The Western Allied project to denazify Third Reich feature film stock
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PREFACE

While I was working on this dissertation on and off over many years, some friends and relatives expressed their amazement that the topic continued to interest me. I will try to provide some explanation here.

When I wrote a master’s thesis about the history of the postwar German filmcensorship board FSK, I was partly inspired by an awareness of the much-needed censorship battles that had been fought in liberal democracies in the 1960s and 1970s. Censorship bodies in liberal democracies had come to accept developments such as an increased questioning of authority; a broader application of democratic political principles; a more critical view of the churches and their influence on social norms; the sexual revolution; more explicit representations of sex and violence; and a heightened emphasis on freedom of expression. Insofar as censorship concerned films intended for grown-up audiences, it tended to be seen as outdated and undemocratic.

What I had not realized before I delved into the subject was that, in a country such as Germany, which had gone through a deeply undemocratic phase, films from that earlier era might still be objects of commercial ambition and might pose a problem to censors because of their undemocratic elements. As it turned out, some of the relevant films exemplified the censorship problem of the tension between, on the one hand, the democratic principle of freedom of expression, and, on the other hand, democratic principles of tolerance, equality, and non-violent democratic rule.

In a world where the internet has revolutionized communication, and has facilitated and broadened access to extremist political movements ranging from neo-Nazism to Islamic extremism, the tension between freedom of expression and the need to stand up for and protect other democratic values is still - or again - a problem of acute relevance. Organizations such as Google and Facebook have only just begun to draw some lines in this respect. Against the background of these present-day developments, the question how the relevant problem was dealt with in West Germany after World War II - which became the topic of this dissertation - continues to interest me.

Now that the dissertation is completed, I would like to express my sincere thanks to those who helped me carry out the project at its various stages.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my “Doktorvater”, Prof. Dr. F.W. Boterman, who offered many of his insights in long conversations and who remained open-minded about the somewhat unusual course of the project. I am very grateful for, on the one hand, the critical intellectual inspiration which he provided and, on the other hand, his unwavering support over the years.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Germany and the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek in the Netherlands, whose financial support greatly contributed to the project.

Furthermore, I have deeply appreciated all the help and support which I received from archivists, librarians and others during my visits to the collections in their custody. These visits were often joyous occasions, where the examination of rare books, historical documents or old film footage helped me to trace historical developments and sometimes yielded the thrill of unexpected discoveries. These visits also made me acutely aware of the importance and unique nature of institutions that guard historical and cultural source materials of the past.

I hope to express my thanks more extensively, and to do more credit to those who have been a source of academic, archival, or personal support over the years, when this dissertation will appear as a published book. But this preface cannot be completed without mentioning Arjen and Lucas - whom I cannot thank enough for their daily patience, understanding, technical help, humor, and capacity to take one’s mind off the stresses of the day. This dissertation is dedicated to them.

Isa van Eeghen
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