely fits into the pattern delineated by Grierson’s definition. That implies that, for a better understanding of its meanings, one should proceed to both retrace the “historical real” and the “context of historical forces” (Renov 1993: 25, 29) that determine it, and to identify the aesthetic principles that underlie the films’ expressive dimension, influenced by the director’s adhering to a certain tradition in documentary film-making as well as by his individual perspective on the represented subject. Moreover, since the films foreground representations of a foreign – here, Romanian – other that lend themselves to an analysis in imagological terms, contextualisation, considering historical factors, “the intertext of a given national representation as trope”, the genre conventions and narrative techniques (Leerssen 2007: 28), becomes a must for their interpretation.

Having spent about a year and a half (most likely, between 2000 and 2002 when the film was completed and edited at the October Film production company) in the village of Budești, Angus Macqueen focused on the tensions within several families of Romanian peasants (Damian in *Journeys*, Opriș and Bud in *Temptation*, Marica in *A Good Wife*), the younger members of which chose to turn their back on the economic and social hardships marking life in the rural area, in particular, and in the Romanian society still in transition to fully-fledged capitalist relations and democracy, in general, in order to pursue their ‘dream’ of a prosperous life in the West. Their cases were relevant illustrations of a main trend in emigration flows after the 1989 change of regime in Romania, when Romanians were motivated by economic rather than political reasons (as used to be the case under Ceaușescu’s dictatorship) to travel across national borders.

As the process of transition from the communist regime to a free capitalist market in Romania turned out to be slow and difficult, resulting, among other things, in an increase in unemployment rates and, hence, precarious living conditions for many Romanian workers, emigration came to be

regarded as the only hope for significant financial gain and a better life. Under the circumstances, depending on factors like age, education, gender, religion, etc., several labour migration trends – permanent/temporary, legal/illegal – developed in time. (Colipcă et al. 2010: 6)

The years immediately following the 1989 Revolution, i.e. 1990-1996, witnessed the beginning of the brain-drain process through the permanent migration of high-education graduates to the USA and Canada, but also to European countries like Germany, as well as “a slow but steady growth in illegal migration, which involved particularly semi- and unskilled Romanian workers, targeting Germany, France, Israel, and, to some extent, Turkey (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005: 2-13, Horváth, 2007: 3)” (Colipcă et al. 2010: 6). Until 2002, though, given the scarcity of opportunities for mass legal migration (no European visa-granting programmes like those developed by the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and relatively few bilateral agreements for temporary legal migration to some European states), the number of Romanians who took the path of illegal (circular) migration to Italy, Spain and Portugal, Hungary, Austria and Germany, or France, Belgium and the UK increased significantly (Simina 2005: 8 and Cojocaru et al. 2006: 5 qtd. in Colipcă and Ivan-Mohor 2009: 3-4). The elimination, in 2002, of the Schengen visa requirement for the legal stay period of three months did not improve the situation but rather favoured the growth of circular migration: many Romanians left the country legally but preferred to stay and work illegally in the European country of their destination after the legal stay period ended. Under the circumstances, such criminal practices as the use of forged or stolen Romanian passports, of fake Irish, Hungarian or Georgian passports or residence cards to cross the Romanian borders endured among those who would return illegally to work on the European black market, after being seized and sent home by the authorities of the EU countries where they initially migrated and prohibited by the Romanian authorities to travel abroad (See the Official Report on *Migration and Asylum in Romania*, 2006: 23 qtd. in Colipcă and Ivan-Mohor 2009: 3).

Unavoidably, Romanians’ exodus to the West, with significant impact on both home and host societies, was widely debated in the media. Next to the written press and television, film became a means of representing this multifarious social phenomenon with the aim of drawing attention to its impact on the evolution of cross-cultural interactions and on

the ensuing reshaping of identities in various European spaces. In this context, several documentary filmmakers took interest in Romanian migrants' stories and sought, by bringing them to the screen, to help the audiences, in the receiving countries as well as in Romania as the sending society, to understand "not only [these migrants'] world" but also their own role in it, to "shape [themselves] as public actors" who "need to know in order to act" (Aufderheide 2007: 5, 6).

For Angus Macqueen, who had spent almost twenty years "getting as close as he could to the changes in Eastern Europe" (Adams 2003) starting from "the Solidarity Revolution and Martial Law in Poland, and then the coming of Gorbachev's Glasnost and Perestroika" (Macqueen 2004), *The Last Peasants* was, next to *Second Russian Revolution* (1991), *The Death of Yugoslavia* (1995), *Dancing for Dollars* (1997), *Loving Lenin* (1998), *Gulag* (1999) and *Vodka* (2000), "part of an ongoing quest (...) eastwards" (Adams 2003) and of "a one-man crusade against [the] indifference" of the Western public to "the uneasy cultural and economic relationships between East and West long after the barriers have come down" (Adams 2004). Aware of the political and social complexities of the Romanians' illegal migration, of the prejudiced reactions of the Western European media to it, sustained by negative stereotypes that largely confined images of Romania to "children with disabilities, homeless people sleeping under bridges, traffickers of human beings, shoplifters, (...) inferior beings living among dead rats in the Parisian slums" (Longin Popescu 2004), the British director decided to raise in the minds of his Western European (primarily British) viewers questions about why Romanians migrated and, in their hearts, the desire to know and understand better these newcomers. Speaking about the educational function of his documentaries, he stated that:

With *The Last Peasants*, I set myself the task of making an audience fall in love with an illegal immigrant. In Britain, they are usually the subject of lurid headlines about invasions and scroungers. Yet these are the people who clean our houses, dig our gardens, and generally do the jobs we no longer want to. I wanted to understand what drove them from their own homes to the urban squalor that so many live in on the edges of our cities. (Macqueen 2004)

Moreover, if one considers Macqueen's choice of subjects, i.e. Romanian peasants from the village of Budești, Maramureș, whose

centuries-old community and lifestyle are doomed to slow degradation against the background of Romania's transformation into a capitalist, consumerist society, one realises that there are further reasons that account for his *Last Peasants* project. The dissolution of the rural community in Budești stirred in Angus Macqueen nostalgia for the past and he hoped that his films would equally remind the English viewers of a moment in their own history, when men and women from the English countryside "invaded the slums of industrial towns in the nineteenth century to make a living and transform their lives" (Macqueen 2003: 106). The image of the turn-of-the-millennium Romanian Maramureș looks to Angus Macqueen like "the set for a Thomas Hardy film or an ambitious costume drama, with extras on their horses and carts bouncing along barely treated roads, men scything in the fields and families threshing their wheat in water-driven machines made in the nineteenth century" (Macqueen 2003: 106). He repeatedly expressed his regret that the genuine rural culture of Maramureș, this "utopia in the past" that even Nicolae Ceaușescu's policies of collectivisation, urbanisation and 'systemisation' of Romanian villages had spared, would be destroyed by merely fifteen years of 'democracy', by "the harsh realities of capitalism and competition" (Macqueen 2003: 102, 103).

Also, Macqueen's focus on Romanian peasants inhabiting an exquisitely beautiful area like Maramureș is not entirely divorced from certain tropes dominating the tradition of Romania's representation in the English mindset. One cannot help connecting it back to the 'rather old' history of representing "the identity of the Romanians *as* peasants" in various writings of wide circulation in Western Europe (Drace-Francis 2013: 16). The *topos* of the Romanian peasant having a primitive, agriculture-based lifestyle, yet endowed with eloquence, innocence and other simple virtues that make him "the idyllic counterpoint to the corrupt and greedy city-dwellers" and to the civilized West that remains indifferent to his sufferings can be clearly retraced from the classical to the nineteenth-century (French and English) writers (Drace-Francis 2013: 19, 31). Yet, as Alex Drace-Francis remarks,

(...) as post-Romantic writers in the West but even more acutely in Romania, would try to invest the peasant with value *qua* peasant, they would come up against a new paradox (...): that to praise the peasant way of life and at the same time attempt to encourage the peasant to actually

adhere to it, was actually to force him to remain a barbarian and an outsider to the empire. (2003: 25)

Angus Macqueen does not negate the Western tradition in the representation of the Romanian peasants. His filmic narratives actually echo it: “the perfect peasants” of Maramureş (Macqueen 2003: 102) still largely live off subsistence agriculture, build their own wooden houses, keep livestock, distil and drink their own brandy, in contrast to their city-dwelling co-nationals, as well as to the city-dominated West, already ‘contaminated’ by consumerism and globalisation (though to different extents). It is this temptation of the West with its enticing glamour and commodities that causes the rupture in the collective society of the Romanian peasants and condemns the Romanian migrants to a lonely, miserable life, separated from their families and vilified by their European hosts, transformed into outsiders within the EU ‘empire’.

On the other hand, he implicitly acknowledges that these people cannot be forced to live in ‘primitive’ conditions once they have got the ‘taste’ of freedom and opportunities that the change of regime and the opening to the West promise, especially since the local industry has crumbled and has very little to offer to those who seek employment. He seems to have seen in that, as previously mentioned, an effect of ‘history repeating itself’ only in another part of Europe.

Nevertheless, his vision remains entangled in the paradoxes that characterise the peasant myth: while militating in favour of not forcing Romanian peasants to remain ‘barbarian’ and outsiders to the EU ‘empire’, encouraging his viewers to sympathise with Romanian peasants turned migrants and, why not, even to help them integrate in the multicultural melting pot of Western Europe, he laments the slow extinction of the peasant way of life and obliquely implies that Romanians and the rest of the Europeans altogether should save it and embrace it while they still can (see also Longin Popescu 2004).

Actually, one has to ‘read’ the ultimate message of Macqueen’s films between images and sounds. In order to show how some of the Romanian migrants’ lives might relate to those of the Western European audiences, how what happens in Romania affects what is happening in the Western European countries of the migrants’ destination (see Adams 2003), the British director chose to resort to a combination of the observational

and participatory modes<sup>2</sup> in his documentary trilogy. The dominant seems to be observational or direct cinema filming, minimizing the interventions of the filmmaker in the process of “document[ing] the inner lives of ordinary people” (Winston 2011: 88-89). The ‘direct’, ethnographic gaze of the British outsider (see Hayward 2006: 120) on the small peasant community of Budești, allowed for by the use of light, hand-held cameras, reveals a slice of life events, more often than not leaving the filmmaker in the position of a mere observer who does not interfere with the action. Probably the most eloquent evidence of Macqueen’s adhering to the principles of direct cinema and of “journalistic non-interference” is his recording, in *The Last Peasants. Journeys*, of Ion Damian’s “brutal journey” to the West:

“I could have got [Ion and his friends] to Paris. But you have to just let them do what they do. You cannot help. Not least because you would be breaking the law” [Macqueen says]. He and his assistant producer posed as a honeymoon couple on the continental train, waving a hand-held camera about, never drawing attention to the real subject of their film. (Adams 2003)

Keeping voice-over narrating to a minimum, only to fill in information gaps and to explicitly set the frame of action, as well as recording direct sound at the time of filming, equally contribute to creating the impression that the British filmmaker “attempts not to interpret for the viewer nor to cheat in what [he] shows” (Hayward 2006: 120).

Yet, there are, especially in *The Last Peasants. Journeys*, enough instances that pertain to the participatory (cinéma-vérité) sociological investigation. For instance, the presence of the camera and of the filming crew is recognised by Petru and Ion Damian when they are asked questions about their reasons for migrating and the impact of migration on their families. Also, a conversation with Ion Damian’s son, Vasiluc, rendered in voice-over, equally emphasises the occasional interaction of the filmmaker with his subjects. Thus, the audiences may equally get a sense of how situations in the film are influenced by the filmmaker’s presence (See Hayward 2006: 76-77 and Nichols 2001: 33, 115-123).

Altogether, this mixture of rhetorical strategies characteristic of the observational and participatory modes serves a double goal: to give voice to Macqueen’s subjects that are twice peripheral – as inhabitants of a rural



area distant from Bucharest, the centre of power in Romania, and as Romanian migrants coming from a country in the margin of Europe, who, at the time of filming, had not yet gained the status of EU citizens – and to put forward an alternative version of the ‘history’ of major social phenomena in post-Communist Romania like the disintegration of the rural communities and labour (internal/external, legal/ illegal) migration.

**‘Home’, the West and the Romanian migrant in *The Last Peasants Journeys***

Like the other two films – *Temptation*<sup>3</sup> and *A Good Wife* – in Angus Macqueen’s *The Last Peasants* trilogy, *Journeys* does not rely on the hegemonic and institutionalized ‘side’ of the story of Romanians’ migration at the turn of the millennium but foregrounds the private stories of the Damian family from Budești, Maramureș, whose life is conflict-ridden and ultimately wrecked by lack of prospects at home and the mirage of the West.

One storyline focuses on Petru Damian, his wife Maria and his son Adrian. They are the ‘lucky’ ones who managed to migrate illegally to France, most likely about 1995<sup>4</sup>. Unfortunately, they run out of ‘luck’ there as Petru is arrested by the French authorities. Yet, he manages to escape and makes it to Dublin. The family is thus torn apart, and Petru and Maria get to live separate lives in Dublin and Paris, respectively. Alone in Paris, Maria sets as her main goal that of making a good living for herself and her son Adrian.

A second storyline reveals the attempts of migrating of Petru’s brother, Ion Damian, and of his wife, also called Maria. Ion is very confident that he can get a visa for France in exchange for 2,300 German marks. His departure has, nonetheless, to be postponed: his father, Vasile Damian, dies and, since he is his old mother’s only help, he has to stay by her. After the period of mourning is over, Ion and two younger men from the village set out with a guide who promises to get them to Italy. They travel across Hungary under the train, holding tight to some wagon pipes, perfectly aware that the slightest mistake might cost them their lives. Unfortunately, the guide abandons them in Vienna five minutes before the departure of the train to Italy and steals Ion’s bag. They try to make it on

their own to Paris, but are seized by the German police on the train and repatriated.

Disappointed by Ion's failure, his wife Maria decides she should try her luck and leave abroad. She borrows money to buy false travel papers from a local middleman. But she is not lucky either: a week later, she is told that the man arranging for her passport was arrested. So, heavily in debt, she has to get used to the idea of going on with her life in the village, next to her husband and her children.

That these private stories acquire "evidential force" (Renov 1993: 28) within the frame of social transformations and cultural clashes related to Romanians' emigration to Western Europe countries is subtly suggested by the use of setting and sound that lends circular structure to the filmic narrative while drawing attention to the double perspective - of the Romanian ('Home') community and of the Romanian diaspora in the host societies - from which emigration, as the main theme of the documentary, is regarded. The film begins with the image of Ion Damian, as he goes alone to cut grass in the pastures that cover the green hills of Budești. He walks towards the camera, his scythe on the shoulder, and stops to scrutinize, with a concerned look on his face, what lies ahead, an uncertain future as a migrant, irrespective of destination, that his voice-over points to:

Pân' ajung de-atâtea ori mai fac. Risc de câte ori ... de câte ori trebuie să risc, de-atâtea ori risc. Pân' ajung. Odată tot ajung. Videm [sic] cum: sub tren, deasupra trenului... Oriunde, numai s-ajung. [English subtitles: I'll keep trying till I get there. However dangerous it is. I'll keep trying. I'll go the West in the end. On a train, under the train... Whatever it takes.] (Macqueen 2002)

Key visual elements subtly hint at Ion's split self-identity, caught between his rural roots - he's still wearing the traditional, Maramureș-specific hat, the "clop" - and the influence of urban life, visible in the rest of his outfit, i.e. his more practical, casual sweater and leather jacket rather reminiscent of a town-dweller's clothing. The sun set over the picturesque landscape of Budești, symbolically insinuating into the visual text Ion's hopelessness and, at the same time, the sense of the gradual disappearance of the rural culture that he belongs to threatened by the "inexorable pull of urban capitalism" (Adams 2003) and of the 'Western European dream'. Actually, the sunset functions as a graphic match, doubled by a 'sonic match' provided by tense,

increasingly louder extradiegetic music, connecting the image of 'Home' to that of the West, here represented by Paris, glimpsed at from a revolving carousel cabin. Thus, the visual and the auditive tracks render the same feelings of loss of hope and loneliness: ironically, even if the 'dream' of going West is fulfilled, living among the splendours of the West (here, La Tour Eiffel, l'Arc de Triomphe, the obelisk in the Place de la Concorde, the Seine) does not bring about the happiness and prosperity that the migrants expected. The case of Maria and Adrian, Petru Damian's wife and son, both illegal migrants in Paris, is relevant in this respect: as the end of the film reveals, they are the ones contemplating the impressive Parisian scenery from the height of the carousel cabin. Maria makes plans for their future: they will apply for papers and get all they need, a proper job and a proper flat, but these achievements belong to an indefinite, uncertain future that scares Maria, if one were to take connotatively her final remarks. Ultimately, neither staying home – like Ion Damian, who fails to emigrate – nor reaching the West seems to bring a sense of fulfilment to Romanian peasants who seek to re-shape their identity by crossing the borders between the rural and the urban, East and West, periphery and centre. That may account for the heavy silence, broken only by the selective sound of the swishing of Ion's scythe, with which the film ends.

In its triptych-like structure, Macqueen's documentary adds more 'flesh' to the initially barely suggested representations of 'Home' and the West (as previously commented upon). Part I actually begins with scenes of everyday life in the Maramureş countryside in late autumn, set amidst charming hills, with large pastures, orchards and haystacks, yet full of hardships. Visual symbolism is again instrumental in reinforcing the idea of a world trapped between the rural traditions and the urban progress, between the poverty and miserable life conditions in the Romanian village, as consequences of economic decline, and the 'mirage' of globalizing tendencies: several children play football, perhaps dreaming of becoming great football players when they grow up, yet their game does not take place on a proper football field, but in the muddy streets of Budeşti, among stacks of wood logs. The rolling ball in itself, repeatedly shot in close up, may be said to be indicative of the passage of time and of the changes that the rural Romanian community has undergone in time. And while some children are playing, others are working hard by their parents' and grandparents' side, their image being accompanied by the narrator's plain

description (in voice-over) of the economic and social context that favours post-1989 migration to the West:

Since the fall of Communism, the villagers have had hard times to find work outside the village. Now most families rely on money sent home by someone working illegally in Western Europe. (Macqueen 2002)

The sequence presenting life in Ion Damian's family is symptomatic of the dramatic deterioration of life conditions in the Romanian countryside. Living off a small piece of land, Ion and Maria Damian have to work hard to support their two children, Vasiluc and Măriuca, whom they love and would like to see properly educated. That is why, when Vasiluc offers to help his father to cut wood for the fire, he is sent to prepare his homework. Paradoxically, despite their good intentions, the parents painfully discover that their endeavours are still not enough to ensure the best conditions for their children's education when Vasiluc brings to their attention the fact that he does not even have a school bag; they can only hope that he will get one from school.

Following the "circular, seasonal lives" of the Budești community (Adams 2003), the film proposes a typical ethnographic gaze on local customs like the annual brandy distilling around Christmas, introduced by Dumitru Fărcaș's melancholy, Maramureș-specific *tárogató* music. Apart from emphasising cultural specificity, the sequence allows a closer examination of people's reactions to the changes in their lifestyle, marked, next to economic decline and increasing poverty, by political confusion. Besides putting forth a not very flattering stereotypical image of Romanian men as alcohol-addicted and fond of politics (in line with the saying according to which all Romanians are good at football and politics), it reveals the peasants' concern about finding an explanation for the course of events in post-1989 Romania and about making the best choices for the future that would entail an improvement of their life conditions. Thus, the peasants gathered around the distilling machine democratically express their political orientations with regard to the coming elections: the references to Paul of Romania, Hohenzollern, and Ion Iliescu as candidates to the presidential elections indirectly point to the temporal frame of the depicted events, i.e. November-December 2000. Ion Damian, in particular, without explicitly siding with left-wing party leaders, cannot refrain,

however, from voicing his outrage at the disastrous social and economic consequences of the transition from Communism to globalizing capitalism:

Păi nu vezi... nu vezi c-o fost complexul cel mai mare de porci, o fost al doilea din Europa și l-o distrus. Păi da' nu... nu contează că l-o vândut, da' noi amu trebuie să aducem de la unguri carne. [English subtitles: We had one of the biggest pig farms in Europe. The democrats destroyed it. They went and sold it. Now we have to import pork from Hungary.] (Macqueen 2002)

His speech occasionally acquires overtones of nostalgia for the Communist regime that may be accounted for by the loss of stability and financial security that he experienced after its fall:

Păi demult boierii ceia și-o făcut palate și-o avut tot ce-o vrut și săracii o lucrat la ei că n-o avut ce face. Păi normal că comuniștii o naționalizat. De ce să stai tu în 50 de camere? Las să stea și cel ce n-are. Nu? [English subtitles: In the old days, the rich built palaces and we were their servants. Communists stopped all that. Why should one family have fifty rooms?] (Macqueen 2002)

Christmas celebration is symbolically associated with the 'good news' regarding an opportunity of migrating for Ion Damian. When he brings home the Christmas tree, Ion informs his family that he might get a chance to emigrate illegally. The wife, Maria, is very enthusiastic and approves all the steps that Ion says he will have to take in order to gather the very large sum of money necessary to pay for the fake visa. Even the children are happy that their father will migrate at the thought that he will send them money and presents and that, maybe, they will even spend the next Christmas together in another country. One can easily guess from Ion's gestures as he speaks about his departure (joking with Vasiluc, caressing and kissing Măriuca) the reasons why he is determined to take such a big step: as he plainly states later in the film, it is his desire to offer his children decent living conditions, comfort and proper education that drives him on to face the risks of such a journey across national borders.

Another 'Home'-related sequence from the end of Part I is endowed with a two-fold function: it adds to the ethnographic/anthropological concern with "uncontaminated cultural practices" (Aufderheide, 2007: 106) that the modern world could not yet destroy and reveals the reason why Ion Damian's first plans of migrating are thwarted. Ironically, at a moment

when nature seems to come back to life after the long winter, when the mountain stream flows among ice-covered rocks (another symbol of the inexorable passage of time) and small birds are looking for food among the leaves that come out from under the melting snow, death strikes man unexpectedly. The image of the barren trees and the Maramureş-specific threnody announce the death of the family patriarch, Vasile Damian, at the age of 71. The funeral, which is presented in all its details, is attended by the entire village. Friends and neighbours stand by the side of Vasile Damian's wife, son, Ion, and daughter-in-law, Maria, accompany the dead on his last journey by singing sad, lamenting songs and playing their alphorns (*trâmbițe*, specific to Northern Romania). Yet, no member of the other son, Petru's family is able to attend the funeral: for them, returning to Romania would be the end of the 'Western adventure'. As a matter of fact, one could speculate that Vasile Damian's death epitomizes the very disappearance of an entire generation. As in *Temptation*, in the allegorical pattern in which Angus Macqueen shapes his subjects' stories to construct the image of a once immutable way of life at 'Home', which seemed to belong to a world of myth rather than to changeable reality, winter evokes "the breach between God and man, between parents and children who are doomed to pay for their original sin (which they assume) wondering across the land" (Colipcă 2010: 76). With the patriarchal father figure gone, the mother is reduced to a helpless, passive, silent observer of her family's dissolution in the process of evolution from the 'old' large-power distance to the 'new' small-power distance culture (see Hofstede 1991). The only thing she can do is, as shown at the beginning of Part III, to pray for the forgiveness of her children's sins and their safe return home. Her image on her knees and her voice-over reciting "The Lord's Prayer" also bring to the audiences' attention another stereotypical feature of Romanians, i.e. their being fervent Orthodox believers.

Like his brother and other young men from the village, Ion Damian renounces his parents' way of living and tries to rise up to his family's expectations by setting out on a journey to the West, presented in Part II. His previous hesitations in taking action in this respect had already led to 'trouble in paradise' as his wife Maria, more ambitious and prone to challenge established patterns and to embrace individualism, grew disappointed with him and blamed him for not being as determined as his brother Petru. For her, as for the rest of community, Petru, now "rich in

euros, is a hero" (Adams 2003). Unfortunately, Maria blinds herself to the consequences of Petru's 'determination', i.e. his marriage falling apart. When he finally decides he should go, Ion does it with the hope that thus he will be able to better provide for his children. As a conversation with Ion's son Vasiluc indicates, though not very enthusiastic about his father's departure, the boy approves of it and wishes his father could earn more money so that they could keep up with the progress of the 'civilized' society. (His uncle sent him a mobile phone and he expects his father to send him money for a professional mountain bike with 30 gears.)

In a striking sequence of great emotional impact which relies on the juxtaposition of live sound and close-ups on the wheels and tracks as the train speeds to the West, the filmmaker adds Ion's voice-over to let the viewers know how he travelled five hours hanging on to the underside of a train, risking his life to get to Vienna. There is no wonder that, when he is next shown speaking to the camera, Ion seems to be in a rather bad shape. He is in a hotel room in Vienna with the two other men who chose the same way out of Romania. Ion is very tired, smokes and sighs a lot, and that betrays the fact that things did not go exactly as planned. As he confesses to the camera, the guide ditched them and stole his bag. He is disoriented and desperate. So, he asks for advice from his brother Petru: thus, they are instructed to buy tickets for Paris, to stay calm and not to stand out at the station or during the trip to avoid drawing the attention of police patrols; if they manage to pass unnoticed and they reach Paris, they will be helped by Maria, Petru's wife. His brother's advice and blessing, as well as the thought that he must sacrifice everything for his children's future (which moves him to tears), determine Ion to take further action and to try to get to Paris after all. As in the closed space of the hotel room, in the open space of the railway station the three migrants continue to be overwhelmed with fear. The sequence that shows them finally on the train to Paris conveys particularly Ion's great joy of having managed to leave the Vienna station and to cross Austria without being caught. Yet, as the beginning of Part III discloses, joy will soon be replaced by the agony of being stopped before reaching the French border.

Ion's and his youngest companion's return to Budești, which opens Part III, seems to be a reason for joy only for their old mothers and Ion's children. Coming home late in the evening as if ashamed and unwilling to be seen, the two men share with their families their 'adventures': how they

were arrested when Ion paid a visit to his friend in his compartment (their third companion, Ionuc, luckily escaped), how they were mistreated by the German police, sent back to Romania and spent six days in jail. As he tells his story to an 'audience' formed by his wife Maria, his two children, his own mother and his friend's mother, Ion seems to be torn apart between the joy of seeing and kissing his children again and outrage at being misjudged by the German other. His story foregrounds one of the negative stereotypes of the Romanian migrant as the police patrol abusively generalize in calling Ion and his companion "criminals". As Macqueen explains,

Ion was shocked to realize that the moment he got to the West, under a train, he had become a criminal in the eyes of the state and of many people around him. 'Romanians are criminals, that is what everyone thinks,' murmurs Ion in muted horror when he returns home as a deportee. These economic migrants are cast into a legal minefield whose logic few of them understand. (2003: 106)

The dissolution of the rural community, with its large power distance and strict gender hierarchies is again suggestively hinted at by the focus, in this context, on the attitude of Maria, Ion's wife. Unlike her children who fall asleep happy that their father is back, she is bitterly disappointed by Ion's failure. Instead of comforting him, she anxiously asks him if he would leave again. She openly claims she has no intention of staying any more in this "bloody" country and, when her husband braves saying she would not last for five minutes abroad, she dares him, mocking at his manliness and reproaching him that he acted without thinking first. To save face in front of his friend and relatives, Ion puts an end to the discussion announcing (without enthusiasm) that they will try to leave again.

However, as he delays the next attempt to reach the West and seems rather tempted to return to the 'old ways' (he is shown alone on the hill cutting grass or leading the cows to the pasture), Maria, who is determined to turn her back on the poverty and 'primitivism' of the rural culture of the East and to embrace change, progress and the promise of a better/more prosperous life in the West, decides to take things in her own hands and to emigrate, even at the expense of her family's financial stability and emotional balance. Though the family is already heavily in debt, she does



not seem to care and borrows the equivalent of two years' income to buy false travel papers. Already turned into a 'bad wife', she gets carried away with the dreams of self-fulfilment and disruption of gender hierarchies to the point that she becomes a bad mother too. She has been definitely seduced by the new life 'philosophy' according to which "we should earn more money, we should change, we should progress" (Adams 2003). The fact that she is about to become a different woman is subtly pointed at by images of Maria, speaking on the phone with her brother-in-law Petru, without wearing – for the first time in the film – the scarf to cover her head and many clothes to cover her skin: her hair is loose and she is wearing a silky, sleeveless blue blouse. She openly confesses:

Abia aştept, măi, ... păi eu cred că nu mai... nu mai am niciun chef să lucr-u-n România. Amu așa m-aş duce... [English subtitles: I can't go on working here. I've just got to get away.] (Macqueen 2002)

She is blinded by envy when she sees other people having cars and no cares, all in all, living a good life off the money sent by members of their families who migrated abroad. Petru's warning that she should be careful because the illegal migration business is controlled by the Mafia obviously disconcerts her, but is not enough to make her change her mind, so she goes on with her plans. As she is supposed to travel as a Western business woman, she hitches to the local town to prepare, i.e. to buy clothes and make-up. The sequence that shows Maria putting on her make-up at home prefigures the extent to which she will change, provided she manages to get abroad. Almost ignoring her husband, who watches her sadly but silently, and her mother-in-law, still dressed in mourning clothes, who observes her from a distance with a blank stare on her face, Maria carefully applies the make-up, mimicking TV show hosts, and she is so taken with her own artificial beauty that she cannot even stand the children next to her. Their naïve questions about the use of make-up bother her and she goes as far as brutally pushing away her daughter when, curious about the small boxes and lipsticks she has never seen before, she tries to touch her mother's staff or interposes between her mother and the mirror. Maria's rejection triggers the children's defensively scornful reaction – Vasiluc asks if they will put her as a scarecrow in the field – which Ion shares completely (they all laugh at her) and which she chooses to ignore, as she is too busy wondering whether she looks like 'a real woman'.

The filmmaker's skilful handling of visual symbolism is obvious again at the end of the film when the image of red apples at the beginning of the fall conveys Biblical connotations of temptation and sin (the fall of woman from the Garden of Eden). However, when the narrator's voice-over cuts in, the viewers find out that, a week later, Maria's hopes are destroyed by the news that the man arranging for her passport was arrested, so she lost the money. Hence, the next frame focuses on her, back in her countryside-specific clothes, her hair covered by a scarf, 'paying for her sin', working in silence on the hill, in the company of another woman, to gather the fallen apples from the orchard.

Crosscutting is used to shift from one storyline to another and to alternate thus the images of 'Home' with those of the illegal Romanian migrants who strive to make a living in the West. Petru Damian, Ion's brother, and his family are, this time, in focus. In the first Romanian diaspora-related sequence, Irish music and a puppet show with two green paper-made leprechauns announce the change of setting to Ireland, where Petru settled (apparently about 1998). Petru is filmed in situations that are representative for his condition as an illegal migrant. On the one hand, he is shown manoeuvring a floor polishing machine, while his voice-over reveals that he lives a lonely life, trapped in the circle of work – going home – getting some sleep – back to work again. "Petru seems to have traded the Spartan Arcadia of his village for an invisible and lonely life on the most inhospitable margins of a distant city" (Adams 2003) and a close-up on the brand of the floor polisher, "Victor", is used by the British filmmaker to ironically suggest that what to Petru's family back home appears to be a 'victory', i.e. his succeeding to migrate to the West, is hardly that. As a matter of fact, Petru wants to keep himself constantly busy to avoid thinking of home and of his wife and son, whom he left behind in Paris. He even avoids opening the subject in his filmed confession: "Nu prea am timpul ăsta de a mă gândi la anumite probleme." [English subtitles: "I don't have time to feel anything."] (Macqueen 2002) His only connections with 'Home' and his family are: the TV programmes (while he stays at his desk checking his balance sheet and counting money, he listens to the comments made on the performance of a Romanian gymnast in a sports competition); the mobile phone (he is shown several times talking on the phone with his wife, his brother or his sister-in-law); and a few photos. The pictures of his wife and son lie scattered on a small table, next to his

favourite armchair, among chocolate boxes and Irish symbols, chief among which one deserves special attention: the small clay figurine of a policeman, which somewhat reminds Petru all the time of his being an illegal migrant who has to keep a low profile to avoid being arrested and repatriated.

On the other hand, as the Irish host space is perceived as either alienating (Petru is mostly shown alone) or subtly threatening (as the symbolism of the policeman figurine suggests), Petru tries to integrate in the local group of Romanian migrants whom he joins for a party at Megan's Pub. Images of the party contribute to reinforcing other stereotypical representations of the Romanians as party and drink-lovers (a Gypsy singer cheers the guests with a drinking song), but, at the same time, through the choice of participatory filmmaking that brings about a direct encounter between the interviewer and the interviewee, they also disclose the sad stories behind this show of joyful appearances. Thus, the viewers find out that Petru considers migration a risky enterprise that requires much sacrifice, but which has to be undertaken if one wants to fulfil one's dreams. However, when the interviewer tests the strength of Petru's belief in the subsequent benefits of the sacrifice he has made by asking questions about his wife and son, Petru looks down as if ashamed or unable to face the truth and gives a laconic answer ("Bine. Adrian îi la școală, foarte bine. [English subtitles: "They're fine. Adrian is in school now. He's doing very well."] (Macquene 2002), before he sinks in silence, nervously playing with his glass of wine on the table. As in the phone conversations with his wife Maria, shown later, in Part III, Petru opts for such rhetorical strategies as vagueness and silence, indicative of the fact that, for him, separation from his loved ones is difficult to bear, hence a subject to be avoided.

At the end of Part I, Petru's isolation is revealed to be all the more painful as he cannot even attend his father's funeral. He has to live with this burden and to picture the funeral from the photos and the tape sent by his brother. During the funeral procession, his father's last letter to his family is publicly read: he thanked his wife and his children for all the help they gave him in life and asked for their forgiveness. Stricken with grief and with the irony of the situation – his father thanked him, though he could not be there by his side to help him through his illness or to bury him – Petru covers his eyes and mourns, though too late, his father.

The loneliness and inner suffering that an illegal migrant separated from his/her family must painfully cope with also surface in the sequences that focus on Petru's wife Maria and their son Adrian, in Paris. In Part I, a tension-building segue adds to a setting-changing cut from Dublin to Paris introducing Maria. Her interview, overlapping images that show her taking the underground train to go to work, always travelling mostly in the company of other (black, Asian, Arabian) migrants/representatives of marginal social groups, clearly reveals her feeling an outsider ("Eram foarte, foarte străină. ["I felt such an outsider."] (Macqueen 2002) and her sense of insecurity, as she obsessively points out that she is "not OK". Nonetheless, she has to make a living and to support her son, hence she works as a housekeeper/ domestic cleaner. Maria's case provides Angus Macqueen with an opportunity to show "how different European nations adopt wholly different policies to their migrant workers". In turn-of-the-millennium France, for instance, illegal migrant workers like Maria were tolerated as long as they did not cause any trouble. "If they made an application for asylum, however, or were stopped in the market place, they would be immediately deported" (Adams 2003)<sup>5</sup>. That accounts for Maria's painful awareness of her illegal status and constant fear of being arrested and sent home.

Like the frames shot on the train, those showing Maria walking in the Parisian streets offer the filmmaker an opportunity to put together a more complete picture of the cultural diversity characterizing the migrant communities in Paris, all sharing precarious living conditions for which tired faces, beggars and children sleeping on the pavement are metonymically symbolic of, but also to emphasise a certain sense of solidarity among migrants as Maria shares her umbrella with a young man while they are waiting for the red light to change. The rap song that accompanies this sequence, raising issues of differences in values, legal status ("sans-papiers") and hardships of life for the migrants and all other marginal categories, reinforces the message and enhances the emotional impact aimed at empathic unsettlement.

Another sequence allows discussing representations of Maria's life as a migrant woman in terms of her relationship with her son Adrian. Her motivation for migrating is obviously strictly related to the hope of an improvement in the family's financial status and the desire of better providing, together with her husband, for their son Adrian's needs. She is

not animated, initially at least, by the wish to challenge the gender role system in the Romanian patriarchal society. As a matter of fact, throughout her long stay in Paris, she remains faithful to her husband, though he is away in Dublin, and shows her elderly in-laws, with whom she keeps in touch by phone, due respect, behaving hence according to the principles of the large power-distance society she comes from. Her conversation on the phone with her mother-in-law reveals her a sensitive woman who suffers at the thought that her marriage is falling apart – whenever asked about her relationship with Petru, she is rather vague and changes subject – and who desperately tries to gather all her strength to survive and to provide for her son. She cannot allow herself to be overwhelmed with despair and homesickness, so she wipes her tears and gets back to work.

After the forced separation from Petru, Maria's entire life revolves around her son Adrian and it is out of motherly love that she, as an example of a good mother, reacts against the established norms of her community, refusing to send her son to work. Her desire to offer him a better life and education keeps her going on, even when, as a migrant, she has to assume the risk of experiencing humiliation and even violence. At some point, in Part III, she tells some of her friends how she was attacked, robbed and beaten in an underground station. As her illegal migrant status prevented her from asking for help from the police or the medical system, she had to manage then on her own and this made her all the more bitterly aware of her isolation, vulnerability and double victimization (as a migrant and as a woman). (see also Colipcă 2010: 265)

The third part of the film actually invites the examination in the mirror of the two sisters-in-law, Petru's wife, the migrant, and Ion's wife, the would-be migrant, who have the same name, Maria, connoting "the prototype of the patriarchally constructed obedient, hard-working woman from the countryside" (Colipcă et al. 2010: 64). In both women's cases, sooner or later, the dream of fulfilment in the West becomes the source of rebellion against the established gender order. Unlike Ion's Maria, who rapidly evolves into the bad wife carried away by the obsession to live the 'Western European dream', Petru's Maria initially rises (as previously shown) to the expectations implied in the connotations of her name, but eventually she does change, slowly yet surely, her mentality. She left for France with her husband and child looking forward to a life together sharing the advantages and disadvantages of a migrant's status. She admits

that she thought of France as of a mirage (an idea equally emphasised through the association of the image of Maria walking in the street on her way to work with diegetic music, as two street accordion players play “Over the Rainbow”):

În satul meu era un proverb că o să facem ceva numai când o să ajungem la Paris. Pentru că atunci credeam că nu o s-ajungem niciodată. [English subtitles: In the village, we had a saying: ‘I’ll do it when I get to Paris.’ Because we believed we’d never get there.] (Macqueen 2002)

Ironically, the life she lived in Paris, working illegally to support her son Adrian and without having Petru by her side, is hardly ‘the dream that she dreamt of’. Still, after five years of life without her husband, she seems to have grown more independent: a hint in this respect is provided by her dressing style, which is not very sophisticated, but quite elegant and, anyway, completely different from the traditional folk costume she probably used to wear in the village. In addition, she finally dares to challenge her husband’s authority as the head of the family. She has a hard time putting up with his silence, which she taxes as lack of affection and detachment from family problems. Over the phone, she reproaches him that he does not know what it feels to be hurt inside and she is very bothered by his laconic, vague replies and his forced laughter; in fact, Petru’s reaction proves, as previously mentioned, that he cannot cope with the situation. Already upset about Petru’s not joining her and Adrian in Paris, she is even more outraged by the gossip back home: she is rumoured to have filed for divorce and, thus, implicitly forced into the stereotypical frame of the easy woman. Having undergone acculturation, she has managed to move from the ‘mental software’ of the large power distance and collectivist patterns characterising the sending society to that of small power distance and individualism dominating the French society (see Hofstede 1991). She explicitly states:

Dar eu i-am spus ca nu mă interesează de nimeni, absolut de nimeni, decât de mine, de viața mea, de Adrian. Eu nu pot ... pentru că eu, când am fost agresată la metrou și mi-o furat geanta, și m-o strâns de gât și m-o bătut, și am stat în casă o săptămână, n-o venit nimeni să-mi deie un gram de apă. Cine o venit, pe ăla o să ajut. [English subtitles: I told him I don’t care about anything, just about myself. Just me, my life and Adrian. No one did a thing when I was attacked in the subway. I was

strangled, beaten up. I had to stay at home for a week. I only help those who help me.] (Macqueen 2002)

That the receiving society has remained indifferent to her problems, to the isolation and marginalisation that she is condemned to, subtly hinted at in the film by the absence of sequences showing Maria's interaction with the French hosts, is also confirmed by her seeking comfort in the company of other Romanian migrants. Her friends in Paris, in whose families a certain balance in the domestic sphere has been achieved by the husbands' direct involvement in taking care of the children, as a step forward towards the feminine type of culture developed by the French, encourage Maria to divorce Petru, to liberate herself from a marriage that can no longer make her happy and to get on with her life. That, for Maria, Petru Damian's wife, means, as her previous statement clearly shows, to be, above all, a good mother for her son Adrian and sets her, once more, in contrast to her sister-in-law, Ion Damian's wife, who seems ready to reject and even abandon her children to 'emancipate' herself from the bonds of her 'Home' culture and to embrace the 'Western ways'.

The end of the film unites in a visually impressive sequence images of the sad, disrupted lives of the two related families, Petru's and Ion's. Petru is shown all dressed up, but alone going to what appears to be a church and joining the parishioners who sing a religious song in French. This is his way of maintaining an emotional bond with his family in France. Maria and Adrian spend some time together watching the Parisian panorama. She tries to keep her spirits up making plans for the future, but she is afraid and her asking her son to hold her hand as they reach the top of the carousel might be indicative of her relying on her son's support to go on through this difficult period in their lives. Ion, who has resumed his habit of wearing the "clop" - another sign of his resignation and return to a traditional way of life - is deep in thought, unable to enjoy the splendid landscape that surrounds him, and works hard in silence to provide for his family. The conclusion, rather implicit, is that, far from fulfilling people's dreams, migration has brought about pain, estrangement and the destruction of family bonds.

## Concluding Remarks

In *The Last Peasants. Journeys*, the stories of the Damians from the village of Budești, Maramureș, allow Angus Macqueen to raise questions regarding the death of the rural culture in Romania, labour migration to Western Europe, as well as the process of (re)construction of the migrants' identity as influenced by gender and cultural differences in particular. His filmic text is largely underlain by such dichotomic oppositions as old/young, man/woman, rural/urban, legal/illegal, centre/periphery, East/West, and its rhetorical strategies, chief among which the exploration of spaces – public/private, open/closed – and the use of music and sound effects, definitely arrest the attention of the audiences. In many ways, this film – like the whole *The Last Peasants* trilogy – implicitly acknowledges that the Western Europeans' images of Romania as the East had not changed even at the turn of the new millennium. As Joep Leerssen puts it:

The implicit European self-image is one of a separation between an ordered interior world, ruled by laws and by domestic values, a household with a centre of gravity in traditional authority, and cordoned off from an unordered outside where only the law of the jungle applies. (...) Outside this ordered world of domesticity are nomads, displaced or placeless strangers, who live in non-houses, whose fires are not on a hearth but under the open skies, and whose behaviour is wild, lawless, unregulated, and transgressive. In this stereotypical self-other opposition, Europe's ultimate Stranger is the Displaced Person... (2017: 22-23)

The illegal migrants 'flooding' the Western European countries coming from post-Communist Romania regarded as still 'non-Europe' in the early 2000s, when it had not joined the European Union yet, were, then, strangers condemned to marginalisation, hence, as already mentioned, the lack of any images of interactions between the Romanian migrants and their hosts, the former being shown mostly as victims of loneliness and isolation, occasional socialization being limited to the Romanian diaspora. Western Europe's 'centrality', "carry[ing] with it the connotation of dynamism and development" (Leerssen 2000: 277) is shown to be definitely well-rooted in the Western European self-image, as well as in the 'mental software' of the Romanian other, irresistibly lured by the mirage of the 'Western European dream'. Post-Communist Romania at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century remains the periphery and



Macqueen's choice of his subjects as peasants seems to reinforce its stereotypical image as "timeless", "backward" and "traditional" (Leerssen 2000: 277).

Set in a picturesque, idyllic landscape, the rural world that the Damians belong to moves slowly, living "from season to season, from harvest to harvest, without thinking about progress, about altering their lifestyle" (Macqueen qtd. in Longin Popescu 2004) until "the great moment of change" comes and the young generation, finding their archaic culture more of a burden, seeks to replace it with the glamour of consumerism. Altogether, the vision that lies at the heart of this largely observational, occasionally participatory, documentary is not exactly unproblematic. It is true that it aims to deconstruct the romanticised image of an idyllic countryside, reminiscent of nostalgia for a distant past, and to create "a conflict" in the minds and hearts of the turn-of-the-millennium Western European – especially British – audiences by showing them that it is hard to live without all the commodities that about a hundred years of capitalism and consumerism had got them used to.

It also records Romanian customs and a cultural heritage that seem doomed to be lost in time owing to spreading capitalism and globalization. But, at the same time, it subtly pleads for the revival of the pastoral way of life and the 'return to the land' in the Romanian countryside, if only half-way, as long as that can ensure the 'new peasants' a decent income and living conditions, and for the sake of re-establishing a bond with nature and the cycle of the seasons (entirely lost in Western countries) (see Macqueen qtd. in Longin Popescu 2004). Beyond that, the greatest merit of *Journeys* and of the whole *The Last Peasants* trilogy lies in the lesson that could still appeal to the audiences even now, more than ten years after Romania's accession to the European Union: for the Romanians, to be proud of their culture and their past, and to treasure them, and for the Western public, to change their attitudes towards the foreign other and to become more tolerant and open to cross-cultural dialogue.

## Notes

1. 2003 – Prix Europa IRIS for TV non-fiction, BFI Grierson Best Documentary Series Award, Royal Television Society Awards for Photography, Editing and Team – Best Documentary Series Award; 2004 – the First Annual Directors' Guild of Great Britain DGGB Awards – Best Documentary Award.

2. According to Bill Nichols, there are six primary modes in documentary filmmaking: the poetic mode, the expository mode, the observational mode, the participatory mode, the reflexive mode and the performative mode. Nichols points out that: "Once established (...), modes overlap and intermingle. Individual films can be characterized by the mode that seems most influential to their organization, but individual films can also 'mix and match' modes as the occasion demands." (2001: 33)
3. For a detailed analysis of Macqueen's *The Last Peasants. Temptation*, see Colipcă Gabriela Iuliana (2010) "Migration and Romanian Identity in Angus Macqueen's *The Last Peasants. Temptation* (2003)", *Communication interculturelle et littérature*, no. 1 (9), January-February-March 2010, 74-80.
4. Probably to make more prominent the mythical time, the *illo tempore* conveying a sense of permanence to the representation of life in the village of Budești, Macqueen avoids being very specific about the historic time frame and does not explicitly indicate the years when Petru Damian and his family illegally migrated to France, when Petru reached Ireland or when Ion and his wife tried to follow their relatives' example and go West as illegal migrants as well. The viewers are challenged to make use of the subtle temporal references incorporated either in the narrator's voice-over or in the protagonists' interventions to discover when exactly the events in the documentary happened.
5. Angus Macqueen points out the differences in migrant-related policies in France and Britain, at least until 2002, in the following terms:

[Romanian migrants] know they are not political asylum seekers, but in Britain are encouraged to ask for it. In France, they know that if they apply for asylum at the local police station they will either be arrested and deported on the spot, or simply chucked on to the streets. In Britain, they know jobs are easier to come by and the pay is better than in France, where employment laws are much stricter and attack the employer not the immigrant. Equally, they know that in France, without the right identity document, they can be picked up at any moment. (Macqueen 2003: 106)

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