

Widerstand des Kinos: Anti-Nazi Sentiments and Resistance by Exiles of the German Film Industry

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Abstract

Before 1933, the German film industry was thriving and created some of the most famous films in World Cinema. After the rise of the Nazi Regime, many of the actors, producers, screenwriters, and directors responsible for German films were forced into exile. By examining films, interviews, and memoirs, this thesis explores the methods of anti-Nazi resistance used by German film exiles ranging from helping other refugees, refusing Nazi offers to return to Germany, participating in the allied cause for World War II, and making anti-Nazi films. In their new homelands, these exiles were able to express their defiance and resist the Nazis through their professional status and their art-form.

1. Introduction

Hedy Lamarr, the actress once described as the ‘most beautiful woman in the world,’ was much more than a pretty face. Originally named Hedy Kiesler, the Austrian-Jewish actress emigrated to the United States in 1937 after fleeing from her husband Fritz Mandl, owner of a munitions factory which supplied weapons to Italian Fascist forces.¹ In 1940, after war erupted in Europe, Lamarr told German-American composer George Antheil that she “did not feel very comfortable, sitting there in Hollywood and making lots of money when things were in such a state.”² Using her knowledge of weaponry gained from her association to Mandl along with her gift for invention, Lamarr—with the assistance of Antheil—developed the concept of a radio-controlled torpedo, which used frequency hopping technology to resist jamming by Nazi U-boats.³ On June 10, 1941, the pair patented their invention and hoped the United States military would utilize the torpedoes in combat against the Third Reich.⁴ Ultimately, the United States government rejected the device, citing that the torpedoes would be too heavy for use, yet Lamarr’s concept of frequency hopping—now known as spread-spectrum broadcasting—served as “the basis for the transmission of signals used in WIFI, bluetooth, cellphones, GPS and military technology.”⁵ Actress Hedy Lamarr attempted to wield her inventive skills and knowledge to assist the Allied forces against the Axis powers, but it would not be until many years later that her invention’s significance was truly realized.

While the story of Hedy Lamarr’s torpedo is quite unconventional, the practice of German film exiles resisting or defying the Third Reich was common. After Hitler came to power in 1933, many filmmakers opted for exile rather than working for or being persecuted by the Nazi Regime. According to estimates, around 800 members of the German film industry came to the United States between 1933 and 1945.⁶ Upon arriving in their new homeland, many of these émigrés chose to resist the Third Reich. Their forms of defiance do not adhere to the concept of armed opposition which is often commonly linked with resistance.⁷ For German film exiles, their art-form and their status as filmmakers and celebrities were their weapons to defy Nazism. By refusing to participate in the Nazi film industry, working alongside the Allied forces in World War II, and enlightening the American public to the brutality and manipulative nature of National Socialist ideology through entertainment films, German film exiles were able to actively resist the Nazi regime.

2. Historiography

Writings on exiles of the Third Reich did not begin until the late 1960s and 1970s. The historiographical lacuna on victims of Nazism until nearly thirty years after the end of World War II fits into the overall trend of German historical study. According to Robert G. Moeller, the German understanding and acknowledgment of the crimes and victims of the Third Reich was a slowly developing process.⁸ As a result of this gradual formation of German comprehension of the Holocaust and the Nazi Regime, scholars often left the stories of German exiles on the fringes of historical discourse. Some of the earliest texts in the field of German exile study were émigré and political activist Laura Fermi's *Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration from Europe 1930-1945* (1968) and film journalist John Baxter's *The Hollywood Exiles* (1976). These monographs are primarily dedicated to providing brief biographical descriptions of European émigrés in the United States but do not incorporate any in-depth analysis of the unique circumstances of their lives in exile.⁹ While these early works on European exiles of the 1930s and 1940s had shortcomings, Fermi's and Baxter's texts did contribute to the establishment of German exile studies.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the field of German exiles experienced a dramatic increase in scholarship. Film critic John Russell Taylor's *Strangers in Paradise: The Hollywood Emigres, 1933-1950* (1983), son of Jewish refugees and literary scholar Anthony Heilbut's *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America, from the 1930s to Present* (1984), and art historian Jean-Michel Palmier's *Weimar in Exile: The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America* (1987) all broadened the study of German émigrés, yet approached the subject in a similar fashion. All of these monographs examine how the German exiles influenced American culture.¹⁰ Taylor's *Strangers in Paradise*—which many historians view as the seminal work in the field of German exile studies—serves as the prime example of this approach. Taylor's text describes the careers and cultural impact of exiles from the fields of film, art, music, and performance arts after their immigration to the United States.¹¹ Additionally, members of the film industry were never the singular focus of the 1980's texts as scholars also incorporated the stories of other intellectual and artistic groups. In the 1990s, film historian Jan-Christopher Horak's article "German Exile Cinema, 1933-1950" (1996) and film historian Gene Daniel Phillips's *Exiles in Hollywood: Major European Film Directors in America* (1998) narrowed their focus solely on members of the German film industry who migrated to Hollywood, yet continued to follow writing trends established in Taylor's monograph by focusing on cultural impact.¹² While writings of the 1980s and 1990s further developed the field of German exiles, their singular focus on the émigrés' cultural influence ignores other potential qualities of the exile story which are worthy of exploration.

Scholars have recently developed new perspectives for examining German film exiles. In contrast to previous works on film émigrés, some recent monographs such as German literary scholar Erhard Bahr's *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (2007) and film historian Nicholas Smedley's *A Divided World: Hollywood Cinema and Émigré Directors in the Era of Roosevelt and Hitler, 1933-1948* (2011) use the exiles' stories to examine broader trends of the 1930s and 1940s. In *A Divided World*, Smedley utilizes the stories of German exile filmmakers as a means to juxtapose the political climates of Nazi Germany to the United States.¹³ Similarly, Bahr's *Weimar on the Pacific* uses the German exiles as a framework to discuss the crisis of modernity in the early 1900s.¹⁴ Other works, such as documentarian Karen Thomas's film *Cinema's Exiles: From Hitler to Hollywood* (2009) and film scholar Gerd Gemünden's book *Continental Strangers: German Exile Cinema, 1933-1951* (2014) have brought the concept of an 'exile experience' to the forefront of the discussion of German émigré filmmakers. *Cinema's Exiles* focuses on the difficulties experienced by refugee filmmakers trying to establish themselves in Hollywood.¹⁵ In *Continental Strangers*, Gemünden analyzes the films by German film exiles to understand how the movies' images and stories reflect the personal stories of the directors and screenwriters involved.¹⁶ These recent works have all pursued new methods for exploring the story of German exiles and facilitated the possibility for further fresh perspectives on the subject.

One topic which previous scholarship has not thoroughly explored is the anti-Nazi tendencies of German film exiles. While some texts from the 1980s and the 1990s do mention instances of exiles committing anti-Nazi defiance, the historical discourse only discusses specific groups of émigrés actions. For example, journalist Volkmar Zühlsdorff's *Hitler's Exiles: The German Cultural Resistance in the United States and Europe* (1998) only examines anti-Nazi defiance committed by scholars, journalists, authors, or politicians.¹⁷ Scholars' selection of only individuals considered their fellow members of the intelligentsia concerning resistance could result from an intentional or unintentional bias. For examining disdain for National Socialism among film exiles, historians have often solely relied on anti-Nazi movies. Scholars commonly mention these movies in either a biographical summary of a filmmaker, a general synopsis of émigré film genres, or in a chapter about a particular movie from the 1930s or 1940s, such as Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942). For instance, in "German Exile Cinema, 1933-1950," Horak only references

anti-Nazi pictures in a brief two-and-half pages of text during his broader discussion of exile film genres.¹⁸ The German exile cinema scholarship which features the most thorough examination of anti-Nazi films is Germünden's *Continental Strangers*. Four of the six case studies present in the book are about anti-Nazi films produced by German exiles.¹⁹ While *Continental Strangers* may contain the most discussion of anti-Nazi tendencies among German film exiles texts, Germünden still only looks at one possible method in which émigrés could voice their objections to Nazism. Although some previous monographs have briefly deliberated on the anti-Nazi sentiments of German film exiles, no scholarly works have been devoted solely to the subject.

While historians have frequently explored the stories of German exiles since the 1970s, scholars have often overlooked the anti-Nazi sentiments of these individuals. German exile studies' focus on the exiles' influence on American culture has caused the field's analysis to deviate from the cause of the refugee's plight: Nazism. As scholars appear to be diversifying their approach to the subject of German exiles beyond simply detailing the contribution of émigrés towards American culture, this thesis attempts to contribute to this shift by re-centering the historical discourse to exiles' lives and their resistance to the Nazis.

3. Into and In Exile

Among scholars who study German film exiles, there is no consensus regarding a definition for the term 'exile.' Although each historian uses a different set of criteria for the term, there are some similarities among these exiles' backgrounds which this thesis will use to define 'exile filmmakers.' All of the exiles explored in this thesis were either associated with Germany or employed as directors, screenwriters, actors, or other positions in the country's cinema before 1933. Also, the term 'German film exile' does not strictly apply to ethnic Germans because the pre-1933 German-language cinema was multi-ethnic. The majority of those involved in the German film industry were ethnically Jewish, and many of the most prominent directors and actors were immigrants from other countries, such as director Fritz Lang (Austrian), actor Peter Lorre (Hungarian) or director Anatole Litvak (Russian). Although these émigrés were from diverse ethnic backgrounds and arrived in the United States at different times, all German exile filmmakers had a relationship with German cinema that changed with Hitler's rise to power and formed their status as exiles, which was integral to their identities and to their reasoning for resisting the Nazi regime.

The story of German exile filmmakers begins in the Weimar Republic, Germany's first democratic government which existed from 1918 to 1933. Scholars and the general public often remember this period in German history for its vividly rich cultural environment, which produced fine works of art, music, architecture, and in particular, film. Weimar cinema is often described as "the Golden Age of German film," as the country was then one of the world's leading producers of movies, and its film industry even rivaled Hollywood's studio system.²⁰ The Weimar era's famous filmmakers, such as F.W. Murnau (director of *Nosferatu*) and Fritz Lang (director of *Metropolis* and *M*), and production companies such as Ufa produced some of the most famous examples of world cinema which still resonate today.

The rise of the Nazi Party to power in 1933 not only marked the end of the Weimar Republic but also signified the demise of German cinema's 'Golden Age.' Under the Nazi Regime, the Ministry of Propaganda and its minister Joseph Goebbels took control of the national film industry. According to Eric Rentschler, "film played a central role in the operations of the Ministry of Propaganda, serving as a mass mobilizer and an ideological weapon."²¹ In 1933, Goebbels founded the *Reichsfilmkammer*, an organization which all members of the German film industry had to join to obtain work.²² Additionally, Ufa—the leading production company of German film now under the control of Goebbels—fired all of its Jewish workers.²³ Like many aspects of Weimar society and culture, the creative freedom, innovative nature, and prowess of German cinema experienced a stark shift due to the rise of the Third Reich.

Nazism's control of the German government and the nation's film industry forced many filmmakers to chose exile. There were three distinct periods of migration for German exile filmmakers working in Hollywood by the start of World War II: pre-1933, 1933, and late 1930s. The pre-1933 émigrés were the earliest arrivals to the United States, and their exiled story was unique in comparison to later migrants. Starting in the early 1920s and continuing throughout the rest of the decade, Hollywood executives often recruited members of the German film industry to come to the United States to replicate their European success in the American market.²⁴ While the Nazis were not the primary cause of the pre-1933 exiles' migration, these émigrés are included in this thesis because as Gemünden states, due to ethnic or religious background or disagreements with NSDAP ideology, returning to Germany was no longer a valid option for many of these filmmakers due to the possibility of becoming recipients of Nazi persecution.²⁵ The second faction of exiles fled Germany in 1933 and faced decidedly different circumstances from their pre-1933 counterparts. This group fled Germany in response to the appointment of Hitler as chancellor in January 1933 and the subsequent

fallout from this event, such as the Reichstag fire, the reorganization of the German film industry, and the early anti-Jewish acts like the Civil Service Law.²⁶ The 1933 exiles comprised the largest exodus out of Germany during the Nazi period.²⁷ The final branch of German film exiles to arrive in the United States fled Europe in the late 1930s. Many members of this group initially escaped Germany to neighboring countries in 1933 believing the Nazi regime would soon fall, but new developments in Central Europe in the late 1930s—including the annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia, anti-Jewish actions like *Kristallnacht*, and the outbreak of World War II—forced these refugees into further exile.²⁸ The late 1930s exiles represented the largest group of émigrés to the United States.²⁹ Although members of the German film industry arrived in the United States under different circumstances, the same root cause formed their status as exiles: the rise and expansion of Nazi power in Europe.

Upon arriving in America, German film exiles often experienced drastic changes to their professional and personal lives. For post-1933 émigrés, one common alteration to their careers was their role and status in the film industry. Despite past successes in Germany, Hollywood “seemed little impressed with the past accomplishments and future potentials” of exiles, “however exalted their reputations,”³⁰ resulting in most filmmakers and actors having to slowly rebuild their careers by directing B-movies or starring in minor supporting roles.³¹ Some filmmakers, such as Billy Wilder, who screenwriter Curt Siodmak describes as “the most successful ‘immigrant’ motion picture writer and director Hollywood ever produced,” were able to overcome these barriers and find success in America³² while others, such as pioneer film director Joe May (1921’s *The Indian Tomb* and 1929’s *Asphalt*), never regained their previous prestige.³³ Not only did the émigrés leave behind their careers in Germany, but more significantly, members of their family remained in Europe. Many exile filmmakers were initially only able to secure passage for themselves. Some exiles, such as Salka Viertel (screenwriter of 1933’s *Queen Christina* and 1935’s *Anna Karenina*) who fought two years through the legal system to bring her mother over, were fortunate to obtain passage to America for family members.³⁴ However, after the United States entered World War II in 1941, the government tightened restrictions on immigration—which were already strict due to the ongoing Great Depression—and effectively ended the possibility of more exiles or their family emigrating to America.³⁵ As a result of immigration restrictions, many émigrés’ families remained in Europe throughout the war, often with tragic results. For instance, numerous family members of directors Billy Wilder and William Wyler were victims in the Holocaust.³⁶ Due to their migration, many émigré filmmakers endured personal and professional struggles which shaped their exile experience.

Although disoriented emotionally and professionally by their emigration and their new environment, many exiles worked together to help each other and form a community in Hollywood. Many exiles already established in Hollywood—predominantly pre-1933 émigrés—worked diligently to help former coworkers and friends. Some exiles, such as Salka Viertel and Paul Kohner, sent money overseas to pay for refugees’ passage to the United States, while others such as Marlene Dietrich, provided housing to new arrivals.³⁷ These acts of support were not carried out solely by individuals but also through organizations formed by exiles. In the late 1930s, a group of exiles consisting of agent Paul Kohner, director Ernst Lubitsch, actress Charlotte Dieterle, and Liesl Frank (wife of writer Bruno Frank) founded the European Film Fund. The fund’s primary goal was to provide money and jobs to newly arrived exiles through monthly contributions made by established émigrés and by providing work at major studios through contracts negotiated by Kohner.³⁸ As Paul’s brother Frederick Kohner states, the European Film Fund was “vital” because it “supported indigent artists and their families in the European colony who were unable to earn a living.”³⁹ The exiles’ system of support also extended into the formation of their community. Exiles would often gather together in each other’s homes to eat, socialize, and form working partnerships. According to Maria Riva (Marlene Dietrich’s daughter), “the German colony,” as it was often called, “was the most structured” and closely knit of all the foreign filmmakers living in Los Angeles.⁴⁰ Although German film exiles were forced to flee Europe, they stuck together, helping each other through their troubling experiences.

The rise of Nazism in Europe forced hundreds of German filmmakers and actors to choose exile rather than returning to or staying in Germany. As a result of their decision to leave behind their former homelands, many émigrés relinquished their former lives, left behind their families, and often never returned to their former prominence in film. Despite these struggles, German émigrés filmmakers aided each other and formed a community in Hollywood based on their identities as exiles of the Nazi Regime. The forced decision to become exiles ignited or reinvigorated anti-Nazi sentiments among film émigrés.

4. Nazi Offers

The leaders of the Nazi Party noted the emigration of filmmakers from Germany. For the Nazi regime, film was to be an integral part of their campaign of domination in Europe. As Antje Ascheid states, “the orchestration of monumental

spectacles and the programmatic use of film images for propaganda...were integral to National Socialist politics.”⁴¹ To achieve their propagandist goals for cinema, the Nazis offered lucrative positions in their reconfigured film industry to both those who fled and those still present in the country. Many members of the former Weimar film industry accepted these offers and continued to work for the new regime while others defied the Nazi leadership and chose exile instead.

The most desirable of all the émigrés in the minds of the Nazi Party was Marlene Dietrich (*A Foreign Affair*, *Witness for the Prosecution*, *Judgement at Nuremberg*). Now regarded by critics and audiences as the most famous German actor ever, Dietrich was already Hollywood star when the Nazis assumed power.⁴² She arrived in Hollywood in 1930 per the request of director Josef von Sternberg (*The Blue Angel*, *Morocco*, *Shanghai Express*, all which star Dietrich).⁴³ After 1933, Nazi officials approached Dietrich on multiple occasions to become “the ‘queen’ of the German film.”⁴⁴ According to Erica Carter, the Nazis were searching for a “key figure on the international stage [which] combined the qualities of Germanness with the world stature that Goebbels demanded. That figure was Marlene Dietrich.”⁴⁵ The Ministry of Propaganda was so intent on bringing Dietrich back to Germany that they wielded every weapon at their disposal to force her to return. According to Eric Rentschler, Goebbels “issued directives prohibiting negative words about Dietrich” in the press to allow her reputation to remain high, in hopes of her return.⁴⁶ Upon receiving the NSDAP’s offers, Dietrich intentionally misled Goebbels and the Propaganda Ministry by stating she would gladly make a film for them if Josef von Sternberg could direct, when in reality—as a vehement anti-Nazi—she had no intentions of returning.⁴⁷ Despite the Nazi Regime’s many requests for her talents, Marlene Dietrich never succumbed to their lucrative offers.

Marlene Dietrich was not the only former member of the German film industry who was offered a position in the newly reformed German cinema. The Ministry of Propaganda also approached Dietrich’s husband, Rudolf Sieber, for a role in the Nazi film industry.⁴⁸ According to Dietrich, Sieber—a former assistant director of Joe May—received a proposal from the Nazis to become the head of Ufa, but left Berlin that same day to join her in exile.⁴⁶ Similarly, in potentially the most infamous account of Nazis offering positions to exile filmmakers, Joseph Goebbels also attempted to coerce director Fritz Lang to take the position as the head of the German film industry, which he also refused before fleeing.⁵⁰ Another noteworthy example of a German actor or filmmaker refusing to cooperate with the Nazis was actor Conrad Veidt (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Waxworks*, *The Thief of Baghdad*, and *Casablanca*). As a prominent figure in both German and American films during the 1920s, the Nazis offered Veidt—similar to Dietrich—the role as the leading star of their reconfigured German cinema, but on one condition: he must divorce his new Jewish wife, Ilona Barca Prager.⁵¹ According to J.C. Allen, Veidt “refused to cooperate with the Nazis” and opted to express his revulsions of the party and its ideology vocally.⁵² For exiles with anti-Nazi sentiments, there was no possibility that they would accept any proposition from the Nazi regime, no matter the potential benefits for themselves.

Not all members of the German film industry rejected offers from the Ministry of Propaganda to stay and be the stars of Nazi Cinema. Established actors such as Willy Fritsch, Hans Albers, and Heinz Rühmann all continued their on-screen success from the Weimar period into the Third Reich. Some of these actors, such as Emil Jannings (winner of the first Academy Award for Best Actor in 1929) worked in Hollywood in the 1920s but chose to return to Germany due to the transition from silent to sound films or because of their support for the Nazis.⁵³ While the return of these stars helped the Third Reich find success in the film industry, the overall mass exodus of filmmakers and actors from the country delivered a severe blow to Nazi cinema. According to Sabine Hake, the Ministry of Propaganda built Nazi cinema based on a star system.⁵⁴ The exodus of actors from the German film industry left the star system starved for talent. In response, as German actor under the Nazis Willy Fritsch stated, the regime looked towards international markets for potential replacements.⁵⁵ Many of these new stars of German film were meant to emulate exile actors, such as Zarah Leander who Nazis promoted as the next Marlene Dietrich.⁵⁶ These new stars along with the established talent from the Weimar era both contributed to Nazi film propaganda. Werner Krauss (actor in 1920’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1925’s *Joyless Street*, and 1939’s *Robert Koch*) was the official ‘state actor’ (*Staatschauspieler*) of the Nazi Regime and played multiple roles in the 1940 anti-Semitic film *Jud Süß*.⁵⁷ The majority of filmmakers and actors from the pre-1933 German film industry continued their work under the Nazis, demonstrating the uniqueness of the exiles’ choice to not participate.

When actors and filmmakers refused offers from the Ministry of Propaganda to return to or remain in Germany, the Nazis demonstrated their displeasure with the exiles’ acts of defiance. In response to the exiles’ rejection of Nazi offers, the Propaganda Ministry attempted to either eliminate film émigrés’ existence from public knowledge in Germany. According to Steven Bach, as early as April 1933, Nazi officials “began revoking citizenship of some of Germany’s greatest names and artists” and deemed these individuals *personas non grata*.⁵⁸ As actor Paul Henreid (*Casablanca*) who was deemed an ‘enemy of the Reich’ explained, being blacklisted by the Nazis hindered film professionals’ abilities to receive any opportunities in cinema, as they could no longer prove their credentials to executives.⁵⁹ The Nazis also monitored the exiles’ locations and actions overseas. Screenwriter Curt Siodmak (1941’s

The Wolf Man) recalled being “traced [by Nazi officials] through German embassies to London,” and placed “on the Nazi extermination list in 1937.”⁶⁰ Additionally, the NSDAP created propaganda campaigns against former stars to distort their image within Germany. Just as the Nazis pursued Marlene Dietrich more than any other star, they administered the most severe propaganda campaign against her. As her fellow actor Willy Fritsch stated when the Nazis abandoned efforts to bring Dietrich back to her homeland, all German newspapers and magazines published defamatory remarks against her.⁶¹ Overall, these efforts by the Nazi Regime to ruin the reputation of exiles within their former homeland worked. On her return tour to Germany in 1960, Dietrich faced animosity from German audiences and even boycotts for her performances.⁶² Her experience was quite common among exiles, as Palmier states, the migration of the German film community to other countries was “equated with desertion or treason” for decades after World War II.⁶³ The different measures enacted by the Ministry of Propaganda to ruin exiles’ reputations within Germany demonstrate how deeply the émigrés’ rejection against offers to be members of Nazi cinema ailed the regime and its leaders.

With the fleeing of many of the famous stars and filmmakers in German film, the Nazi Regime responded by offering certain exiles the opportunity to return to their homeland and become the preeminent figures of Nazi cinema. The most steadfast of filmmakers rejected these offers, chose exile, and were vocal about their disgust with Nazi politics. The loss of filmmakers and actors to other nations was devastating to the German film industry and forced the Ministry of Propaganda to retaliate. The Nazi reprisal against the exiles did hurt their reputations in their former homelands, yet they withstood these threats.

5. War Effort

With the United States’ entry in World War II in 1941, many members of the American film industry joined the war effort. Many Hollywood actors and filmmakers enlisted in the military or found other methods of supporting the cause, such as selling war bonds or performing on USO tours. Members of the exile community also contributed to the Allied cause through these manners, yet their role in the conflict was very personal. For European émigrés, supporting the war against Nazi Germany meant fighting the regime responsible for their exile. Many émigrés contributed extensively in the battle against the Axis Powers and were among the most conspicuous members of the Hollywood film industry to participate in the Allied cause.

One of the most common resources that members of the film community utilized to show support for the Allied cause was the USO. According to Emily Yellin, “the United Service Organization was formed in February 1941...[to boost] the morale of the military.”⁶⁴ Many of the most famous stars, exiles and non-exiles alike, performed for troops on tours organized by the USO at home and abroad. Of all the actors to appear on USO tour stages, none was a more prominent and permanent fixture than Marlene Dietrich.⁶⁵ From April 14, 1944 to late May 1945, Dietrich performed four times a day for Allied soldiers.⁶⁶ Attached to General George S. Patton’s Third Army, she stayed near the front, moving from Casablanca, then up through Italy, then into France and the Netherlands.⁶⁷ Later, she convinced General Omar Bradley to allow her to stay with the troops as they entered Germany, despite fears that Axis forces would capture her.⁶⁸ Dietrich’s work in the USO was very personal to her, and she devoted herself fully to the role. After the war, Dietrich described her experience with the USO as “the best role she was ever given, the role she loved the most, the one that was to bring her the greatest success.”⁶⁹ For her efforts during the war, Dietrich received numerous medals from Allied nations, such as the French Legion of Honor and the United States Medal of Freedom.⁷⁰ Dietrich’s experience with the USO serves as only one example of the devotion of some exiles to boosting the morale of troops and reaffirming their commitment to the Allied cause.

Contributing to the Allied cause did not only occur abroad, as many exiles demonstrated support through efforts on the home front. One of the most common methods for exiles and non-exiles to contribute, as Yellin states, was “through opening and performing at a string of canteens in large cities across the country, where [celebrities] would entertain the troops, serve them food, and dance with them.”⁷¹ The presence of Hollywood stars in these establishments had a profound effect on the servicemen who attended. According to Riva, “at the [Hollywood] Canteen, those unreachable ‘gods’ stepped down from the silver screen and turned into flesh-and-blood people, suddenly touchable,” and provided young soldiers with entertainment, relief, and a morale boost.⁷² Exiles such as Marlene Dietrich and Hedy Lamarr contributed to the canteens in manners such as making sandwiches for soldiers and washing dishes.⁷³ This pair was also very active in the other most common method of contributing to the war while still in America: selling war bonds. To sell bonds, the United States Treasury organized tours across the country where stars, as Dietrich states, performed “six to eight hours a day,” before moving onto the next city to raise more funds.⁷⁴ On her bond tours, Hedy Lamarr was the main attraction. According to a reporter, during a war bond drive in New Jersey, a passionate

crowd of 15,000 to 20,000 gathered to see Lamarr needed police enforcement to be placed under control.⁷⁵ Bond drives were able to translate this excitement into monetary support for the Allies. For instance, Hedy Lamar raised \$6,804,850 for the war effort in one day through two appearances in Philadelphia.⁷⁶ On the home front, German exile actors and actress were able to use their professional status to raise funds and boost morale for the Allied cause.

At the battlefield, a few exiles supported the Allied cause by participating in the armed forces. Joining the military was quite common among Hollywood stars after the United States' entry in World War II, as "one-third of Hollywood's male workforce" enlisted.⁷⁷ Most exiles were not allowed to enlist since they were labeled 'enemy aliens' by the United States government.⁷⁸ Some exiles joined their home countries' military, such as actor Jean Gabin (1937's *The Grand Illusion*, 1938's *Port of Shadows*) who enrolled in the French Freedom Forces.⁷⁹ Many exiles who found positions in the United States military used their talents as filmmakers to promote the fight against Nazism.

One exile who was able to enlist in the United States military and who used his artistry to contribute to the Allied cause was three-time Academy Award winner for Best Director William Wyler (1942's *Mrs. Miniver*, 1946's *The Best Years of Our Lives*, 1959's *Ben-Hur*). According to Wyler, he enlisted in the Air Force in 1942 because "I felt I had to go in and see if I could make a contribution."⁸⁰ Wyler joined as a filmmaker and completed two documentaries, *Memphis Belle* (1944) and *Thunderbolt* (1947), for the War Department. Before making the films, Wyler went through extensive aircraft and weapon training alongside combat soldiers, in the event he was needed to operate a machine gun.⁸¹ During his work on the documentaries, the planes Wyler occupied while filming were frequently involved in combat, where he experienced the hardships of war, such as the loss of comrades (including one member of his film crew) and personal injury when he received permanent hearing loss while making *Thunderbolt*.⁸²

Wyler's two films produced for the War Department depicted the anxieties and excitement of aerial combat during the Second World War. 1944's *Memphis Belle* follows the crew of a B-17 Flying Fortress during a mission to drop bombs over Wilhelmshaven, Germany, and 1947's *Thunderbolt* demonstrates the tactical maneuvers of P-47 Thunderbolts during Operation Strangle, the Air Force's strategy to cut Nazi supply lines to Italian Fascist forces.⁸³ In both films, Wyler attempted to instill a sense of realism to the action by forming a personal connection between the audience and the soldiers on screen. Wyler accomplishes his goal for the films through two methods: by placing the camera alongside the crew of the *Memphis Belle* and the single pilot for *Thunderbolt*'s P-47s as they are in the mid-air acrobatics of combat and by including footage of the airmen's lives on the ground between battles.⁸⁴ The intense realism of the documentaries made a lasting impression on the audiences on the home front. In a review written during *Memphis Belle*'s initial release, Bosley Crowther stated, "it is so vivid, in conjunction with the daily news of raids, that it almost pervades the spectator with an illusion of personal experience."⁸⁵ Wyler's documentaries also differed substantially from other propaganda films made by other Hollywood directors for the War Department. Neither of Wyler's war films featured overt propaganda like some of Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series, most notably the jingoist overtones of *Know Your Enemy: Japan*.⁸⁶ Additionally, the realism of *Memphis Belle* and *Thunderbolt* starkly contrasted the staged scenes of combat featured in Capra's *Tunisian Victory* and John Houston's *Battle of San Pietro*.⁸⁷ For *Memphis Belle*, the War Department asked Wyler to shoot re-creation footage of the flying sequences, but he refused, arguing that these false images would compromise the realities of the front.⁸⁸ During his service in the United States Armed Forces, William Wyler produced two honest and emotional documentaries which communicated the realities of air combat to the American public.

The exiles' contribution to the Allied cause against the Axis Powers did not end with the German surrender on May 8th, 1945. For director Billy Wilder, the conclusion of the war marked the beginning of his service for the United States Armed Forces. In April 1945, Wilder "received an offer of the post of Chief of the Office of War Information Entertainment Division in that part of Germany which the United States will occupy."⁸⁹ One of his earliest assignments was as producer, supervising director, and editor for the documentary *Todesmühlen (Death Mills)*. The film, an un concealed propaganda picture, was composed of images of concentration camps liberated by British and Soviet forces.⁹⁰ During the editing process, Wilder chose which shots to include, basing his decision on which images would have the greatest emotional impact on the audience.⁹¹ While the tone of *Death Mills* is more reflective of the overt propaganda which differed from William Wyler's work during the war, the documentary's distressing images of the frail survivors and heaps of dead spoke volumes for the motivations to resist and condemn the Nazi Regime.⁹² For Wilder, the German public was the intended audience for the film. He stated that he wanted "to show this film to as many Germans as possible" as a means of exposing them to the true horror of the camps and as a prevention of Holocaust denial.⁹³ Upon the project's completion, the American occupying forces fulfilled Wilder's ambitions by screening *Death Mills* before German audiences. According to Wilder, they previewed the film in Würzburg, where the majority of the spectators left before the screening finished, horrified and in denial of the images on the screen.⁹⁴ To coerce the German people to bear witness to the atrocities committed by the Nazi Regime, Wilder orchestrated for German viewers to not obtain stamps on their bread ration cards until they watched the entire film.⁹⁵ Billy Wilder's

role in *Death Mills*'s production and distribution demonstrated his commitment to revealing the true darkness of National Socialism to those he once considered his fellow countrymen.

Billy Wilder's endeavors for the American occupying forces did not end with his work on *Death Mills*. In addition to editing that film, the government tasked Wilder with de-Nazifying the German film industry. From April 1945 to September 1945 Wilder "was chief of the movie division of the American Information Control Division in Germany."⁹⁶ In this role, Wilder helped determine which films should be shown to Germans, which also explains how he was able to implement the ration measures for the German screening of *Death Mills*.⁹⁷ Additionally, the War Department asked Wilder to create the rules for rebuilding the German film industry. As Wilder stated, "I was doing the rules and regulations...writing the book on how to release pictures in [post-war] Germany."⁹⁸ Wilder's contribution to the process of rebuilding the German film industry along with his work on *Death Mills* both serve as an example of ironic yet bittersweet justice. By orchestrating the plans to salvage the film industry tainted by Nazism and also to expose Germans to the real horrors committed by the Nazis, Wilder, an Austrian Jew, was able to enact some revenge against the Third Reich, the regime which forced him to flee his adopted homeland and murdered the majority of his family at Auschwitz.

Throughout World War II, many exiles demonstrated their support for the Allies against the Axis powers. Exiles such as Marlene Dietrich and Hedy Lamarr devoted themselves wholeheartedly to raise support for the war effort while filmmakers William Wyler and Billy Wilder used their filmmaking talents to show the American public the reasons why their country was fighting the Nazis. For each of these exiles, for each of these exiles, their personal connection to the enemy nation embodied their dedication to the cause, and they used these feelings to assist in defeating the regime which turned them into exiles.

6. Anti-Nazi Films

The most common method in which German film exiles expressed their anti-Nazi sentiments was through their art form: cinema. From the beginning of World War II in 1939 and into the post-war years, anti-Nazi entertainment films became the primary genre for exiles. During the United States' involvement in World War II, approximately 160 anti-Nazi films were released.⁹⁹ While these movies were not primarily intended to be pure propaganda, their entertainment aspect provided a perfect cover to express anti-Nazi sentiments to the audience. As Klaus Mann stated, the use of anti-Nazi films was to "enlighten the American public as to the terrific Nazi threat to this country, its economic interests and its way of life; to deepen and to intensify the knowledge and the horror of everything Hitler is and stands for."¹⁰⁰ These movies were very effective in rallying the American public against Nazism by highlighting the brutality and manipulative nature of the regime. Anti-Nazi films provided German exiles with the perfect opportunity to allow their feelings towards Hitler and the regime to be heard.

For anti-Nazi films, a question arises on the authority exile filmmakers held over their pictures. In the 1930s and 1940s, movie studios asserted the highest authority over the production process, preventing filmmakers from possessing complete control over their creations. Additionally, censorship guidelines outlined by the Motion Picture Production Code (often referred to as the Hays Code) often prevented filmmakers from realizing their exact artistic vision onto the screen. According to Gemünden, the Motion Pictures Association of America (MPAA) "banned all production on anti-Nazi films" two weeks after Germany's invasion of Poland as an act of solidarity with Franklin Roosevelt's decision to stay neutral in the war.¹⁰¹ The MPAA's and studios' stance against anti-Nazi films changed with the country's entry into World War II in December 1941—simultaneously reflective of America's outlook on the conflict. This reversal of Hollywood attitudes towards the war is demonstrated through the response of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer head Louis B. Mayer to a scene in William Wyler's 1942 anti-Nazi film *Mrs. Miniver*. During the production process of the film in 1941, Mayer criticized the depiction of a German officer, who holds the titular Mrs. Miniver at gunpoint in her home.¹⁰² Mayer told Wyler, "I want to remind you that we're not making a hate picture...we're not at war, we don't hate anybody."¹⁰³ In response to Mayer's critique, Wyler threatened to quit as director if the scene was not included in the film.¹⁰⁴ After American entry into the war, Mayer completely reversed his thoughts towards the scene and even complimented Wyler for featuring it in the picture.¹⁰⁵ This story demonstrates how drastically Hollywood's feelings towards the war altered after American entry, thus allowing directors and screenwriters more freedom to express their anti-Nazi sentiments through film.

Through the medium of film, exiles tried to communicate specific messages about Nazism and World War II to the American viewing public. Although the intent of the filmmakers differed for each film, some common themes are present through numerous anti-Nazi pictures. One of the most frequent directives present in anti-Nazi films was to expose the viciousness of the Nazi Regime to the American public. Perhaps the most apparent demonstration of this

message in a movie directed by an exile was *Hangmen Also Die!*. This 1943 film, directed by Fritz Lang and written by fellow exile Bertolt Brecht (playwright *The Threepenny Opera*, *Kuhle Wampe*, *Life of Galileo*), dramatizes the assassination of Deputy Protector of Bohemia and Moravia Reinhard Heydrich, which occurred on May 27, 1942. Told through the perspective of Czech resistance fighters, the film displays the brutal reprisals inflicted by Nazi officials on the citizens of Prague which materialized in the aftermath of the assassination.¹⁰⁶ The images from the film, such as a Nazi firing squad murdering hostages after the Gestapo told their families the prisoners would be released, demonstrated the ruthlessness of the Nazi regime to the audience.¹⁰⁷ Another common message which anti-Nazi films promoted was the increase in American participation in the fight against Nazism. This theme is present in perhaps the most famous anti-Nazi film made by an exile, 1942's *Casablanca* directed by Michael Curtiz. In the film, the protagonist Rick Blaine (American Humphrey Bogart), assists his former lover Ilsa (Swede Ingrid Bergman) and her resistance fighting husband Victor Lazlo (Austrian exile Paul Henreid) as they flee Nazi forces.¹⁰⁸ Blaine's transformation over the course of the film from an isolationist who "sticks [his] neck out for nobody,"¹⁰⁹ to a collaborator in the escape of Nazi fugitives mirrors the United States pre-1941 position on World War II and the eventual American entry into the conflict. Through the story of Blaine, meant as a reflection of the American public, *Casablanca* attempts to convince the audience to fully support the Allied cause. Exile anti-Nazi films attempted to expose the brutality of the Nazi Regime to the American audience, while also stimulating their support for the war effort.

To communicate their anti-Nazi messages in their movies, exiles utilized a variety of filmmaking techniques. Genre was one method exiles used to convey their anti-Nazi sentiments. Exile filmmakers created anti-Nazi films which spanned a variety of genres including comedy, drama, romance, and suspense. Ernst Lubitsch's 1942 film *To Be or Not To Be* serves as an example of the use of comedy in an anti-Nazi movie. Well-known for his screwball comedies, Lubitsch strikes a delicate balance between comedic and serious tones in *To Be or Not To Be*. He mocks Nazism by depicting Nazi characters as inane and incompetent, yet removes all humor from the film in scenes portraying the struggle of Poles under occupation, such as posters telling citizens they will be interned for not following Nazi rules.¹¹⁰ According to Lubitsch, he intended to balance these tones in the film as a way to satirize "Nazis and their ridiculous ideology," and "remind [American audiences] of the destruction of the Nazi conquest, of the terror regime of the Gestapo."¹¹¹ The choice of story also was vital to conveying anti-Nazi messages in films. As mentioned in the discussion of *Hangmen Also Die!*, dramatized versions of actual events provided ample source material for anti-Nazi films. Another movie which utilized an autobiographical account as the basis for its story was Billy Wilder's *Stalag 17*, based on a play written by actual prisoners of Stalag 17B Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski.¹¹² Another artistic choice utilized by both Wilder and Lubitsch in their movies to communicate anti-Nazi messages were the images shown on screen. In Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* and in Wilder's *A Foreign Affair* (1948) audiences see the remains of Warsaw (Lubitsch) and Berlin (Wilder), two metropolises consisting of destroyed buildings and piles of rubble in the aftermath of Nazi terror (Warsaw) and the fight to end its power (Berlin).¹¹³ These images of devastation were included by the filmmakers to demonstrate the destruction of Europe left in the wake of Nazism. For their films, exiles made deliberate artistic choices to enhance the overall anti-Nazi message.

Another method filmmakers used to convey anti-Nazi sentiments were characters and the casting of actors in these roles. Often directors and screenwriters used dialogue spoken by characters to state their personal feelings towards Nazism and the war. For example, at the end of *Mrs. Miniver*, a priest delivers a monologue to his congregation advocating that "this is not just a war of soldiers in uniform; it is a war of the people... It is our war. We are the fighters. Fight it then; fight it with all that is in us."¹¹⁴ Statements by characters in anti-Nazi films such as those by *Mrs. Miniver*'s priest could be effective means of transmitting the exiles' feelings and beliefs to their audience, especially if the movie's speaker was relatable or convincing. Casting in these films also played a strategic role in how exiles could communicate their anti-Nazi sentiments. Many of the most famous antagonists in exiles' anti-Nazi films were played by German actors, such as Conrad Veidt as Major Strasser in Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca*, Erich von Stroheim as Field Marshal Rommel in *Five Graves over Cairo*, and Otto Preminger as Colonel von Scherbach in *Stalag 17*. In some films, such as *Casablanca*, the majority of the cast is composed of European exiles.¹¹⁵ Often these casting choices were deliberate. For his film *Hangmen Also Die*, Fritz Lang said that he decided to use American actors for the Czech protagonists and German actors for the Nazi antagonists as a way to "explain to an American audience what it means if a country is overrun by foreign soldiers, by foreign governments, by foreign powers, with absolutely other ideals as political ideals."¹¹⁶ These roles also allowed exile actors to contribute in anti-Nazi resistance through film. Characterization and casting of roles in anti-Nazi films served as yet another manner in which exiles could communicate their anti-Nazi sentiments to their viewing audience.

As the aim of anti-Nazi films by exiles was to convince Americans to support the fight against Nazism, positive audience reception was crucial; in most instances, these films were well received. Many anti-Nazi films were financially successful. While many "escapist" films prevailed at the top of the box office, many pictures containing

plots dealing with the war were popular among the audience in the United States and Allied troops abroad as long as the public found the movies entertaining.¹¹⁷ For example, the top grossing films for some studios in 1942—*Mrs. Miniver* for MGM and *To Be or Not to Be* for United Artists—were anti-Nazi pictures produced by exiles.¹¹⁸ Additionally, many anti-Nazi films received widespread critical success. Two of the anti-Nazi films directed by exiles were winners of the Academy Awards for Best Picture: William Wyler's *Mrs. Miniver* in 1943 and Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* in 1944. As then-contemporary film critic Bosley Crowther stated, some of the most critically acclaimed movies made during the early 1940s were films concerning the war.¹¹⁹ Not all anti-Nazi films produced by exiles received acclaim. Critics and audiences chastised some pictures based on the filmmakers' choices in depicting the war. In a review of *To Be or Not to Be*, a journalist criticized the film's use of comedy and stated that "the butchery of a people would hardly be matter for jest."¹²⁰ While these critiques of both films do contain some merit, they are also misguided as they failed to understand the filmmakers' intentions. In response to critiques of *To Be or Not to Be*, Lubitsch stated that the purpose of the film's humor was to mock the Nazis and their ideology, not to create jokes "at the expense of Poland or the Polish people."¹²¹ In most instances, anti-Nazi films created by exiles effectively communicated their message to the American public.

For exiles, their art form, cinema, was the ideal method of communicating their anti-Nazi sentiments to the American public. In these films, exiles were able to tell entertaining stories which also illustrated the barbarism actions and ideological fallacies of the practitioners of National Socialism. Exiles utilized a variety of filming techniques and employed other exiles to assist in conveying their visions. The anti-Nazi films created by exiles helped the American public understand why they should combat the Nazi Regime.

7. Conclusion

The rise of Hitler and National Socialism to power in 1933 forced then-current and past members of Germany's film industry to either not return, flee, or stay in the country. The involuntary decision of many filmmakers and actors to become exiles and join the American film industry upended their professional and personal lives. Many movie professionals overcame the obstacles of life as émigrés in the United States to devote themselves to a personal cause: to defy Nazism. Anti-Nazi resistance by German film exiles took numerous forms. Some exiles such as actress Marlene Dietrich and actor Conrad Veidt denied offers to become the leading stars of Nazi cinema despite reprisals which ruined their reputations in their former homeland. Other émigrés lent their talent and professional status in support of the war effort like director William Wyler through propaganda films and Hedy Lamar through raising money and boosting morale on the home front. The most common method exiles used to fight the Third Reich were anti-Nazi entertainment films, which communicated the nefarious nature of the regime's acts and ideology to the American public. No matter the method film émigrés employed to combat Nazis, these individuals were able to use their professional status and art-form as weapons to defy the regime which forced them to become exiles.

Past historians in the field of German exile studies have often overlooked émigré filmmakers' acts of anti-Nazi resistance. No previous work in the field has been devoted solely to the subject of anti-Nazi defiance by film professionals. While the defiance committed by film exiles differ from the most famous examples of anti-Nazi resistance, such as The White Rose or Operation Valkyrie, the acts carried out by this group of émigrés are no less significant or less worthy of historical analysis. Recent works by Karen Thomas and Gerd Gemünden have countered the previous trend of scholarly works to simply examine German film émigrés' influence on American cinema by shifting focus to the lives and experiences of these exiles. Thomas's and Gemünden's efforts have both pushed the field of exile studies in a new direction, opening the possibility for new perspectives on the subject of German exile filmmakers. By examining the resistance aspect of this group of exiles' lives, this thesis aims to continue the developments in the field of exile studies started by Thomas and Gemünden, while also illuminating an aspect of German film exiles which previous historians have often neglected.

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