



Ohm Krüger's Travels: A Case Study in the Export of Third-Reich Film Propaganda

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Abstract • The Nazi propaganda film *Ohm Krüger* (Uncle Krüger, 1941) utilized former South African statesman Paul Kruger and his role in the Boer War to promote a virulently anti-British message. By analyzing the international career of *Ohm Krüger*, this article reassesses the propaganda value traditionally ascribed to the film in an attempt to encourage further research on the exportation of Third-Reich cinema. The parallels between the British invasion and occupation of Boer land, as represented in the film, and the Nazis' invasion and occupation of European countries were so striking that *Ohm Krüger* was exported almost exclusively to nations allied with Germany while being withheld from occupied territories. The one notable exception was France, which had a long tradition of anti-British sentiment.

Keywords • Boer War, Joseph Goebbels, Emil Jannings, Nazi cinema, *Ohm Krüger* (Uncle Krüger), Hans Steinhoff, World War II

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On 1 October 1941, the French-dubbed version of *Ohm Krüger* (Uncle Krüger, 1941) premiered in Paris at the prestigious *Normandie* cinema on the Champs-Élysées. Directed by Hans Steinhoff for the Nazi-controlled company Tobis, the big-budget feature utilized former South African statesman Paul Kruger (1825–1904) and his role in the Boer War (1899–1902) to promote a virulently anti-British message. *Ohm Krüger* was of the greatest importance to German authorities.² Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels expected so much from the film that he created a special honorary title for it: *Film der Nation* (Film of the Nation), a distinction that was subsequently bestowed on only a handful of other productions. Given its crucial propaganda value, Germany should logically have aggressively exported and publicized *Ohm Krüger* throughout Europe. Doing so would have been relatively easy, for by 1941 Germany had seized control of film production and distribution in many European countries.



Yet the French release of *Ohm Krüger* was exceptional. Unlike other semi-historical, big-budget propaganda films such as Veit Harlan's *Jud Süß* (Jew Süß, 1940) and *Der Grosse König* (The Great King, 1942, also by Harlan), *Ohm Krüger* was withheld from most countries that Nazi Germany occupied. This self-imposed ban prevented the film from breaking even financially, in stark contrast to the considerable profits Tobis was used to and that Terra earned with *Jud Süß*. More importantly, this ban made it impossible to export the anti-British spirit that pervaded *Ohm Krüger*. By analyzing the international career of *Ohm Krüger*, this article reassesses the propaganda value traditionally ascribed to the film in order to offer some general reflections on the exportation of Third-Reich cinema.

Production

In early 1941, Emil Jannings, the Oscar-winning actor best remembered for his portrayal of Professor Rath in *Der Blaue Engel* (The Blue Angel, 1930), wrote a text that eventually ended up as a preface to the memoirs of Paul Kruger. This new edition of Kruger's autobiography, which had originally appeared in German in 1902, featured sixteen new black-and-white pictures.³ The illustrations were not original photographs from Paul Kruger and his contemporaries, but stills from the *Ohm Krüger* movie. Emil Jannings, who like Leni Riefenstahl and Steinhoff never officially joined the Nazi party but strongly supported it, occupied a privileged position within Tobis and was actively involved in the production of several films in which he also starred.⁴ In his baroque preface to the Kruger memoirs, Jannings wrote:

The actor, who takes it upon himself to bring an historical personality to life, must strive for grasping the inevitable and the legitimate in the fate of this individual in such manner that his own time understands the meaning of the past. I have played "Uncle Krüger," the legendary leader [*Führer*] of the Boers, not because he was a well-known personality for the older people among us, a person whose life can be depicted in colorful, varied and exciting ways, but because he was chosen to start a battle that will reach completion in our days. [...] Although he didn't possess military or economic power, he was the first to unwaveringly and incorruptibly defend his little nation's right to life. A wave of outrage swept over the whole of Europe when people heard about the means England dared deploy to break the resistance of this heroic little nation. Those very same means were meant to be used against the German people today. In our own adventurous days, in which the European world is taking on a new order, each sign of life of the German nation is directed towards the goal of reckoning with England. In this the actor does not stand aside, for in such times there is no place for art in a vacuum. [...] As the latest and strongest form of dramatic representation, film in particular has the task of promoting, through its choice of subject, a national community of experiencing and judging. [...] Paul Kruger's ancestors are German by descent—his thoughts, his acts and even

his misconceptions⁵ are similar in our character; only now his fate becomes completely clear to us, although forty years have passed since the Boer War. However, this is only a short time span for historical justice to prevail. The hour of judgment has already been announced. Before this court, Uncle Kruger also appears as prosecutor, to demand atonement for the feigned destruction of the liberty of his people and for the 26,000 women and children that England let die of epidemics and hunger in concentration camps.⁶

Jannings' introduction perfectly reflects the ideological premise of *Ohm Krüger* as well as the political circumstances under which the film was produced. The production of *Ohm Krüger* was closely linked to the British declaration of war, which Nazi Germany provoked (but Adolf Hitler nevertheless did not expect) by invading Poland. After the British-French declaration of war, Goebbels immediately ordered the development of screenplays for anti-British films. Goebbels was very enthusiastic when Emil Jannings' suggestion to make a film about Paul Kruger and the Boer War landed on his desk toward the end of November 1940.⁷ In many respects, the Boer War constituted an ideal subject for an anti-British propaganda film. Projecting the contemporary military conflict against the background of British imperialism was, after all, not without historical validity. The imperialistic policy Great Britain took towards the Boers and some of the tactics employed by the British during the ensuing war, including the creation of concentration camps, do in fact belong to the darker pages of British history.

Although Jannings would strongly repudiate his statements after the war and even claim to have done everything within his power to prevent the film from being made, it was indeed he who came up with the basic idea for the film. The task of directing was entrusted to Hans Steinhoff (1882–1945) who had proved his dedication to the Nazi regime as early as 1933 with *Hitlerjunge Quex* (Hitler Youth Quex). Steinhoff undeniably left his mark on *Ohm Krüger*, but so did Jannings, who was credited with the film's artistic direction. In practice, Jannings acted as producer and on one occasion personally discussed rushes with Goebbels in Steinhoff's absence. After his meeting with Jannings, Goebbels noted that the actor was "working like a man possessed on his Boer film," which the propaganda minister was sure would become "a great success."⁸

Shooting *Ohm Krüger* ran from September 1940 through March 1941. The film cost 5,477,000 Reich marks, the third highest budget of any film produced in the Third Reich and five times more than the average.⁹ The film was approved by censors on 2 April 1941, and premiered two days later. Goebbels was ecstatic: "an anti-England movie you wouldn't dream was possible [...] Some find it too cruel. But it must be cruel in order to have an effect on people. And that is its goal. [...] Jannings is proud and happy. He has every reason to feel that way."¹⁰ As Goebbels' comments and Jannings' preface indicate, *Ohm Krüger* served to justify Germany's ongoing war against Great Britain as well as to legitimize an eventual German occupation of British territory.

The movie's main argument, which tied in perfectly with similar arguments made in other popular media, was of course an historical one. Did the history of Paul Kruger and the Boer War not "prove" beyond any doubt that Great Britain was and always had been a ruthless expansionist state, ready to violate the independence and freedom of any people or nation that rightfully owned something Great Britain wished to obtain?

Story and History

Beautifully photographed by Fritz Otto Wagner, who had worked on pre-Nazi classics such as Friedrich Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), *Ohm Krüger* has high production values and features a stunning performance by Jannings. The film is framed by images of the old and ill Paul Kruger awaiting his death in a Swiss hotel room and recounting the Boer War to a harassing Jewish journalist. This story mixes fact with fiction in ways that unfortunately cannot be discussed in detail here.¹¹ Framed as a flashback, *Ohm Krüger* recounts how Cecil Rhodes, portrayed as the very embodiment of evil by Ferdinand "Jew Süß" Marian, is supported by his government (a manipulative Lord Chamberlain and an alcoholic Queen Victoria) as well as by British missionaries in waging war against the Boers, on whose land gold has been found. The Boers are portrayed as an idealistic people, led by a strong, healthy Kruger. A true Führer character in the National-Socialist tradition, Kruger is wiser than the indecisive members of his parliament and realizes that war with "warmongering England" is inevitable.

When war breaks out, the British decide not to distinguish between civilians and soldiers. Enter the fictitious Jan Kruger, Paul's Oxford-educated son who initially defends the English to his indignant father. However, after a British soldier attempts to rape his wife, Jan joins the Boer commandos. In his absence, other soldiers burn his farm and send his wife to a concentration camp. There Boer women and children are starved to death or killed without cause. For instance, an officer bearing an uncanny resemblance to Winston Churchill shoots a Boer woman who dares to complain about having to eat rotten meat. This scene was obviously inspired by Eisenstein's *Bronenosets Potjomkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*, 1925), a film long admired by Goebbels.

While Paul Kruger attempts to resolve the situation peacefully and rally support for the Boer cause by futilely seeking audiences with European heads of state, Jan manages to locate his wife in the concentration camp. Talking to her through barbed wire and having just found out that his children have died, he is captured by a patrol. The next day Jan is hanged while his wife and all other female prisoners are forced to watch. The commandant subsequently kills Jan's wife. This sets off a rebellion that the British troops end by massacring everyone. Gruesome images of the murdered women fade into the film's final scene, in which the frail, exiled Kruger proclaims that England will one day be punished: "we [Boers] were only a small weak

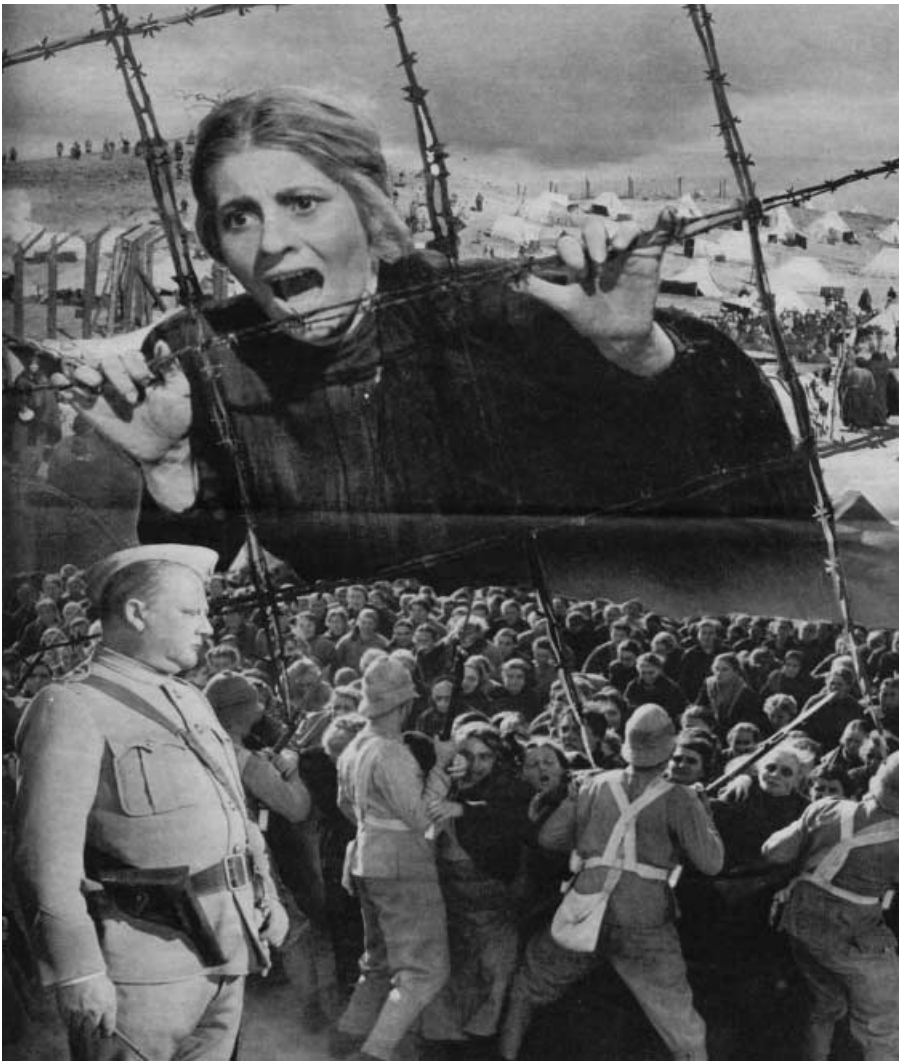


Figure 1 A publicity photo montage published in the *Illustrierter Film Kurier*. Top: Gisela Uhlen, as Paul Krüger's daughter-in-law, in a British concentration camp. Bottom left: concentration camp commander and Churchill look-alike Otto Wernicke

nation" but some day "great and powerful nations will rise against the British tyranny."

It is noteworthy that the real Paul Kruger was indeed of German descent, as Jannings pointed out, and that he was not on South African soil for most of the Boer War.¹² Aged seventy-four when the war broke out, Kruger was too old to take part. Knowing that his capture would bring an immediate end to the war, Boer generals urged him to leave. The British agreed to let Kruger depart for Europe on a neutral ship chartered by Queen Wilhelmina

of the Netherlands, who felt sympathy for the Boers but wished to maintain cordial relations with Great Britain. Kruger landed in Marseille in November 1900. He was welcomed by several dignitaries and a crowd of an estimated 60,000 people. By then, Kruger had already become an international hero and symbol of freedom outside the English-speaking world, where he was admired by some of the intelligentsia (especially in the United States) but vilified by popular media.

In exile his popularity grew larger than ever and was reflected in mass publications (books, newspaper and magazine articles) and all kinds of Krugeriana. After his arrival in Marseille, Kruger was received by the French president, who honored him but did not provide any concrete military or political support. (According to the German film, however, the French president refused to see Kruger.) When Kruger subsequently travelled to Germany, he was welcomed again by large crowds but refused an audience by Kaiser Wilhelm, who indirectly told him to leave the country. Kruger moved on to the Netherlands, where his popularity came close to mass hysteria and the royal family repeatedly received him privately, but paid him no official honors so as not to break Dutch neutrality. Kruger realized once more, to paraphrase his biographer, that he had the hearts of the European states, but not their heads. No government was prepared to take an active stand with the Boer republics. Boer delegations sent to Europe and the United States in 1900 also met with failure. Kruger spent the rest of his life in the Netherlands and France, realizing that his death in exile would be a final act of publicity benefiting the Boers. In the summer of 1904, while losing his eyesight, Kruger moved to Clarens, Switzerland, where he died of pneumonia on 14 July.

What made *Ohm Krüger* different from most historical propaganda films produced in the Third Reich was not its foreign setting, but its treatment of an historical episode that was still fresh in collective memory. The Boer War, often cited as the first war covered by modern mass media, had been followed with great interest by the population of many European states, in particular by the inhabitants of small nations founded in the nineteenth century. Theoretically, this historical sympathy for Kruger and the Boers, combined with hatred for the British and their concentration camps, formed a perfect basis for the international distribution of *Ohm Krüger*. In reality, as always, things were more complicated.

Distribution in Germany and “Independent” Countries

On 4 April 1941, *Ohm Krüger* premiered at Berlin’s most prestigious cinema, the *Ufa-Palast am Zoo*. Goebbels attended the premiere, together with Steinhoff, Jannings, and other members of the cast and production company. The next day, the propaganda minister gave Jannings the honorary ring that came with the title “Film of the Nation.” Goebbels noted smugly in his



Figure 2 Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels (front left) gives Emil Jannings (front right) the "Honorary Ring of German Cinema" denoting the "Film of the Nation." Back right: Fritz Hippler, who tried in vain to export *Uncle Krüger* to neutral territories. Back left: State Secretary Leopold Gutterer

diary that everyone was enthusiastic about the film, except for some "senile bureaucrats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs taking offense."¹³ In the following weeks, *Ohm Krüger* was distributed all over Germany, including regions that had been incorporated into the so-called "Greater German Reich," such as Austria and the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg. The film was supported by the most lavish publicity campaign launched since the outbreak of war seven months earlier. It did very well commercially, grossing nearly 6 million Reich Marks before the end of May. However, the promotional campaign and the larger-than-usual number of screening copies increased Tobis' expenses to the extent that the film did not break even.¹⁴

According to a secret report by the Reich Security Service (*Reichssicherheitsdienst*) of Heinrich Himmler's SS, the film served its purpose well:

All reports from various areas of the Reich confirm that this film has far exceeded the great expectations aroused in all sections of the community. [...] There is no doubt that, propagandistically, the film fulfills its task, especially among the general public. Support for waging war against England was significantly broadened and deepened. [...] The representation of English

brutality clearly had a resounding effect and, psychologically, the composition of the plot drew was perfectly in tune with the current mood of the German people towards England.¹⁵

Previous scholarship on the film, none of which looks into reactions outside the Reich, often cites this document as evidence of *Ohm Krüger's* power as propaganda. However, a careful reading of the report reveals two caveats that need to be acknowledged. The first is its attribution of the film's success to pre-existing anti-British sentiment, suggesting that spectators in other countries not already indoctrinated against England would react less enthusiastically.

Significantly, the report also mentions that there were also some German cinemagoers who felt that the film was too heavy-handed, for instance when British missionaries were shown distributing bibles and guns to South African natives. According to the Security Service, "cinemagoers acquainted with the subject and Africa specialists" also considered that the Boers had been portrayed too positively. The report concluded that "the character of this mixed people [*Mischvolk*—a reference to the mixed German-French-Dutch origins of the Boers] is ambivalent and should, also in view of Greater Germany's colonial tasks after the final victory, not be presented as a picture of the Germanic ideal."¹⁶ It is impossible to determine whether these complaints were actually expressed by spectators or, following common practice, added by the SS to serve its own ideological agenda. Whatever the case, they do point to underlying difficulties that would make exporting *Ohm Krüger* problematic.

In principle, the foreign film market could be divided into three main sectors: occupied territories, independent countries that Germany befriended or influenced, and independent states that wished to remain absolutely neutral in the ongoing war. Obviously, a virulent anti-British film like *Ohm Krüger* was unlikely to be imported by neutral countries. Just as German ambassadors themselves had a fairly long tradition of protesting the international distribution of films they considered anti-German (*All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1930; *The Road Back*, 1937; *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, 1939, and *The Great Dictator*, 1940, among others), neutral countries easily found reasons to refuse *Ohm Krüger*. An attempted release in Sweden prompted local censors to request so many cuts and changes that the whole idea was abandoned, much to the dismay of Fritz Hippler, at the time Goebbels' closest collaborator in the field of cinema.¹⁷ *Ohm Krüger* was apparently not released in any other neutral state, not even in Franco's Spain, where a German version of the film was screened once, for invited guests only.¹⁸

Germany's allies, especially the countries that had also declared war on Great Britain, of course had no objection to importing *Ohm Krüger*. In the first week of June 1941, the film was released in Italy.¹⁹ The Germans went to great lengths—and apparently with success—to make the film a box-office hit. *Ohm Krüger* was dubbed in Italian and Jannings personally attended the premiere in Rome on 6 June 1941, as well as a preview showing in Milan.

In Rome, the premiere was also attended by Steinhoff, the German ambassador, and several German and Italian officials. Mussolini did not attend, but did receive Jannings personally. Naturally, the Italian press expressed great enthusiasm for the film. Later that year, in September 1941, *Ohm Krüger* was awarded the *Coppa Mussolini* (Mussolini Cup) for the best foreign film at the Venice Film Festival, a prize Jannings and Steinhoff had previously received for *Robert Koch* (1939), another historical drama with overtly propagandistic tendencies.

Germany's other main partner, Japan, also imported *Ohm Krüger*, but not until the summer of 1943.²⁰ It remains unclear why it took two years before *Ohm Krüger* was seen in Japan, which declared war against Great Britain in December 1941 and imported a relatively high number of German productions each year.²¹ In 1943, the Japanese Ministry of Education gave the film multiple awards and enthusiastically supported its distribution, for Great Britain was an important adversary to Japan's expansionist policy in Southeast Asia. As one publicity flyer put it, *Ohm Krüger* exposed "the real British empire that hides behind a mask of chivalry."²²

All archival evidence suggests that *Ohm Krüger* did not, with the exception of Italy, play outside the so-called "Greater German Reich" until the fall of 1941 after the Venice Film Festival. It is possible that the delay was caused by the production of an *Auslandsfassung* (special foreign version) discussed below that has to date escaped scholars' attention. Unfortunately, it remains unclear exactly how such a specially modified version of *Ohm Krüger* might have differed from the German original.

Apart from Italy and Japan, *Ohm Krüger* was exported to only six independent states: Slovakia (2 October 1941), Croatia (17 October 1941), Romania (28 October 1941), Hungary (19 December 1941), Bulgaria (late January or early February 1942) and Finland (14 March 1942).²³ It is no coincidence that each of these states was closely linked to Nazi Germany. Economically, Finland was totally dependent on Germany and had, under president Risto Ryti, allied with the Reich by declaring war on the Soviet Union in June 1941. The other five countries, two of which (Croatia and Slovakia) were Nazi puppet states, were the same states that between November 1940 and June 1941 had joined the Tripartite Pact with Germany, Italy, and Japan. Denying *Ohm Krüger* access to their cinemas was therefore unthinkable. Conversely, welcoming the film into their countries was a useful political gesture, an official confirmation of their pro-German policy. This explains why the successive premieres of *Ohm Krüger* were not just gala screenings, but "state premieres" attended by German officers and diplomats, members of the diplomatic corps (mostly from other member-states of the Tripartite Pact) and, last but not least, by some of the highest local authorities.

In Hungary the premiere was attended by members of Admiral Miklós Horthy's government and the Hungarian branch of the Habsburg royal family; in Romania by head of state Marshal Ion Antonescu; in Slovakia by President Josef Tiso and Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka; in Bulgaria by the minister

of foreign affairs and the minister of war; in Finland by President Risto Ryti and Prime Minister Johan Rangell. German film journals such as *Film-Kurier* covered these events extensively and never failed to mention how well the film was received and how popular it turned out to be with audiences in the ensuing weeks. How successful *Ohm Krüger* really was in those territories cannot be established with precision, but it was apparently not successful enough to make the film profitable.

Distribution in Occupied Territories

Nazi-occupied territories, where films from former competitors such as Great Britain and the United States had been banned since the summer of 1940, constituted an equally important outlet for the German film industry.²⁴ In several of these countries, cinemagoers had reconciled themselves relatively quickly to the realities of occupation. Although this did not typically lead, as the Propaganda Ministry liked to believe, to a real affinity with Nazi Germany and its politics, film audiences in many occupied territories did respond well to German film stars such as Kristina Söderbaum, Zarah Leander, Marika Röck, and Heinz Rühmann. Attendance figures for German films were high, even for films that weaved propagandistic messages into classical story lines.²⁵ Theoretically, *Ohm Krüger* could therefore have enjoyed the same box-office success in German-occupied regions as it had within the Reich. However, there were some considerable logistical problems to overcome. This was already clear in June 1941 when the film was released in Luxemburg, a region that in the National-Socialist view was not occupied, but had simply been “brought back” into the Reich. The authorities, hoping for the same enthusiastic reception that *Ohm Krüger* had received “elsewhere” in the Reich, were bewildered to note that many Luxemburgers refused to see the film. Moreover, according to a Security Service report, some of those who did go to see the film started stomping their feet and making noise to protest the concentration camp scenes, among others.²⁶

If the film was badly received in Luxemburg, which had been conquered without any real battle or internment of soldiers as prisoners of war, how would audiences react in countries that had been conquered less easily? How could cinemagoers in, for instance, Norway and Poland, not draw parallels between the German invasion of 1940 and the on-screen representation of Britain invading Boer territories? How could the idealization of Boer resistance not be read as an encouragement for local resistance against German occupying forces? It was probably such logic that eventually convinced the German propaganda ministry or local German occupation authorities not to release *Ohm Krüger* in most occupied countries.

However, a notable exception was made for the French market. As far as the German propaganda ministry was concerned, it was of crucial importance that *Ohm Krüger* be released in France as soon as possible. This ardent

wish, fuelled by the need to alienate Frenchmen from their former British allies and justified by the long history of Franco-British conflict, manifested itself in April 1941. Within two weeks following its German premiere, Goebbels had a print of *Ohm Krüger* sent to the *Referat Film* (Film Service) of the German *Propaganda-Abteilung* (Propaganda Department) in Paris and personally requested advice on its usability there.²⁷ The exact response is unknown, but was probably negative, as the Parisian branch of Tobis was informed shortly thereafter that a specially modified “foreign version” of the film would instead be produced in Berlin.²⁸ In June 1941, Fritz Hippler informed the *Referat Film* that this special version had been ordered by the propaganda minister but not yet approved by Jannings or Steinhoff.²⁹ Sometime between June and September 1941, the edited version of *Ohm Krüger* arrived in Paris and was dubbed in French.

The differences between this version, re-titled *Le Président Kruger*, and its German original cannot be reconstructed in detail because of a lack of production records or a viewable copy of the film.³⁰ Contemporary sources do indicate that the French version had a new introduction consisting of a montage of French newspaper headlines and political caricatures from the turn of the century condemning the British concentration camps. Naturally, these documents were to remind French audiences of their historical sympathy toward the Boers and their opposition to British imperialism. In the words of the German magazine *Film-Kurier*: “This way, the objectivity of the film’s historical view is so to speak corroborated by French voices of the time while the objective impartiality of the viewers is assured.”³¹

Despite the addition of a new introduction, the film’s overall length was reduced. Whereas the German original ran 3,620 meters, or 123 minutes, the French version lasted only 115 minutes.³² Taking into account the new introduction, it is clear that over 8 minutes of the German original were removed. A summary published in the Paris-based (but German-owned) trade journal *Le Film* makes clear that the main storyline remained unchanged, suggesting that only smaller scenes, such as those showing British missionaries handing out guns and Krüger not being received by the French president, were deleted or shortened. It is also likely that the sequence of the British crown prince attending a risqué French variety evening in Paris was deleted.³³

Four days after the Parisian premiere on 1 October 1941, the leader of the *Referat Film* anonymously attended a screening of *Le Président Kruger* at the *Normandie* theater on the Champs-Élysées. According to a report he sent to Berlin, the cinema was sold out and most viewers responded enthusiastically. During its first week, the film caused no protests or demonstrations and French cinemagoers seemed “not to draw parallels between the fate of the Boers and that of their own”—thereby allaying fears expressed by the intelligence service of the German ministry of foreign affairs.³⁴ The film did well at the box office, drawing 34,000 visitors in fourteen days, and continued at the *Normandie* for three weeks before moving to the *Olympia* and *César* cinemas for second-tier exclusive contracts.³⁵ Before the end of the year,



Figure 3 Façade of the *Normandie* theater on the Champs-Élysées, late 1941

the film reached other major cities throughout the occupied zone, including Bordeaux, Le Havre, and Nancy.³⁶ First-week box-office figures reported for the *Apollo* theater in Bordeaux show that the film ranked second among German-made productions there, well behind Willy Forst's dubbed adaptation of Guy de Maupassant's novella *Bel Ami* (1941), but slightly ahead of *L'Assassinat du Père Noël* (Who Killed Santa Claus?, 1941), a French-language murder mystery made by a Tobis-owned production company in Paris known

as Continental Films.³⁷ Just as *Le Président Kruger* was about to be exported to Vichy France, censors there banned *Bel Ami* on grounds of moral decadence and, in an additional punitive measure, also forbade the distribution of *Le Président Kruger* and *Jew Süß* in French North Africa.³⁸ This ongoing censorship battle with Vichy appears to have limited *Krüger's* distribution in the unoccupied zone as well. Trade magazines attest to showings in Toulouse in March and April 1942 with excellent box-office results, but the film was conspicuously absent from other major markets such as Marseille, Lyon, Montpellier, and Nice.³⁹ Timing probably also played a factor, for by early 1942 Nazi priorities had shifted away from anti-British propaganda to denouncing Bolshevism in support of the war on the Eastern Front.

This shift perhaps helps explain why there are no traces of *Ohm Krüger's* being exported commercially to other occupied territories. However, keeping with standard Nazi practices, private screenings were organized for German subjects (soldiers and civilians) as well as sympathetic local collaborationist movements. For instance, *Ohm Krüger* was not distributed in Nazi-occupied Poland, but the Ufa theatre of Łódź organized a screening for German soldiers, dignitaries, and party members. Here too, prestige was added by the presence of prominent officials such as Government President (*Regierungspräsident*) Friedrich Uebelhoer.⁴⁰ In Belgium as well, the film was shown at special screenings organized for local collaborationists.⁴¹

Significantly, *Ohm Krüger* was also slated for general release in Belgium and in the Netherlands, where German film interests were represented by Alfred Greven, the same man charged with reorganizing the French film sector, but Greven failed to export the *Krüger* film to either of the former countries. Even though the film was repeatedly advertised in the Belgian trade press⁴² and covered in the German-owned Dutch fan magazine *Cinema et Theater*,⁴³ an official release date was never set. In Belgium, where French-speaking audiences were to see the French version and "Germanic" Dutch-speaking audiences were to see the original version, the local Tobis branch came close to setting a release date. Contrary to standard practice, in December 1941 the local German propaganda department (*Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien*) organized a test screening of *Le Président Kruger* for Walloon and Flemish journalists.

Around that time, an original version with sparse Dutch subtitles was also being prepared. This version, a print of which has survived in the collections of the Belgian Royal Film Archive, is almost twenty minutes shorter than the German original. Many scenes were cut out, from the distribution of guns to African natives by British missionaries to most of the concentration camp sequences. It remains unknown whether these cuts were made before or after the test screening. According to a tactfully worded report the *Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien* sent to Berlin, the test screening was not very successful: "Even though the film made a lasting impression, it was agreed by almost everyone attending the screening that, by the nature of its entire concept, the film is unfit for the local circumstances, or that at least the time

for its screening has not yet come.”⁴⁴ Plans to release the film were apparently postponed until the summer of 1942, when trade journal *CINEMA* announced the film again. But this never came to pass. The main problem was probably that, unlike French audiences, Flemish and Dutch cinemagoers did not have a long tradition of Anglophobia and had a demonstrated tendency to draw parallels between their situation and the situation of the Boers, with whom they shared a language.

Conclusion

At the end of October 1944, as the military situation overshadowed the production of new films, the German propaganda ministry ordered that a selected body of films “with military or national content” be re-released, in part to inspire the *Volkssturm* civilian militia that Goebbels had recently created. One of these films was *Ohm Krüger*. However, on 31 January 1945, the film’s screening was banned for fear that the morale of German audiences would be harmed by images of Boer refugees whose houses had been destroyed by the British—images that by that time replicated the harsh realities of everyday life in Germany.⁴⁵

Ironically, this incident mirrored a problem German propagandists had encountered over three years before in Nazi-occupied territories. The parallels between the “imperialist” British invasion and occupation of Boer land and the German invasion and occupation of many European countries were so striking that *Ohm Krüger* could be allowed to run only in countries that had remained “independent.” In retrospect, officials at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs had not been as “senile” as Goebbels liked to believe. It is noteworthy that attempts were made to solve this problem by making special foreign versions of *Ohm Krüger*. The “solution” appears to have worked fairly well in a country with a long tradition of anti-British sentiment (France), but not for other regions (Belgium and the Netherlands) with different cultural and historical backgrounds. Like its namesake, the film traveled much of Europe futilely searching for a sympathetic audience. This new information underscores the need to revise traditional views of *Ohm Krüger*’s propaganda value and will perhaps encourage more research into the foreign versions of other Nazi films and the reactions of local audiences to them.

Notes

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2. The spelling of Paul Kruger's name (with or without umlaut) has been disputed. The "Kruger" version is now generally accepted as the right one, but German-language sources often spell it "Krüger." Throughout this article the name will only be spelled with an umlaut when referring to the title of the film.
3. *Ohm Krüger: Die Lebenserinnerungen des Buren-Präsidenten (Neue berechnigte deutsche Ausgabe mit 16 Aufnahmen und einer Karte)*, ed. A. Schowalter (Berlin, 1941).
4. Renata Helker, "Kunst-Ausschus: Emil Jannings als Schauspieler und als Produzent," in *Tonfilmfrieden/Tonfilmkrieg: Die Geschichte der Tobis vom Technik-Syndikat zum Staatskonzern*, ed. Jan Distelmeyer (Munich, 2003), 150–58.
5. For Jannings, these "misconceptions" were his hopes that European governments would support his battle against Great Britain.
6. Emil Jannings, "Paul Krüger," in Schowalter, *Ohm Krüger*.
7. Goebbels' diary entries regarding *Ohm Krüger* are analyzed in Felix Moeller, *Der Filmminister: Goebbels und der Film im Dritten Reich* (Berlin, 1998), 479.
8. *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, 1923–1941*, ed. Elke Fröhlich, 9 vols. (Munich, 1998), 9:56.
9. Ulrich J. Klaus, *Deutsche Tonfilme. Bd 11. 11. Jahrgang 1940/41* (Berlin, 2001), 248–52. Only *Münchhausen* (1943) and *Kolberg* (1944–1945) were more expensive.
10. Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher*, 9:220 and 227.
11. Lengthy summaries of the film can be found in *Ohm Krüger. Arbeitsmaterialien zum nationalsozialistischen Propagandafilm*, ed. Gerd Albrecht, 5 CD-ROMS (Wiesbaden, 2007); Christian Hallstein, "Ohm Krüger: The Genesis of a Nazi Propaganda Film," *Literature-Film Quarterly* 30 (2002): 133–38; David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933–1945*, 2nd ed. (London, 2001), 229–36; Richard Taylor, *Film propaganda. Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, 2nd ed. (London, 1998), 187–95.
12. *The International Impact of the Boer War*, ed. Keith Wilson (New York, 2001); Johannes Meintjes, *President Paul Kruger* (London, 1974).
13. Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher*, 9:56.
14. Moeller, *Der Filmminister*, 237 and 250–51; Boguslaw Drewniak, *Der deutsche Film 1938–1945* (Düsseldorf, 1987), 339.
15. Report from 12 May 1941, reprinted in Gerd Albrecht, ed., *Der Film im 3. Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Karlsruhe, 1979), 195–97.
16. For an analysis that overlaps partially with my own, see Welch, *Propaganda and the German cinema*, 235.
17. Fritz Hippler, "Die Filmzensur der Neutralen," *Der deutsche Film* 6, no. 4–5 (1941): 2–3; for details on Hippler, see Roel Vande Winkel, "Nazi Germany's Fritz Hippler (1909–2002)," [*Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 23 \(2003\): 91–99.](#)
18. "Ohm Krüger in Madrid," *Film-Kurier*, 8 November 1941.
19. "Jannings und Steinhoff in Rom," *Film-Kurier*, 3 June 1941; "Ohm Krüger in Mailand," *Film-Kurier*, 6 June 1941; "Ohm Krüger in Rom," *Film-Kurier*, 7 June 1941; "Die italienische Presse über Ohm Krüger," *Film-Kurier*, 10 June 1941; "Der Mussolini-Pokal für Ohm Krüger," *Film-Kurier*, 16 September 1941.
20. "Erfolg des Ohm Krüger-Films in Japan," *Film-Kurier*, 30 August 1943.
21. Janine Hansen, "Celluloid Competition: German-Japanese Film Relations, 1929–45," in *Cinema and the Swastika. The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*, ed. Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch (New York, 2007), 187–97.
22. Japanese advertisement cited in Michael Baskett, *The Attractive Empire: Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu, 2008), 124–25.

23. "Ohm Krüger in Preßburg," *Film-Kurier*, 1 October 1941; "Ohm Krüger in Preßburg," *Film-Kurier*, 4 October 1941. "Festlicher Start von Ohm Krüger in Preßburgn," *Film-Kurier*, 6 October 1941. "Ohm Krüger in Agram," *Film-Kurier*, 20 October 1941; "Ohm Krüger in Anwesenheit von Marschall Antonescu gestartet," *Film-Kurier*, 30 October 1941; "Erfolgreicher Start von Ohm Krüger in Budapest," *Film-Kurier*, 22 December 1941; "Ohm Krüger begeistert Budapest," *Film-Kurier*, 9 January 1942; "Ohm Krüger in Sofia," *Film-Kurier*, 3 February 1942; "Neues aus Sofia," *Film-Kurier*, 17 February 1942; "Ohm Krüger in Finnland," *Film-Kurier*, 17 March 1942; "Ohm Krüger in Helsinki," *Film-Kurier*, 10 April 1942; "Der festliche Start von Ohm Krüger in Helsinki," *Film-Kurier*, 13 April 1942.
24. David Welch and Roel Vande Winkel, "Europe's New Hollywood? The German Film Industry under Nazi Rule, 1933–1945," in *Cinema and the Swastika*, 6–24.
25. For detailed case studies of twenty different territories, see Vande Winkel and Welch, *Cinema and the Swastika*.
26. Paul Lesch, *Heim ins Ufa-Reich? NS-Filmpolitik und die Rezeption deutscher Filme in Luxemburg 1933–1944* (Trier, 2002), 84–86.
27. Referat Film, Aussenstelle Paris, report of 17 April 1941, United States National Archives (hereafter USNA), microfilm T501 / 141 / frame 446.
28. Referat Film, Aussenstelle Paris, report of 25 April 1941, USNA, microfilm T501 / 141 / frame 483.
29. Referat Film, Aussenstelle Paris, report of 19 June 1941, USNA, microfilm T501 / 141 / frame 672.
30. The Archives Françaises du Film in Bois d'Arcy hold original nitrate prints in poor condition which await transfer to safety film for viewing by researchers.
31. "Deutsche Filme in Paris," *Film-Kurier*, 11 November 1941.
32. Albrecht, *Ohm Krüger*, 24. "Les nouveaux films—Le Président Krüger," *Le Film*, 11 October 1941.
33. The Bibliothèque du Film in Paris has a French publicity still of the scene, but it was not unusual for such promotional materials to be prepared before a film was actually censored. The deletion of such references to "decadent" French behavior would have been essential for securing the film's approval by Vichy censors in the unoccupied zone.
34. Referat Film, Aussenstelle Paris, report of 17 October 1941, USNA, microfilm T501 / 142 / frames 002 and 0047.
35. "Deutsche Filme in Paris," *Film-Kurier*, 11 November 1941. "Programme des cinémas de Paris," *Le Film*, 11 October, 25 October, 22 November 1941.
36. "L'exploitation à Bordeaux," *Le Film*, 11 October 1941; "Deux semaines du Président Krüger à l'Empire," *Le Film*, 8 November 1941; "L'exploitation dans le région de l'Ouest," *Le Film*, 2 January 1942.
37. Referat Film, Aussenstelle Paris, report of 30 January 1942, USNA, microfilm T501 / 142 / frame 360.
38. Referat Film, Aussenstelle Paris, report of 2 January 1942, USNA, microfilm T501/142, frame 331.
39. "Toulouse: les nouveaux tarifs sont bien accueillis," *Le Film*, 11 April 1942.
40. H. Schiller, "Ohm Krüger in Litzmannstadt," *Film-Kurier*, 28 May 1941.
41. "Oom Krüger: een film van haat en offers," *De Balming*, 12 February 1944.
42. Belgian Royal Film Archive, file 'Ohm Krüger.' This file contains a small color poster advertising the film. Tobis advertisements announcing the film appeared

in several issues of the trade journal *CINEMA* (July 1941, August 1941, December 1941 and May 1942).

43. "Een regisseur in actie," *Cinema & Theater*, 15 February 1941. The cover of this issue also features Jannings and explicitly refers to *Ohm Krüger*, which was subsequently expected to play in Dutch cinemas.
44. Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien, report of 15–31 December 1941, USNA, microfilm T 77 / 982.
45. Albrecht, *Ohm Krüger*, 24 and 32.