SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND IDENTITARY BORDERS: ROMANIAN EMIGRATION AND ITS CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS

Gabriela Iuliana Colipcă-Ciobanu, Assoc. Prof., PhD, Ioana Mohor-Ivan, Assoc. Prof., PhD, "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galați

Abstract: The paper focuses on representations of emigration as a consequence of the transition from communism to capitalism in post-1989 Romania and examines the strategies through which several feature and documentary films construct images of 'Home' and the 'West' in an attempt to emphasise identity assertion and re-construction against the background of intersecting economic, social, and political frames in transformation. The corpus includes two sets of films: on the one hand, Romanian filmic productions – Asfalt Tango (1996), Occident (2002) and Italiencele (2004) – focus, from the perspective of the sending society, on the re-negotiation of Romanian migrants' identity as determined by the exclusion/inclusion dynamic that marks their relationships with the home and host societal frameworks; on the other hand, the British documentary trilogy The Last Peasants (2003) – Journeys, Temptation, A Good Wife – foregrounds the endeavours of filmmakers in the receiving societies to arouse public awareness of the complexity of migration as a social and cultural phenomenon and to urge especially the Western audiences to change their attitude towards the migrant Other. The exploration of the selected filmic texts aims at retracing identity-shaping differences considering both West/East and masculine/feminine clashes. The representations of the latter, in particular, are revealed to abide by traditional encodings of masculinity and femininity, as, in most of the cases, Romanian women migrants are shown as still subject to both the domination of the 'Mighty West' and the male domination of patriarchy.

Keywords: film, emigration, identity, West/East, masculinity/femininity.

1. Drawing Borders, Setting Up Borderlands

As relatively recent research in the fields of cultural studies and imagology has revealed, *difference* seems to have become, ever since the mid-seventeenth century, a key concept related to the definition of national character, connoting uniqueness for European nations (Leerssen 2007: 69). For the European countries of the Eastern Bloc that were subject for decades to the Russian imperialist influence, the 1989 and early 1990s wave of Revolutions, paving the way for sweeping changes in Europe's geographical, but also political and cultural borders, brought about the hope of overcoming the mental divisions of European patterns of thinking along the West/East or Centre/Periphery coordinates at the end of a demanding but (hopefully) ultimately rewarding transition to democracy and capitalist market economy, and of the EU border alteration process aimed at "internal integration and external enlargement" (Armstrong 2007: 1). But the remapping of Europe has caused new borders to emerge and the enlargement of what many have envisioned as a 'European empire' has gone hand in hand with the exclusion of the 'unwanted'. Holding different ideas and ideals about "the homogeneity/heterogeneity of political, social and cultural space, and the equality/inequality of its constituent elements; (…) about borders as lines sharply dichotomizing inside/outside or more fuzzy zones of gradual change or border-crossing interrelationships" (Anderson 2007: 9), the nation-states of the 'deterritorialised' and 're-territorialised' Europe have found it difficult to reconcile their strategies of 'fortress Europe' protection with the (neo-imperialist) drive to take actions that would result in EU's expansion as a global economic and political power. In the context of systemic macro-level contradictions revealing Europe still "a collection of separate national states with their own separate ideologies" (Armstrong 2007: 25) and national rivalries, "the countries of the post-

BDD-V95 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 02:58:21 UTC)

communist East-European area have continued to share an ambivalent and floating sense of an identity which is 'no more Eastern, but not yet Western'" (Mohor-Ivan 2010: 135).

Confused by the internal – economic, political, social and cultural – fissures characterising their societies in transition, more and more East Europeans hoped that they could take advantage of the newly gained freedom of movement across national borders and migrate from their areas of high economic, political and social insecurity to what they perceived as areas of lower insecurity to the West. Yet, most of them have got to discover the hard way the ambivalence of the 'new Europe' that, while professing adherence to a neo-liberal philosophy of EU enlargement, remained still tributary to colonial values in determining who belongs in, who belongs out, and who does what in terms of labour. Double standards abound in the asymmetrical scenario of the EU border system "reflecting the 'gated community' attitudes of those within" (Armstrong 2007: 5), that can be accounted for partly by self-interest related to economic and political control, partly by "the persistence of power and mental structures sustaining the condescending attitude behind Eurocentric thinking, which divide the world into two cultural fields" (Mohor-Ivan 2010: 135), with the West retaining its privileged central position against 'the rest' (Shohat and Stam 1994), the 'lesser' or the 'Other Europe', through a "nesting orientalist" discourse (Todorova 1997). In this context, the flows of transnational migration from the East European periphery to the West European centre have created new socially and culturally constructed borderlands in which identities are re-negotiated within profoundly hybridized contact zones where cultural encounters challenge and problematise the binary systems that initially brought them into being (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2007: 25).

Running counter to Eurocentric thinking, emigration and its accompanying multiculturalism are liable to open up "a culturally significant space" (Iordanova 2001: 262) in which traditional borders established between "self and other, native and foreign, home and deterritorialisation, centre and periphery, West and East" (Mohor-Ivan 2010: 35) become effaced in the expanding and dynamic 'borderlands' that migrant communities create.

Particularising for the Romanian case with a view to following identity-producing changes in physical and ideological borders and borderlands, in the context of the epistemic, political and cultural competition in post-1989 Europe, the paper addresses migration as a complex phenomenon that causes "disparate cultures [to] meet, clash and grapple with each other" (Pratt 1992 cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2007: 48), as represented in several filmic narratives that probe the migrant's cinematic construction against the interplay of (sometimes) conflicting loyalties to notions of 'Home' or 'the West'.

2. Images, Stereotypes and Migrants' Representations

In imagological studies, image is defined as a "mental or discursive representation or reputation of a person, group, ethnicity or 'nation'" (Leerssen 2003: 342), which acts in the cultural and communicative spheres as a cognitive "knowledge structure" or schema that controls our opinion and behaviour towards the 'other'. When the collective experience of a group or a society alters due to the shifts occurring in the cultural and historical contexts, images also change as representations of a new cultural reality. Failing to adjust, images turn into stereotypes or clichés, "a pejorative, reductive, monosemic, essentialist and discriminatory representation of the Other [which involves] an elementary conception of the dichotomy between the 'in-group' and the 'out-group'" (Villain-Gandossi 2001: 27).

The above-stated dialectics can be easily illustrated by the representational range of a migrant's identity that has often negotiated "the question of otherness in terms which are not only political, but also geographical" (Draga-Alexandru 2001: 123). Within it, this identity has differently been inflected function of its being posited within the 'home' or the 'host' cultures, adding to the traditional images of the adventurer vs. the exile (in the home culture)

BDD-V95 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 02:58:21 UTC)

or the adapter vs. the alien (in the destination culture), more recent images and stereotypes, summarised by the table below (see IOM[1]):

Home Society	**Host Society**
The **adventurer** (dares to move out in search of the new)	The **adapter** (brings new energies and spawns creativity in creating a new life)
The **exile** (separated from the original culture and embracing a different way of living)	The **alien** 'Other' (separated by his/her differences from the destination culture)
The **victim** (of human trafficking/illegal migration)	• The **illegal** emigrant and the 'asylum seeker' (potential threats to local values and identity, scapegoats for economic insecurity) • The trafficked **prostitute**
The **returned migrant**: • The source of richness and potential agent for development • The 'alien', for having adopted the cultural values of the host society • The 'failure', unable to adapt to and be successful in the host society	

(Mohor-Ivan 2010: 136)

Due mention should also be made of the fact that certain discursive representations of migration seem to particularly dwell on "the intracultural split" (Anzaldúa 1987 cited in Leitch 2001: 2219) characterising the diasporic borderlands/contact zones that emerge at the very heart of the dominant receiving culture in the process of migration. Such images disclose how inequalities in the relations between the parties engaged are confronted, how, struggling to make visible their cultural/ethnic/gender difference (that the dominant culture perceives as threatening and tries to control under its "collective shadow" – Anzaldúa 1987 cited in Leitch 2001: 2219), migrants develop "a new consciousness", creating "a new mythos – that is, a change in the way [they] perceive reality, the way [they] see themselves, and the ways [they] behave" (Anzaldúa 1987 cited in Leitch 2001: 2214).

3. Re-imagining Borders: Romanian Emigration in Filmic Representations

As a consequence of the transition from communism to capitalism, emigration has become a social, cultural and political topos of post-1989 Romania. In its turn, as a social praxis "in which the power politics of dominant groups and the interplay of forces acquire considerable importance" (Zacharasiewicz 2007: 2), film has also found emigration artistically useful to emphasise identity construction and re-construction against the background of intersecting economic, social, and political frames in transformation, foregrounding the role that their representations play in uncovering the residual mental schemata that account for "the prevalent images of a society and the ways of representing [other] ethnic groups and nations" (Zacharasiewicz 2007: 1).

Feature films like Nae Caranfil's *Asfalt Tango* (1996), Cristian Mungiu's *Occident* (2002) or Napoleon Helmis's *Italiencele* (2004), as well as Angus Macqueen's *The Last Peasants* (2003), a British documentary trilogy including *Journeys*, *Temptation* and *A Good Wife*, are but some examples of a more substantial corpus of films (see Colipcă et al. 2010)

[1] The table is adapted from the information provided by "The Image of Migrants in Society", IOM (International Organisation for Migration) report, available at: www.iom-seasia.org/resource/pdf/image.pdf.

BDD-V95 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 02:58:21 UTC)

that display an articulate interest in exploring the issue of Romanian emigration in the post-1989 socio-economic and political context.

Asfalt Tango may be interpreted as a commentary on the 1990s Romanian society and one of its most topical debates, namely that of sex trafficking under the cover of the Western entertainment industry, for its main plot focuses on a group of Romanian girls who are convinced to emigrate through the promise of a glorious career as future cabaret-dancers in Paris. Beneath the burlesque of the comic incidents that accompany their journey to the Romanian border, the micro-stories related to the individual members of this group function as a means of foregrounding both "the reasons for migrating (the 'West'/ France perceived as a *mirage*, a place that would solve all problems and bring both personal and public fulfilment), as well as the costs of migration (the severance of emotional ties and abandonment of duties within the home society; implied prostitution)" (Mohor-Ivan 2010: 137).

More complex in its narrative structure (three intertwining plots in which the same events are shown from different angles as main characters from one story are cast as secondary in another one) and set at the beginning of the next decade, *Occident* focuses on the migrant's 'stay or leave' dilemma. The film juxtaposes pre- and after-1990 Romanian emigration patterns against a similar interplay between an imperfect 'home' and the lure of the 'West'/Germany, Italy, France, Holland; yet, it averts attention from the actual migrants' journeys by focussing on their passages' end points, a strategy which highlights the paradoxical and conflicting strains entailed by emigration: move and inertia, quest and retreat, or bliss and distress.

Set at about the same time with *Occident*, *Italiencele* closes the circle of the migrant's journey by representing both its set-off (two sisters from a small rural community decide to emigrate illegally and work as strawberry pickers in Spain) and its end-point (their return to the native village with the horrific secret of having been trafficked and sold as prostitutes in Kosovo). Similar to the other two films, *Italiencele* thus engages with topical issues in the wider debates on migration: "the reasons for migrating (the 'West'/Spain, Italy perceived as a *mirage*, a place that would solve – mainly financial - problems); the costs of (illegal) migration (human trafficking); reintegration and the mixed home perceptions of returned migrants (admiration: sources of richness and development/hostility: less 'native'; unable to make it abroad)" (Mohor-Ivan 2010: 139).

Angus Macqueen's *The Last Peasants* series, which includes the documentaries *Journeys*, *Temptation* and *A Good Wife*, adds to the list of filmic productions meant to give an artistic expression to filmmakers' interest in the transformations brought about by the re-territorialisation of Europe after 1989, chief among which the massive emigration of Romanians with direct and significant impact on the sending and the receiving societies. As the British film director indicates in personal statements (Macqueen 2004) and interviews, the three documentaries were intended to counter the negative effects of "lurid" British media representations of Romanian (at that time mostly illegal) migrants by casting a humane, empathic gaze on "what drove them from their own homes", as well as on their experiences while living in "the urban squalor (…) on the edges of [British] cities", doing jobs that the British no longer wanted to (Macqueen 2004). Thus, Macqueen's "way" of "talking" about the Romanian Other, which draws on the rhetorical strategies of both observational/direct cinema filming and participatory/cinema-vérité sociological investigation, is circumscribed to his "crusade against [the] indifference" of the West towards the Eastern societies after the fall of Communist regimes (Adams 2004). Weaving carefully in the appealing, sometimes allegory-oriented, artistic framework of triptych-like narratives the individual stories of members of several families (the Damians in *Journeys*; the Opriș and Bud families in *Temptation*; and the Maricas in *A Good Wife*) from the village

BDD-V95 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 02:58:21 UTC)

of Budești, Maramureș, the trilogy ponders on images of Romanian peasants trapped in the whirl of post-1989 societal changes, between their centuries-old rural culture and the mirage of Western consumerism (France, the UK, Ireland, the USA, Belgium). The focus on their striving for a better life in a context that opposes the old to the young, the experienced to the inexperienced, man to woman, the rural to the urban civilisation, the East to the West and legal to illegal border crossing seeks to put Romanian emigration into a new light and, hopefully, to contribute to turning the viewers, especially from among the Western hosts, into public actors fully aware of the dynamics of national identity and alterity in various European cultural spaces.

4. The Migrant's Construction: Within/Without Cultural and Gender Borders

All the films selected for analysis project images of emigration and of the migrant's experience against the background of an imagined space that (re)configures the actual borders that the migrant crosses so as to emphasise the migrant's transgression of "embedded hierarchies established between self and other, native and foreign, home and deterritorialisation, centre and periphery, West and East" (Mohor-Ivan 2010: 139).

In all three feature films, 'Home' appears as an un-idealised landscape marked by contrasts between the traditional and the familiar, on the one hand, and the unpredictable pressures of modern-day existence, on the other. For instance, the cityscape of *Occident* bears the marks of the transition from a collectivist to an individualist society visually highlighted through an abrupt juxtaposition of shots of communist-style sordid tenements and fancy urban developments (ironically, the name of the city store in *Occident* is "More and More: A Life Philosophy"). Likewise, the rural landscape of *Italiencele* reveals a peasant culture that has become a mere commodity, Romanian folklore being commercialised for the sake of the voyeuristic Western gaze of a French cameraman. Both types of representations combine in *Asfalt Tango*, as "'Home' glimpsed through the bus windows fluidises the scenery otherwise made up of disparate oppositional pairs (the picturesque versus the derelict, the urban versus the suburban, the urban versus the rural, the new and the old) suggesting the social and economic cleavages in the local culture and inviting at the reconsideration of Romania's margins and Romania as margin" (Mohor-Ivan 2010: 139).

The documentary films display similar images of 'Home' as conflict-ridden, yet reflected upon from a rather melancholy perspective that lends the visual text an elegiac touch. Angus Macqueen's artistic vision of the Romanian rural society is intended, indeed, to make a difference and to show that there is more about Romania than just children with disabilities, beggars, stray dogs, or criminals/traffickers, but, at the same time, it does not manage to escape the Western stereotype of Romania as still a predominantly rural – and therefore, underdeveloped, primitive, inferior – society. Providing coherence and cohesion to the trilogy, the visual representations of the spatial frame at 'Home' reveal the Romanian countryside as idyllic and Eden-like, and serve as vehicles of allegory as its transformations in the passage from one season to another and from one regime to another (i.e., from communism to capitalism) subtly echo the story of the fall of man: "summer reminds of man's life in God's Eden Garden, autumn, with the apple harvest, parallels the temptation and man's eating from the tree of knowledge, while winter, with its gloominess and ensuing sense of loneliness and isolation, calls to mind 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). The Biblical allegorical pattern is meant to symbolically sustain the theme of the slow dissolution of the traditional way of life in the Romanian village – which, in Hofstede's terms (1991), could be characterised as a large power distance, collectivist, masculine type of community with a tendency to high uncertainty avoidance – giving way to behavioural patterns specific to individualism and the

BDD-V95 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 02:58:21 UTC)

small power distance culture, as illustrated in the stories of Petru and Ion Damian (*Journeys*), Laurenţiu Opriş, Lorinţ and Florica Bud (*Temptation*), Mihaela Marinca and Radu Bud (*A Good Wife*).

Less insisted upon, though impossible to ignore in films that would not sacrifice the journalistic integrity of the mostly observational approach that the British director opts for, the urban Romanian landscape is occasionally glimpsed at to better illustrate the economic, social and cultural cleavages characterising the post-1989 society. Both open-air sceneries and indoor settings foreground the marks of globalising civilisation in the Romanian towns (large tenements, railways, shops and McDonald's restaurants; well-furnished modern apartments with barely any personalising markers) as opposed to the natural landscape of the Maramureş hills (narrow unpaved paths winding down the slopes, meadows full of mountain daisies, haystacks and rich orchards, lovely forests and fresh mountain rivers) and the charmingly traditional though poor and small rooms in the old-fashioned Maramureş houses decorated in the folk style, with woven carpets on the walls and old black-and-white pictures of family members (Colipcă 2010: 77-78).

It is the cultural myth of the 'West' that informs migrant representations of the host society. These are visually sustained by metaphors of glamour, success, prosperity and security (e.g. panoramic images of Paris with La Tour Eiffel, l'Arc de Triomphe, the obelisk in the Place de la Concorde, la Seine, etc. – *Asfalt Tango*, *Occident*, *Journeys*; appealing shop windows and joyful puppet-shows in Dublin – *Journeys*; the lights and the flashy shop boards and windows in London – *Temptation*; the wide, clean, well-paved, police-surveyed streets of Paris – *A Good Wife*). Nevertheless, this myth of a distant idealised West is revisited by all films, which either question its truth-value – as implied by the open endings of *Asfalt Tango*, *Occident*, and each of the three *Last Peasants* films – or overtly deny it by showing the unsettling outcome of a migrant's dream – as the fate of the main characters in *Italiencele* and *Journeys* demonstrates. The inauthenticity of the 'West' is further exposed through metonymical characters which embody its mercantile values (Marion, the French business-woman in *Asfalt Tango*), its hypocritical posturing (Jerome, the French 'benefactor' in *Occident*) or its sexual deviancy (Van Horn, the Dutch 'official' in *Occident*), while also pointing to composite hierarchies within Europe itself (Nae, the Romanian illegal migrant turned 'German' and Luigi, the Italian of African origin in *Occident*). The same effect is achieved in the documentary films by: the silencing of the hosts' voices (there is no contact with the migrants, the latter remaining confined to their diasporic groups or, at most, to migrant-migrant interactions in *Journeys*); the juxtaposition of metonymic images of the 'civilised' West and of migrant enclaves pervaded by a sense of exclusion, marginalization, emptiness, isolation, utter poverty, and hybridisation (Lorinţ's claustrophobic London room in *Temptation* and Petru Damian's barely-furnished Dublin room in *Journeys*).

The migrant's construction, bordering both 'Home' and the 'West', proves unstable. It either abides by traditional stereotypes or subtly dismantles them by deviating from their oversimplified representations, categories and values. In *Asfalt Tango*, the collective feminine character impersonated by the eleven would-be dancers is both adventurer and implied object of sex-trade. In *Occident*, Mihaela and Sorina seemingly are adventurers likely to end up as exiles, while Nicu is the illegal migrant-adventurer turned victim. In *Italiencele*, the sisters start as illegal worker-adventurers and end as victims of trafficking. In *Journeys*, Petru and Maria Damian are adventurers turned embittered exiles, unlike Ion Damian, who seems more of an exile, pushed by personal circumstances to illegally migrate, only to become a victim of migrant smugglers and of the EU border control system. In *Temptation*, Lorinţ Bud is another example of adventurer turned exile, while Mihaela

BDD-V95 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 02:58:21 UTC)

Marinca in *A Good Wife* evolves from an adventurer to an exile and a victim of migrant-migrant violence.

The documentary films, in particular, dwell more explicitly on diasporic borderlands that have not been assimilated into the dominant culture of the receiving country and that are kept at its margin isolated by the hosts' ignorance and sense of superiority. Seen mostly as agents ready to perform hard work at a cheap cost and, at the same time, as a threat to the security of the Eurocentric nation-states at the core of the EU, migrants like Petru and Maria Damian, Mihaela Marinca and Lorinț Bud acquire visibility only within the frame of the (Romanian) migrant communities in Dublin, Paris and London. Otherwise, they remain 'a blind spot' of the receiving society, hence, the lack of sequences to represent migrant-host interactions.

In terms of gender representations, the three feature films foreground emigration as an almost entirely feminized phenomenon, unlike the documentaries which show relatively equal interest in the different ways in which Romanian men and women experience it. This may be accounted for by the actual emigration trends characteristic for the post-1989 Romanian context, where emigration has often been triggered by the persistence of patriarchal patterns and mentality, limiting women's opportunities in the process of neo-accumulation and the public sphere.

On the whole, all the films point to the social, economic and cultural problems that women must cope with in post-communist Romania. Jeni and Lenuța in *Italiencele* are victimised by the economic stagnation and pre-modern standards of living characterising the Romanian village, and by an enduring patriarchal system which oppresses and brutalises women (embodied in the drunken, erratically violent father, and the human trafficker and rapist Giovani). Florica Bud in *Temptation* is equally compelled by rural patriarchy to move exclusively within the domestic sphere as a would-be peasant's wife. This provides the incentive for allegedly-empowering border-crossing, without her being aware of the fact that finding employment abroad in precarious, low paid jobs will not lead to a full disruption of gender hierarchies, but, on the contrary, to reproducing and even intensifying them (Morokvasic 2007: 70). Similarly, poverty, homelessness and aberrant patriarchal behavioural codes operate within the urban space, as shown in *Asfalt Tango* and *Occident,* inducing the women protagonists' search for personal fulfilment through emigration.

Otherwise, womanhood is construed in terms of "traditional encodings of femininity and societal role models which are in fact variations on general gender stereotypes, becoming thus sub-stereotypes in themselves" (Mohor-Ivan 2010: 140). In accordance, femininity is equated with passivity, victimhood, sexuality and domesticity. In the feature films, this is exemplified by subtypes like the woman ready to trade herself in the promise of material fulfilment in the West (*Asfalt Tango* and *Occident*), or the naïve victim of sex trafficking (*Italiencele*). Their lack of agency is hinted at through the control that male figures invested with patriarchal authority exert over the course taken by their emigration journey. Its start is determined by bullying fathers (*Italiencele* and *Occident*), husbands and imperfect lovers (*Asfalt Tango* and *Occident*); its trajectory is established by fake impresarios (*Asfalt Tango*), matrimonial agents (*Occident*) and traffickers (*Italiencele*); even its end, in one particular case (*Italiencele*), is resolved through male intervention: an American soldier arrives by car in the remote Romanian village to look for the girls he saved in Kosovo.

In the documentaries, the exploration of the ways in which gender roles are preserved, enforced or challenged in the process of emigration remains within the limits of the same traditional pattern that equates womanhood with passivity and domesticity, but stress falls on slightly different images, namely those of mother and wife figures. If *A Good Wife* invites the reconsideration of the wife stereotype in the context of a society in transition

BDD-V95 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 02:58:21 UTC)

at home or in the process of emigration to the West (Radu Bud's wife-to-be vs. Mihaela Marinca), *Journeys* examines in the mirror two mothers and wives who turn their back on the poverty and 'primitivism' of the rural culture of the East to embrace change, progress and the promise of a more prosperous life in the West. Petru Damian's Maria sets out for France as a good wife and mother; after 5 years of enforced separation from her husband (turned an exile in Dublin), she learns, indeed, to enjoy her independence and challenges her husband's authority, yet she remains entirely devoted to her goal of providing for her son. Unlike her, Ion Damian's Maria shows such a strong and disquieting determination to go abroad that she is ready to jeopardise the family's financial security, to rebel against her husband who has given up the idea of migrating, and even to become a bad mother who cares more about her dreams of self-fulfilment than about her children's well-being.

5. Conclusions

The exploration of the role and meanings of media(ted) images through the film analysis above has aimed at shedding light on the various ways in which Romanian migrants' (often disquieting) experiences have been cinematically 'translated', as well as on the dynamics of auto- and hetero-images which emerge and/or metamorphose in the context of cross-cultural encounters underlain by vernacular attitudes towards the 'other' that permeate multiple levels of the sending and the receiving societies. Embedded in the cultural matrix of emigration as a complex phenomenon and as a way of living for many Romanians, the films here in focus foreground textual tropes (Leerssen 2007: 27) on which the conceptualisation of the migrant relies. These are articulated and disseminated in different cultural contexts and are endowed with diverse meanings by people who try to make sense of everyday practices, depending on their relationship – inclusion/exclusion – with a particular group. As the table below shows, these filmic texts rewrite preconceived migratory maps with their own images which fit the frames in which cultural differences are generally conceived, and/or subtly deconstruct them through the re-negotiation of the migrant identity at the crossroads of shifting notions of 'Home' and the 'West'.

	Home	**The West**	**The migrant**
Asfalt Tango	a *teatrum mundi* of East-European transition from communism to capitalism and from localism to globalization	a seductive *mirage* that can turn *deceptive*	adventurer at the start of the East – West journey / potential victim at its implied end
Occident	an urban and conflicted space suspended between communist-induced lethargy and capitalist-adopted craving	a *mirage* and *refuge*	adventurer turned exile at both ends of an open East – West journey
Italiencele	an 'inauthentic' rural space, in-between the pre-modern and the modern, localism and globalization	a coveted *mirage* turned *bitter*	adventurer turned victim and prodigal exile within a circular East – West – East journey
Journeys	an idyllic, 'natural', though somewhat primitive rural space that the 'siege' of	a *mirage* of prosperity and security turned *restrictive* and *ambivalent*	adventurer turned exile at the end of the East – West journey / exile at the beginning of the

BDD-V95 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 02:58:21 UTC)

	globalization, the economic decline, the social, political and moral confusion brought about by the transition from communism to capitalism condemn to a 'slow death'		East-West journey turned victim at its end
Temptation			adventurer and prodigal son turned exile
A Good Wife			adventurer turned victim at the end of the East –West journey

The audiences are thus invited to ponder on and to reconsider attitudes towards migrants at both ends of the emigration journey, in full awareness of the ways in which migrant mobility and cultural diversity may contribute to the construction of a sense of Europeanness beyond the "Manichean logic restricting identity to particularism and opposition" (Mohor-Ivan 2004: 255). In a world marked by the global exchange of "images, sounds, peoples and goods", cinematic representations of Romanian emigration are likely to impact on the "feeling of group belonging" and 'deterritorialise' "the communities' process of self-image construction" (Palacios Cruz 2008: 16), acknowledging thus both the inevitability of cultural change and the ambivalence (often empowering) of the hybridised state in which a migrant's borderland is located.

References

Adams, Tim (2004) "Angus Macqueen by Tim Adams", in *The Second Annual Seattle International Documentary Film Festival*, available from http://www.sidff.org/macqueen.html.

Anderson, James (2007) "Singular Europe: an Empire Once Again?", in Armstrong, Warwick and James Anderson (eds.), *Geopolitics of European Union Enlargement. The Fortress Empire*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 9-29.

Anzaldúa, Gloria (1987) "Borderlands/*La Frontera*: The New Mestiza", in Leitch, Vincent B. (general ed.) (2001) *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2211-2223.

Armstrong, Warwick (2007) "Introduction: Borders in an Unequal World", in Armstrong, Warwick and James Anderson (eds.), *Geopolitics of European Union Enlargement. The Fortress Empire*, London and New York: Routledge, 1-8.

Ashcroft, Bill, Garreth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds.) (2007) *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*, Second edition, London and New York: Routledge.

Colipcă, Gabriela Iuliana (2010) "Migration and Romanian Identity in Angus Macqueen's *The Last Peasants. Temptation* (2003)", in *Communication interculturelle et littérature*, no. 1 (9), Galați: Europlus, 74-80.

Colipcă, Gabriela Iuliana, Ioana Ivan-Mohor, Michaela Praisler, Gabriela Dima, Antoanela Marta Dumitraşcu, and Mariana Neagu (2010) *National Identity and the Media, National Case Study Report – Romania*, available from http://www.gemic.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/WP4-Report-Romania-final.pdf.

Draga-Alexandru, Maria-Sabina (2001) "Constructing the Female Self in the Migrant Postcolonial Fiction", in Scanlon, Julie and Amy Waste (eds.), *Crossing Boundaries: Thinking about Literature*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 121-129.

Hofstede, Geert (1991) *Cultures and Organisations. Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival. Software of the Mind*, London: Harper Collins Publishers.

BDD-V95 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 02:58:21 UTC)

IOM (International Organisation for Migration) "The Image of Migrants in Society", *IOM (International Organisation for Migration) report*, available from www.iom-seasia.org/resource/pdf/**image**.pdf.

Iordanova, Dina (2001) *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media*, London: BFI.

Leerssen, Joep (2003) "Image", in Beller, Martin and Joep Leerssen (eds.) (2003) *Imagology: a Handbook on the Literary Representation of National Characters*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 342-344.

Leerssen, Joep (2007) "Imagology: History and Method", in Beller, Manfred and Joep Leerssen (eds.), *Imagology: the Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: a Critical Survey*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 17-32.

Leerssen, Joep (2007) "The Poetics of National Character (1500-2000)", in Beller, Manfred and Joep Leerssen (eds.), *Imagology: the Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: a Critical Survey*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 63-75.

Macqueen, Angus (2004) "Angus Macqueen by Angus Macqueen", in *The Second Annual Seattle International Documentary Film Festival*, available from http://www.sidff.org/macqueen.html.

Mohor-Ivan, Ioana (2004) *Representations of Irishness: Culture, Theatre and Brian Friel's Revisionist Stage*, București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

Mohor-Ivan, Ioana (2010) "Border-crossings: Representations of 'Home', the 'West' and the 'Migrant' in Romanian Film", in *Communication interculturelle et littérature*, no. 3 (11), Galați: Europlus, 135-142.

Morokvasic, Mirjana (2007) "Migration, Gender, Empowerment", in Lenz, Ilse, Charlotte Ullrich, and Barbara Fersch (eds.), *Gender Orders Unbound. Globalization, Restructuring and Reciprocity*, Opladen, Farmington Hills: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 69-97.

Palacios Cruz, Maria (2008) "Imagining the Balkans … in Film", in Darras, Matthieu and Maria Palacios Cruz (eds.), *Balkan Identities, Balkan Cinema*, Torino: NISI MASA, European network of young cinema, 14-24.

Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam (1994) *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, London and New York: Routledge.

Todorova, Maria (1997) *Imagining the Balkans*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Villain-Gandossi, Christiane (2001) "The Genesis of Stereotypes in the Interplay of Identity and Otherness in North-South Relations", in *Hermes*, No. 30, 27-40.

Zacharasiewicz, Waldemar (2007) *Images of Germany in American Literature*, Iowa: University of Iowa.

Filmography

Asfalt Tango, Dir. Nae Caranfil, Romania & France, 1996.

Occident, Dir. Cristian Mungiu, Romania, 2002.

The Last Peasants (*Journeys, Temptation, A Good Wife*), Dir. Angus Macqueen, UK, 2003.

Italiencele, Dir. Napoleon Helmis, Romania, 2004.

BDD-V95 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 02:58:21 UTC)