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Audiovisual Production by the Contemporary European Extreme Right: Filmic Inheritances and Intertexts to Spread the Hate

Abstract

This article analyses the narrative techniques of major far-right political parties in contemporary Europe, based on their promotional videos on YouTube. It argues that the construction of their discourse is based mainly on cinematic references that connect with both the post-modern epic and the propaganda machinery of the Third Reich. Their visual motifs are thus positioned on two intertextual axes: post-classical cinema and Nazi propaganda. To support this hypothesis, a qualitative methodology of discourse analysis is applied, with special emphasis on the textual analysis of both formal features (staging, framing, and editing) and thematic content (the political messages conveyed). After offering a brief outline of the current state of the dissemination of right-wing extremist messages on YouTube, the article examines a sample of 53 of the most important institutional videos by the 12 far-right parties that have been most successful in their respective national elections. The results confirm that their visual motifs evoke three of the most characteristic fields of signification of the extreme right: the construction of the leader, the idea of nation, and the creation of an external enemy. In all three cases, a series of images is used with the aim of both captivating the audience with historical-military references and appropriating stylistic features from the nationalist iconography of the *Heimat*, which inspired many of the UFA films of the Nazi era.

Keywords
Extreme right, audiovisual narratology, discourse analysis, intertextuality, political communication, propaganda.

The EU elections of 2019 made it clear that the parties of the new extreme right have become a consolidated force in European institutions. Although these groups only first established a significant presence in the previous elections in 2014, their existence can be traced back at least to the 1980s (Camus & Lebourg, 2017). In the United Kingdom, France, and Italy, the parties on the far right (Brexit Party, Rassemblement National, and Lega) have even won the most votes, while in other countries like Spain they enjoy a solid voter base. Although the differences between these parties have so far prevented them from forming a united political bloc in the EU Parliament, they all share something of a common framework built on three basic pillars: ultra-nationalism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde, 2007).

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Of these three, it is perhaps the populist dimension, founded on a simplified view of the social reality and promoted by propaganda videos that receive thousands of views on platforms like YouTube and social media, that has led to the success of these parties and to their progressive consolidation at the institutional level.

In this context, the purpose of this article is to analyse the video messaging of these political parties with the aim of identifying the visual motifs they make use of to sustain their arguments. Our starting hypothesis is that the construction of their discourse is founded mainly on cinematic references that allude to both the post-modern epic and the propaganda of the Third Reich. These visual motifs are thus positioned on two intertextual axes: post-classical cinema and Nazi propaganda. The analysis focuses especially on how their discursive strategies are applied to three of the most characteristic fields of signification of the extreme right: the idea of nation, the construction of the leader, and the creation of an external enemy. It is posited here that part of the success of their video productions is based on a complex intertextual approach that draws mainly from cinematic sources in its construction of the land, the masses, and the enemy.

Following an outline of contemporary populist movements and a description of the methodology used for this analysis, the article is divided into three sections based on the points identified above as the most significant in the discourse of the contemporary extreme right. The first explores the relationship between *epic nostalgia*, the masses, and leaders, focusing on how the promotional videos of the far right draw their conception of political achievements and military identity from the blockbusters that revived the "sword-and-sandal" genre and its derivatives at the beginning of this century. The second examines how this *epic* quality is transferred to a specific territory in order to analyse the construction of the idea of nation, observing the significant differences between the land of the voters–based on the concept of habitability –and the land of the leaders– based on the notion of conquest. Finally, the third section analyses how the enemy is configured as an Other, mainly through depictions of the migrations provokes by the Syrian civil war.

1. An outline of populism in the YouTube era

In the Spanish general elections in April 2019, a far-right party burst onto the country's political scene for the first time since the disappearance of New Force in 1982: Vox, led by Santiago Abascal. In the days leading up to that election, two videos related to the party went viral. While Vox's campaign relied mainly on a single ad with the slogan "Un nuevo comienzo" ("A New Start"), outside the official party propaganda these two videos offered two different faces of the movement. The first, which could be described as a clear example of the "Streisand effect" (Jansen & Martin, 2015), came from the progressive online news publication *CTXT* when it asked an anonymous glazier about his voting intentions and received an impassioned speech in support of the extremist party. The second was a video of a truck driver who decided to record himself defending Abascal's party and suggesting that violent measures should be taken against its political rivals. Both videos attracted attention because they were exploited by Vox to reinforce the key idea of its campaign: that its voters were honest *workers*, and that most ordinary people felt disconnected from the political left. The pro-filmic content of the two videos explicitly links both these citizens to their *productive* activity. Both are presented in frontal shots, addressing the camera directly and offering an extraordinarily precise reproduction of the stance of the radical voter: anti-intellectualism, the defence of bullfighting, a change to gender politics, and finally, the idea of *the workers* and their social interests as being associated mainly with Spanish right-wing politics. Obviously, the ironic, overbearing tone of the interviewer for *CTXT* only serves to vindicate those who would sympathise with the worker. It is worth looking more closely at the second viral video, and the specific statements of the anonymous truck driver:

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> The glazier gave that leftie a real kick in the balls… the smartarse journalist… it totally cracked me up. Now then, listen up, lefties, I'm a trucker, I'm a worker too, I'm a labourer, and I'm with Vox. Let's see if you get it now because with all the education you got, right? And so many degrees, eh? You've got a brain like a walnut […] We gotta get a well, like the one in the Sparta movie, and tell you all: *This is Sparta!* Kick, into the fucking well, leftie after leftie, one by one[1].

The worker's speech is unequivocal: journalists, and in fact anyone with any doubts about this "patriotic movement," should be exterminated, just like in the "Sparta movie," a reference to *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006). These words have an uncomfortable historical echo in a country where the State had the custom of burying their political enemies in ditches during the years of Franco's dictatorship. Even today, after 40 years of democracy, Spain is second only to Cambodia among countries with the largest number of missing persons: 114,226, most of them buried in mass graves (Calle Meza, Lacasta Zabalza, & Serrano Burgos, 2016, p. 199). Both videos reflect the effects of populist discourse on the population and the power of platforms like YouTube to turn personal testimonies into viral sensations.

Populism is a concept in constant evolution that escapes generalisations. This makes a complex and hazardous task of any attempt to define it (Alvares & Dahlgren, 2016; A. Taggart, 2000), to discuss it from a political, philosophical, or even psychoanalytical perspective (Žižek, 2019; Alemán & Cano, 2016), or to conduct a systematic analysis of its particular communicative processes (Palao Errando, 2016; Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018). According to most of the literature on the subject, populist movements are usually founded on a particular construction of the concept of *nation,* appropriating this concept to offer simple solutions to complex problems through the attribution of guilt to an *enemy* of the *nation*. This is in consonance with its conspiratorial attitudes, and the strategies of exaltation and personification that typify a certain kind of "pop politics" (Mandredi-Sánchez, Amado-Suárez & Waisbord, 2021). Todorov's prophesies related to the three inner enemies of democracy –messianism, ultra-liberalism and populism (2012, p. 13)– have been confirmed in recent years in the field of political communication (Mounk, 2018; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), and from both European progressive (Fernández-Vázquez, 2019) and conservative (Krauze, 2018) perspectives.

In a social context severely destabilised by the Great Recession of 2008 and the migrant crisis provoked by the wars in Syria and Iraq, with the very particular flow of images that these crises produced (Marzal Felici & Soler Campillo, 2018), populist parties have essentially created two enemies against whom they direct their hate speech on behalf of *the nation*, albeit tailored in different ways to each national situation. The first is an *internal enemy*, identified with the representatives of the Establishment (liberals, democrats, Europeanists, and the journalists who give them their voice), who are blamed for the economic situation and its policies of *austericide*; and the second is an *external enemy*, constructed around the immigrant population, especially Muslims, who are accused of stealing jobs from the native-born population and taking advantage of welfare benefits. Muslim migrants are also conflated with the Islamist terrorists responsible for the wave of attacks perpetrated on European soil in recent decades.

As Benjamín Arditi suggests, there is a mode of populist representation that "revolves around a specific set of themes: the promise of inclusion and participation in the public sphere, ambivalence about the 'immediate' nature of the relationship of democratic

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[1] "El cristalero que le ha metido el *zascazo* al progre de los cojones este… el *periolisto*… que me estoy descojonando. A ver, enteraros, progres, yo soy camionero, soy currito también, soy obrero y soy de Vox. A ver si os enteráis ya porque con todos los estudios que tenéis, ¿vale? Y tantas carreritas, ¿no? Tenéis un cerebro como una nuez […] Teníamos que poner un pozo, como el de la película de Esparta, y deciros: ¡Esto es Esparta! Patadita, al puto pozo, pero progre por progre, uno por uno." Our translation. Original statements taken from
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJIVQUHBOBI [Date accessed: 21 April 2019].

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representation, and the personalisation of political direction in the leader, who functions as a symbolic encapsulation of the movement" (2009, p. 134). This ties in with the ultra-nationalism and authoritarianism that are presented as solutions to save the nation from its enemies: to defend it against the Other, against the foreign. This in turn is associated with the defence of national symbols and traditions and the sense of connection to the land. Like any *problem issue*, it is also depicted as a top priority that must be addressed urgently; it is posited not as an opportunity for reflection, but as a constant flow of propagandistic images that spread quickly to every corner of our visual culture.

2. Methodology

The objective of this study is to analyse how this ideological depiction of affinities (with the land and the *nation* as a flexible category) and hostilities (with *internal* and *external* enemies) has been expressed in recurring visual motifs in the promotional videos posted on the YouTube platform, where most of this type of content is found (Rodríguez-Serrano, García-Catalán & Martín-Núñez, 2019). While films, and specifically documentaries, have been used throughout history for the purpose of disseminating propaganda (Arnau, 2020), in recent years these discourses have begun filling video-sharing and social media platforms. Moreover, the visual motif "constitutes a privileged site of analysis for the essential condition whereby images –their relationship with power, sovereignty and contemporary systems of visuality– are the subject of iconographic studies" (Salvadó, Oliva & Pintor, 2020, p. 177). To this end, we have conducted a qualitative analysis on a sample of 53 videos uploaded to YouTube channels in the 12 EU countries where extreme right parties have parliamentary representation. This sample was selected from a universe of 13,000 videos on the official YouTube accounts of the various parties, to which the following selection criteria was applied:

a)   They must be uploaded to the party's official channel, i.e., they had to be *recognised* by the political party itself as material that it voluntarily disseminates and identifies with.

b)   They must be among the most viewed videos on the channel, i.e., their impact on the public needed to be clear and verifiable.

c)   They must be filmed and edited by the party itself (appearances on other media services, recordings of meetings or of parliamentary speeches, etc., were thus excluded).

d)   They must have a discursive construction that aims for an emotional impact through storytelling techniques (Salmon, 2007), in which the classical affective/rhetorical division of so-called "social narratives" (Shenhav, 2015) was easily identifiable.

The sample selected (see Table 1) includes 53 specific videos that have collectively received literally millions of views. For the study of these videos, a semiotic method of textual analysis was applied, focusing on two dimensions: the formal and the thematic. The formal dimension includes elements of staging (character construction, acting, setting, and set design, costumes, visual effects, or lighting), while also considering elements of framing (frames and shots) and editing (montage, spatiality and temporality). The thematic dimension focuses on the analysis of the political message conveyed. This twofold approach has facilitated the identification of intertextual relationships with post-classical film imagery and Nazi propaganda.

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Table 1: Sample of 53 videos by Europe's 12 far-right political parties with representation in their respective national parliaments.

Political party	Country	Number of videos analysed
Jobbik	Hungary	4
Law and Justice *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*	Poland	6
Freedom Party *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ*	Austria	5
National Rally *Rassemblement national, RN*	France	4
Danish People's Party *Dansk Folkeparti*	Denmark	4
United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	United Kingdom	4
Alternative for Germany *Alternative für Deutschland, AfD*	Germany	4
Party for Freedom *Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV*	Netherlands	4
Golden Dawn *Χρυσή Αυγή*	Greece	5
Vox	Spain	5
Sweden Democrats *Sverigedemokraterna, SD*	Sweden	5
League *Lega*	Italy	3

Source: Own elaboration.

3. Results: Analysis of visual motifs

3.1. *Workers and leaders: an epic question*

The video of the aforementioned Vox truck driver who cited Snyder's film *300* bears a strange resemblance to the official videos of the Greek far-right party Golden Dawn. Allusions to ancient times can be found in this party's videos when its followers are shown meeting next to a statue of Leonidas that bears the famous inscription –always directly above the party leaders' heads– *ΜΟΛΩΝ ΛΑΒΕ* (*come and take them*), cited by Plutarch as the challenge the Spartan king made to Xerxes I of Persia (1987, p. 194). But Greece and Spain are not the only countries where iconic references to Antiquity are invoked in support of the far right: there are also examples in the resurgence of a kind of "mythical thought" in Germany (Nothnagle, 1993) and France (Lawtoo, 2018) associated with different neo-Nazi and neo-fascist movements.

It seems clear that the aim of such references is to identify a new point of origin in opposition to the humanism of the Enlightenment. However, contrary to the use of the Greek context that can be found in the work of scholars who have studied this movement from a pro-democratic perspective, like Pedro Olalla (2014), what seems to be sought here is not so

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much the recovery of a way of inhabiting the world, of relating to the land, time, or myth, but the evocation of an *epic* that is neither political nor social, but exclusively *cinematic*. In other words, it is not founded on the ideas of community, *polis* or even *nation*, but merely aims to elicit an emotional response through the repeated referencing of epic films. For example, on the day before Spain's national elections in April 2019, Vox posted a meme on its social media accounts which, in a redesign of a frame from *The Lord of the Rings* (Peter Jackson, 2001), identified the party as a kind of epic resistance against a wall covered in different icons associated with feminism, the LGTBI community, and the antifa movement. A marked horizontal line suggests the possibility of uniting a single agent (Spain/Vox) against an army of all kinds of enemies who are positioned iconically both in the space of evil (Mordor) and in meaningful opposition to the sword wielded decisively by the protagonist.

Both *300* and *The Lord of the Rings* belong to the post-modern epic film tradition that began with a very different film which, through its resurrection of the "sword-and-sandal" genre (Lacalle, 2003), effectively revived a whole constellation of visual motifs associated with war, sacrifice, and bloodshed: *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000). A notable aspect of the audiovisual construction of this film is its conscious *poeticising* of an anachronistic individual persecuted by a series of forces embodied by a corrupt and brutal political structure. *Gladiator* is constructed as an explicit recycling of both the principles of the sword–and–sandal film and the iconic essence of Nazi imagery (Barker, 2008; Briggs, 2008; Tudor, 2011). On the one hand, it attempts to establish a visual signifier of evil (embodied in the corrupt Roman system) set in an urban environment (the heart of the Empire) in opposition to a *rural* world, anchored in family and traditional values, thus vesting it with the innocence and purity that characterises a mythic timeframe. As Marc A. Weiner (2018) suggests, Zimmer's score straddles a line between a vaguely Wagnerian conception filtered through the bombastic use of that composer by the Third Reich and the simplified resource of certain folk instruments. In this sense, it is hardly surprising that the music chosen to accompany the appearances of Marine Le Pen, Jimmie Åkesson, Márton Gyöngyösi, and Nikolaos Michaloliakos should be remarkably similar to the musical patterns that mark the work of Zimmer and his studio, Remote Control Productions (Tejero Nogales, 2019, pp. 155-183).

Ridley Scott encapsulates this idea in a single camera movement that would come to be recognised as a kind of synecdoche for the whole film in the years that followed: a detail shot of the hand of Maximus (Russell Crowe), caressing the wheat stalks of his homeland. It is worth noting that this is also the opening shot of the film, and thus the image that effectively launched the era of the post-modern epic, and that its narrative function is to serve as a flashback, as it is a memory that crosses Maximus's mind before going out to battle. The power of this image in the audiovisual constructions of the far right has been so remarkable that several parties (Vox, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, and Dansk Folkeparti) even reference it explicitly, nearly always associated with the figure of the party leader. The power of this shot lies in its suggestion of a tenderness in the relationship between man and nation, expressed in a caress. It is a relationship that is no longer *productive* –like that of the truck drivers or glaziers– but that has a telluric, necessarily mystical quality. The leader is not only capable of directing the battle; with his gentle ways he can draw out the original power of the *Heimat*[2], a privileged symbolic space in which the nation's traditions and beliefs are rooted, and as will be shown below, a space that demarcates the boundaries that exclude those who do not belong to the land, who are not capable of experiencing or savouring the intimate, redemptive symbolic relationship that it offers.

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[2] *Heimat* is a German word that is usually translated as "home," "birth country," or "fatherland," but whose meaning goes beyond those terms because it refers not to a geographical location but to a state of being associated with the culture, the landscape, and the people who inhabit it. Nazism appropriated the love of the *Heimat* to turn it into hatred of those who, according to their criteria, did not belong in it.

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It is also a gesture that is firmly anchored in our visual culture. It calls to mind BMW's "¿Te gusta conducir?" ("Do you like to drive?") campaign in the year 2000 (the same year that *Gladiator* was released), where the driver reaches his hand out the window and waves it gently in a gesture of connection with the landscape. We never see the driver's face, or even the car, but the camera angle suggests a POV shot, inviting the spectator to purchase the car in order to take the place of that body travelling safely while reaching out to touch the unfolding *physis*. This image, a tactile, mystical invitation, which BMW still evokes nearly twenty years later (even using the same slogan), was also decisive for a shift in advertising trends, which themselves serve as a mirror for political propaganda, and thanks to which the privilege of emotion and experience over reason occasionally blurs certain features of the political documentary.

3.2. *Showing the land*

A cursory look at the discursive lines underpinning Nazi Germany's construction of the *Heimat* reveals a clear predilection in audiovisual discourses for the *rural* and the *countryside* in opposition to the city, which was synonymous with cosmopolitanism, interracial mixing, and intercultural encounters. Halfway between the nascent existential analytic and the Expressionist style of films like Karl Grune's 1923 film *Der Straße* (see the analysis by Luis Arenas, 2007), Nazi cinema generally exhibited a fondness for small villages, the sublimation of harvest rituals and an evasion of the portrayal of urban life immediately after the Weimar Republic[3].

The contemporary far right has adopted this same blueprint, although it must deal with the problem of the constantly shrinking rural population and the concentration of votes in the cities. At the same time, the necessary suggestion of hypothetical economic progress promised by these parties requires the introduction into the image of *technological* elements and of certain visual clichés of neoliberalism –mostly in the form of high-angle or low-angle shots of gleaming skyscrapers– to add a certain touch of *contempariness* to their proclamations. However, the main line of the discourse has not shifted even an inch from the basic line of the 1930s. This is evident, for example, in the opening frame of Alternative for Germany's 2017 campaign ad[4]: the centre of the shot is dominated by a mass of skyscrapers cloaked in an asphyxiating cloud of smog. Stretching across the top of the frame is an overcast, apocalyptic sky that leaves the timeframe of the image undefined (is it dawn or dusk?), while at the bottom of the frame, as a kind of silent witness, is the shadow of a single tree that seems to serve as a contrast to the urban wasteland. A closer look reveals suburban clusters of buildings beyond the tree, engulfed in the smog. This is not the landscape that the party considers characteristic of the *true identity* of the German people, if we compare it to the visual identity of the party that dominates its website.

A variation on this idea also appears in *A vidék pártján*, one of the promotional ads for the Hungarian Jobbik party. At one point in the narration, the leader appears in the foreground, followed in a tracking shot on a slight angle that highlights his figure, as he walks past a row of urban vegetable gardens. In the background, a series of cheap housing blocks are outlined in a monotonous, grey against the sky. Behind him, an anonymous farmer –whose worn-out work clothes contrast with the immaculate white and shiny grey of the politician's attire– follows humbly in the protagonist's footsteps. Effectively, the message seems to be that even the urban world, even the concrete buildings rising into the sky, need to be *reformed* by

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[3] There are some exceptions to this rule, however, such as *The Four Companions* (*Die vier Gesellen*, Carl Froelich, 1938), a highly eccentric film with a proto-feminist message, in which four female friends who work for an advertising agency in the city form a kind of partnership. Of course, the film ends with the inevitable heterosexual marriage; nevertheless, many of the ideas it posits seem strangely progressive compared to the contemporary notions of Europe's far right in relation to gender.

[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRoHZ-QKwhk [Accessed 8 July 2020].

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the presence of agriculture, farming, a return to the rural world. The city is an inevitable evil that takes us away from the mythology of the countryside, but that can somehow be reformulated and filled with new plants which we, like the protagonist in *Gladiator*, should be able to reach out and touch. Moreover, similar to this contrast between the figure of the farmer and that of the political leader, the videos analysed also exhibit an interesting paradox in relation to the *Heimat*. Generally, the land is not shown with the same visual strategies when it is associated with the voters or the public as when it is linked to the party leader. These two categories need to be examined separately to consider how they operate.

3.2.1. The habitable land

In the quest for voters, the European *Heimat* to be restored, which in most cases is *strictly national,* is nearly always welcoming and habitable. It is depicted as a harmonious, green territory, shown in sweeping pan shots that reflect the austerity of the countryside and the picturesque beauty of rural buildings (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Dansk Folkeparti ad.

It is often portrayed using spectacular high-angle pan shots taken by drones: the *habitable* areas are generally neat and orderly, decorated with national flags, all fitting tidily into a pleasant, domesticated natural landscape. As will be shown in the next section, this is generally the major difference between the *nation of the voters* and the *nation of the leaders*: in the first, life is peaceful and must be *maintained*, while in the second, the leaders confront a romantic, stylised, sublime nature, against which to measure their strength. This inevitably recalls the famous aerial shots of the city of Nuremberg at the beginning of *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*, Leni Riefenstahl, 1935).

The construction of society shown in these images clearly ties in with what Dorian Astor identifies as the key question for contemporary liberal democracies: "How are we going to maintain it?" This question stands in opposition to the one asked by those Third World citizens with no resources and driven into exile: "What will become of us?" (Astor, 2018, pp. 346-347). The aim is effectively to depict the land, once again associated predominantly with *productive* activity, as subject to a constant threat.

In a kind of visual representation of Ernst Jünger's conception of *technology* (2003), the intention is to show that work is not founded exclusively on a macroeconomic framework (which tends to be associated with Brussels and with the supposedly menacing ideas of George Soros, in a kind of updated version of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*), but on an understructure that is at once mythical and technological, rapid and destructive, formative and threatening. This is why the central figure –the *target audience* for the message– is once again the citizens *who work* to *defend their home* from the external threats that surround it. Moreover, this definition of work never includes intellectual activity. We are never shown teachers, artists, thinkers, researchers, or scientists, as the depictions are limited to two

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variables: *manual* (craftsmen, labourers, cooks, etc.) or what could somewhat cynically be referred to as *biopolitical* (police officers, soldiers, and in a stretch, doctors caring for victims of Islamic terrorist attacks).

One example of this is the video "*Wahltag ist Zahltag*"[5] produced by Austria's FPÖ party. In an analytical montage based on a series of cross-fading shots, this video depicts a base of voters exhausted from everyday activity, comprised mainly of three symbolic figures: the family (a mother feeding her child, an old woman), manual workers (a baker, a labourer, a mechanic), and athletes (a boxer and a bodybuilder). Mixed in with these images is a brief shot of a businessman and, more notably, a man looking for work, shown from a heroic low angle. The attitude of the unemployed man (Fig. 2), his look of determination, his gaunt expression, and his position in the frame, could also be compared with Leni Reifenstahl's portrait of the Reich Labour Service workers in *Triumph of the Will* (Fig. 3).

Figures 2 and 3: Productive forces in *Wahltag ist Zahltag* and in *Triumph des Willens*.

The FPÖ is aiming for a visual code in which the *worker* is portrayed more in mythical terms than in terms of economic activity. Work is inseparable from belonging to a land. Not having work is a tragedy that warrants a low angle shot, and thus losing work to immigrants is a double dishonour: leaving the productive citizen unemployed, while offering the sacred work of the *Heimat* to someone who, despite receiving a lower wage and enduring conditions close to exploitation, does not deserve it.

In the montage of *Wahltag ist Zahltag*, everyday life is portrayed as a battle. The Herculean athletic bodies of Arno Breker's sculptures return now in a post-modern parody: boxers and bodybuilders. The body prepares for action, and each one occupies the place it should in the hierarchical chain of the *Heimat*. The dimensions of the life cycle and nourishment are represented by women: the *mother* and the *old woman*, associated with both the tasks assigned to them by tradition and the risks of being left unprotected in old age –although there is also the female baker, who feeds the nation with her hard work. As a counterpoint to the women, the men are boxing, fixing cars, or lifting pieces of scaffolding. In the very middle of this series is a shot that stands out: a close-up of Heinz-Christian Strache, who at that time was the party's leader, shown in a lateral tracking shot that appears just when the announcer speaks of "a blue miracle" ("ein blaues Wunder"), in reference to the party's brand identity.

Strache's face thus plays the role of the unifying visual element around which all the productive forces of the nation are constructed: mothers, workers, fighters, all placing their trust in this man at the centre to rescue the mythological space that is theirs from the internal and external forces that threaten it. It is important to acknowledge here that Strache's case is slightly different from that of other leaders of Europe's far-right movements. In contrast to the rigorous, romantic seriousness discussed in the next section, the former leader of the FPÖ

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[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJsluapqhtQ [Accessed 8 July 2020].

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combined messianic poses with more light-hearted and playful approaches, like the series of rap songs he recorded in the early 2010s, or his tacit endorsement of the ultra-conservative web-series *Familie Berger*.

In any case, while European citizens are fighting to *preserve* their conditions of everyday habitability (their neatly arranged white houses surrounded by the power of technology and by a much more comfortable version of nature), the party leaders are fighting on a very different level: the level of myth.

3.2.2. The conquerable land

In contrast to the citizen (who must *preserve* and *inhabit*), the leader must necessarily *conquer*. The leader's mission is a titanic task that places them in a mythical dimension where rage against certain forces viewed as unjust and destructive –the European Union, immigration, other political parties, etc.– are *embodied* as forces of nature, showing the most threatening side of the *Heimat*. This marks a recovery of the old vocabulary of the colonial era, when the *conquest* of the Other was viewed as a national obligation, a kind of glorious quest, nearly always founded on religious imagery and invariably supporting violent action as the only solution for troubled times.

As noted above, such *troubles* are made explicit through an aesthetic category drawn from Kant: the *sublime*. This is understandable, as "for the most part nature excites the ideas of the sublime in its chaos or in its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation, provided size and might are perceived" (Kant, 2007, p. 178). The notion of nature as a force that threatens to destroy and that dazes those who manage to keep their gaze on it is generally expressed in mountains, valleys and, of course, in rushing water and storms that explicitly evoke the German concept of *Sturm* appearing both in Romanticism and in the construction of a "National Socialist language" (Klemperer, 2001). One of the slogans *resurrected* by the German far right was Heidegger's very particular translation of a quote of Plato's that the German philosopher used to close his rectoral address: "Alles Grosse steht in Sturm" ("All that is great stands in the storm")[6]. This is why Alice Weidel (Alternative for Germany) is shown walking in the rain, while Kristian Thulesen Dahl (Dansk Folkeparti), Nigel Farage (UKIP), and Jimmie Åkesson (Sverigedemokraterna) are each shown walking alongside rivers or canals. Indeed, Farage and Åkesson are both presented in almost identical close-ups: shown in profile, gazing to the right, with the natural background out of focus.

But the clearest example of this type of audiovisual strategy can be found in Marine Le Pen's official video for the French elections in 2017[7]. The video begins with the leader describing her ties to her land, her country, and its history, through a series of slow-motion aerial shots showing her on the edge of a cliff, watching the waves crash against the shore and standing up to the force of the wind. One of the shots quite literally reproduces Caspar Friedrich's famous painting *Wanderer above the Sea and Fog*, underscoring the intertextual connection with the Romantic sublime. After outlining the threats to France –Islamism, "which threatens women's freedom," or the Establishment, "which has lied, failed, betrayed, and misled the people and lost France"– she presents herself as the country's salvation. The video ends with more images of the sea, making a visual connection with her name: *Marine*. But this time she is no longer looking out on the waves, but sailing, steering resolutely at the helm of a boat. She has conquered the brute force of nature; she has tamed it. Once again, the slow-motion shots and the epic music underscore the importance of this moment: she has come to restore the order, justice, security, and prosperity that have been lost, "on behalf of the people" ("Au Nom Du Peuple"), as the caption over the final shot reads. This last shot also shows the Élysée Palace, the official residence of the French president and, therefore, the final

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[6] On the critical problems with this translation, see the footnotes to Ramón Rodríguez's Spanish translation (Heidegger, 1989, p. 19).

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYWnuQc5mYA [Accessed 8 July 2020].

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throne for Le Pen to conquer. The fact that she is capable of taming the wild rage of nature makes it clear that she will now be able to defend the nation in the majestic fortress where the presidents work and speak, with democratic legitimacy, on behalf of a nation.

These exterior shots of Le Pen confronting and taming nature are interspersed with indoor shots showing the candidate looking over a family photo album in the comfort of her home. At the very moment when she asserts her status as a woman –in order to immediately identify herself as a potential victim of Islamic violence– she shows us a picture of a young Le Pen that is the only image we see of her looking directly to the camera, as if calling to us from the past to write the future. The photograph shown bears a clear connection with the image of Brigitte Bardot, not only for the make-up and hairstyle, but for the sensuality of an expression and gaze that seeks to *conquer* the camera. The face of French cinema of the 1960s and an icon of sexual freedom and animal rights, Bardot has always expressed support and admiration for the far-right leader. In fact, the National Front's electoral campaign in 2017, a few months after the release of the video analysed above, made use of Bardot's image as an icon to support the banning of the *burkini*. In an interview in 2014 for *Paris Match*, the actress confirmed her admiration for Le Pen, stating explicitly: "I want her [Le Pen] to save France; she is the Joan of Arc of the 21st century"[8]. And in the video analysed, after a warm-hearted shot of Le Pen on horseback and another of her standing beside the horse wearing a cowboy's hat (in a symbolic allusion to heroes of Western films), we are shown two low-angle shots taken at sunset, looking up to a golden statue of Joan of Arc[9], also on horseback, gazing out to the horizon with her flag held high, at the very moment that Le Pen describes herself as "intensely, proudly, loyally, and resolutely French." She is a warrior, and as such, she can explicitly confront her enemy in combat. The identification of that enemy will be discussed below.

3.3. *Depiction of the enemy: alterities*

Although the particular approach that far-right parties take to those they consider their enemies–journalists, liberal politicians, the European Union–was already mentioned above, their treatment of the specific issue of immigration warrants a section of its own. In general, the far right in Europe tends to adopt an antagonistic position towards the Muslim population, conflating Islam with terrorism, although it is worth highlighting certain distinctions between countries. In the United Kingdom, in keeping with its pro-Brexit stance, the UKIP identifies Eastern Europeans as the enemies, arguing that their presence in Britain is causing social unrest and that they are stealing jobs away from Britons. In the cases of Spain (Vox) and Italy (Lega), special emphasis is placed on immigrants from North Africa and the arguments put forward tend to be related more to economic concerns than to the danger of terrorist attacks or the supposed spectre of the *Islamisation* of Europe. Anti-Semitic propaganda, which was promoted by many extremist blocs during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (Lipstadt, 1994; Shermer & Grobman, 2009; Poggio, 2006), maintains only a lingering and nearly always muted presence, associated in most cases, as noted above, with the figure of George Soros.

Notwithstanding these distinctions, the extent to which some parties construct so many of their visual motifs *in opposition* to Islam is notable. This is certainly the case of the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid, whose most viewed videos include one[10] that contains a series of captions equating the Muslim religion with various alarmist concepts ("terror," "invasion,"

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8   At https://www.lavanguardia.com/gente/20140820/54413870503/bardot-quiere-que-marine-le-pen-juana-de-arco-del-siglo-xxi-salve-a-francia.html. [Accessed 24 August 2019].
9 It is important to remember that the symbology of Joan of Arc is central for Le Pen's party, as veneration of the saint has effectively "taken over" the celebration of the traditional Labour Day on 1 May in the party's political calendar of events. Ever since the former National Front decided to establish a presence in unions, factories, and other associations traditionally associated with the workers, the "Jeanne d'Arc" signifier has been used as a textual operator to attack those who Le Pen claims have betrayed the working class (Davies, 1993).
10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoBeCQhWFfY [Accessed 8 July 2020].

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"totalitarianism," "Sharia"). Upon reaching the final description ("dodelijk", roughly translated as 'lethal'), the red lettering of the caption begins to bleed. The conversion of the word into blood –a strategy typical of credit designs in B-movie horror films– eliminates its symbolic quality, and with it any possibility of accommodating the perspective of the Other and, therefore, any possible dialogue. The design bluntly conveys the idea that terror is the only language of Islam, its only project, against which Western hatred is the only barrier or natural response.

There are also constant references to the forced migrations of Syrians and Iraqis who arrived in Europe fleeing the various civil wars in their homelands. Archive footage of these events can be found on the channels of Alternative for Germany and the Danish People's Party (Figs. 4 and 5), for example.

Figures 4 and 5: Alternative for Germany and Danish People's Party.

An analysis of both these images suggests that the dehumanisation of the migrants is clearly a primordial objective. The asylum seekers are given no face; they are merely a faceless crowd sweeping across the country. Their bodies are always viewed from a distance and from a slightly higher angle, representing that *impossible gaze* (Žižek, 2011, p. 23) that exists in all fantasy narration where the subject, constructed as an innocent bystander, is present but outside the scene. The second shot, taken from a drone, makes use of the compositional lines of the railway tracks to mark the apparently descending trajectory, although the threatening crowd or *invading masses* effect in the Alternative for Germany image is not achieved here. Notable among the paradoxes contained in these images is the fact that, while *executioners* are vested with a human dimension (as can be seen in the images of the Islamic State killers used by Sweden's Sverigedemokraterna on its channel), *victims* have no visible face because the angle or the filters do not permit it, and the only close-ups shown are of women wearing niqabs. The texture of the image is distorted through the application of various digital filters that obscure the immigrants to produce a monstrous motif, which the members of Alternative for Germany themselves determine to *enclose* in a kind of concentration-camp space.

The black and white images also evoke the opening shots of *The Eternal Jew* (*Der Ewige Jude*, Fritz Hippler, 1940). In both cases, we find once again the visual motif of the road (the exiles), belongings rescued from war, poverty as a synonym for threat, and invasion. In both cases there is also an impersonal, neutral voice-over that offers a flat reading of the content of the images and that alerts the public to the risks of *contagion* brought by these *personae non gratae.* It is also worth noting that another cinematic image used by the far right to represent migrants is the zombie, a prominent genre in contemporary film and television production. With their headless bodies, zombies are guided by pure impulse, and have the ability to spread evil because –like Islamic terrorists– the notion of death means nothing to them.

There are also striking parallels in the staging of the videos by European far-right parties and the opening scenes of *The Eternal Jew*. The videos often include a composition with a

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wide-open road, shot from an overhead angle, along which the lines of exiles move vertically. The moving masses are also shown from the side, again in a high angle shot. The use of black and white adds a touch of roughness to the depiction. On the one hand, we know that this has become a cliché in post-modern representations of Nazism (Lozano Aguilar, 2001), but on the other, that same connection creates a genuinely unsettling quality that the hypothetical critical viewer would have to take into account. The obvious visual connection between European Jews in the 1940s and contemporary Muslims not only speaks to the hidden agendas of extremist political parties, but also fits in surprisingly well with the suggestion of restoring the old project of racial struggle and of Europe as a fortress for the defence of the purity of immemorial traditions. This is an idea that can be most clearly identified in the discourses of the Eastern European parties. As Hungary's Jobbik party itself argues, many of these tensions find their roots in the legacy of Soviet repression during World War II and the subsequent occupation of the post-war years; however, it is striking to note that the Poles and Hungarians fail to consider that *they* were the "racially inferior peoples" who were to face the firing squads in the final stages of the Nazi *Lebensraum* project.

4. Conclusions

The main ideas outlined above in relation to the *visual motifs* used by European far-right groups as a mechanism to captivate their viewers can be summed up systematically in the following points.

First of all, the post-modern "sword-and-sandal" film and its fantasy epic variants can be identified as the main source for the far-right parties' particular collection of audiovisual stylistic strategies. Beyond the examples cited (*300*, *Gladiator,* and *The Lord of the Rings*), there are framing and editing strategies –such as the constant use of slow motion, the inclusion of aerial shots that magnify the space, or the musical accompaniment drawing directly from the scores of Hans Zimmer– that clearly define the political intention. It is unsurprising that the plotlines of the films cited, and others that could be added to the list (such as Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight trilogy), feature epic heroes rising up against tyrannical or crumbling political regimes or corrupt democracies (Burgos Mazas, 2010; Gil Ruiz & García García, 2016).

Secondly, it is clear that the motifs related to the portrayal of the land, the community, and the constituent elements of the nation are of special importance in the videos of these political parties, associated with their nationalistic and Eurosceptic stance. These motifs exhibit two different dimensions. On the one hand, the audience is offered a sublimated rural image with *technological* touches suggestive of economic prosperity. This vision is based on the traditional parameters of *habitability* on which the philosophical idea of the *Heimat* is constructed (Heidegger, 1994). It is a vision that extols a telluric connection, founded on the inherent qualities of the community that are in turn projected into a future in which the achievements of the past are rewritten or transformed –a process roughly designated by the German term "Andenken", which contains a complexity that could not be rendered in this context with the word "memory" or "souvenir." On the other hand, the party leader is characterised through the opposite aesthetic function: immersed in the *sublime* landscape and the vastness associated with the indomitability of nature, the conqueror forges his or her way through the *storm* (*Sturm*) of post-modern times and assumes the role of *saviour* of the nation.

Thirdly and lastly, the videos of these far-right parties identify two types of antagonists: an internal enemy –journalists, intellectuals, leaders of other parties, and mysterious figures suggested in references to the "European Union"– and, especially, an external enemy – represented predominantly by Muslim migrants, although migrants from North Africa or Eastern Europe are also referenced in some cases. This construction serves to privilege discursive attitudes based on fear, evoked with a backdrop of terrorism, and also to radically dehumanise the victims of recent conflicts, through the impossible gaze of an innocent

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external spectator who at the same time enjoys a privileged, almost demiurgic position in the scene.

Over the time that this research has been conducted, there has been a progressive increase in the viewing of radical extreme right-wing content promoted by political parties with parliamentary representation, and at the same time these parties have been stepping up the frequency and audiovisual quality of such content. They are clearly aware of the ideological niche that has opened up on the internet, and despite the barriers imposed by the various technological platforms, they have shown an extraordinary capacity to regroup.

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