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A FILM BY
CRISTIAN MUNGIU

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SYNOPSIS

A few days before Christmas, having quit his job in Germany, Matthias returns to his multi-ethnic Transylvanian village. He wishes to involve himself more in the education of his son, Rudi, left for too long in the care of his mother, Ana, and to rid the boy of the unresolved fears that have taken hold of him. He's preoccupied with his old father, Otto, and also eager to see his ex-lover, Csilla. When a few new workers are hired at the small factory that Csilla manages, the peace of the community is disturbed, underlying fears grip the adults, and frustrations, conflicts and passions erupt through the thin veneer of apparent understanding and calm.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Transylvania

I recall watching a Mel Brooks film in the eighties called *Young Frankenstein*. It was already a comedy, but even more for us, in Romania – since the main character was getting on board a train in New York and getting off that train in Bucharest, which in the film was Transylvania's capital. Transylvania stood for that place which is at the end of the world and is also the country of vampires and monsters.

The story of *R.M.N.* takes place a little before the pandemic, during Christmas 2019 and the beginning of 2020, in a small multiethnic village in Transylvania, the most western Romanian province. It's the story of Matthias who returns from Germany and of Csilla who works at the village bakery.

I won't get too deep into Transylvania's history but for us, it represents the typical kind of territory that was disputed between two countries and passed from one to another. A bit like Alsace and Lorraine. In our case it's between Romania and Hungary, or rather the Austro-Hungarian empire. Therefore, there are Romanians and Hungarians living in Transylvania. But they're not the only inhabitants. Some 700 years ago Saxons were given land there, at the edge of Europe, next to the Carpathians. Therefore, there are also Germans in Transylvania. Most of them left in the 70s when Ceausescu sold them to Western Germany for 5,000 DM per capita. The rest left after the fall of communism. But their houses, fortified churches, cemeteries, and villages with tall fences are still there. And there are also many Roma people in Transylvania. They first came as slaves or servants some 200 years ago, and many moved into the houses abandoned when the Germans left.

With so many ethnicities, Transylvania became a favorite playground for populist or nationalist movements of all kinds. There were street fights with victims in the 90s. Later, things calmed down: many people went to work abroad as poverty affected them regardless of ethnicity. Nationalism is refreshed again every now and then, especially before elections.

But don't get confused: the film is not about a situation in Transylvania and not even about Romanians, Hungarians and Germans sharing the same territory. It is set there but it's also about Russians and Ukrainians, whites and blacks, Sunni and Shia, rich and poor, even tall and short. Whenever there's a second person in the room, they will be perceived as being from another tribe and therefore a potential enemy.

Languages, religions, flags (and other minor differences for which people kill one another)

In the film, Hungarians speak Hungarian, Romanians – Romanian, and Germans speak German, but nonetheless they understand each other. They all speak English since it's also a story about globalization and its side effects. The most sophisticated characters even speak French. And, of course, the Frenchman speaks English, while the people who came from afar speak their own language which nobody else understands.

As a spectator, if you understand all these languages, bravo. If not, there are subtitles: sometimes they have different colors for different languages, sometimes it will be up to you to figure out who speaks what. The Romanians have a red-yellow-blue flag, the Hungarians in Hungary have a red-white-green flag, but the Hungarians in a couple of Transylvanian counties have a blue and yellow one – the flag of the so called *Tinutul Secuiesc* | *Székely County* – which militates for autonomy. Strangely, for historical reasons, this county is not on the border with Hungary but somehow in the middle of Romania.

Romanians are mostly Orthodox; Hungarians are mostly Catholic while Germans are mostly Lutheran. But it's not that simple: some Hungarians are Unitarians, some Romanians are Greek-Catholic, some Germans are Calvinist.



Therefore, each village has several different churches – and even the bells toll differently. Today, with so many people having gone abroad to work, many of the churches have very few parishioners. The Protestant churches are closed. Still, there is usually somebody in the village who holds the key to the church for whoever wishes to visit. When somebody from the village dies abroad, sometimes thousands of kilometers away, a relative of his will call home - so that the bells in his native village toll for him.

These differences might seem minor, and they are certainly complicated to follow. Still, throughout history wars were fought because of such particularities and people killed other people for even smaller differences.

Mioritza and other inspirations for the film

I didn't realize *Mioritza* was an inspiration for this film before I noticed how many sheep and other animals feature in the film. *Mioritza* is tricky to explain - it's a national Romanian ballad about three shepherds and their flocks. Now these shepherds come from different regions, one has more sheep and he's richer, so the others simply decide to kill him and take over his flock. His beloved sheep, his faithful dog, and nature in general try to warn him but he believes in destiny: if this is his fate, so be it. There's even a pattern associated with *Mioritza*, with Romanian geography and with this mentality about life: it's called the *uphill and downhill* rhythm. We all study *Mioritza* in school and in the film the children recite it for the Christmas feast. Matthias' faithful dog warns him when danger arises and his sheep care for him maybe more than anybody else.

Besides *Mioritza*, of course, there was the real story: before the pandemic some factory owners in *Tinutul Secuiesc* considered hiring workers from afar - given that the locals had left to work in Western Europe. Still, the characters of *R.M.N.* and the relationships between them are fictional, as are the motivations and attitudes of each, and the events of the narrative itself.

Another distant source of inspiration is the Rosia Montana story; essentially, it's the dilemma between giving people jobs mining gold (and destroying the environment with cyanide) or saving the environment and wonderful landscapes for future generations while the locals live in a continued state of poverty.

And then, there were the regular news stories about animals and the side effects of Romania apparently having the biggest population of bears and wolves in Europe.

Traditions

Traditions mean that people do something because some other people did it before them. In the end, somebody did it originally for some purpose, which very often was "to chase away bad omens". You must agree even this explanation has more sense than doing something because "it's the tradition."

In the film, we portray several winter traditions: some people dress in sheep and goat skins and dance, others wear bear skins and are whipped, some dress as our ancestors, *the Dacians* - sympathized with for opposing the Roman conquest. In some other areas in Romania, men simply wear masks and huge helmets for the New Year's Eve. They meet on the first day of the year and they fight each other to death. They don't even come from different villages: the uphill ones fight the downhill ones - and sometimes some get killed. Don't judge them: at least it's fair and square. Not very different from all the sports and competitions which substitute for the same instinct of engaging your tribe against another.

Stereotypes and narratives

One of the most recurrent narratives explaining Romania's current position among European countries is that we didn't manage to develop as much as western societies because we were busy fighting the invaders who wished to plunder Europe; and because we kept them busy here in the East, westerners had all the time in the world to develop - and erect their opulent cathedrals.

But there are a lot of other current narratives used to explain the state of the world today: globalization is the new Babel, a sign that the world is coming to an end; when diseases will also become global, the end will follow swiftly; global warming is yet another sign of the imminent ending and soon the over-exploited resources will be exhausted and people will be fighting for survival.



For centuries, it was easier to identify the invaders. The locals lived in small villages among the forests and as soon as anybody on horseback showed up from the other side of the hill, he was a potential enemy (tourism came later). Today, with airplanes, things got more complex. One peculiar stereotype regards the Huns, the Hungarians' ancestors, arriving on horseback and eating the raw meat they tenderized under their saddles. The stereotype is so common that nobody doubts it. Some 30 years ago, The European Council recommended the use of the term Roma instead of Gypsy – perceived as offensive. Romania tried to oppose the initiative for the confusion it generated between Roma and Romanians but with no success, so the confusion deepened. For Romanians, to be taken as Roma is the greatest offence while westerners perceive our desire to make the distinction as already an inappropriate discriminatory attitude.

Themes

R.M.N. brings into question the dilemmas of today's society: solidarity vs. individualism, tolerance vs. selfishness, political correctness vs. sincerity. It also brings into question this atavistic need to belong, to identify with one's ethnic group, with one's tribe, and to naturally regard others - whether of another ethnic group, another religion, another gender, or another social class - with reservations and suspicion. It is a story about old times - perceived as trustworthy - and present times - perceived as chaotic; about the underhandedness and falsity of a European set of values that are claimed more than they are implemented. It's a story about intolerance and discrimination, about prejudice, stereotypes, authority, and freedom. It is a story about cowardice and courage, about the individual and the masses, about personal versus collective destiny. It is also a story about survival,

about poverty, about fear and a grim future.

The film speaks about the effects brought about by globalization in a small community rooted in secular traditions: values of bygone times have dissipated, but the access people got now to the internet did not bring updated values but rather burdened them with the difficulty of distinguishing the truth and their personal opinions in today's informational and moral chaos.

R.M.N. also tackles the side effects of political correctness: people learned that it is better not to speak up if their opinions differ from the norm of the day – but the political correctness is not a formative process, and it didn't change opinions profoundly – it just made people express less what they think. But eventually things cumulate and at some point, they spill out.

The story itself does not associate "politically incorrect" opinions with any particular ethnicity or group: since opinions and actions are always individual, they are not dependent on any group identity but on much more complex factors.

Beyond social connotations, there is a deep general human level to the story - it speaks about how our beliefs can shape our choices, about our instincts, irrational urges, and fears, about the animals buried inside us, about the ambiguity of our feelings and actions and the impossibility of ever fully understanding them.

The things I like the most in the film are those that can't be put into words.

Visual red threads

There are several recurrent images and visual motifs in the film. If you ever have the patience to watch the film twice, you'll have something more to discover.

Style

Shooting one take per scene (no matter how long or complex the scene) is a statement that profoundly shapes the filmmaking style. Consequently, as a director, you need to stage the situation as believably and as truthfully as you can and then record this moment. The rhythm doesn't come from editing, but it's internalized. Ellipses take place only between scenes - the situation unfold in real time, nothing is cut off.

Applying consistently this decision led to shooting a collective scene of 17 minutes with 26 characters speaking - in one take.

Shooting

The screenplay was written in the spring of 2021, financing and production followed swiftly and the shooting took place from November 2021 to January 2022. We preferred not to shoot in *Tinutul Secuiesc*, but in Rimetea, an ex-UNESCO heritage Transylvanian village.

The main parts were performed by professional actors, the supporting parts by non-professionals. Actors were given their part but not the scenes concerning situations they wouldn't have known, as characters. The dialogues were fully scripted.

The film was shot on digital in existing locations except for Csilla's house which was built from scratch on location.

Title

Apparently, empathy and other social skills are generated on the surface of the cerebral cortex while the more animal instincts that helped humans survive occupy the rest of 99% of the brain.

R.M.N. stands for *Rezonanta Magnetica Nucleara*. In English is *NMR* – *Nuclear Magnetic Resonance*. And in French it is *IRM*. Basically, it's an investigation of the brain, a brain scan trying to detect things below the surface.

When reading the screenplay, somebody suggested the film could be called *Europe 2.0*. While when shooting, I fell upon a picture from late 19th century in one of the locations called: *Lamb of God*.

I thought that would make a good title.



CRISTIAN MUNGIU

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Cristian Mungiu is a Romanian filmmaker born in Iași, Romania, in 1968.

His debut film, **OCCIDENT / WEST**, premiered in Directors' Fortnight in Cannes in 2002 and was an audience hit in Romania. In 2007, his second feature, **4 MONTHS, 3 WEEKS AND 2 DAYS**, was awarded the Palme d'Or in Cannes. The film later received several Best Film of the Year awards from various international associations of film critics. It also won the European Film Academy awards for Best Film and Best Director.

Mungiu returned to Cannes in 2009 as a writer-producer-co-director with the collective episodic film **TALES FROM THE GOLDEN AGE**, and as a writer-director in 2012 with **BEYOND THE HILLS** – double awarded for Best Screenplay and Best Actresses. **BACALAUREAT / GRADUATION**, his fifth film presented in Cannes, won Best Director in 2016.

CAST

Marin Grigore	Matthias
Judith State	Csilla
Macrina Bârlădeanu	Ana
Orsolya Moldován	Mrs Dénes
Andrei Finți	Papa Otto
Mark Blenyesi	Rudi
Ovidiu Crișan	Mr Baci

CREW

Written and Directed by	Cristian Mungiu
Cinematography	Tudor Vladimir Panduru, RSC
Production Designer	Simona Pădurețu
Costume Designer	Cireșica Cuciuc
Editor	Mircea Olteanu
Sound	Olivier Do Hùu, Constantin Fleancu and Marius Leftărache
Executive Producer	Tudor Reu
Producers	Cristian Mungiu / Mobra Films (RO)
Coproducers	Pascal Caucheteux and Grégoire Sorlat / Why Not Productions (FR) Delphine Tomson / Les Films du Fleuve (BE) Anthony Muir and Kristina Börjeson / Film I Väst (SE)
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