

Transculturality of the Alps: The Role of Image and Sound in a European “Multiple *Bergfilm*” of the 1930s

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The discovery of the Alps in the specific genre of the mountain film was originally a German answer to the Westerns from the USA in the late 1920s. This brought a number of important personalities such as Fanck, Riefenstahl and Trenker onto the German film market, though the genre developed in different ways in other contexts, too. The mountain film *Der Sohn der weißen Berge / Les Chevaliers de la Montagne* by Trenker and Bonnard was coproduced as a German-French multiple version (MV) in 1930 and represents the beginning of a longer series of ‘multiple’ coproductions by Trenker. During the generalization of sound, MVs are meant to create the ‘same’ film for each country interested in it. In order to make the versions successful in their contexts, each of them is shaped according to early audio-visual techniques and adapting elements such as cast, fictional nationalities, music, dialogues or gestures. This article aims to approach the two MVs from a comparative, transcultural perspective in order to highlight their specificities. The aim is to investigate the transcultural character of the Alps arguing that, due to their semantic openness, the Alps provide an ideal setting for transcultural communication and for the nationalization process essential to the MVs. As a territory at the crossroad of several countries and cultures, the Alpine environment proves through *Der Sohn der weißen Berge / Les Chevaliers de la Montagne* to be a privileged territory for multiplecinematic cultural transfers that contribute to the establishment of European cinema.

Keywords
Mountain films
Multiple Versions
Luis Trenker
Transculturality
Alps
DOI
[https://doi.org/
10.54103/2036-
461X/17960](https://doi.org/10.54103/2036-461X/17960)

INTRODUCTION

The discovery of the Alps in the specific genre of mountain film is generally considered a German cinematic answer to the U.S. Western in the 1920s (Stern 2001) which famously produced several important protagonists of the German-language film market, such as Arnold Fanck, Leni Riefenstahl, and Luis Trenker. As the geographical centre of Western Europe, the Alps are par excellence charged with various meanings and functions in Western modern imagination. The numerous historical and natural philosophical conceptualizations of this landscape bear witness to this. The culturally charged semantics of the Alps, which have been rediscovered in mountain films since the first hours of cinematography, range from the imagination of a natural recreational space (von Haller 2006; Rousseau 1978) to the sublime version of the mountains (Kant



1974) to the imagined experimental space of human experience (Felsch 2007).¹ Thus, even in Fanck's films, nature appears as the dominant actor in the form of untouched mountains, terrifying storms, or avalanches, with the camera serving as a mediator of the seemingly unmediated, spectacular experience in the Alps.

Fanck's mountain films made the Alps accessible to a mass audience at the beginning of the 20th century, while the popularization of this 'unspoiled' landscape contributed to its very destruction.² The media penetration of the Alps in early mountain films was finally able to tie in with the audience's direct experience of this landscape, since alpinism had developed into a mass phenomenon since the beginning of the 20th century. And just as the popularity of alpine sports soared in Europe and North America in the 1920s and 1930s, so too would mountain film, as a medium conducive to alpine tourism, become a multinational, popular phenomenon very early in the history of European cinema. A closer look at the early film history of this genre reveals that mountain film productions are by no means limited to the German film market or as the German answer to the U.S. Western.

With the emergence of multiple versions (MVs)³ in the transitional phase from silent film to sound film, a viable, transnational as well as transcultural cinematic subject was recognized in the multinational projection space as well as sporting-real experience world of the Alps, which was to contribute to the establishment of European cinema. MVs had emerged in the highly innovative phase of sound film generalization in the early 1930s as part of most national film industry's internationalization strategy. Today dubbing seems to be a natural practice for exploiting films internationally. But at least until 1933, dubbing was far from accepted or widespread, and MVs played a central role in film production in the early 1930s. In the European context they were mostly coproduced for the French, German, English and Italian film markets, with transnationally successful titles such as *Der blaue Engel* (Josef von Sternberg 1930, D/E) or *Der Kongreß tanzt* (Eric Charell 1931, D/F/E) (Garncarz 2013).

MVs aimed to produce a 'same' film for each country interested in the production, using different cultural adaptation strategies and techniques depending on the case. In order to make the versions successful in their respective contexts, each version was designed to adapt elements such as cast, fictional nationalities, music, dialogue, and gestures, in a process that also incorporated strongly national production aspects such as (trans)cultural identifications.⁴ Each MV thus resulted in a product that could be considered a single film or several different ones. In this sense, we tend to stick to the idea that there is no truly original version or MV of the same title. Each MV is at the same time an independent film as well as interdependent from the other versions of the same title.

In this article we would like to take a closer look at the 1930 German-French coproduced MV *Der Sohn der weißen Berge/Les Chevaliers de la Montagne*⁵ by Luis Trenker and Mario Bonnard. By comparing the two versions we aim to show that the Alps as a transcultural carrier of meaning as well as a transnational, sportive space of experience also gained an important status in the European

cinema of the 1930s through the MVs. Our main argument is that mountain films were predestined for internationalization, if not Europeanization through MVs. Indeed, due to their multinational character, the Alps offer the ideal setting for transcultural communication as well as for the nationalization processes necessary for MVs. A process which appears to be enclosed in the title of the two versions already. Their difference in both content and graphic testifies of the efforts and cultural adaptation processes through which *Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers* went [Fig. 1 - 2]. In this sense, the MVs directly contribute to the progressive internationalization and popularization of Alpine landscapes and narratives, which corresponded to a longer cultural imagination in Western cultural history.

The setting of our case study, *Der Sohn/Les Chevalier*, is the ski resort of Zermatt on the Matterhorn, which lies at the border between Swiss and Italian territory. This is why the alternative title of the film, sometimes used as a subtitle, is *Das Geheimnis von Zermatt*. The film takes place during an international ski championship. Next to being a sport film, though, it also negotiates a love and crime story, with a mountain and ski guide as the main character, interpreted by Luis Trenker and named Turri in *Der Sohn* and Charlier in *Les Chevaliers*. When Turri/Charlier meets a young Parisian woman, Mary, he too gets into troubles and ends up being suspected of murder. But the film's hero is

Fig. 1
Ending of the first
sequence of *SwB* (links)
and *CdM* (right).

Fig. 2
Beginning of *SwB*
and *CdM*.



determined to uncover the trap he had fallen into and help his teammates win the championship...

Although this film by Trenker and Bonnard is an important case study both for the early audiovisual translation strategy of MVs and for the transcultural significance of the Alps for a rapprochement of European cinema in the 1930s, a scholarly examination (as well as other MVs of this genre) has been lacking to date. In order to highlight the (trans)cultural specificities of this French-German coproduction, we will analyse the visual, textual and musical levels separately and comparatively. As we will show, on the one hand, the interpretation of the joint script cannot be separated from the national and cultural contexts in which the films were seen; on the other hand, the alpine environment proves to be a privileged territory for a multifaceted cinematic cultural transfer.

MVs have so far been studied mainly in terms of the linguistic aspects and the visual components of the films. However, our case study allows us to pay special attention to the soundtrack in the different film versions, which in MVs constitutes a particularly important element in (trans)cultural translation.⁶ Thanks to the availability of both copies of the French and German versions of Trenker and Bonnard in the Mountain Museum of Turin, our comparative audiovisual analysis is possible, which is a rare case in the history of MVs.⁷

In addition to a French and German film version, an Italian edition of the film circulated, with the French version as its visual basis. At that time, the Italian film industry was probably still too young to compete in the market and could probably not afford a national MV. Since we could not find the Italian film version, we include it only marginally in our comparative analysis on the basis of a few archival materials we could find about it.

Before we compare the visual, textual, and musical aspects of the two film versions to better highlight their variations and implications, we briefly contextualize mountain films and specifically *Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers* in relation to the MVs.

MOUNTAIN FILMS AND *DER SOHN DER WEISSEN BERGE/LÉS CHEVALIERS DE LA MONTAGNE* IN RELATION TO MVs

Mountain films set in different mountainous regions of the world have existed since the dawn of cinema. The publication *Cinema delle Montagne* of the Mountain Museum in Turin, which lists nearly 4,000 feature films in the history of mountain cinema, largely testifies to the history of this genre (Audisio 2004; Mantovani 2020). Generally acknowledged as the first preserved mountain film to feature the Alps as its setting, *Cervino* is an Italian film production from 1902, which in six minutes deals with the ascent of three mountaineers and a cameraman to the top of the Matterhorn.

The process of 'gentrification', by which Rick Altman (1999) refers to the

procedural and dynamic nature of a film genre, seemed to have arguably contributed to asynchronous developments of the mountain film genre in the respective countries. While *Der Sohn* had long been recognized and marketed as a mountain film in Germany in 1930, *Les Chevaliers*, on the other hand, faced a different genre development in France, where the film was promoted as a sport film in view of the skiing subject. Its reception as a sports film emerges, for example, in *Le Cinéopse* on the occasion of the film's premiere ("Chez Vandal", 1930).

The early mountain films of German production, which emerged from the genre of documentary sports and nature films of the 1910s and 1920s, are closely associated in with the geologist and photographer Arnold Fanck and the so-called Freiburg Camera School. Mountain films of that period of German film production has also been the most thoroughly studied to date, which may be related in part to its reception by well-known film critics and theorists (such as Siegfried Kracauer). For many decades, mountain films were characterized as a manifestation of a reactionary anti-modernism, 'similar to the back-to-the-land philosophy and health cults that characterized interwar Germany in the run-up to Hitler's takeover' (Bush 2019, 2).⁸ As Alex Bush correctly recognized, Kracauer's reading of the German mountains films of that historical period was not only politically motivated, but tied to a long tradition in German visual culture that understood the Alps as an 'absolute 'unhistorical' landscape'(Bush 2019, 2; Simmel 1919, 138) and created a canon beginning with the romantic paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. It was not until later readings that the 'romantic rhetoric of the Alps' (von Moltke 2002) in German mountain film was based on 'manifestations of modernity' (Haver 2005, 136).⁹ In the 1930s, German mountain film was shaped by Fanck's student Luis Trenker. Born in 1892 in South Tyrol, Trenker worked as a mountain guide in addition to being an architect. He first came across mountain film in 1923, when he was hired as an alpine consultant during the shooting of Arnold Fanck's film *Der Berg des Schicksals* (1924), and later as an actor.

National highlights of the mountain film genre in France, on the other hand, did not occur until the 1940s and 1950s with the films by director and professional alpinist Marcel Ichac. In reaction to the German approach to the genre, 'the French mountain film was to impose a new version freed from any pathos and giving its place to the gesture and the pure relationship of man to the mountain' (Fenoli 2009, 3). Before that, mountain films from Germany were shown in France. Although he then distanced himself from the German conception of mountain films, Ichac had surely seen most of them, including *Les Chevaliers* (Ichac 1960, 12-13).

In Italian cinema, as mentioned at the beginning, mountains played a central role very early on, in the 1910s mainly with directors such as Giovanni Vitrotti and Mario Piacenza. Piacenza, who was also a professional alpinist like many directors of this genre, once again filmed the ascent of the Matterhorn with *Ascensione al Cervino* (1911) – this time the cinematic event lasts 14 minutes. The Alps were also to become a setting in an episode of the *Maciste* (1915–

1926) series. In *Maciste alpino* (Maggi-Borgnetto, 1916), the Italian film hero, Bartolomeo Pargano, with his masculinist, heroic character roles may have later found a continuation in the figure of Trenker (Schrader and Winkler 2018).

In the history of MVs *Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers* is a special case. For one thing, this German-French coproduction was the first of a series of MVs of the mountain film genre 'made by Trenker'. It was followed by *Berge in Flammen* (1931, D/F/E), *Der Rebell* (1932, D/E), *Condottieri* (1937, D/I) and *Der Berg ruft* (1938, D/E) (Haque 2013).¹⁰ These 'multiple *Bergfilme*' or 'multiple mountain films' have received little attention from film scholars despite their quantitative and qualitative relevance to European cinema in the 1930s, which we wish to highlight here.

In research on the mountain film genre, this is probably due to the tendency to focus on Trenker's German titles, since for the cultural history of the Alps in German-speaking countries, the South Tyrolean 'mountain legend' even has a mythical function.

As for the MVs, the lack of attention in academic literature could be attributed to the fact that none of these titles were produced by UFA, that is, that major German film production company of the time. Film history itself also lacks the connection between MVs and mountain films. For example, although Siegfried Krakauer's proto-fascist reading of Trenker's films is well known, Krakauer (2017) never mentions its MVs. Even in the chapter Corinna Müller (2003, 339 – 350) devotes to *Der Sohn*, specifically exploring how revolutionary its dubbing technique was for the early 1930s, there is no mention of *Les Chevaliers*.

REGIONAL, NATIONAL, EUROPEAN IDENTITIES (AND WHERE TO FIND THEM)

Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers fosters the establishment of the career of Trenker as a sound film professional; together with him, also Renate Müller and Mary Glory have been positively favoured by their roles in the two MVs. The case of Glory is particularly striking, for Trenker was not that famous in France in 1930 and therefore she gets to emerge as the main star of *Les Chevaliers*. This is often highlighted in the press, for instance by Maurice Bessy in *Cinéma*, who says that *Les Chevaliers* is one of the films that established Glory among 'our first stars' (Bessy 1931), but is also evident in the graphic of the several film posters [Fig. 3 and 4], as well as in the film credits: Luis Trenker is always in the foreground of the German material, whereas the prominent star in the French material is definitely that of Mary Glory, and in film credits of *Les Chevaliers* the first mentioned is Glory, followed by Trenker.

MVs often play on the adaptation of the nationalities on a double level: the nationalities of the cast involved in the film, and the nationalities of the fictional characters. In the case of *Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers*, a significant part of the cast remains unchanged. Luis Trenker as main character, a professional skier

Fig. 3 (next page)
Poster of *SwB* (1930),
provided by Museo
Nazionale della
Montagna di Torino.

**LUIS
TRENKER**

**DER
SOHN
DER
WEISSEN
BERGE**

› Das Geheimnis von Zermatt ‹

VERLEIH
DEUTSCHE FILM  COMMERZ GMBH

ÉDITION OMNIUM-CINÉ

JACQUES PATHÉ présente:

LES CHEVALIERS DE LA MONTAGNE

COMÉDIE
DRAMATIQUE
SPORTIVE

Une production MARCEL VANDAL, CHARLES DELAC,
JEAN DE MERLY & ITALIA FILM
Réalisation de MARIO BONNARD

Interprétée par

MARIE GLORY
LOUIS TRENKER
JIM GÉRALD
PIERRE MAGNIER



IMP. BÉDOT & Co. 14, Av. Foch - France 92001

LE VAUCLUSE

(Documentaire)

LA DEMOISELLE
DE LA RADIO

(Dessin Animé)

OMNIUM-MAGAZINE

(Revue documentaire)

	<i>Der Sohn der weißen Berge</i>	<i>Les chevaliers de la montagne</i>
Language	German	French
Director	Trenker, Bonnard	Bonnard, Trenker
Producers	Itala-Film	Vandal & Delac
Distributors	several all over DE	Gaumont-Franco Film-Aubert
Screenwriters	Trenker, Schmidtkunz (book/story) Bonnard, Malasomma, (screenplay) Schulz (dialogue)	Trenker, Schmidtkunz (book/story) Bonnard, Malasomma, (screenplay) Schulz (dialogue)
Actors / Characters	Luis Trenker (Hans Turri) Renate Müller (Mary Dulac) Maria Matray-Solveg (Anni) Michael von Newlinsky (Gregor Milacs) Karl Steiner (Koste) Emmerich Albert (Morel) Leo Peukert (father) Jim Gérald (desk clerk)	Luis Trenker (Georges Charlier) Mary Glory (Mary) Yvette Beschoff (Christine) Michael von Newlinsky (Ing. Milacs) Charles Steiner (Coste) Emmerich Albert (Sorel) Pierre Magnier (father) Jim Gérald (desk clerk)
Release	12 August 1930	07 November 1930
Composer	Giuseppe Becce	Giuseppe Becce
Lyrics	Heddy Knorr	Pol Varenge
Format	35mm, 1.20:1	1.33:1
Duration	64,04 min	57,56 min ³⁶
Locations	Matterhorn, Zermatt, Grindelboden	Matterhorn, Zermatt, Grindelboden

Fig. 4 (next page)
Poster of *CdM* (1930),
provided by Museo
Nazionale della
Montagna di Torino.

and mountain guide; Michael von Newlinsky as the antagonist, engineer Milacs; Karl Steiner and Emmerich Albert as friends and other team members of the German ski national team; Jim Gérald as desk clerk.

As shown in the table above, the names of all these characters have been changed in *Les Chevaliers* to better fit the French linguistic and cultural system, starting from the adaptation of 'Hans Turri' as 'Georges Charlier'. Also, this part of the cast that remains in both versions is exclusively Austrian or Austro-Hungarian, exception made for Gérald, who is the only French actor acting in both films – something that the French press did not hesitate to stress.

Then, two are the relevant characters played by different roles in the two versions, starting from the character of Mary, played by German Renate Müller and by French Mary Glory respectively. The same for the character of Anni/Christine who is the cousin of Turri/Charlier and has tender feelings for him; she is also played by a German actress in *Der Sohn* and a French one in *Les Chevaliers*.

Consequently, we have observed that all characters that change between the two versions are of German and French nationalities accordingly. But the core part of the cast is of Austrian origins, and while the 'foreign' stars change between *Der Sohn* and *Les Chevaliers*, the Austrian ones remains unchanged. This has an impact on the acting and presence on the screen, for the Austrian cast obviously acts very similarly and is dressed in the same way in the two versions, though the same cannot be said for the German and French actors. If we consider the *Doppelgänger* Müller and Glory, for instance, we observe a difference already in their clothes. Müller has a stronger impact, and her physical stature, her way of speaking and dressing mirrors a resolute, strong-willed style, while Glory has a more modest and delicate presence. The fact

Fig. 5
In this scene, when the German/French team greets Mary and her father, only the dressing style of Müller (links) and Glory (right) variates.



Fig. 6
In this scene with the two female characters of Mary and Anni/Christine, both dresses variate. Especially the fur that Müller wears (links) imposes itself visually during the scene.



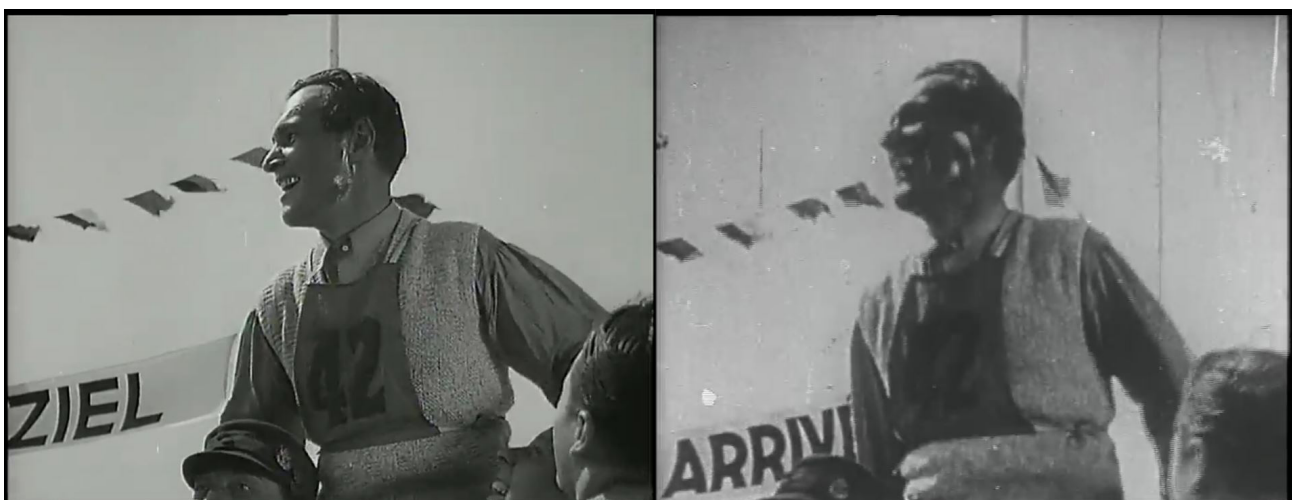
that the clothes used were so different could, in the context of MVs, testify to a detailed plan of cultural adaptation [Figg. 5-6].

Also, as we will see in a few lines, the production took care of details such as having two different banners advertising the finish line once in German 'Ziel' and once in French 'Arrivée' [Fig. 7].

As shown, the majority of the cast in both versions is of Austrian origins, and the fictional film character Turri has Austrian origins in the film, too, though Turri and his teammates run for the German ski national team in *Der Sohn* and for the French one in *Les Chevaliers*.

The trio gets to meet Mary at the beginning of the film, who immediately recognizes them as famous skiers and is thrilled to meet them: this shows how each version gives to its own national audience not only its own national star, but also its own fictional champions (French champions in *Les Chevaliers*

Fig. 7
Detail of two different banners advertising the finish line. The shot is almost identical, but the banner is written in German in *SwB* (links) and in French in *CdM* (right).



and German ones in *Der Sohn*). Also, it is in this same scene that another important variation manifests. In the German version, Turri states that they run for Germany for the *Europa Meisterschaft in Skilaufen*, while Charlier, in the French version, says that they represent France for the *Championnat de ski*. In the French version, the general European background is not kept, as also confirmed by the analysis of the textual level of the films. After the aforementioned misadventures, and with the help of his ski-comrades, then, Turri/Charlier will finally succeed in making Germany win the race in *Der Sohn* – France in *Les Chevaliers*, spectacularly joining his teammates at the very last moment.

If one looks at the main character, then the issue goes even further. Turri is competing for Germany, though from his accent and his way of expressing we understand he comes from South Tyrol (as Trenker himself). In addition, his friend Anni, who also has a crush on Turri like Mary and lives with him and his mother in the hotel, prepares Turri's favourite dish: '*Tiroler Knödel*'.¹¹ Interestingly, Charlier is depicted as French because of his language, first of all, but also due to a quite peculiar culinary adaptation; also in the French version, his cousin Christine prepares for her beloved Charlier his favourite dish: a '*soupe au fromage*'. This reference could have been avoided easily, or even cut; instead, the dish is kept, and it is adapted to the new targeting context. The *Knödel* are a cultural vehicle and, as such, they are kept and adapted accordingly. The attention to such a detail is enough to show how attentively these versions have been constructed to make their respective national identifications possible [Fig. 8].

To sum up, the most important consequences of these choices related to nationalities and cultural elements is that in the German-speaking version there are three nationalities interacting (Germany, Austria, France), while in the French version all happens within France and French culture. In this sense, it is quite emblematic the fact that, in one of the first scenes, the friends of Turri refer to Mary as the '*Französin*', while the friends of Charlier refer to her as '*la fille Parisienne*'. To the internationalism of *Der Sohn*, *Les Chevaliers* answers with an intra-national structure, where the main opposition kept is that of being

Fig. 8
Christine serves 'Tiroler Knödel' to Turri (links)
and Anni serves 'cheese soup' to Charlier (right).



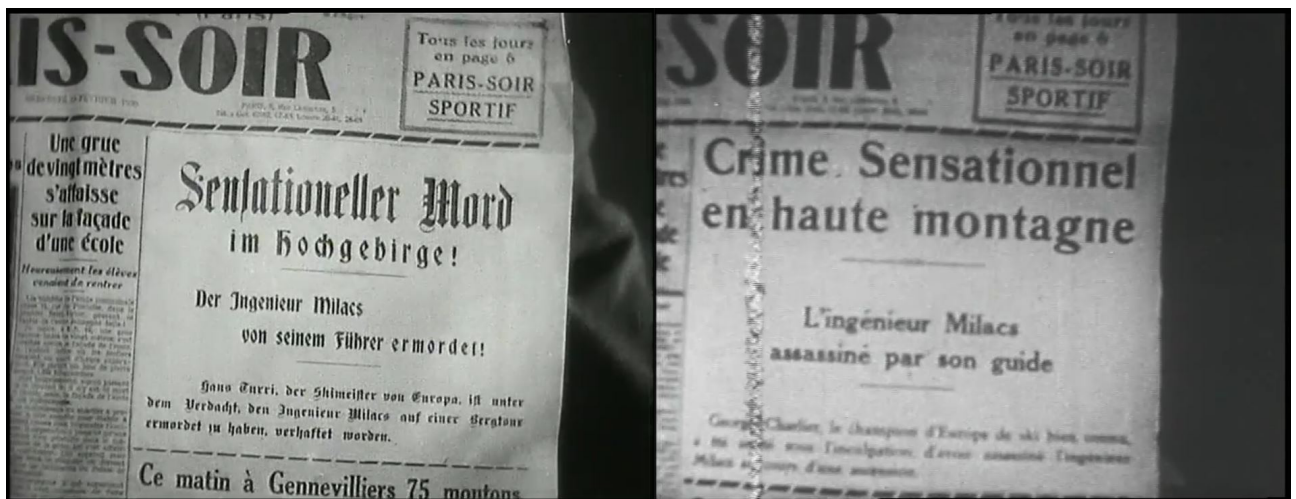
French from Paris instead of French *not* from Paris. Again, it would have been easy and more consistent to switch the two nationalities instead, having Mary coming from Germany. In a production where much attention is given to the kind of dish the actors are eating, one can assume that the choice of the nationalities must have been well thought, too.

On a side remark, it is worth noting a specific aspect of the Italian edition of the film. Here the ski-team is not German, nor French (as one could have expected, since the visual version that circulated in Italy was *Les Chevaliers*), and, surprisingly, it is not even Italian. The team in the Italian film edition is Swiss. So, in this case the aim was not to nationalize the team to better fit the new target context, but rather to renationalize it in a more neutral way, which was more consistent with the Swiss setting of Zermatt and the Swiss protagonists. This renationalisation strategy could also be related to the lip-synching constraints when revoicing the dialogues in Italian, since the French pronunciation is closer to the Italian one than the German one. Altogether this choice was allowed by the multinational Alpine context, which makes all these combinations plausible and legitimate.

THE TEXTUAL DIMENSION AND (MULTI) NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

The important role given to the text, in several forms, is a peculiarity of this film and therefore deserves special attention, especially due to the way it gets to be connected to identity issues and transnational variations. In fact, many scenes of both versions display textual elements such as posters, geographical signs, press articles, telegrams, notes and letters, which all together contribute to introduce a further level of complexity.

Let us begin with the most prominent of these multiple textual elements, namely the press articles. Right after Turri/Charlier is accused of murder, the news spreads in the press. In one of the very few sequences of both versions set in Paris, we first see some shots connoting the urban environment and, right afterwards, we see that the journal *Paris Soir* is being distributed in the streets. In the first page, one clearly reads the title 'Sensational murder in high mountains. Engineer Milacs was assassinated by his mountain guide', in German and in French respectively. One element is immediately striking: while *Les Chevaliers* is linguistically consistent, in *Der Sohn* one sees that this article, written in German, has been attached over a journal otherwise all written in French [Fig. 9]. Also, in the few seconds before this textual scene, the Parisian environment is symbolized in both versions by some images of fireworks and of the '*Galeries Lafayette*' (which appears in textual form, too), though only in *Der Sohn* we see a short shot with the Tour Eiffel right before the press' sequence. Supposedly, for *Les Chevaliers* there was no need to take care of the shot with the Tour Eiffel, for the French audience would have been already familiar with



Paris and would not have needed any further symbol to identify it.

There is another element that reconnects to the metropolitan Parisian environment in *Der Sohn*: the character of Milacs' wife, who in the German version appears in a couple of scenes, for example through phone calls or a telegram mail. In *Der Sohn*, one of these scenes follows the sequence with the said press article: we are in Paris, in a luxurious café, and we see the shocked reaction of Milacs' wife apprehending the tragic news of her husband's (fake) death. Therefore, this scene not only brings us to the urban environment, but let us meet an additional, quite important character (indeed, the trap to Turri has been planned together by her and Milacs, as we will learn later in the film). So, the existence of Milacs' wife in Paris is filtered by phone calls, a telegram and by the reading of the press, but is still present and carries with her an urban environment which, even though briefly, contrasts with the otherwise omnipresent mountainous environment.

In *Les Chevaliers*, this is all very different. At the beginning of the film the wife does not call to the hotel, she just sends the telegram to Milacs and, more importantly, she never really appears on the screen. In fact, also in the credits, her character is not mentioned at all. In the French version, Milacs' wife only exists through her telegram – the textual level – and the verbal references of her husband. The plot stays the same but her physical presence is cut and, with her, the scene in the Parisian metropole, too. This way, also Paris (and, with it, the urban environment) gets to be partially erased, so that *Les Chevaliers* reduces its openness even further, especially when comparing it with the multi-national and multi-environmental *Der Sohn*.

A final example is the posters advertising the ski competition. At the encounter with Mary, Turri tells that his team runs for the '*Europa Meisterschaft in Skilaufen*', while Charlier mentions a '*Championnat de ski*'. This variation is confirmed by the posters of the competition. They appear several times in the background, for instance at the reception where the desk clerk works. They both display the same image of a skier, the location indicated is also the same (Zermatt), though the poster in *Der Sohn* says/indicates '*Europa Meisterschaft*'

Fig. 9
Scene displaying the articles 'Sensationeller Mord im Hochgebirge. Der Ingenieur Milacs von seinem Führer ermordet!' in German in *SwB* (links) and 'Crime Sensationnel en haute montagne. L'ingénieur Milacs assassiné par son guide' in French in *CdM* (right), though both are framed in the same first page of the magazine 'Paris-Soir'.

and that in *Les Chevaliers* only 'Championnat'. This testifies of a different attitude towards the otherwise identical event, the ski competition, which is presented as European only in *Der Sohn*. Our suggestion is that German productions were already relating to a European ideal, while French ones might have been less interested in stressing this aspect.

THE MUSICAL DIMENSION OF MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE BY GIUSEPPE BECCE

Film music is crucial, both for the aesthetic experience of the early mountain film and for the transcultural identification of the Alps in the genre, as we show with the example of *Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers*. It was the Italian composer Giuseppe Becce who particularly shaped the soundtrack of the mountain film genre. *Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers* was to mark the beginning of a collaboration between the Becce, Trenker and the French film producer Vandal et Delac, which had not yet been consolidated. His music was able to express 'the eternally changing panorama of the mountain world, the uncanny life of the clouds and the grandiose physiognomy of the mountains', as can be read in a German press release for his movie *Der Berg ruft* ("Bergspitzen" n.d.).

Considering the reception of his works, Becce is considered Germany's first film composer, collaborating with some of the most renowned directors during the silent era. *Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers* was to mark the launch of a decade-long collaboration with Trenker. Becce's preference for the mountain film genre can be traced to an aesthetic kinship with the silent film. In fact, there was no other sound film genre that had such long scenes with sparse dialogue and an overall documentary character as the mountain film and therefore demanded on the technique of the musical accompaniment, characteristic of silent cinema exhibition. Stylistically Becce's mountain film scores of the 1930s are also heavily influenced by music scored before the commercialization of synchronised sound in cinema, that is, for silent films. Becce's lyrical, heroic scores especially in combination with Trenker's spectacularly photographed forces of nature were in academic literature studied as propagandistic (Koepnick 2009, 122-123). However, Becce's film-musical style, which was influenced by Weber, Wagner and the tradition of symphonic poems, not only was consistent before, during and after 1945, but also represented a commonly used musical style in mainstream film productions until the 1950s. His repeated use of musical pastorals for the mountain landscapes (also in German-speaking *Heimatfilme*), which give expression to a modernist sentimentality, also corresponded to the conventionalized stylistic device for the tonal depiction of nature. Besides this, there is also noticeable influence of popular *Schlager* (sound film hits) – whether as source music or as nondiegetic soundtrack.

As discussed by Corinna Müller (2003), the exterior shots in the German-French coproduction *Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers* were shot without sound

recording. Both the sounds and the dialogues were post-synched, and the music passages added later. In addition to the adaptations of the respective language and cultural system, there are also differences on the musical level. In the following chapter, we will elaborate on the role of music in playing with the different nationalities and cultural elements in the respective film versions. More specifically, we will approach the different levels of film music analytically, extra-diegetic and diegetic music as well as the sound film hit *Wir Kameraden der Berge/Marche des Chevaliers De La Montagne* composed especially for the film by Becce.

MUSICAL 'AUTHORSHIP' AND EXTRA-DIEGETIC SIGNATURES OF THE ALPINE REGION

The level of extra-diegetic music immediately raises questions about musical 'authorship'¹² in the French-language version. During the final sequences of the film, a completely different music can be heard in the French and German-language version, the latter of which Becce composed.¹³ This is the sequence of the ski race, which lasts nearly ten minutes in both versions. The silently shot alpine panorama in Zermatt could have well been visually and musically adapted as a unifying element between the cultures, without the need to add another important difference between the two film versions. However, the fictional winter sports event in the Zermatt ski region was partially shot with two different cameras as well as we hear a completely different musical accompaniment in *Les Chevaliers* than in *Der Sohn*.

In *Les Chevaliers* it consists of a few monotonous motifs and rhythmic figures that sound in unison. In total, we hear 10 minutes of low-contrast effects and atmospheric music. If the refrain theme of the sound film hit *Wir Kameraden der Berge* were not sounded several times instrumentally, Becce's trace would have been blurred completely. The musical illustration of longer film scenes with more or less unchanged image subjects is actually one of the composer's specialties, which he had already stylized in the silent era.¹⁴ In the German version, on the other hand, we hear contrasting illustrative music very typical of Becce, consisting of motifs from the sound film hit, march-like rhythms, waltz-like themes, and rapid up-and-down sequences that correspond with the skiers' rapid movements. Instrumentally, woodwind and brass instruments, strings and percussion are used, making the accompanying music more contrasting. It is hard to imagine that problems with the copyright could have been the reason for a completely different extra-diegetic music for this final scene in *Les Chevaliers*. In the French version, there are film scenes that reveal Becce's characteristically suspenseful underscoring, even if somewhat altered by the editing of some scenes such as the one in which Milacs is searched for in the mountains.

In general, Becce's signature on the level of extra-diegetic film music is less to be found in *Les Chevaliers* than in *Der Sohn*. This has to do with the fact that some film scenes with extra-diegetic music from the German version do not appear in the French one or have been omitted. For example, the scene in *Der Sohn* at the beginning of the film where ski jumpers are shown competing for a minute and a half. In addition, we hear off-screen voices commenting on the sporting event and a rural utility music (*Gebrauchsmusik*) played instrumentally by a brass band, which corresponds very well with the identification of the Austrian origin of the actors and the fictional Austrian origin of Trenker in *Der Sohn*. For all practical purposes, the post scoring of the dialogue and the dubbing of the music would have allowed the scene to be used in *Les Chevaliers*, but the brass band music associated with the Austrian countryside probably disrupted the intra-national structure of the French version.

The scene after the ski jumping competition in *Der Sohn* likewise does not appear in *Les Chevaliers*. This is accompanied by the fact that an important musical topos associated with the Alpine region is also not heard. In *Der Sohn*, we see Trenker, Mary, and Milacs sitting on a mountain peak, with cuts to the cross-country skiers training in the snow-covered Alpine landscape. This is accompanied by oboe and clarinet passages as well as horn phrases. Becce repeatedly resorted to these typical characteristics of a musical pastoral for the setting of high mountain landscapes in mountain films as well as in *Heimatfilme*¹⁵. Becce thus joined a phenomenon of European artistic expression for the musical depiction of pastoral and rural life that had been received since antiquity. This tonal 'topoi' or 'code' associated with the Alpine region and circulating medially in works such as Richard Strauss's *Eine Alpensymphonie* (1915) is omitted entirely in *Les Chevaliers* by the omission of the scene. Only in the opening credits of the French version, when the Matterhorn is shown in close-up, one hears elements of the pastoral topos. The fact that the musical representation of the Alpine region was omitted in *Les Chevaliers* and thus also freed from a specific kind of audiovisual pathos perhaps already indicates the genre's own development in France, which indeed took on striking characteristics a decade later through Ichac.

DIEGETIC MUSIC AND NATIONAL REFERENCES

The diegetic film music is another important narrative element in the play with nationalities and the respective cultural adaptation strategies of the German-French versions. For example, right at the beginning in *Der Sohn*, while the three skiing buddies stop at a hut after meeting the French tourist for the first time during their training on the ski slope, Turri is teased by Morel. The friend insinuates that Turri likes '*die Französin*' and then whistles the Marseillaise, thus simultaneously locating Mary geographically via the whistled melody

of the French national anthem. In *Les Chevaliers*, this musical reference to France was cut out; it was probably not necessary within the intra-national conception of the film version. In *Der Sohn*, another national descriptor can be observed through the diegetic music, namely in the Paris scene already mentioned above, in which the 'sensational murder in the high mountains' is announced in the café. In *Der Sohn*, we see three coffeehouse musicians and hear a *chansonnière* singing along with them. Through the representation of the coffeehouse musicians, not only the atmosphere of the luxurious café, but rather the geographical location itself is made clearly audible to a German-speaking audience – and this primarily through the use of the French *chanson*. Just as in the Paris scene in *Les Chevaliers* the Eiffel Tower was omitted as a symbol of French identification, in the same scene we do not hear any music that should represent France.

A cultural adaptation of the diegetic film music to the respective film version can also be described by the use of the sound film hit *Wir Kameraden der Berge*. Apparently inspired by the songs of Ferruccio Biancini ("Febbrile attività" 1930, 6), the hit song was composed by Becce especially for the film, although it was to be heard again in later feature films and documentaries with an Alpine setting – for example in the feature film *Berge in Flammen*, which was made a year later. In *Der Sohn* as well as in *Les Chevaliers*, the song is used as a recurring motif linked – whether sung, whistled or instrumentally – to the three skiing companions, while the song in its sung manner has been adapted to the respective language and cultural system of this MV. We hear the refrain of the song in *Les Chevaliers* in French and in *Der Sohn* in German when the three ski buddies perform together. The linking of the song with the three skiers intervenes significantly in the dramaturgy of the film, since it is not only about the film hero Trenker, who defeats evil and energetically restores the disordered order, but also about the motif of comradeship, omnipresent in alpinist discourse.

The text was written by the German author Heddy Knorr. She worked as an author in numerous films in which Becce was responsible for the sound film hits.¹⁶ In accordance with the alpine subject matter, the text has as its content both the idealization and exaltation of the high mountain landscape and the heroic male comradeship experience in the mountains and could therefore be more easily communicated linguistically and adapted transculturally.

TRANSCULTURAL SOUND OF THE ALPS

The plurimedial dissemination of sound film hits, for example, in sheet music, records, music albums, or printed song texts is part of the conventions of the commercial evaluation of film music by the music industry, which gives the films a specific musical dimension and has a decisive influence on their memory-forming potential. The marketing of film music also provides information about the success of a film. The plurimedial distribution of *Wir Kameraden der Berge*

was to leave a lasting mark on the sound of the transnational and transcultural space of the Alps. The film song was distributed in different media in Germany, France and Italy parallel to the release of the film. In Germany, for example, a recording with two record stars of the Weimar Republic – the singer Paul O'Montis accompanied by the lightly swinging dance orchestra of Danjos Béla – appeared on the German label Odeon under the title *Wir Musketiere der Alpen* (1930) immediately two days after the film's release.¹⁷

In 1930, a recording under the same title with a record star of the Weimar Republic, namely Oskar Joost, was also released on the German label Electrola. The same recording from July 1930, also went on sale in France and Italy through *disque grammophone* and *disco grammofono*. Like Electrola, both labels belonged to the British Gramophone Company near Berlin. The distribution of the sound film hit with a German recorded text version in France and Italy can be traced back to the fact that German was spoken and consumed in the regions of Alsace-Lorraine and South Tyrol. After all, South Tyrol, located in the Alps, was predestined for the reception of the mountain and hiking song *Wir Kameraden der Berge*. A reception of Becce's hiking song in Alsace-Lorraine cannot be ruled out due to its geographical proximity to the Alps. In addition to the marketing of the song in various recordings, it was also distributed through sheet music editions in the transnational Alpine region and thus made available for the various practices of musical appropriation.

In 1930, for example, the song *Wir Kameraden der Berge* was published for voice and piano by the publishing houses Winkler & Harm (Innsbruck), by Anton J. Benjamin (Leipzig) and by Edition Meisel & Co (Berlin). Under the title *Marche des Chevaliers De La Montagne* and in the arrangement by Fryck Winners, Becce's sound film hit was also published in 1931 in a sheet music edition for orchestra and piano by the French music publisher E.M.A.C [Fig. 10].¹⁸ The French text was written by Pol Varence. The translation of the song text into French naturally allowed for a nationwide reception or cultural remembrance of *Les Chevaliers*. The distribution of the sound film hit in French also allows conclusions to be drawn about the popularity of *Les Chevaliers* or the popularization of the mountain film genre, which was to find an important starting point in France with *Les Chevaliers*. The transnational marketing of the song refers not least to the transcultural identification of the Alpine region.

THE ALPINE EPICENTRE

Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers is a succeeding model of MV. The two versions are based on the same screenplay, they have been created semi-simultaneously (Barnier 2013)¹⁹ and adapted by the same persons, though they have been shaped differently according to their targeting contexts. Indeed, the analysis of film, text and music lead altogether to a similar conclusion: by playing with different nationalities, having a European frame and displaying the metropolitan environment, *Der Sohn* is more internationally oriented than *Les Chevaliers*,

Fig. 10
Poster of the music
of *CdM, Marche des
Chevaliers De La
Montagne*, E.M.A.C.
1931, provided by
Museo Nazionale della
Montagna di Torino.

**1.° MARCHÉ DES
CHEVALIERS DE LA MONTAGNE**
2.° DE TOUTE MON ÂME TANGO

DU FILM

LES

**CHEVALIERS
DE LA MONTAGNE**

PRÉSENTÉ PAR MYNDAL, CH. DELAC ET J. DE MERLY



PAROLES DE
POL VARENGE
MUSIQUE DE
WALTER GOEHR

EDITIONS MUSICALES D'ADAPTATIONS CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUES

E.M. A.C.



PRIX : 1.50

which is the result of several relocations and adaptation strategies. The changes of location were emphasized primarily acoustically through the use of diegetic music, as reminded by the musical cue of the *Marseillaise* and the musician in the French café.

In the French version, the dimension of the 'other' is reduced to the minimum, since the action takes place in Zermatt, which is in Switzerland and not in France. Starting from the same point, that is, from the narratological and geographical epicentre of the Alps, *Der Sohn* goes more international and European, while *Les Chevaliers* goes more local and remains within the French context. We suggest that the reason for this might be that Trenker and mountain films were already well established in the German-speaking context at the time of the release of *Der Sohn*, while in France the first establishments of a mountain film genre coincided with the release of *Les Chevaliers* – as, has been shown, *Les Chevaliers* was also still marketed there as a sport film. In other words, the German version could count on an audience familiar with the genre, the romantic rhetorics of the Alps, and the film's main character, the romantic rhetorics of the Alps, and the film's main character, Luis Trenker, and thus could take a broader, more international direction.

The setting of the Alps, on the other hand, first had to find an audience in France. Arguably, with the intra-national structure within audiovisual narration, the new, mountainous film location could be brought closer and conveyed to a French audience of the time. Nevertheless, if one avoids the distinction of nationalities and urban environment, part of the transnational atmosphere remains in the French version as well. The film is actually set in a 'foreign' country, in the Swiss location of Zermatt, and we also acknowledge the presence of other national teams, for instance the Austrians who are the main competitors during the race in the final scene of the film. The fact that the location is not strictly French is not so problematic for *Les Chevaliers*, since the Alps bring with them a multinational environment. Because of their semantic openness, the Alps offer a particularly ideal setting for MVs, an 'open-air epicentre' for transcultural communication as well as for nationalization processes.

As a geographical territory at the intersection of several countries and cultures, the Alpine environment proves to be a privileged territory for diverse cinematic cultural transfers through *Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers*. This is also confirmed by the hit song *Wir Kameraden der Berge*, composed especially for the film: its international marketing illustrates how open the subject of the Alps was to transcultural appropriation practices, both through the sale of the German recordings in France and Italy and through the French version of the lyrics by a French publisher. In order to understand how the adaptation strategies of MVs worked together, it would be further interesting to link our analysis to the question of how the film and Becce's hit song circulated in countries such as Switzerland and Austria, which are close to the film production and content of the film. Since we know that a post-synchronized version of the film existed and circulated in Italy, a further comparative analysis of this French-German MV should primarily include the Italian context.

Since *Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers* is the first 'multiple *Bergfilm*' of the history of cinema, our analysis can serve as a solid basis for understanding the transcultural significance of the Alps in European cinema of the early 1930s, although again, the Swiss, Austrian, and Italian contexts of *Der Sohn/Les Chevaliers*'s reception and interpretation are missing for a broader assessment. Due to a lack of source insights on the Italian version of the film or a lack of resources for systematic research of press materials on the film in the aforementioned countries, we focused on the two cultural context the film was produced by.

To sum up, the 'multiple *Bergfilm*' by Trenker object of our paper contributes a deeper understanding of the significance of the Alps in European early sound film history and of the progressive medialisation of the alpine landscape through mountain films.

The authors would like to express our sincere thanks to Marco Ribetti, Museo Nazionale della Montagna di Torino, for his precious help and for allowing us access to the audiovisual material for research purposes.

Notes

¹ On the shifting conceptions of the Alps in cultural and intellectual history and the backgrounds of the history of the mountain film genre see Giesen 2008 and Baer 2016.

² German mountain film has received critical attention to date for its political, social, and aesthetic implications, but remarkably little about its role in the environmental history of the Alps. On the depiction of mountain films in the context of the development of Alpine tourism and the role of the media in environmental change. For an investigation on that topic see Peabody 2021. On the idea of climate history in constellation with modernity in early German mountain film see also Bush 2019.

³ The following abbreviations will be used from now on: MV(s) for multiple version(s).

⁴ The most prominent research on the phenomenon of the MVs has been conducted between 2002 and 2004, when the topic was actively revitalized by groups of film scholars in Hamburg, Germany, and especially in Udine, Italy. See for instance the issues of *Cinema & Cie* devoted specifically to MVs and to the concept of multiplicity (nn. 4-6, 2004-2006); Distelmeyer 2006; Antonini 2003). These essays raised fundamental questions about MVs and set the basis for future research. Next to them, Martin Barnier (2004) has specifically specialized on French-Hollywoodian oversea cases. The works by Joseph Garnarcz on the interrelation between languages and cultures, Malte Hagener on the transnational dimension of MVs, and Chris Wahl on UFA productions (all published in *Cinema & Cie*) have been especially useful to frame the current study.

⁵ The following abbreviations will be used from now on: *Der Sohn* for *Der Sohn der weißen Berge* and *Les Chevaliers* for *Les Chevaliers de la Montagne*.

⁶ Very few papers and scholars have researched the interrelation between MVs and music. Few exceptions are the ones involving the German-French MV *Die Dreigroschenoper / L'Opera de quat'sous* as well as the German, French and Italian coproduction *Paprika* (1932/33). See O'Brien 2006; Calabretto 2004; Zechner 2021.

⁷ In many cases, the MVs are not archivally accessible. Contrary to expectations, we were only able to find the French copy in the archive of the Mountain Museum in Turin, which plays a relatively minor role in Europe. However, this shows how important it is in the research of MV's to also give importance to the more local, specialized cultural heritage.

⁸ This reception was prominently represented by Siegfried Kracauer (2017) and Susan Sontag (1981).

⁹ In the international reassessment of the fictional, German mountain film, Eric Rentschler (1990) was one of the first to highlight the genre's dialectical relationship between 'untouched' nature on the one hand and modern technology on the other.

¹⁰ For a detailed analyses of both versions see Haque 2013.

¹¹ The fact that '*Tiroler Knödel*', of all things, are the favourite dish of a Swiss mountain guide was considered irritating in a film review of the 1930 German version with regard to the linguistic portrayal of the various nationalities, as was the fact that the Americans, French and Swiss in the German version all speak in the Berlin dialect. ("Alpine Literatur" 1930, 102–103).

¹² In many cases, film music is a collaborative effort. Especially in genre cinema, the music, as it is ultimately heard in the final soundtrack, is rather to be understood as a sequence of decisions. Conceptual preliminary stages of the film music can already be found, for example, in some scripts for Trenker's mountain films.

¹³ Part of the composed music of this final scene is available in the music collection of the German Film Institute in Frankfurt (DFF, Deutsches Filminstitut).

¹⁴ For example, his cinema pieces are characterized by flexible and lively architecture.

¹⁵ Maria Fuchs. 2024. "The Silences of the Woods: Heimat and Anti-Heimat", 19th century music, forthcoming.

¹⁶ For example, she wrote the lyrics for the sound film hits of *Berge in Flammen*, *Condottieri* or *Der Verlorene Sohn*.

¹⁷ According to Andreas Schmauder (owner of Phonopassion, an archive of historical sound carriers) the record was released on 14 August 1930.

¹⁸ An edition of the sheet music is in the French National Library.

¹⁹ The concept indicates MVs shot keeping time and space unity within the versions of a same title.

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