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The Search for Europe: An Analysis of Subversive Counter-Narratives in *Reise der Hoffnung* and *La Haine*

RESUMÉ

Denne artikel undersøger, hvordan dominerende europæiske myter dekonstrueres i henholdsvis den schweiziske film *Reise der Hoffnung* (1990, Xavier Koller, Schweiz/Tyrkiet/Storbritannien/Frankrig) og den franske film *La Haine* (1995, Mathieu Kassovitz, Frankrig). I filmene sker dekonstruktionerne gennem brugen af ikoniske symboler – postkortet i *Reise der Hoffnung* og Eiffeltårnet i *La Haine* – der blotlægger banaliteten i de mytiske løfter om Europa. Fra 'den fremmedes' blik, som begge film indtager, træder Europa ultimativt frem som en absurd konstruktion, ude af stand til at indfri sit eget løfte.

ABSTRACT

This article investigates how dominant European myths are deconstructed in the Swiss film *Reise der Hoffnung* (1990, Xavier Koller, Switzerland/Turkey/UK/France) and the French film *La Haine* (1995, Mathieu Kassovitz, France) respectively. In these films, deconstructions occur through the use of iconic images – the picture postcard in *Reise der Hoffnung* and the Eiffel Tower in *La Haine* – that reveal the fundamental banality inherent in the mythical promises of Europe. From the position of the 'other', which both films take, Europe ultimately steps forward as an absurd construct that is unworthy of its own promise.

EMNEORD

Europæiske myter, ikoniske symboler, *otherness*, europæiske film

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Introduction

“Europe has always been an idea in search of a reality. And history is not linear, it is open” (Sonne 2017). So said the political scientist Ivan Krastev in a 2017 interview with the Danish newspaper, *Dagbladet Information*. Krastev’s argument is specifically noteworthy in two ways: He presents Europe as a construct, an idea, that somehow has not found its reality, while simultaneously emphasizing that there is no necessary path of continuity for Europe. We will continually need to tell new (and adjust existing) stories that shape the meaning of the changing reality we inhabit. The constructedness of Europe was also an undercurrent in the thinking of Denis de Rougemont, who in the aftermath of the Second World War saw the need for a symbolic creation of Europe in order to prevent it from being destroyed by its constituent nations. Rougemont wrote that it is difficult to find Europe and that it is only the search itself that will create it: “We will find Europe only by making it anew” (Passerini 2003, 23). This constructionist determination never to take Europe or Europeanness for granted, to view Europe as an ongoing symbolic process, represents the fundamental epistemological position of this paper.

I seek to delve into the search for and thus creation of a version of Europe through a mythical reading of two European films: The Swiss film *Reise der Hoffnung* (1990, Xavier Koller) and the French film *La Haine* (1995, Mathieu Kassovitz). This search entails a critical engagement with the symbolic creation of European identity since my main argument will be that the films confront France (in the case of *La Haine*) and Europe (in the case of *Reise der Hoffnung*) with its own dominant myths – that both films act specifically within Krastev’s void between Europe as idea and reality. In order to qualify this further, I will engage in a brief digression.

Recognizing Rougemont’s ambition, Stuart Hall (2003, 38) identifies the driving force in the search for the myths of Europe as “that idea, figure or image which might impose a unifying vision, a common framework of intelligibility, on highly diverse societies, whose histories have dramatically diverged over the centuries”. The search for the shared narrative is legitimate and necessary, but the question remains what form such a narrative might take. Will it provide “depth and texture”, or will it “be an exercise in the production of yet another version of Europe’s foundational story”? In a somewhat resigned tone, Hall cannot discern what will prevent the reworking of the European myth from

lapsing once again into a search for 'origins', which will thereby allow Europe to deny its historical instability and deep connections with other histories and cultures and "somehow seamlessly re-connect the mythical past with Europe's disrupted recent present and future" (Hall 2003, 38).

Similar to Hall, and mimicking Krastev's view of history, Luisa Passerini (2003, 25) emphasizes that the history of Europe is not one of continuity but instead one of rupture. To perceive it otherwise would be to turn a blind eye to that part of history which should neither be ignored nor reproduced – colonialism, genocide, persecution of minorities, oppression of women, and much else besides. Nevertheless, the tendency to (re)create itself in its own desirable image is characteristically European; the narrative of moderate, liberal, democratic, tolerant, free market, constitutional Europe is well known and crucial to European identity (ibid., 44).

In my analysis, I will show how *Reise der Hoffnung* and *La Haine* subvert this image by producing a counter language, an alternate narrative closer to the Europe of discontinuity and contradiction. They puncture the grandeur of the myth and promise of Europe to reveal the bleakness of the marginalized reality.

More specifically, the films' subversions are constructed through the symbolic use of iconic images. In *Reise der Hoffnung*, it is the picture postcard depiction of the idyllic Swiss Alps that carries heavy symbolic potential and functions as the protagonists' motivation for leaving rural Anatolia in search of a better life. In *La Haine*, it is the image of Paris and France *par excellence*, the Eiffel Tower, which is the crucial symbol confronting France with its own narrative. The deconstruction of these myths occurs through these icons, something that Chiara Bottici (2009, 12) views as the condensational power of myths through the concept of icons: "This concept points to the fact that, by means of a synecdoche, any object or gesture [...] can recall the whole work on myth that lies behind it". At the same time, the condensational power is the reason for the difficulty in analysing myths: Icons allude to - rather than openly convey - the underlying myths (ibid.). In relation to the films in question, the icons do not carry the entire meaning themselves. As noted in constructionist thought, meaning is *relational* (Hall 1997, 13). This suggests that the iconic images cannot be sufficiently comprehended without being analysed in relation to the rest of the narratives, the other signs of the text, since they are co-producers of meaning.

To combine the threads: What ultimately follows is an investigation into how the postcard in *Reise der Hoffnung* and the Eiffel Tower in *La Haine* work as symbols that confront France and Europe with their respective dominant myths. It is thus by extension also an investigation into how Europe can be imagined in relation to its 'others', into how Europe appears from its "liminal edge" (Hall 2003, 37).

Films challenging the idea of Europe

In recent years, the experience of Europe from the position of its 'others' has been a significant topic in European cinema. Yosefa Loshitzky (2006) shows how these films challenge the notion of white and Christian Europe by presenting Europe as an unquestionably multicultural and multiethnic space. One of the narrative strategies in showing this version of Europe is spatial: The films place the *mise-en-scène* on the outskirts of famous cities, revealing the 'unofficial' or forgotten peripheries, and thus consistently deconstruct the "iconic images of the classical European cities that make for easily consumed picture-postcard views" (ibid., 746). Through this notion, Loshitzky has already touched upon elements of the main argument in this paper. However, the contribution here is the mythical reading of the iconic images, which, to the best of my knowledge, has not been applied to either *Reise der Hoffnung* or *La Haine*.

In Loshitzky's broad genre categorization of the aforementioned wave of films, she distinguishes between three types: these are films concerned with 1) the migration journey itself, 2) the representation of the encounter with the host society when 'In the Promised Land', or 3) the experience of the second generation of immigrants and beyond (ibid., 745).

Reise der Hoffnung lends its title to the name of the first genre, 'Journeys of Hope'. More specifically, these films depict the lived experience of the migrants who leave their home countries in search of a better future in Europe. Tragically, these hopeful endeavours often turn into 'journeys of death' (ibid.). In *Reise der Hoffnung*, death is the destiny of Mehmet Ali, the young son of the Turkish peasant, Haydar, and his wife, Meryem. In the treachery of the freezing night, Mehmet Ali loses his life in the Alps on the heavily guarded border between Switzerland and Italy, which the family attempts to cross illegally. His

death in the mountains is ironic since it was the picture postcard image of the idyllic Alps, sent by Haydar's cousin, that had catalysed the family's hope. In it, the cousin praises Switzerland as a true "paradise", and the postcard becomes the image onto which the family projects its desires. The postcard becomes a promise of Europe, and the paradisiac discourse it creates forms a symbolic thread throughout the narrative, its deceptive nature being revealed along the way. I will show how this occurs later in the text.

La Haine belongs to the third genre, which deals with the second and later generations, who still experience oppression and 'othering' from dominant society (ibid., 745-746). In *La Haine*, we follow the *black/blanc/ beur* trio Hubert, Vinz, and Said as they in the course of a day move through the Parisian suburbs of *la banlieue* before taking a 'journey' to the inner city, and eventually, returning 'home' to a dramatic and violent end. The trio of *La Haine* lives in the *banlieue*, originally a collective term for the suburbs of larger French cities. By the end of the 1980s, however, the *banlieue* had in a more narrow sense come to refer to those housing estates "linked with poor-quality social housing and high densities of immigrant and other disadvantaged populations" (Tarr 2005, 17-18). The popular discourse signifying the *banlieue* as a nucleus of trouble is unquestionably linked to the riots in the suburbs of Paris and Lyon in the early 1980s and 1990s. These riots are viewed by William Higbee (2001, 198-199) as frustrated responses to the marginalization and exclusion to which the *banlieue* residents have been subjected: The socioeconomic reality, a disproportionately high immigrant population, and the government's failure to understand and alter conditions such as social and ethnic exclusion, have ultimately qualified "the disadvantaged *cités* of the 1990's as the marginalised territory of the 'other'". The events in *La Haine* take place in the midst of a social upheaval resulting in frequent violent collisions with the police. By following the movements of the three protagonists, who are involved in the riots, we experience how limited a world they inhabit and how they throughout the narrative unsuccessfully attempt to enter a space of freedom. A spatial analysis structured on similar arguments has been conducted by Adrian Fielder (2001) and will be included below.

Towards the end of the film, the trio find themselves on a small hill, with the Eiffel Tower dominating the view. At first, the tower appears on the right side of the frame, juxtaposed with Vinz rolling a joint, highlighting the symbolic

dimensions of the tower. Subsequently, the tower appears as a shining beacon in the distance, while the protagonists simultaneously joke around and express feelings of alienation. And finally, the tower is presented in its entirety at the centre of the frame, as the trio can be heard leaving their spot on the hill, and just as their voices slowly disappear, the lights on the tower shut down. This is the promise of France turned to darkness.

This introduction to the films has sought to provide an initial argument as to why a comparison of the two might be meaningful. The iconic images of the tower and the postcard function in similar ways, and it is my intention to further qualify this argument through a more detailed analysis of the narrative elements introduced above.

The sirenic voice of the postcard

The first characters introduced in *Reise der Hoffnung* are Haydar and his cousin, Kemal, as we encounter them in the midst of a conversation concerning Kemal's imminent journey to Switzerland in search of employment. The image of Fortress Europe is implicitly drawn as Kemal, in a decontextualized sentence, tells Haydar, "You can't even cross a river", meaning that the border crossing must happen in the mountains. Nevertheless, Haydar seems immediately obsessed with following this ambition, and when he receives the postcard – which in a remarkably 'epic' language promises that in Switzerland "butter will flow from the udders of your goat, your yoghurt will be firm like ice cream from Maras" – his mind is definitively set. Instantly, the postcard is granted almost holy status: The family gathers around it, gazing at it with hopeful and longing eyes, and it is brought along on the journey towards 'das Abendland', serving as a promise of the destination ahead.

In her analysis, Angelica Fenner (2003, 37) praises the film for showing how visual stimuli, such as media representations, motivate flows of migration. From this perspective, the postcard functions as a "mobile text" creating Switzerland as a utopian site, thereby assisting "in the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds within ongoing global deterritorialization". Similarly, Loshitzky emphasizes how the postcard in the course of the narrative deconstructs and subverts the image of Switzerland, demonstrating the significant role of "mass-produced representations in generating fantasies that become driving forces in global geographical mobility" (2006, 750-751). Of

course, the deconstruction of Switzerland as “the paradise behind the mountain” is not arbitrary. The country is known for its political neutrality, for its extreme wealth, for being home to the International Red Cross and the 1951 Refugee Convention agreement, and so on. These traits add to the absurdity experienced when Switzerland steps forward as a severely guarded space, highly suspicious of foreign ‘invaders’. Even though I recognize these readings centred on the deconstruction of Switzerland, and especially the perceptions of the postcard as a projection site for desire that motivates movement, I simultaneously suggest that the postcard in a broader sense contains the myths of Europe.

The postcard’s paradisiacal discourse allows it to read it in relation to Europe’s prosperity myth. According to Bottici (2009, 24), the narrative of the rich and prosperous Europe has an impact both deep and wide, and it concurrently recalls the gendered aspect of this myth: “A beautiful woman that may be conquered, she is also our motherland; she gave birth to us and nourishes us”. The image of butter that will flow from Haydar’s goat steps directly into this imaginary space. The prosperity myth has a masculine component as well, that of the icon of Europe as a train to prosperity, a train leading to “the promised land”. The train comes to symbolize modernity, rationality and speed, thus creating Europe “as a modern, fast and rational means of transportation” (ibid., 26).

The modern connotations are indeed invoked by the train that appears at the very beginning of *Reise der Hoffnung*. When told that the children are near the train tracks, Haydar immediately leaves the village celebration to set off after them, and the train is as such established as a threatening force. The children both fear and desire the train. When Mehmet Ali lies on the tracks, the train is perceived from his gaze, appearing as an unstoppable power, moving ahead with fierce intensity, completely unaware of the boy on the tracks. That Mehmet Ali is lucky to leave this encounter alive is an early allusion to the phantasmagorical potential of the modernity and prosperity myth. The train of modernity will push through all obstacles, necessarily crushing those who are not on board.

The origins of modernity play a crucial role in the idea of Europe, and there is scholarly agreement on locating the origins of the modern way of life in sixteenth-century Europe, “with its corollaries of individualism and democracy

in the convergence of capitalist economy, territorial state, and modern science" (ibid., 19-20). While this also taps into the widespread narrative of Europe as "the cradle of civilization", *Reise der Hoffnung* shows the human implications of the movement into the heart of modernity, the logic of capitalism and the logic of the nation state. This is a movement from rural life into the modern world, and the dichotomy between rurality and modernity is a significant source of meaning in the film. But it is also a somewhat outdated opposition (or so it can easily become), and I agree with Fenner's critique of the naiveté of the Turkish migrants, who are almost completely powerless after leaving their homes (2003, 36). The film does, however, show just how little space is left for 'others' in their attempt to realize the promise of Europe.

Another way of revealing the 'true nature' of the journey westward is the depiction of the capitalist system into which they step: The modern world also contains a corrupted variant of capitalism. This is most apparent in the strategies of the human smugglers, who are solely motivated by capital, resulting in dehumanizing treatment of the migrants. That Haydar and his family have stepped into a world beyond their control becomes clear as they are consistently required to pay more money: "The mark [Deutsche Mark] has become more expensive", as a smuggler reasons. As such, the narrative takes on almost Kafkaesque dimensions as the smugglers refer to distant powers, unintelligible systems, which cannot be consulted or negotiated with. The specifically amoral dimension of capitalist logic is also at work in the logic of the nation state. The Swiss officer in charge at the border is eager to collect personal data and register the migrants, a preliminary step in the process of detention and deportation. He is a fierce representative of the institutionalized doctrines of the immigration policies, in which human beings are reduced to formalities, leaving little room for the human dimension.

Through its promise of prosperity, the postcard also establishes desire. As Haydar sells his property, he returns to the family with 'luxuries' bought in the city, as if to show how the family's future will look. Gazing through the shop window, he is mesmerized by the shining jewellery inside. The film contains several examples of desire being created by the gaze through a window, but this is the only time when the characters are permitted to move through this transparent wall, bearing in mind that Haydar must sell the jewellery almost

immediately afterwards. Desire is created but never fulfilled, and that which cannot be grasped can always be seen.

This despairing mechanism is clearest when the migrants, nearly dying in the cold, encounter a luxury spa in the Swiss mountains. Desperately screaming for help, they see a corpulent man stepping out of a swimming pool, slowly approaching them, only to tell them from the other side of a glass wall: "It's closed". From the migrant gaze, the prosperous European, living a life of abundance, emerges as an absurd character. His world is beyond their reach, and the glass wall becomes a manifestation of *difference*, setting worlds apart.

Loshitzky (2006, 754) views this image as a "reflective duality, of privilege mirrored by its counter-image" and takes interpretation of the image further, calling it "the ultimate iconic image of Fortress Europe". That the permanent European narrative becomes Fortress Europe shows both the powerful and potentially deceptive dimension of the prosperity and modernity myth. "The promised land" is only for a select few: "It can easily turn into a fortress, symbol of a polity that destroys internal boundaries in order to erect even more powerful external borders" (Bottici, 2009, 26).

As such, the film deconstructs the dominant myths of Europe, revealing their insufficiency as meaningful narratives to those who seek to become part of them from a marginalized position. Following Bottici's notion of the seductive power of myths (ibid., 20), the postcard takes the form of a siren singing the myth of prosperity, seducing the protagonists to seek out its voice. The nature of the postcard medium also points to this dimension: A manipulated and cliché-driven depiction of a destination.

The most extreme example of the inconsistency "between the realm of representation and the realm of the phenomenological" (Fenner 2003, 38) is the experience of the brutal Alps. It is paradoxical that Mehmet Ali at one point, lost in the mountains, sings to himself, attempting to enter an imaginary space in order to escape the phenomenology of the 'paradise'. Similarly, the insufficiency of the postcard as a reliable representation is alluded to as Mehmet Ali feeds the postcard to the family goat, thereby making manifest that the grass depicted on the postcard is not 'real' grass. Ultimately, the postcard becomes a nucleus of meaning: It is through this icon that narratives are

constructed, negotiated, and deconstructed to present a version of Europe only imaginable from the position of its 'other'.

The banality of the Eiffel Tower

As the Eiffel Tower scene is dense with meaning, serving as the collection point for several narrative threads established throughout the film, the following analysis will initially concern narrative elements that add to the understanding of the scene's symbolic potential.

Like *Reise der Hoffnung*, *La Haine* presents the position of the 'other' in the form of Hubert, Vinz, and Said. The three are approached as such when they encounter the surrounding society, either through their 'journey' to inner-city Paris or when the media or police show up at the *cités*. Even though popular discourse signifies the *banlieue* as a primarily North African space and the unquestionable ethnic dimension of the perception of these spaces as troublesome, I follow Carrie Tarr's (1997, 78) argument that *La Haine* is essentially about social exclusion, not ethnicity. At the same time, it would be reductive to completely neglect the role of racial tensions in the narrative. Some of the policemen are openly racist, and the imaginary presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen as well as the inclusion of skinheads alludes to hostility towards non-whites. However, the *banlieue* is represented as a multiethnic space in which the *black/blanc/ beur* trio stands as part for the whole. The police are multi-faceted in terms of attitudes and ethnicities as well. This is a multiethnic France, and ethnicity is not the main source of conflict. The exclusion experienced is instead spatial.

As Higbee (2001, 200) has pointed out, the narrative time of *La Haine* is almost equally divided between the *banlieue* and the inner city of Paris, thereby assisting in the establishment of the dichotomy between centre and periphery. This dichotomy has historically been at work in a colonial logic of the city at the expense of the *banlieue* residents: "The spatial and social segregation of their inhabitants, which continues to the present day, effectively recreated the colonial geographical model of a city composed of adjacent but mutually exclusive parts" (Tarr 2005, 6). However, this does not mean that centre and periphery exist independent of each other. The inability of the *La Haine* protagonists to establish a space of their own is primarily caused by 'central' actors such as the media and police.

In a reading inspired by Michel de Certeau, Fielder (2001, 272) perceives the city space as a conflict zone where the “individual citizens inhabit a textual system in which they themselves are not the authors”. Freedom inside this system lies in an ability to “poach” in the system, to create an autonomous zone. When the trio joins a group of male youths on a rooftop, this stands out as just such a space of autonomy. However, the police break up the gathering, thereby becoming an institutional mechanism for bringing deviants back into the city-as-text, where they are under control and easily monitored. The protagonists’ attempt to escape the ever-present monitoring and to ‘poach’ in the system continues as they move deeper into Paris – unsuccessfully though, since the “eye of power” is always nearby (ibid., 278-280).

A recurrent narrative element in *La Haine* is the television news covering the riots, thereby hinting at the media’s significant power in the discursive creation of the *banlieue*. The media shows up there as well and approaches the trio, asking: “Did you take part in the riots? Did you break anything?” Their response is hostile: Vinz throws a rock at the car, and Hubert shouts at them “this ain’t Toiry [a drive-through zoological park outside Paris]”. The ‘othering’ process at work here can explain their reaction.

For Didier Lapeyronnie (2017, 147-148), the ‘Muslim-Arab’ identity is largely a negatively connotated category assigned by dominant society. This categorization requires ‘Arabs’ to constantly account for and confront negative stereotypes about themselves, leading young people with immigrant backgrounds to finally adhere to the stereotypes: “They play the character and become ‘Arab’ even when they are not”. Even though Lapeyronnie speaks of a specific ‘Arab’ identity, the psychological mechanisms are basically identical to the ones at work in the scene. The trio respond by refusing dominant society’s attempts to project a certain identity upon them, in this case the identity of ‘fascinating wild beasts’. At the same time, their reaction partially confirms the stereotype. Confronting dominant society and the experience of how they are perceived as undesirable ‘others’, they know only how to adhere to the designated identity and act as they are ‘expected’ to.

This mechanism is also at work when the trio enters a private viewing at an art gallery. From the protagonists’ gaze, it becomes an exposure of the absurd truisms of the cultural upper class. These privileged people gather in luxurious settings, get food and drinks served by waiters, enjoying and consuming

modern art. All of this appears ridiculous to the trio, yet Hubert understands how to apply the social codes. When speaking with two girls, he introduces Said as a shy poet. Said, however, does not know how to engage in 'sophisticated' conversation and ends up appropriating the *banlieue* identity. When their 'guise' is torn away, Vinz and Hubert follow Said out of the party, yelling and breaking things. The man shutting the door behind them confirms the designation of a certain spatial identity to this kind of behaviour: "Guys from the *banlieue*". The art gallery scene thus inhabits Tarr's idea of the adjacent but mutually exclusive parts of the city and their inhabitants.

As mentioned above, the film's aesthetic presentation of the tower places it in a specifically symbolic domain. Like many others, Roland Barthes (2012) sees the tower first and foremost as the universal symbol of France and Paris. However, the tower has further potential: "This pure – virtually empty – sign is ineluctable, because it means everything" (ibid., 124). The tower is the "total symbol" since it serves no specific practical purpose; it can only be symbolic and specifically not confined within one limited domain. Given that the tower serves as a "pure signifier" (ibid.), how does it work symbolically in *La Haine*?

The hill, with the tower dominating the view, becomes a momentary 'safe' space for the trio. Here, Hubert ironically asks Vinz to spread some of his wisdom, and in a similar tone, Vinz lists several well-worn sayings. There is one he saves for special occasions: "Liberté, égalité, fraternité". Invoking the national motto, the film specifically engages with the grand myth of France. French exceptionalism is central to national self-understanding: "Its model of a strong state, social protection for its citizens and the mantra of 'liberty, equality, fraternity' from the Revolution of 1789 makes France unique, 'a beacon for the human race,' according to Jacques Chirac, its president from 1995 to 2007" (Fenby 2014, 18). Based on the events that followed 1789, the French historian Jules Michelet similarly identified France as "the pilot of the ship of humanity", but to Jeremy Jennings (2011, 146), that "same messianism also informed the manner in which France had created itself as an individual personality and indivisible unity". As a symbol in the film, the Eiffel Tower comes to allude to this narrative, bearing the burden of French grandiosity, rising as a phallic beacon. That the lights shut down shows the banality of this promise of France, in the same way that "liberté, égalité, fraternité" are presented as empty words. Ultimately, the tower takes the same symbolic position as the postcard in *Reise*

der Hoffnung: An iconic image that gets shallower and shallower the closer you look at it. Indeed: "There are postcards of Paris dramatically altered just so that the Eiffel Tower will fit in" (Thompson 2000, 1137).

The promise of France is beyond the reach of the protagonists, symbolized by their sheer distance from the tower. Reading an actual tourist guidebook to the Eiffel Tower, you might stumble upon these words: "The view from the top platform is over the whole of Paris and *even* the more distant suburbs" (Thompson 2000, 1139, my italics). *La Haine* is the voice of the periphery, of the part of France that *does* exist out there in the distance. Hubert's recurrent story of a man falling towards the ground is an allegory of fatalistic life on this periphery, the experience of the alienated 'other': "It's like us in the projects. So far, so good". At the same time, it is a story of a country in free fall, and *La Haine* does create a France of contradiction, certainly not an "indivisible unity". In this film, the Eiffel Tower contains the grand myth of France, but it is simultaneously through this icon that the narrative is deconstructed, manifesting the counter version narrated from the margins.

Conclusion: Europe's dependency on difference

The experience of the 'other' that both films depict carries with it a significant part of modern European history. It points to the creation of a modern mode of thought, in which certain logics of *difference* play a powerful role in determining people's faiths. According to Stuart Hall, "'Otherness' was from the beginning an invention of European ways of seeing and representing difference" (2003, 43). Hall refers to Tzvetan Todorov's argument that America was the start of Europe's attempt to "assimilate the 'other', to deprive it of its radical alterity, while at the same time fixing it in its difference" (ibid.). This suggests the beginning of an imperative that seems alive and well today, saying: "You need to become like us, but you can never be one of us". To be simultaneously assimilated and locked within one's 'otherness' leaves a potentially torn self and marks the near impossibility of crossing the line of difference. The destiny of the characters in *Reise der Hoffnung* and *La Haine* should be viewed in this light.

At the same time, Edward Said (1978) emphasizes that the 'other' is not only a European invention; it is a necessary component in the construction of Europe. To Said, the Orient is a European construction of its reverse image, serving as

the projection site for Western fantasies and anxieties about itself. As such, European identity is formed through a negation. This is echoed by Hall, who in Europe sees a constant necessity to establish identity through difference from 'them' (2003, 38). The establishment of an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy is related to one of the most fundamental mythical strategies: minimizing difference within while maximizing difference between (Pfister 2007, 30). However, what counts as the 'within' is more complex than it might at first appear since the 'other' is not simply constructed as an external entity. Hall (2003, 42) points to the "mythological systems, which imaginarily peopled the outer perimeters of the European heartland". These symbolically marked the dividing line between 'us' and 'them':

This corpus of popular and scholarly legend mapped Europe's shifting internal borders, and began the process – still vigorously alive – of marking out the continent into its different zones, distinguishing between the "real" European home and the rest, charting the always porous, always moving frontiers between civilization and barbarism, and trying to fix the limit of Europe's internal "others". (ibid.)

As such, *La Haine* and *Reise der Hoffnung* represent the two mythical 'others' constructed by Europe in order to continually create itself. The protagonists in *La Haine* are those internal, barbaric 'others', viewed by dominant society as residing beyond the boundaries of civilization. The migrants in *Reise der Hoffnung* are the external 'others', necessarily excluded from entrance due to their difference. They must be sustained in a position of difference if European identity is to be upheld.

Both films come to represent a culturally pessimistic position in which the 'other' is fundamentally appointed to this excluded domain. A similar pessimism dominates Hall's answer to the question of whether Europe could become a home for the homeless and hopeless as "turbo-capitalism" unleashes its force across the globe, sending tens of thousands on the margins to drift across the world:

Thousands who nightly hurl themselves at passing Euro-star trains at the Sangatte refugee camp at the mouth to the Channel Tunnel, are from that "other" Europe on whose difference "the idea of

Europe” has always depended. Perhaps we have had enough of myths. Perhaps Europe has had one myth too many. (2003, 45)

However, the strength of the dominant European myths remains intact. As Barthes reminds us, myths work through a process of naturalization – “re-presenting History as Nature” (Barthes in Hall 2003, 40). According to Bottici, for now it is only the myth of modernity and prosperity, in all its variants, that can prevail, even though it seems to be the history of “divisions and rivalries”, the Europe of the wars and the camps, “that appears specifically European”. As Krastev also touched upon, the question becomes not *when* Europe began but *where* it will lead us (2009, 29).

Reise der Hoffnung and *La Haine* both create a version of Europe that engages critically with the work on myths, challenging the narratives of prosperity and modernity and the French and European exceptionalist ideals – the narratives we think *with*, rarely *over*. Their Europe is one of severe contradiction. Aesthetically, the films allude to and construct the grand myths of Europe through iconic images, only to deconstruct the narratives by exposing the fundamental banality of these images. Ultimately, Europe steps forward as a construct unworthy of its own promise.

At the same time, and let this be the final remark, the films point to a realization of a progressive European heritage, which should co-exist with the critique presented in this paper. Even though Jacques Derrida has been criticized for Eurocentric tendencies towards the latter part of his more Europe-‘enthusiastic’ work (El-Tayeb 2011), I will highlight a paragraph from Derrida’s last interview before his death, in which he told *Le Monde* that:

What I call “deconstruction”, even when it is directed against something European, is European, is a product of Europe, a reflection of Europe on itself as experience of a radical otherness. Since the days of the Enlightenment, Europe has been in a permanent state of self-critique, and in this tradition of perfectibility there is a hope for the future. At least I hope so, and this is what fuels my indignation before utterances that condemn Europe utterly, as if it were defined only by its crimes. (Birnbaum 2004)

While it is necessary to deal intensely with the European crimes (since they are so often ‘forgotten’), I agree this should not be the whole endeavour. Derrida reminds us of a European hope, an antidote to Europe’s own pathologies. Both *Reise der Hoffnung* and *La Haine* write themselves into the specifically European tradition of consistent self-critique. They expose the European dark sides and precisely through this process, they practice another promise of Europe, one that is not illusory. In this lies the progressive potential for change.

Just as cinema may often repeat and reproduce dominant narratives, cinema can also be a privileged space for formulating and experiencing a counter language that challenges social reality, setting forth its contingency and constructedness, thereby engaging in the struggle to create it anew.

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