

Press kit



**Controversial
Kinship**
Colonial and
National Socialist
Violence

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**Umstrittene
Verwandtschaft**
Koloniale und
nationalsozialistische
Gewalt

dhm Deutsches
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Controversial Kinship

Colonial and National Socialist Violence

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum



Speech of Prof. Dr Raphael Gross, President of the Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

Press conference on 15. October 2026, 6.30 p.m.

+++ The spoken word applies +++

We historians make comparisons all the time. It is part of our work. In recent years, one comparison in particular has taken on public and political significance far beyond the field of history: the comparison between colonialism, fascism and National Socialism.

On the one hand, many people see such a comparison as completely normal; on the other, however, it also triggers concerns – in particular, the fear of a relativisation and the blurring of historical distinctions.

It was precisely this often-shared uneasiness that gave rise to my desire to address the topic in an exhibition. We are taking it up because it is part of our commitment to strengthen historical judgement: empirical knowledge helps people to form their own judgement – and perhaps after visiting the exhibition – a new one.

I heard that Stephan Malinowski was currently working on a book project on this very subject. That's how I came to know Stephan – and it has indeed proved to be a great stroke of luck for all of us.

In Stephan Malinowski, we were able to secure an internationally connected historian as curator, who is an expert in both the history of National Socialism and that of European colonialism.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that we are apparently the first museum to tackle the subject in this way. We compare the forms of violence, without equating them. We depict the nearly century-long history of this debate and test its arguments against the historical facts.

It soon proved impossible merely to present the various positions and place them in their historical context without taking a stand ourselves: Which arguments are plausible? Which do not stand up to empirical scrutiny? Where do they tend to relativise, and where do they distort historical differences?

As a result, this exhibition may – unwittingly – be more than just a historical account: it is likely to become part of the debate itself.

The interpretation that colonialism and fascism are closely intertwined emerged as early as the 1930s – long before the so-called “Historikerstreit 2.0” and also before the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of fascism came up in the GDR.

Italy’s war of aggression against Abyssinia provided an important historical context. In this war, Fascist Italy, in violation of international law, employed poison gas and committed extremely serious crimes of violence.

At that time, the Caribbean intellectual George Padmore was already using the term “Colonial Fascism”. He applied it not only to the Fascist violence in Abyssinia, but also to forms of racist rule and violence within the British Empire.

The comparisons between colonialism, Fascism and National Socialism that have been drawn since the 1930s are by no means uniform. They have pointed to similarities and structural affinities, but some have even claimed to find a direct parallel, an identity.

In 1936, Jawaharlal Nehru, for example, described imperialism and Fascism as close relatives, indeed as twins. These different forms of comparison – and the question of how far they hold up historically – are of interest to us in the exhibition.

I learn something from every exhibition – perhaps most of all from this one. The full breadth of the subject only became clear to me through discussions with Stephan Malinowski, our team, and other specialists.

A conference organised by the University College Dublin and the German Historical Institute in Washington D.C. in May this year was particularly important. While I’ve been reflecting on the differences between anti-Semitism and racism for over 25 years – and have always found the attempt to equate the two irritating – many other forms of comparison have only become clear to me through this exhibition.

And I must also admit: the discussions have changed my own stance. Initially, I perceived the comparison primarily as a polemic and a scholarly fallacy. Since engaging with the topic, my perspective has shifted.

From a methodological standpoint, it is clear that a comparison is not the same as a direct parallel. Comparisons can reveal similarities, connections and interdependencies that would otherwise remain hidden. At the same time, they sharpen our awareness of differences and of what is historically specific. And even the futile search for a parallel can reveal what makes a particular event unique.

Conquest, plunder and destruction, repression, forced labour, camps: many key forms of Nazi violence can certainly be compared with forms of colonial violence. But it is precisely this comparison that reveals massive differences.

It is no coincidence that these forms of violence also play an important role in our plan for a new “Documentation Centre on the Second World War and German Occupation in Europe”: these forms of violence are to be presented there in order to highlight the specific nature of Nazi occupation.

However, an empirical comparison also shows that many of the historical attempts to find parallels prove to be untenable.

For instance, in November 1938, Gandhi advised German Jews to draw inspiration from the methods of non-violent resistance against British colonial rule. Martin Buber subsequently asked Gandhi in March 1939, with horrified amazement, whether he even knew what a concentration camp was. In this way, Buber was pointing above all to the fundamentally different reality of the Nazi camps.

There was also another crucial difference: while colonial crimes could be publicly denounced in Great Britain, particularly in London, there was no comparable public sphere in the Nazi state where non-violent resistance could have had an effect.

Leading Nazis remarkably often resorted to colonial analogies when speaking of German rule in Eastern Europe. It could be that in the face of the monstrosity of the crimes they had already committed and were still planning, they were searching for familiar historical points of reference. The comparison with colonial rule made the radically new nature of their own actions appear as something already familiar – and thereby relativised it.

Yet it is precisely here, in the eastern territories of the Nazi Reich, that the comparison between colonial and Nazi practices of violence reached an insurmountable limit, namely at the extermination camps of Operation Reinhardt – Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka – as well as at Auschwitz-Birkenau. No colonial counterpart can be found for them.

Jewish men, women, the elderly, children and infants were transported, in some cases over vast distances, for the sole purpose of murdering them in the gas chambers of these camps.

This is particularly evident in the deportation of the Jews from Rhodes in the summer of 1944: In a complex operation lasting about three weeks, without any military or economic rationale, people were

transported by ship and rail over more than 2,000 kilometres to Auschwitz, where the vast majority were murdered immediately upon arrival.

The temporal dynamic is also crucial: there is no equivalent in the colonial systems of violence examined here that can compare with this systematically organised and increasingly industrialised mass extermination.

At the same time, this fact reveals the inadequacy of the much-discussed thesis “From Windhoek to Auschwitz”: what happened here is not the culmination of traditions of colonial violence, but rather their most clear-cut transgression of its limits – and thus a turning point in the history of European violence.



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Controversial Kinship Colonial and National Socialist Violence

From 16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027 at the Deutsches Historisches Museum

What do colonial and Nazi violence have in common? How do they differ? And why has the question of a possible connection between the two remained controversial to this day? Since the 1930s, questions such as these have been debated by anti-colonial thinkers, journalists, politicians, historians, and Holocaust survivors. The exhibition "**Controversial Kinship: Colonial and National Socialist Violence**" – curated by Stephan Malinowski and opening at the Deutsches Historisches Museum on 16 October 2026 – examines a historical comparison that has been debated for nearly a century and extends far beyond the discipline of history. The exhibition traces the ongoing debate over similarities, differences, and equivalence back to its historical origins. The museum's aim is to promote a more nuanced discussion of the topic and enable visitors to assess such comparisons for themselves on the basis of historical evidence.

Raphael Gross, President of the Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum: "With this exhibition, we are undertaking a close historical examination of the debate about the comparison between colonial and Nazi violence. We are not attempting to settle this debate, but rather to tell its story. Our role as a historical museum is to create a space in which historical

findings are taken seriously – even if they do not fit neatly into a political narrative. The exhibition also examines where empirically verifiable similarities between the two regimes of violence actually exist, and when the comparison has been used primarily as a political argument.”

Stephan Malinowski, curator of the exhibition: “The question of the relationship between colonial and Nazi violence has been answered in highly different ways by perpetrators, anti-colonial intellectuals, and historians. In recent years, it has once again moved to the centre of public debate. The exhibition takes up this controversy, traces it back to its historical roots, and thereby aims to strengthen visitors’ critical judgement.”

History of the Comparative Debate

In the mid-1930s, intellectuals in the centres of the anti-colonial movement – from Calcutta, Algiers, and Accra to London, Paris, and New York – advanced the idea, still influential today, that two historical regimes of violence were closely related, even though they differed markedly in temporal, geographical, and structural terms: European colonial rule, which lasted for several centuries, and Nazi domination over Europe, which ended barely six years after it had begun but saw acts of violence conceived and carried out with extraordinary speed. Anti-colonial thinkers regarded fascist rule in Europe as the continuation of colonial and racist violence in a new form, now turned against Europe itself. International in scope, the exhibition recounts the history of this comparative debate from a broad geographical and temporal perspective. Focusing on the Nazi regime of violence and the Holocaust, it asks which colonial experiences served as the principal points of comparison in the debates between 1900 and 1960.

Controversial Kinship: Nine Key Themes

Colonial and Nazi rule were rooted in violence, exploitation, and annihilation. While they may appear at first glance to have numerous similarities, a closer examination also reveals fundamental differences. The question of whether the two systems of violence are related in any substantive sense remains contested. Even more controversial, both then and now, is the question of the extent and significance of the parallels between them, and whether these parallels imply continuities or even causal connections. In this context, the DHM presents an empirically grounded examination of historical phenomena whose interrelationships can be productively explored across both forms of rule, without reducing one to the other or treating them as identical.

Just after the prologue, the first of the exhibition's nine galleries examines the conditions under which anti-colonial intellectuals in the 1930s first advanced the idea of a link between colonialism and fascism. The historical backdrop is Fascist Italy's invasion of the Ethiopian Empire in October 1935 and the global protests against this exceptionally brutal colonial war of conquest.

As visitors continue through the 1,100-square-metre exhibition space, they encounter a range of themes central to colonial and National Socialist rule that have long shaped debates about the relationship between the two: repression; racism and antisemitism; conquest and settlement; concentration camps; collaboration; resistance; forced labour; industrialised extermination; and the (in)visibility of extreme violence. Historical source material is presented alongside contemporaneous and later interpretations. The exhibition also examines how comparisons between the two systems have been politically instrumentalised since the 1930s. In the epilogue, newly recorded video interviews with historians from around the world offer a variety of perspectives on the relationship between colonial and Nazi rule. The focus is on questions of continuity, rupture, and comparability.

The Limits of Historical Comparison

Historical comparisons can help us understand systems of violence, evaluate different interpretations, and identify structural similarities and fundamental differences. They can also flatten complexities, relativise past crimes, and be instrumentalised for ideological purposes. For this reason, the exhibition addresses the possibilities and limits of historical comparison. It portrays the systematic murder of European Jewry not as the culmination of colonial traditions of violence, but as the most radical departure from these traditions and as a turning point in the history of violence in Europe. Here, the examination of similarities and overlaps does not culminate in deeper understanding; it loses its explanatory power. The eighth room of the exhibition illustrates this interpretation through a rarely noted episode: the deportation of the Jewish population of Rhodes in the summer of 1944. Defying all military and economic rationale, they were transported by ship and train in a three-week operation over a distance of more than 2,000 kilometres, only for the vast majority to be murdered immediately upon their arrival in Auschwitz. There are also no colonial counterparts for the extermination camps established at Bełżec, Sobibor and Treblinka in 1942, which served exclusively to murder people as quickly and efficiently as possible. This exhibition room is therefore the only one without a colonial counterpart.

Located on the lower level of the Pei Building, the exhibition explores the debate over historical comparison through around 580 objects from the

DHM's collection and from museums and archives in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Namibia, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Poland, Spain, South Africa, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It includes paintings, drawings, photographs, postcards, books, periodicals, documents, and historical artefacts. Film and audio stations provide additional perspectives on the exhibition's themes, while a German- and English-language audio guide offers background information on selected objects and the exhibition itself. A richly illustrated catalogue in both German and English, featuring scholarly essays by international experts, will be published by Wallstein Verlag. An accompanying academic programme, a film series, guided tours, and educational events will further expand on the exhibition's themes throughout its run.

Press material: The press kit and high-resolution images are available in the [press section of the DHM website](#). Please make sure to use the accompanying captions, which provide background information on the subjects depicted.

DHM Journal: Video interviews with DHM President Raphael Gross and curator Stephan Malinowski, as well as further features on the exhibition, can be found at www.dhm.de/journal/en/programme/c/umstrittene-verwandtschaft

Controversial Kinship

Colonial and National Socialist Violence

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum



Exhibition texts

What links exist between colonial and National Socialist violence? How do they differ? And why is the “kinship” between these two histories of violence still a matter of controversy today? Since the 1930s, these questions have been asked time and again: by anti-colonial thinkers, Holocaust survivors, journalists, politicians, and historians.

The exhibition explores the long history of this juxtaposition. It traces the debate about similarities, differences and equivalences back to its historical origins. Across nine rooms, it explores a range of themes central to both systems of rule: the historical origins of the comparison, racism and anti-Semitism, conquest and settlement, concentration camps, collaboration, resistance, forced labour, extermination, and the (in)visibility of extreme violence.

Focusing on the period from 1900 to 1960, the exhibition examines the violent dimensions of European colonialism and Nazi rule over Europe and empirically considers the debates about their comparability.

Comparisons can help us understand systems of violence, scrutinise interpretations, and identify specific characteristics. However, they can also oversimplify, obscure, or be co-opted. Where, then, do the advantages and disadvantages of the comparison lie?

(Prologue) Room of Questions

Colonial and Nazi rule were both founded on violence. At first glance, they appear to have numerous similarities; on closer inspection, however, fundamental differences also become apparent.

Two objects in this room symbolise this tension: a whip and a can of Zyklon B. They initially highlight the difference between widespread kinds of physical violence and newer forms of industrialised mass murder. At the same time, the juxtaposition warns against jumping to conclusions: whips were also used in Nazi concentration camps. Colonial powers used poison gas as a wartime weapon in Africa.

The objects and questions in this room invite visitors to reflect on the relative comparability of violence, exploitation, and extermination as central elements of both systems of rule

(Room 1) Colonial Facism

In the summer of 1936, the League of Nations in Geneva was the scene of two highly symbolic events. On 30 June, the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie addressed the assembly with a speech in which he protested against fascist Italy's war of aggression and its colonial subjugation of Ethiopia. He called on the democratic states gathered in the League of Nations, united in the name of humanism and international law, to intervene in the conflict.

Three days later, the Jewish journalist Štefan Lux shot himself in front of the lectern during a debate, to protest against the disenfranchisement and persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany.

In retrospect, both events – and the protests against colonial and Nazi violence they embodied – seem to foreshadow later debates about the connections between the two systems of violence.

The Abyssinian War

In October 1935, fascist Italy launched a war of aggression against the Ethiopian Empire, a sovereign member state of the League of Nations. The aim was colonial expansion and the creation of “living space”.

This attack marked a new form of unrestrained violence: Italy waged a strategically planned aerial war and employed poison gas, which was prohibited under international law. The bombing targeted not only military installations, but also villages, fields, military hospitals, and civilians. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives.

Despite military defeat, the Ethiopian resistance movement evolved into a long-running guerrilla war. The brutal conflict led to anti-colonial protests worldwide.

Persecution of Jews and the International Community

On 3 July 1936, a public suicide took place in the plenary hall of the League of Nations in Geneva. Štefan Lux, a Jewish journalist, entered the hall during a session, threw leaflets into the room, and shot himself in front of the assembled delegates. Through this act, he intended to draw attention to the growing persecution of Jews in the German Reich and the inaction of the international community.

In retrospect, this act of desperation appears prophetic on two counts: the radicalisation of Nazi persecution of Jews, and the refusal of the international community to offer refuge to those being persecuted.

Anti-colonial Activists

In the mid-1930s, a new, internationally networked movement of anti-colonial critics began to take shape. In Paris and London, the centres of the largest colonial empires, activists from Africa, the Caribbean, the USA, and India joined forces. The Italian invasion of Abyssinia became a rallying point for their efforts, drawing a strong response worldwide, particularly among Black anti-colonialists.

This was the moment the idea first emerged that colonialism and fascism were expressions of the same form of violence, a notion still influential in today’s debates. To these observers,

fascist rule in Europe appeared to be a continuation of colonial and racist violence by other means – even within Europe itself.

(Room 2) Repression

Colonial systems of rule and the Nazi state both employed surveillance, concentration camps, and the suppression of resistance as key instruments of control. Anti-colonial critics identified structural similarities between the two systems early on.

The space available for criticism differed considerably between the two systems. In the big cities of the colonial empires, at least limited opportunities for public criticism existed, whereas such opportunities were almost entirely eliminated in the Nazi state.

This difference lay at the heart of a dispute between Martin Buber and Mahatma Gandhi in 1938. The leader of the Indian independence movement advised the Jews in Germany to employ methods of non-violent resistance. The Jewish religious philosopher Martin Buber pointed to the new form of violence in German concentration camps. In a letter to Gandhi, he described how the Nazi dictatorship violently suppressed any form of public criticism.

The First Concentration Camps

Around 1900, the first concentration camps emerged in the context of colonial wars. These camps served primarily to “suppress uprisings”. Civilian populations were interned, monitored, and forced to work. Camps were a fundamental feature of colonial rule and remained so until the 1960s. The British camps came to light during the Boer War. Tens of thousands of people died there from starvation and disease. Even more deadly were the camps in German South-West Africa during the war of extermination against the Herero and Nama peoples. Extreme violence and systematic neglect led to mass deaths. At the same time, camps of the colonial powers were publicly criticised. Contemporary reports denounced the violence and conditions. In the long term, this pressure contributed to significant reforms.

Opposition and Resistance

In all colonial powers, there was resistance within the colonies and criticism in the metropolises. Colonial violence was openly criticised in parliaments, newspapers, books, cartoons, and anti-colonial organisations. This criticism was often inconsequential, but it was clearly visible.

In the Reichstag, the Social Democrat August Bebel condemned the atrocities of German colonial policy. Mahatma Gandhi, a lawyer educated in England, organised non-violent resistance in South Africa and India. Both represent internationally visible forms of criticism of colonialism.

At the same time, indigenous resistance in the colonies was suppressed with extreme brutality, as in the 1937 massacre in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. In the long term, however, anti-colonial resistance and criticism in the metropolises weakened colonial rule and contributed to its demise.

Early Concentration Camps in Germany

The first Nazi concentration camps were established in 1933. In 1934, they were placed under the control of the SS and removed from legal oversight. In Germany, they were one of the most important instruments used to terrorise the country's own population.

The camps served to eliminate political opponents and crush all forms of resistance. A strict hierarchy was established within them. Prisoners were divided into categories and identified by fabric triangles in different colours. Forced labour, violence, and arbitrariness defined life in the camps.

The so-called "re-education" was a propaganda lie. As a visible instrument of terror, the camps had a lasting impact on the social climate. They were widely visible signs of the omnipotence and propensity to violence of the dictatorship.

Exclusion and Terror

By 1934, the Nazi state had developed into a dictatorship with an unusually extensive system of surveillance, control, and terror. After crushing its political opponents, it turned the persecution against

the Jews living in Germany. The Nuremberg “Racial Laws” and other decrees led to a steady deprivation of rights. Harassment, social exclusion, economic expropriation, and violence sanctioned and organised by the Nazi state characterised everyday life.

With the pogroms of 9 November 1938, the violence rose to a new level. Synagogues were destroyed, shops looted, and thousands of people arrested.

From 1939 on, the measures were increasingly aimed at the expulsion of the Jewish population. At the same time, opportunities to leave the country were further restricted. Starting in October 1941, a general ban on emigration came into effect for all Jews in the German sphere of influence.

(Room 3) Racism and Anti-Semitism

Racism and anti-Semitism are patterns of thought and behaviour designed to disparage and oppress certain groups of people. Both have roots stretching back centuries. Towards the end of the 19th century, both systems were increasingly legitimised through pseudoscientific claims and expanded into political weapons.

The classification of people by supposedly natural categories was applied to politics, law, medicine, and everyday life. Both systems of exclusion and oppression were among the most influential ideological frameworks of modern Europe. Racist thinking in European colonialism asserted the “superiority” of white, “Aryan” or “Germanic” groups. It declared others, particularly people of colour, to be “inferior”.

Only anti-Semitism developed a conceptual framework in which Jews were regarded as “inferior” and, at the same time, branded as all-powerful rulers of the world.

Racist Theory and Practice

In the course of European colonial rule, racist theories gained significant traction in the 19th century. Influential natural scientists lent credibility to the notion of superior and inferior “human races”, thereby legitimising colonial power structures. Colonial rule was largely founded on racist principles, including “race laws” and bans on interracial marriage.

In 1885, the Caribbean anthropologist Anténor Firmin published his work “De l'égalité des races humaines” (The Equality of Human Races). In it, he challenged the racial theories of his time and emphasised the fundamental equality of all people. His book stands in the tradition of humanist resistance against racist theories and their application in practice.

Staged “Inferiority”

Starting in the late 19th century, people from the colonies were displayed for European audiences in “human zoos”. They were portrayed as backward and “primitive”. Millions of visitors viewed such exhibitions in zoos, at fairs, and in amusement parks. The shows served as entertainment while simultaneously reinforcing power structures and racist ideas.

After 1945, forms of racism in the colonies changed under the concept of “development”. The colonised societies were now regarded as immature children who needed to be educated according to European standards. Such ideas continued to shape politics and public perception long after the formal end of the colonial empires.

The Theory and Practice of Anti-Semitism

The term “anti-Semitism” emerged in Germany in the late 1870s. It draws on centuries above all of religiously defined hostility towards Jews. The biological thinking underlying racial theory represents an intensification of older systems of discrimination. Jews were then regarded as enemies even when they had fully become assimilated in the broader society.

At the beginning of the 20th century, widely circulated propaganda intensified the notion of a secret “Jewish world domination”. The idea that Jews secretly infiltrated and controlled society as a whole and wanted to suppress other peoples distinguished anti-Semitism from other forms of racism. From 1933 on, the Nazi regime translated these ideas into a systematic policy of exclusion, disenfranchisement, and destruction.

Staged “Inferiority”

Like the colonial powers, the Nazi regime staged the supposed “inferiority” of various groups of people. In addition to Jews, this applied to Eastern Europeans, Sinti and Roma, people with disabilities, and homosexuals.

Public humiliation, laws, and violence reinforced one another. With the “racial laws”, the state intervened profoundly and violently in people’s lives from 1935 onwards. The Nazi regime systematically pursued the proclaimed goal of a “pure national body”, placing millions of people across Europe in grave danger.

(Room 4) Conquest, Settlement, Transformation

On the surface, colonial land grabs and National Socialist conquests in occupied Eastern Europe bear striking similarities. In both systems, “race” and “space” were central categories. Expulsion and settlement aimed to create a new order of things.

The colonial fiction of the “discovery” of new worlds obscured the reality of violent conquest, the effects of which can still be felt today.

The aim of the Nazi policy of conquest in the East was to create a German settlement area whose influence was to extend as far as the Urals. Around 300 million people of “Germanic” origin were to dominate this area. SS leaders in particular often used colonial vocabulary for these plans and drew comparisons with the colonial era. Both violent regimes sought the radical transformation of territories, societies, and cultures. They accepted the extermination of entire populations in the process. While colonialism in its final phase seemed to offer prospects of “development”, Nazi rule left nothing but destruction in its wake.

Settlement, Violence and “Civilisation”

The European settlement of the North American east coast in the 17th century was a continuation of a much older expansion. It was followed by a violent process of land seizure and expulsion of the indigenous peoples. The westward movement of the “frontier” was based on military force, treaty breaches and expropriation. Within a few centuries, the initially small European minority had become the dominant force.

In other regions of the world, like parts of Asia and Africa, European settlers remained small minorities. They mostly lived in segregated settlements organised according to racist principles. Under the guise of “civilisation”, they established violent rule and the ruthless exploitation of the land.

Mastery of Nature

In colonial contexts, the subjugation of people was always accompanied by an attempt to master nature. Landscapes were to be exploited and transformed. This impulse was also expressed in European big-game hunting, which served to demonstrate power and superiority.

Gigantic construction projects such as dams and waterways aimed to reshape and control nature. This was accompanied by the transformation of farming methods as well as changes to ways of life and accommodation. Many of these plans were never realised. Others continue to shape the affected regions to this day.

The imposition of European construction methods and ways of life often went hand in hand with violence and reformist “modernisation plans”, particularly after 1945.

Colonial Fantasies up to 1939

Unlike the victorious powers, Germany lost its colonies following its defeat in the First World War. Yet colonial fantasies persisted throughout the Weimar Republic and into the Nazi regime. They were also reflected in state-level plans for overseas possessions. However, such ideas were gradually superseded by expansionist plans focused on Eastern Europe, which Hitler had already laid out in his propaganda volume “Mein Kampf”.

Following the occupation of Poland in 1939, millions of people were forcibly cast out and resettled. The aim of the National Socialist policy of conquest was to create a “living space” defined by racist principles.

Land Grabbing and Domination

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the planning and implementation of radical restructuring was considerably intensified.

The conquered territories in the East were not only to be controlled, but also fundamentally transformed by means of expulsion, resettlement, and mass murder. This encompassed the restructuring of towns, villages, rivers, landscapes, roads, and marshes.

Towards the end of the war, the planners foresaw their rule extending as far as the Urals. The “General Plan East” envisaged the expulsion or death of millions of people. This also involved the so-called “Starvation Plan” of 1941 which projected the deaths of around 30 million people.

(Room 5) Collaboration: Between Coercion and Conformity

The Nazi occupiers in Europe, like colonial powers, relied on the cooperation of local players. In both of these unequal relationships, a militarily superior power was dependent on cooperation to secure its rule.

Collaboration is rarely based on ideological agreement. For the most part, it comes about under conditions of violence and coercion. The subjugated were either making the best of their few available options or simply trying to save their own lives.

Most forms of collaboration and forced cooperation do not give a clear-cut picture of perpetrators and victims. Rather, they involve fluid transitions shaped by the necessity of surviving under a superior force: over time, the cooperation with occupiers could change into distance. The initial accommodation with the occupiers could lead to resistance.

Colonial Auxiliary Forces

Colonial rule usually began with an imbalance: small European minorities faced large indigenous majorities. To secure their precarious hold on power, colonial regimes sought the support of local populations. Administration and surveillance could often only function with the support of indigenous groups. Colonial wars were planned by European officers but fought predominantly by indigenous soldiers.

The boundaries between coercion, assimilation, and resistance were fluid. Collaboration with colonial powers could coexist with resistance against Nazi Germany. Similarly, anti-colonialist governments could form temporary alliances with Nazi Germany. Rather than clear-cut opposition, what emerged were unstable and often contradictory alliances.

Education and Engagement

In France and Belgium, the term *évolués* (the evolved, developed) was used to describe small, Europeanised elites in the French colonies. This group of “developed” individuals consisted primarily of indigenous people who had received a Western-style school and vocational education and were proficient in French. They served as civil servants, teachers, soldiers, or medical staff within the colonial administration. They enjoyed certain social and legal privileges, but remained largely excluded from politics.

Some *évolués* initially served as agents of colonial rule, but later became influential critics or opponents of the system. At the same time, many remained key pillars of the colonial system and fought on the side of the Allies against Nazi Germany and the Axis powers during the Second World War.

The Invention of Collaboration

Collaboration occurred in all countries occupied by Germany. The term took on its political meaning in France in the 1940s and initially referred to cooperation with the occupying forces as the supposedly best option for a defeated nation.

The extent and motives behind collaboration were equally diverse: coercion, ideological affinity, personal gain, or the hope of retaining some freedom of action. The Nazi regime conscripted industrial workers in the occupied territories and often brought them to work in Germany.

Collaboration played a central role not only in the administration, but also in the war economy, the suppression of the resistance, and the deportation and murder of European Jews.

Auxiliary Volunteers – Police and Military Units

In 1941, the Wehrmacht began taking on local personnel – mostly recruited from the civilian population or from among Soviet prisoners of war – as “auxiliary volunteers” (so-called “Hiwis” – those “willing to help”). They were often deployed in transport operations, security units, and in the fight against partisans. Such units were also active within the police force, in ghettos, and in concentration and extermination camps. Recruitment was driven by propaganda and material incentives, but coercion and the pressure of sheer survival were also frequently involved.

In 1943, non-German soldiers on the Eastern Front amounted to around one third of those wearing the German uniforms. By 1944, they made up more than half of all those serving in the Waffen-SS. After the SS objected, to the formation of such units as the Russian “Vlasov Army”, which was composed of prisoners and émigrés, was no longer pursued.

Anti-colonial Cooperation

For strategic reasons, the Nazi regime sought alliances with anti-colonial movements in the European colonies. This included an alliance with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who spread anti-Semitic and anti-British propaganda and was involved in the formation of Muslim units for the Waffen-SS.

Subhash Chandra Bose, a leading figure in the Indian independence movement against the British, also collaborated with the Nazi leadership for a time. He supported the formation of Indian units, which were placed under the command of the SS in 1944.

In both cases, these were minority groups. Far more Muslims and Indian soldiers fought on the side of the Allies against the German Reich and its alliance partners. Such cases illustrate a recurring pattern in collaboration: the tactical alliance with the enemy of one's own enemy.

(Room 6) Forms of Resistance

The violence of the colonial and Nazi regimes gave rise to diverse forms of resistance. Certain similarities can be found between anti-colonial movements that waged guerrilla wars against European colonial powers and the struggle of partisans during the Second World War. Parallels also exist on the side of the authorities, where violent reactions ranged from “punitive expeditions” to modern counter-insurgency strategies.

It was not uncommon for privileged members of the colonial powers to become leaders of the resistance. The grey areas and contradictions in individual biographies – between cooperation and resistance – were later largely overlooked in the commemoration and celebration of these figures.

The possibilities for resistance, however, varied greatly. An exemplary case is the comparison of anti-colonial liberation movements, some of which were well-armed, with the insurgents in the Warsaw Ghetto. The uprisings in the Nazi extermination camps were doomed to failure, as those involved had no military resources whatsoever.

Resistance in the German Colonies

Anti-colonial resistance played an important role in the German colonies. Many local rulers initially sought to secure their autonomy through treaties or cooperation with the German colonial power. However, treaty breaches, land seizures, and acts of violence by German soldiers and settlers led to uprisings and guerrilla wars.

These were met with massive military force. Between 1904 and 1907, conflicts in several regions escalated into colonial wars with genocidal traits, particularly against the Herero and Nama peoples and during the Maji Maji War.

The violence destroyed the social structures, economic systems, and living environments of many colonial societies. Its consequences are still felt today and shape ongoing debates about remembrance and colonial continuities.

Biographies of Resistance

Anti-colonial resistance was often influenced and led by privileged “insiders” within the colonial system. These were individuals who had worked in the administration, in missions, or in the military and educational systems of the colonial powers. They were thoroughly familiar with the language, culture, and techniques of domination of the European colonial powers. From these privileged positions, they emerged as champions of radical critique and political resistance.

Since the 1930s and increasingly after 1945, many of these activists have attracted international attention. They gained support from anti-colonial movements on a global scale. As theorists, political leaders, and as much-discussed, revered, and at times romanticised symbolic figures, they continue to influence debates on colonialism to this day.

Resistance in Germany

Resistance to the Nazi dictatorship grew in the time before and after 1933, primarily within organisations on the political left. But by 1934, their networks, structures, and leadership had been largely crushed by the Nazi state.

Thereafter, the resistance often continued in small groups or through individuals. Links between these groups and common strategies in the struggle remained fragmented. Courage and personal conviction characterised many actions, but had only a limited impact.

The biographies and actions of individuals and groups stand as examples of moral resistance against terror and dictatorship. At the same time, the history of the German resistance bears witness to the strength of the regime. The Nazi dictatorship could not be overthrown from within. It was defeated militarily by the Allies, lacking decisive resistance from within Germany itself.

Resistance under Occupation

Resistance movements took various forms in all the countries occupied by Germany. In Poland, France, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, for example, partisan groups emerged which the Wehrmacht was unable to control, even when resorting to extreme brutality.

Many groups received support from the Allies and were able to exert considerable pressure on the German occupying forces. Sabotage, reconnaissance, and armed combat shaped the reality of daily life in many regions.

In the occupied countries, resistance also existed within ghettos, concentration camps, and extermination camps. Some uprisings – as in the Warsaw Ghetto – are particularly well known. Others – including those in the extermination camps – have received little attention.

These actions had no chance of military success, yet they retain great symbolic significance to this day. They represent an attempt to preserve a degree of autonomy and to make a lasting mark, even under conditions of extreme terror.

Colonies as a Resource for the Resistance

Following the defeats of 1940, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and French General Charles de Gaulle called for the struggle against Germany to continue. To this end, they assigned important roles to the colonies.

Colonial territories served the Allies as areas of refuge and as a base for the necessary military reorganisation. At the same time, the colonies provided enormous economic resources and human manpower. Raw materials, food, and industrial capacity bolstered the Allies' war effort.

Moreover, some four to five million soldiers from Africa, Asia, and other colonial regions fought against Nazi Germany and the other Axis powers. Through their efforts, they played a decisive role in sustaining the colonial powers. Many of these soldiers hoped for political change and national independence at home. These hopes were dashed in 1945.

(Room 7) Forced Labour

The ruthless exploitation of human labour and natural resources was one of the defining features of European colonial rule, continuing into the 20th century. The violence employed in this process exceeded all prevailing legal norms in Europe.

Forced labour also played a central role within the Nazi regime's sphere of influence. The Nazi concentration camps and deportation of civilian labourers and prisoners of war represent an extreme form of the colonial forced labour practices.

Within a few years, the Nazi regime had deployed around 13 to 14 million forced labourers – a figure equivalent to that reached by the transatlantic slave trade over a period of some 350 years.

Both systems of rule shared an extreme degree of coercion and violence in the service of economic exploitation. What distinguished National Socialism above all, however, was the direct transition from economic exploitation to targeted extermination through hard labour.

Forced Labour in Africa

In Africa, forced labour was a central feature of colonial rule. Colonial governments, companies and settlers used forced recruitment, taxes, and violence to control the workforce.

Forced labour was particularly widespread in the cultivation of raw materials for export, such as rubber, cotton and cocoa, as well as in the construction of railways, roads and other infrastructure. To achieve their goals, officials, entrepreneurs, and their staff frequently resorted to violence, punishment and starvation. Colonial regimes often justified this practice by claiming that it helped to abolish slavery or that it promoted the “development” of the colonies.

An extreme example of colonial violence was the international exploitation of the Congo. Several million people are believed to have suffered as a result of violent coercion in rubber production.

The Bengal Famine

The Second World War, the colonial war economy, and political decisions all contributed to the 1943 famine in the British colony of Bengal. Forced labour and conscription, and military measures disrupted the economy and everyday life. British authorities destroyed boats and confiscated rice stocks in order to hinder the expected Japanese invasion. Rice imports to Bengal from Japanese-occupied Burma plummeted. Transport and local supply systems collapsed.

The colonial administration responded late to warnings of famine and prioritised the transport of troops and military supplies over adequate provisions for civilians. Landless people, fishermen, and the urban poor were particularly affected.

It is estimated that two to three million people died. It stands as a stark example of colonial atrocities that remain largely ignored in the Western world today.

Forced Labour in Germany and Europe

Forced labour was a fundamental element of the Nazi regime and economic system. It existed in the German Reich, in the occupied territories, and in the concentration camps.

Millions of men and women were deployed in industry, transport, armaments production, agriculture, construction, local authorities, and in private households. Within the German Reich alone, around 13 to 14 million people were subjected to forced labour between 1939 and 1945.

By the time the tide of war turned in the winter of 1941/1942, the German war economy had become heavily dependent on this labour. In 1944, foreign civilian workers and prisoners of war accounted for around a quarter of all workers in the German Reich. In sectors central to the arms industry, the figure was often well over half.

Forced Labour in Concentration Camps

Forced labour in the concentration camps represents a distinct case within the Nazi system of extreme exploitation. Millions of people were forced to work in camps, satellite camps, and occupied territories. Prisoners were made to manufacture weapons, ammunition, vehicles, aircraft, and industrial goods, or to work in quarries and on construction sites.

Forced labour was part of a system of deliberate exploitation and – in the case of Jewish prisoners – of “extermination through work”. Hunger, violence, disease, and extreme working hours led to mass deaths. One example of this is the Mittelbau-Dora camp complex in Thuringia. There, from 1944 onwards, prisoners produced rocket weapons – the V1 and V2 – in mine tunnels, under deadly conditions.

(Room 8) Industrial Extermination

In 1941, the Nazi policy of extermination reached a completely new, historically unprecedented stage. Mobile task forces murdered over a million people behind the front lines in the East through mass shootings.

At the 1942 Wannsee Conference, the already ongoing murder of European Jews was further coordinated and accelerated. At the same time, extermination camps such as Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka were established – facilities that were not “camps” in any conventional sense. They served exclusively for the rapid and efficient murder of people. The Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp was soon incorporated into this system.

Nothing in the history of European colonialism can compare with this specific form of state-organised murder of civilians, carried out on an industrial scale and without military justification.

Wannsee Conference

On 20 January 1942, 15 high-ranking representatives from the ministries, the Nazi Party, the SS, and the police met in a villa on Berlin's Lake Wannsee. The conference served to coordinate the murder of European Jews, which had already begun. The minutes document the systematic registration of Jewish populations by country and set a target of around eleven million people to be killed. The Wannsee Conference stands for the bureaucratic organisation of an ongoing genocide.

Extermination Sites

In the so-called Generalgouvernement, the central section of German-occupied Poland, the murder campaign known as "Aktion Reinhard" was carried out in 1942/1943 to systematically murder the Jews in that area. To this end, extermination sites were established in Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka.

These sites were not "camps" in the conventional sense of the word; most of those who arrived had only a few hours to live. Rather, the sites were designed exclusively for murder. They differed fundamentally from all known forms of colonial concentration camps. Around 1.7 million people were murdered in the facilities specifically built for the Reinhard operation.

From 1943, the facilities were systematically dismantled, mass graves were opened, and forests were planted to erase all traces of the atrocities.

The Deportation from Rhodes

Until 1944, a small Jewish community of around 1,800 people lived on the island of Rhodes in the eastern Mediterranean. Their roots stretched far back into antiquity. Life was characterised by trade, craftsmanship, family, and everyday Mediterranean life.

In July 1944, the Jewish inhabitants of Rhodes and the neighbouring island of Kos were arrested and deported. The agonising journey by ship and train to Auschwitz, over a distance of around 2,500 kilometres, lasted over three weeks. Around two-thirds of those deported were murdered in the gas chambers on the very day of their arrival.

The extermination of this comparatively small Jewish community, situated far from Germany, took place at a time when the war had long since been lost. The murder followed no military or economic logic, but purely the ideological drive towards total extermination. These events exemplify the systematic murder of millions of Jewish people in Europe.

Auschwitz

The Auschwitz concentration camp, established in 1940, became the most notorious symbol of Nazi mass murder. The camp complex combined various functions and changed in the course of time.

Like other camps characterised by imprisonment, terror, and forced labour, Auschwitz-Birkenau developed from around 1942 into an industrially organised killing centre. In specially constructed gas chambers and crematoria, people were systematically killed and their bodies incinerated. Auschwitz was also the hub of a Europe-wide system of deportations. Trains from almost all German-occupied regions arrived there.

Most of the deportees were murdered immediately upon arrival. Among the victims of this industrial extermination were the Jewish men, women and children from the island of Rhodes. Auschwitz represents the systematic combination of administration, technology, and murder on a hitherto unknown scale.

(Room 9) (In)visibility

The question of how much violence a society accepts also depends on its geographical distance from the events and on the (in)visibility of the cruelty being perpetrated. Much of the violence took place at a distance: in the colonial territories or in occupied Eastern Europe.

In both systems of rule, it was of central importance to render parts of the perpetrated violence invisible. Images and reports were controlled, filtered, and falsified. When this control failed, revelations could trigger criticism and carry significant political consequences. The Nazi regime succeeded to a high degree in concealing the nature and scale of its violence from the global public. Secrecy was a structural element of state violence.

These efforts to conceal violence were countered by attempts from members of the opposition and victims of persecution to document and publicise it. Control over images and interpretations thus played a decisive role in determining the stability, perception, and vulnerability of repressive rule.

“Atrocities” and Colonial Scandals in Africa

Around 1900, an increasing amount of information about violent colonial practices began to reach the European public. In the German Empire, reports of colonialist Carl Peters’ brutal methods sparked criticism in the press and in parliament.

This led to a Reichstag debate on the legitimacy of colonial rule. At the same time, a worldwide wave of outrage spread against “Congo atrocities”. Journalists, activists, and missionaries circulated reports, photographs, and eyewitness accounts. Intellectuals organised campaigns to put diplomatic pressure on governments.

These protests did not put an end to colonial exploitation. Nevertheless, they led to promises of reform, strengthened humanitarian networks, and brought colonial violence to the attention of a global political audience.

Colonial Wars of Western Democracies

Colonial violence remained a central source of conflict for Western democracies well into the mid-20th century. Some two to three million people died during the famine of 1943 in the British colony of Bengal. The British government attempted to downplay the scale of the disaster, while photographs and reports brought it to international attention.

In the Algerian War, which lasted until 1962, France exercised violence through repressive counter-insurgency methods, systematic torture, and mass internment in camps. Hundreds of thousands of Algerians were killed. Revelations led to protests, trials, and political crises. Comparisons with the Holocaust lent particular force to the anti-colonial criticism.

After the Mau Mau War in Kenya (1952–1960), the British kept incriminating files under lock and key. It was not until 2011 that their existence was publicly confirmed, prompting widespread debate. This led to claims for compensation, legal proceedings, and renewed scrutiny of colonial responsibility.

Propaganda and the Destruction of Evidence

The Nazi regime used trivialising images and propaganda to conceal its violence. Staged photographs and film footage from concentration camps like Dachau or Sachsenhausen attempted to show orderly detention conditions. This was particularly evident in the propaganda film about the Theresienstadt ghetto, which was designed to create the illusion of near-normal everyday life.

At the same time, the regime attempted to remove all traces of the violence. Under “Operation 1005”, beginning in 1942, mass graves were opened, bodies were cremated, and forests were planted over the sites to conceal them. The aim was to destroy evidence and hamper future investigations.

Witnesses – The Limits of Deception

The Nazi regime attempted to conceal the mass murders in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, individual resistance fighters managed to smuggle information out and bring it to the attention of the international community.

Jan Karski brought information about the mass murders in occupied Poland to the attention of the American President. At Auschwitz-Birkenau, prisoners managed to photograph the process of mass murder – the only known images of their kind. Emanuel Ringelblum organised a secret archive in the Warsaw Ghetto to preserve documents, reports, drawings, and accounts of daily life for posterity. Germaine Tillion smuggled information about human experiments out of Ravensbrück concentration camp.

These examples show that even the Nazi regime not have complete control over truth and memory.

(Epilogue) Perspectives and Positions

Debates about the similarities and differences between colonial violence and Nazi rule have carried on since the 1930s and continue to the present day. Rooted in the fields of history, the social sciences, and cultural studies, these debates shape political discourse, media coverage, and art.

The discussion focuses on questions of continuity, discontinuity, and comparability. Some cite colonial traditions as key precursors of Nazi violence, while others emphasise the differences and the unprecedented nature of the Holocaust.

The interviews with experts present a range of perspectives and positions in the debate and invite visitors to join the discussion.

Aomar Boum, Professor of Anthropology, History, and Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles

Sebastian Conrad, Professor of Modern History at Freie Universität Berlin

Edward Kissi, Professor of Africana Studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa

Stefanie Middendorf, Professor of Modern and Contemporary History (Dictatorial Studies) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Martin Thomas, Professor of Imperial History at the University of Exeter

Controversial Kinship

Colonial and National Socialist Violence

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum



Dr Stephan Malinowski

Dr Stephan Malinowski, Professor Emeritus of Modern European History at the University of Edinburgh, is a historian. His areas of research include the history of violence in 20th century Europe, with a particular focus on colonial and Nazi history. He studied history and political science in Berlin and Montpellier. From 1995 to 1998, he was a doctoral candidate at the European University Institute in Florence. From 1998 to 2008, he held positions as a research fellow, assistant and acting junior lecturer at the Technical University of Berlin, the Humboldt University of Berlin, and the Free University of Berlin. His doctoral thesis on the history of the German nobility from 1871 to 1945 was awarded the Hans-Rosenberg-Prize in 2003. His academic career has taken him, among other posts, to Harvard University as a Kennedy Fellow, to the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies as a Fellow, to University College Dublin for three years, and to the University of Edinburgh, where he taught for twelve years. In 2022, Malinowski was awarded the German Non-Fiction Prize for his book “Die Hohenzollern und die Nazis. Geschichte einer Kollaboration” (“The Hohenzollerns and the Nazis: History of a Collaboration”). Since 2025, he has been teaching again at the Free University of Berlin.



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Colonial Kinship

Colonial and National Socialist Violence

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Dates and Facts

Place	Deutsches Historisches Museum Pei Building, basement
Running time	16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027
Opening hours	Monday to Sunday, 10 am – 6 pm Quite Hours (exhibition time with no group tours): Tues 4–6 pm, Sat 10 am–noon Closed on 24 December 2026
Admission	Single ticket: 7 € reduced 3,50 € free up to age 18 Combiticket (all exhibitions): 10 € reduced 5 € free up to age 18 Online-tickets: ticket.dhm.de
Information	Deutsches Historisches Museum Unter den Linden 2, 10117 Berlin Tel. +49 30 20304-0 info@dhm.de
Internet	www.dhm.de/en/controversial-kinship www.dhm.de/journal/en/programme/c/controversial-kinship
Social media	#dhmBerlin #dhmControversialKinship
Exhibition surface area	Ca, 1 100 m ² , Pei-Bau, basement
Extent of the exhibition	Around 600 objects arranged in nine thematic rooms as well as a prologue and an epilogue, 3 projections, 5 audio stations, 7 historical film clips and an artistic video work, 4 interactive media stations, 14 interviews

President	Prof. Dr. Raphael Gross
Director of Exhibitions	Dorlis Blume
Project head	Dr. Philipp Springer
Curator	Dr. Stephan Malinowski
Research assistant	Frauke Kerstens
Project assistant	Lena Schott
Education and Communication	Brigitte Vogel-Janotta
Exhibition design	Gregor Müller-Übach, Mirjam Schwab
Audio guide	Nathanael Kuck, Berlin, K13, Kinomischung und Tonstudio, Berlin, soundgarden audioguidance GmbH, Munich Dr. Nike Thurn
Accompanying programm	Dr. Nike Thurn
Publications	“Controversial Kinship. Colonial and National Socialist Violence” (edited by Raphael Gross and Stephan Malinowski for the Deutsches Historisches Museum) Wallstein Verlag Historische Urteilskraft 05. Magazin des Deutschen Historischen Museums (Hrsg. Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum) Titelthema: Koloniales und antikoloniales Denken
Sponsor	Supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media

Controversial Kinship

Colonial and National Socialist Violence

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Controversial Kinship Colonial and National Socialist Violence

Edited by Raphael Gross and Stephan Malinowski

317 pages, 82 illustrations (partly in colour), softback with flaps, 17 x 14 cm
ISBN 978-3-8353-6187-4

€ 28.00

Expected to be available from 14 October 2026

Historical foundations of the debate on the “kinship” between colonial and National Socialist violence

The question of whether colonialism and Nazism can be compared with one another has been at the centre of bitterly contested historical-political debates in recent years. However, the controversy extends far beyond the field of history and began as early as the 1930s. This volume focuses on the question of the alleged “kinship” between two violence-prone regimes which, at first glance, share a number of similarities, but on closer inspection also exhibit significant differences: centuries of European colonial rule and the brief, radically accelerated Nazi rule in Europe. The book examines the foundations of this comparison for the period of 1900 to 1960 and addresses topics such as racism, antisemitism, forced labour, collaboration and resistance. What significance, for example, did concentration camps hold in their respective contexts? How did the circumstances surrounding anti-colonial guerrilla units differ from the uprisings in the Warsaw Ghetto or in Auschwitz? By drawing on a broad spectrum of international examples, this volume aims to help steer a highly emotionally charged debate back to its factual core.



Historical Judgement 05. Magazine of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

Cover story: Colonial and Anti-Colonial
Thinking

Published by: Stiftung Deutsches
Historisches Museum
Berlin 2023, 102 pages, in German
ISBN 978-3-86102-231-2
€ 12.00 plus shipping

Historical Judgement 05. Magazine of the Deutsches Historisches Museum

The fifth edition of “Historical Judgement” examines colonial and anti-colonial thinking in German history. It examines how Kant, Herder and Hegel positioned themselves in relation to colonialism and introduces contemporary critics of the German colonies. It also explores colonialist movements under National Socialism and the critique of colonialism during that period, as well as anti-colonialism in the GDR and critical voices in the Federal Republic prior to 1989.

In addition, writer Barbara Honigmann explains why the narration of history always also involves the history of the narration. Rosemarie Burgstaller writes about the Nazi propaganda exhibition “Das Sowjetparadies” (The Soviet Paradise). Jens Bisky focuses on the meanwhile demolished Palace of the Republic. The musician Frank Bretschneider recounts how he and his underground band AG Geige managed to make and distribute electronic music in the GDR. Finally, Dominique Hipp examines the “Stammtisch” (regulars’ table) as a German phenomenon, and Philipp Springer asks what kind of things people donate to museums – and why.

Controversial Kinship

Colonial and National Socialist Violence

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum



Accompanying Programme

Impulses. On Colonial and National Socialist Violence

Matinee to open the Accompanying Programme

Fri, 16 October 2026, 11 am, Pei Building

Mary Fulbrook and Edward Kissi in conversation; moderated by Julia Voss

For almost 100 years, discussions have raged about the parallels and differences between colonial and Nazi violence. What is the historical background of these often politically driven debates? What perspectives come to light on the similarities and continuities, but also the ruptures and limitations of these two systems? On what empirical evidence are these discussions based?

Science historian Julia Voss speaks with Mary Fulbrook, Professor of German History at University College London and author of such books as *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice* and *Bystander Society. Conformity and Complicity in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust*, and historian Edward Kissi, Professor of Africana Studies at the School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies, University of South Florida, and author, among other works, of *Outside Looking In: The World Universalises the Holocaust* and *Africans and the Holocaust: Perceptions and Responses of Colonised and Sovereign Peoples*.

The discussion will take place in German and English with simultaneous interpretation.

Admission is free, please register [here](#).

Doorways: A quote, an object, a room

Lecture series with tour

A quote and an object lead into one of the exhibition rooms. What do they address, what do they reveal, what's behind them? With brief insights, the experts will broaden our perspective on the topics associated with these matters; afterwards, the respective room can be explored and discussed in greater depth.

Wed, 18 November 2026, 4 pm, Pei Building

With Pascal Grosse on the room "Racism and Antisemitism"

Wed, 25 November 2026, 4 pm, Pei Building

With Baijayanti Roy on the room "Collaboration"

Wed, 2 December 2026, 4 pm, Pei Building

With Nabila Oulebsir on the room "Conquest, Settlement, Transformation"

Wed, 9 December 2026, 4 pm, Pei Building

With Sven Beckert on the room "Forced Labour"

Wed, 16 December 2026, 4 pm, Pei Building

With Hewan Semon Marye on the room "Colonial Fascism"

The discussion and guided tour will take place in German.

Admission for the event is free, register [here](#). Please note that, in addition to the booked event, you will also need to purchase an exhibition ticket for your chosen time slot.

Alliances. Anti-colonial and anti-fascist networks

Day-long programme

Sun, 24 January 2027, 10 am–6 pm, Pei Building

Common cause rather than deep divides: When and where did networks of solidarity and broad-based alliances begin to appear in the struggle against colonialism and Nazism? How did they emerge, who shaped them, and what sets them apart? A day-long programme featuring films, guided tours, talks and workshops.

With Emma Kuby, Leslie James and others.

Trials. Colonialism and Nazism on Trial

Talk Series in cooperation with the Documentation Centre “German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War” (ZWBE)

The USA vs. Otto Ohlendorf et al. (1947–48); the Military Court vs. Djamila Boupacha (1960–61); the Public Prosecution vs. Klaus Barbie (1987); Mutua et al. vs. the United Kingdom (2012): Four trials that dealt with colonial and Nazi violence – both in the courtroom and in the accompanying debates, and with comparisons between the two. What were the charges and what arguments did the defence use? What social, historical and political controversies of the 1940s, 1960s, 1980s and 2010s were also at stake in these trials?

Moderated by Claus Leggewie

Wed, 3 February 2027, 6.30 pm, Pei Building

The USA vs. Otto Ohlendorf et al., 1947/48

In the so-called “Einsatzgruppen Trial” (Task Forces Trial), concepts of colonial violence, “civilization” and mass crime were particularly evident; these formed part of the defence strategies and served to relativise their actions. How were other sets of crimes invoked or distinguished from one another? What significance did such references hold for the contemporary reception of the events and early confrontation with National Socialism?

With Alexa Stiller, Leonie Steinl and others

Wed, 17 February 2027, 6.30 pm, Pei Building

The Military Court vs. Djamila Boupacha, 1960–61

Djamila Boupacha, aged 22, was put on trial before a French military court in Algeria for a planned bomb attack. The fact that her confession had been extracted through torture and sexual violence triggered a media scandal which led to the trial being moved to France and sparked widespread solidarity with the defendant. What arguments were used to accuse the French colonial regime of malpractice? What parallels were drawn with Nazi crimes of violence? And what impact did these debates have on Algerian and French society?

With Raphaëlle Branche, Stephan Malinowski and others

Wed, 3 March 2027, 6.30 pm, Pei Building

The Public Prosecution vs. Klaus Barbie, 1987

Following protracted international intervention, the trial of Klaus Barbie, the former Gestapo chief in Lyon, first got underway decades after the crimes he had committed. His defence attorney, Jacques Vergès, consistently questioned the legitimacy of the court by referring to France's history of colonial violence. What parallels between Nazism and colonialism were drawn during the trial? And how did these arguments affect the broader social discourse and influence perceptions of the war and occupation periods – and, not least, such perceptions in the present day?

With Jan Gerber, Annette Wieviorka and others

Wed, 17 March 2027, 6.30 pm, Pei Building

Mutua et al. vs. the United Kingdom, 2012

Historical research laid the foundations for this trial, which was brought by former Kenyan internees and torture victims against the UK Foreign Office. It focused not only the brutal colonial regime but also on the involvement of the highest levels of the British government in the cover-up of these crimes. The trial thus highlighted not only the history of violence but also the persistence of colonial power asymmetries. What consequences did this have for society's confrontation with historical responsibility and its necessary prerequisites?

With Caroline Elkins and others

Sites. Violence and Resistance in Exhibitions

Day-long programme in cooperation with the Documentation Centre
“German Occupation of Europe in the Second World War” (ZWBE)

Sun, 28 February 2027, 10 am-6 pm, Pei Building

From propaganda exhibitions and “human zoos” to exhibitions on resistance: how were violence, hierarchies and power relations staged and demonstrated in and through exhibitions – or, conversely, challenged and subverted? A day-long programme featuring films, guided tours, talks and workshops.

With Harriet Atkinson, James Fortuna, Lanisa Kitchiner, Sandrine Lemaire, Gregor Müller-Übach, Tanja-Bianca Schmidt and others.

Further information and registration available under
www.dhm.de/en/programme

Programme subject to change

Controversial Kinship

Colonial and National Socialist Violence

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Zeughauskino Programme

“Controversial Kinship: Cinematic reflections on colonial and Nazi violence“

23. October to 14. December 2026

What is the relationship between the roughly 500-year history of European colonialism – with its tradition of domination based on racist worldviews, conquest, the use of violence, and exploitation – and the Nazi reign of terror over Europe, which lasted barely five years? To what extent can they be compared? In what respects are they fundamentally different? The exhibition **“Controversial Kinship: Colonial and National Socialist Violence”**, explores the history of such comparisons. It sheds light on key topics in the debate, juxtaposes historical sources with contemporary interpretations, and examines how different political systems have drawn parallels between colonial and Nazi violence.

The Zeughauskino is accompanying the exhibition with an international retrospective that brings together films of various origins and styles. The earliest films in the series date from the Nazi era, when the regime itself used film productions to conjure up fantasies of colonialism and violence. Most of the retrospective films, however, adopt a critical, reflective perspective. They were made from the mid-1980s onwards in various contexts and countries. They share a re-examination of previous viewpoints and interpretations. The feature films and documentaries uncover new, previously neglected aspects of colonial and Nazi violence, while many of them are concerned with ideas of representational criticism. They offer an invitation to explore, through film history, this controversial kinship. The Zeughauskino retrospective will continue on in the first quarter of 2027.

Fri, 23 October 2026, 7 pm, Zeughauskino (Pei Building)

Introduction: Stephan Malinowski

Camp de Thiaroye

SN/DZ/TN 1988, D/Sc: Ousmane Sembène, Thierno Faty Sow,
M: Ismaël Lô, Ph: Smaïl Lakhdar-Hamina, Cast: Ibrahim Sane,
Sidiki Bakaba, Philippe Chamelat, 154' · **DCP, Engl. subtitles**

Sun, 25 October 2026, 7 pm, Zeughauskino (Pei Building)

Introduction: Kamil Moll

Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India

IND 2001, D: Ashutosh Gowariker, Sc: Ashutosh Gowariker,
Kumar Dave, Sanjay Dayma, Ph: Anil Metha, Pr: Aamir Khan,
M: A. R. Rahman, Texts: Javid Akhtar, Cast: Aamir Khan, Gracy
Singh, Rachel Shelley, Paul Blackthorne, 224' · **DCP, Engl.
subtitles**

Tue, 3 November 2026, 7 pm, Zeughauskino (Pei Building)

Saul fia

Son of Saul

HU/FR 2015, D: László Nemes, Sc: László Nemes, Clara Royer,
Ph: Mátyás Erdély, Cast: Géza Röhrig, Levente Molnár, Urs
Rechn, Todd Charmont, Jerzy Walczak, 107' · **DCP, German
subtitles**

Sat, 7 November 2026, 8 pm, Zeughauskino (Pei Building)

Introduction: Rainer Rother

Dahomey

FR/SN/BJ 2024, D: Mati Diop, Ph: Joséphine Drouin-Viallard,
Ed: Gabriel Gonzalez, M: Wally Badarou, Dean Blunt, Voice:
Makenzy Orcel, 71' · **DCP, German subtitles**

Tue, 10 November 2026, 7 pm, Zeughauskino (Pei Building)
Introduction: Tilman Schumacher

Das Himmler-Projekt

Dt 2000, D: Romuald Karmakar, Sc: Romuald Karmakar, Stefan Eberlein, Ph: Bernd Neubauer, Werner Penzel, Florian Süßmayer, Ed: Nicholas Goodwin, Cast: Manfred Zapatka, 185' · **Digital SD**

Tue, 17 November 2026, 7 pm, Zeughauskino (Pei Building)
Introduction: : Seggen Mikael

Germanin

Dt 1943, D: Max W. Kimmich, Sc: Hans Wolfgang Hillers, Max W. Kimmich, M: Theo Mackeben, Cast: Peter Petersen, Luis Trenker, Lotte Koch, Louis Brody, 92' · **35mm**

Sat, 28 November 2026, 11 am (Part 1) + Sun, 29 November, 11am (Part 2), Zeughauskino (Pei Building)

Shoah

FR 1985, D/Sc: Claude Lanzmann, Ph: Dominique Chapuis, Jimmy Glasberg, William Lubtchansky, Ed: Ziva Postec, 567' (Teil 1: 274', Teil 2: 293') · **35mm, German subtitles**

Sat, 5 December 2026, 6 pm, Zeughauskino (Pei Building)
Introduction: Fabian Tietke

Heia Safari. Die Legende von der deutschen Kolonialidylle in Afrika

BRD 1966, D: Ralph Giordano, two parts: 45' + 44' · **Digital SD**

Heia Safari – Für und Wider

BRD 1967, 125' · **Digital SD**

Mon, 14 December 2026, 7 pm, Zeughauskino (Pei Building)
Introduction: Matthias Struch

Carl Peters

Dt 1941, D: Herbert Selpin, Sc: Ernst von Salomon, Walter
Zerlett-Olfenius, Herbert Selpin, Ph: Franz Koch, M: Franz
Doelle, Cast: Hans Albers, Mohamed Husen, 115' · **35mm**

Majubs Reise

Dt 2013, D/Sc: Eva Knopf, Ph: Rainer Hoffmann, Ed: Anne
Glossmann, M: John Gürtler, Speaker: Jule Böwe, 48' · **DCP**

Further information and tickets: www.dhm.de/zeughauskino/en

Controversial Kinship

Colonial and National Socialist Violence

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum



Tours and educational offers

You can find the latest offers and more information at the [DHM Website](#). Registration, information and booking are found under fuehrung@dhm.de or 030/20304-750.

Offers for individual visitors

Public tours

German

🕒 60 minutes

€ 3 € (plus admission)

📅 Mon 3 pm, Thu 4 pm, Fri 2 pm, Sun 4 pm

English

🕒 60 minutes

€ 3 € (plus admission)

📅 Tue 1 pm, Sat 4 pm

Hörführung / Audioguide

German and English

🕒 60-90 minutes

€ 3 € (plus admission)

Free thematic tours

9 November 2026 on German history

(free admission to the exhibitions)

14 December 2026 International Day against Colonialism

27 January 2027 Holocaust Memorial Day

(free admission to the exhibitions)

25 March 2027 International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and Transatlantic Slave Trade

Bookable offers

Languages: German, English, French, Italian, Spanish

Tour for adults

🕒 60 minutes

€ 75 € plus admission (max. 25 Persons), 30 € plus admission
(for max. 10 Persons)

Thematic tour

🕒 75 minutes

€ 1 € per pupil (free admission as a class)

1 € per student (free admission as a seminar group)

30 € Group (max. 10 persons, plus admission)

75 € Group (max. 25 persons, plus admission)

Tour for college students

🕒 60 minutes

€ 1 € per person

Learning German in the Museum

Tour for integration and orientation courses

German

🕒 90 minutes

€ 1 € per person

Tour for members of the Bundeswehr and the police

German

🕒 90 minutes

€ 75 € (max. 25 persons, free admission)

Offers for school classes

Tour for school classes

Secondary levels I and II

German

🕒 60 minutes

€ 1 € per student

History workshop for school classes

Secondary levels I and II

German

🕒 120 minutes

€ 2 € per student

Filmwerkstatt / Film workshop

“Carl Peters” (1941) – film and exhibition

Provisional film

Secondary level II and college students

German

Deutsch

🕒 360 minutes

€ 5 € per pupil / student

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Controversial Kinship

Colonial and National Socialist Violence

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An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



1

Gäbrä Mädhən Nəguse, The Battle of Tembien, 1950s/1960s © MITAG - Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, Rovereto

This painting, in the style of Ethiopian folk art, commemorates the first Battle of Tembien in January 1936, when Ethiopian forces fought against advancing Italian troops in northern Ethiopia.



2

Alfredo Gauro Ambrosi, Bombardamento in Africa Orientale (Bombardment in East Africa), Trentino 1936 © Museo dell'aeronautica Gianni Caproni (Fondazione Museo storico del Trentino, C00222

Alfredo Gauro Ambrosi painted the bombardment during the Italo-Abyssinian War of 1935–1936 in the style of aeropittura (aerial painting), thus combining enthusiasm for technology with the Italian fascists' claims to power and superiority.

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Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence

dhm

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



3 C. L. R. James during a rally at Trafalgar Square, London, 25. August 1935, Reproduktion © Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images, K025939-A4

In August 1935, the Caribbean intellectual C. L. R. James (1901–1989), chairman of the International African Friends of Abyssinia, spoke to a crowd of around 500 people and warned of the impending Italian attack on Abyssinia.



4 Concentration camp for Herero and Nama in German South West Africa, 1905–1908 © Sam Cohen Library, Scientific Society Swakopmund (<https://sciswk.com>)

From 1884 to 1915, the German Empire was a colonial power in what is now Namibia. The German administration used violence to enforce its rule and repeatedly oppressed the local population, which put up resistance against land seizures and human rights violations. Between 1904 and 1908, the violence escalated in a war of extermination against the Herero and Nama. Under the command of General Lothar von Trotha, tens of thousands were killed, died of thirst in the Omaheke Desert, or perished in camps. This oppression is regarded as the first genocide of the 20th century.

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Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence

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An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



5

5_High boots belonging to a member of the General SS, Obersturmbannführer, Sturm 112, 1933–1935
© Deutsches Historisches Museum

The black, knee-high boots were a defining feature of members of the SA and SS. They symbolise determination and obedience, but also violence and the suppression of opponents.



6

Vladimír Matějka, "Obedience", from the nine-part cycle "There is a path to freedom ...", Příbram, after 1945
© Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen, Oranienburg, IV 208

In 1939, Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945) coined the cynical motto: "[...] there is a path to freedom. Its milestones are obedience, diligence, honesty, order, cleanliness, sobriety, truthfulness, a spirit of sacrifice, and love of the Fatherland!" He promised that prisoners would be released from the concentration camp. In reality, this became increasingly rare after the war began. After his imprisonment, Vladimír Matějka, a former prisoner of the Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps, created a nine-part cycle on Himmler's propaganda lie, at the request of fellow prisoners. He set it against scenes of a prisoner's everyday life at Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

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Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence



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16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



7

Torah finials with fire damage © Jüdisches Museum Wien, Inv. Nr. 7556, photo: Lukas Pichelmann

The Torah finials come from the Währing Synagogue, which was located on Schopenhauerstrasse in Vienna. The systematic discrimination against Jewish men and women in the German Reich reached its first peak around 9 November 1938. As part of the November pogroms, anti-Semitic acts of violence took place in numerous towns and cities. The synagogue was set on fire around midday on 10 November 1938. The fire brigade intervened only to protect the surrounding houses. The building burned to the ground, and the ruins were cleared away in 1939–1940.



8

Miniature model of the entrance gate of the “Abyssinian Village”, Dresden, ca. 1910
© Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, Dresden

The model was created as part of a competition for the exhibition architecture of the “International Hygiene Exhibition” in 1911. The winners recreated an Abyssinian village in which around 75 men, women and children from Abyssinia were put on display. The people, brought to Germany by Continental Enterprises Limited, were forced to perform dances, re-enact combat scenes, and demonstrate their craft skills.

Press images
Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence

dhm

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



9 Measuring compass from the Dachau concentration camp, Germany © Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin

The measuring device was found at the camp infirmary following the liberation of Dachau. It had previously been used to measure sick prisoners.



10 Tropical helmet for "Schutztruppen" officials, London, 1888–1914 © Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin

The tropical helmet served not only as protection from the sun and rain, but it also signified affiliation with the white colonial ruling class.

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Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence



An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



11 Hippopotamus hoof from East Africa, mounted as a cigar case, “Max Erler” Fur Company, Leipzig, ca. 1915
© Museum der Stadt Lünen, L 074

Colonial official Ernst Goormann had this hippopotamus hoof prepared as a “cigar case” in Leipzig by the court purveyor Max Erler. According to an invoice dated 18 June 1915, the three other hooves from the hippo that had been shot during a big-game hunt in East Africa were made into two flowerpots and a wine cooler. The hippopotamus hooves were shipped to Germany as cargo. The entire process cost Ernst Goormann – or rather, his father – 135.50 marks.



12 Clearing of land by setting grass on fire during a German research expedition to Tendaguru in German East Africa, 1909–1913, Photographer: Edwin Hennig or Werner Janensch © Berlin, Museum für Naturkunde, K 002, 414

Members of an expedition to excavate and remove dinosaur skeletons observed the slash-and-burn practices in East Africa. Later, expedition leader Edwin Hennig recommended this method as an efficient means of developing and controlling the natural environment in the colonies.

Press images
Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence

dhm

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



13 Shooting practice at the Colonial Women's School Rendsburg, from a photo album of Principal Karl Körner (1885–1976), 1930s © Schleswig-Holsteinische Landesbibliothek, Kiel

Although Germany had forfeited its colonies in 1919, the colonial school took up operations eight years later. It prepared young women for life in Africa and later for settlement in the occupied eastern territories.



14 Franciszek Targosz and Czesław Lenczowski, „Fox Hunting“, Auschwitz concentration camp 1943–1944 © Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim

Rudolf Höss (1900–1947), commandant of Auschwitz concentration camp, commissioned two concentration camp prisoners to paint this picture: Franciszek Targosz (1899–1979) began the painting and Czesław Lenczowski (1905–1984) completed it. It reflects the Höss family's aristocratic lifestyle, which was also evident in the regular hunting excursions near the camp with his son Klaus.

Press images
Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence

dhm

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



15 Aerial view of the destroyed city of Wieluń, September 1939 © Muzeum Ziemi Wieluńskiej, Wieluń

Wieluń was the first undefended Polish town to be bombed by the German Luftwaffe at the start of the war on 1 September 1939. Within a very short time, around 75 percent of the town was destroyed, including the 13th-century church. Around 1,200 people were killed. As Wieluń was not a strategic target, the attack was primarily intended to test the German dive bombers under actual combat conditions.



16 Production of new signs with German street names, Poznań, 1939 © Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-E11777

The Germanisation of the occupied territories began soon after the outbreak of war. It included the renaming of Polish streets, which aimed to instil a sense of belonging to the Reich among the German inhabitants. At the same time, the new German order of domination was to be made unmistakably clear to the Polish population.

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Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence

dhm

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



17 Postcard featuring “Askaris” and the German Imperial flag, c. 1910 © Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin

African soldiers serving in the German colonial forces in German East Africa were known as “Askaris”. Due to the small number of European soldiers, the German colonial forces also began in 1889 to rely on recruits from East Africa, Sudan and Egypt.



18 Model 1915 “Adrian” steel helmet for the French colonial infantry, France, 1915–1918
© Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin

This steel helmet was introduced as the standard helmet for the French Army during the First World War. The ‘Tirailleurs sénégalais’ were also equipped with it. These units, recruited from soldiers in the French colonies in West Africa, fought as part of the French forces in both the First and Second World Wars. They were regarded as particularly formidable fighting units and were frequently deployed on risky missions such as assault operations.

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Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence

dhm

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



19 Mohammed Amin al-Husseini with Heinrich Himmler, Hochwald field command post in East Prussia, 4 July 1943 © Bundesarchiv, Bild 101III-Alber-164-18A, photo: Kurt Alber

Mohammed Amin al-Husseini (ca. 1896–1974) sought to establish a pan-Arab state in the French and British mandate territories and hoped for German support. Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler used him to further their own interests, to mobilise Muslim SS volunteers and disseminate anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda. Through the radio station “Radio Zeesen”, al-Husseini spread his political goals as well as Nazi ideology throughout the Arab world.

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20 Water bottle of a Herero, 1885–1904
© Ethnologische Sammlung des Museums Natur und Mensch – Museen Freiburg, photo: Axel Killian

After the Battle of Waterberg, the Herero fled into the Omaheke Desert. The German military blocked all other routes, sealed off water sources, and prevented the men, women, and children from returning. Tens of thousands died of thirst, exhaustion, hunger, and persecution.

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Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence

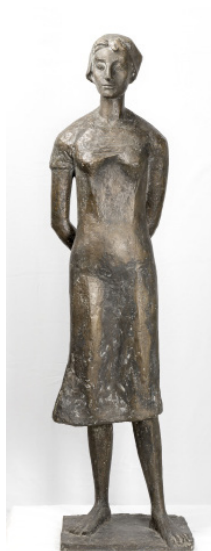
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16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



21 Frantz Fanon at an Afro-Asian solidarity conference, Conakry (Guinea), 15. April 1960
© mauritius images / TopFoto

Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), originally from Martinique, was a psychiatrist, philosopher, and writer. His analyses of colonialism, racism, and power influenced anti-colonial movements worldwide. In Algeria, he joined the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), treated resistance fighters, and researched the psychological consequences of colonial violence and oppression. He died in the USA in 1961. Members of the Armée de libération nationale (ALN) secretly transported his body to Algeria, where Fanon was buried in accordance with his own wishes.



22 Jenny Wiegmann-Mucchi (1895–1969), *Interrogation in Algeria, 1958/1959*, Neue Nationalgalerie, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, photo: André van Linn
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2026

The German artist Jenny Wiegmann-Mucchi (1895–1969) created the bronze sculpture during the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962). It commemorates the Algerian activist Djamilia Bouhired (born 1935), who was charged by the French army with involvement in attacks, tortured, and sentenced to death. Jenny Wiegmann-Mucchi was active in the resistance against Italian fascism from 1943 to 1945.

Press images

Controversial Kinship

Colonial and National Socialist Violence

dhm

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



23 Leaflet "Vivre libre ou mourir" ('Live free or die'), London, 1944 © Lyon, Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation, 1966.614.3

The leaflet features the French flag, the Cross of Lorraine, and Marianne. With these national symbols and the slogan from the French Revolution, it called for resistance against the German occupation.



24 Badges used to identify Polish forced labourers, 1939–1945 © Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin

From 1940, Polish forced labourers were required to wear such badges. Violations of the regulation could be penalised with imprisonment or detention in a "labour re-education" or concentration camp.

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Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence

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An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 to 11 April 2027



25 Tombstone of Esther Sulam, Rhodes, 1668
© Jewish Museum of Rhodes

Jewish life had a centuries-old tradition on Rhodes, as documented by this 17th-century tombstone. Prior to German occupation in 1943, the Jewish population numbered around 1,500. In July 1944, German forces deported the entire community to Auschwitz, including children and the elderly. The vast majority were killed in the concentration camp's gas chambers shortly after their arrival.



26 Alexandro Angel, Members of the Maccabi sports club, Left to right: Buchuk Cohen, Moshe Alhadeff, Yosef Alcana, Aslan Israel, Haco Franco, Albert Alhadeff, Rahamin Benoun, Rhodos, 1938 © Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation Archives, Los Angeles

Almost all the Jews of Rhodes were murdered in Auschwitz, including every single person pictured here. About 200 Jewish people from the island survived the Holocaust.

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Press images
Controversial Kinship
Colonial and National Socialist Violence

dhm

An Exhibition of the Deutsches Historisches Museum
16 October 2026 – 11 April 2027



27 David Olère, “Vers la mort” (“On the Way to Death”),
Paris, 1945 © Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris (France) /
Coll. David Olère, DS-O.1678

The French artist David Olère was deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in 1943 and assigned to the Sonderkommando. As a witness to the mass murder of Jewish people, he processed his experiences in numerous works of art. The painting depicts a group of people arriving at the crematorium shortly before their murder, along with its smoking chimney.

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DHM Exhibition Preview 2027/2028

As of 14 October 2026, additions and alterations are subject to change



7 April 2028 to 14. January 2029

Portraits of German History (working title)

On 7 April 2028, the exhibition “Portraits of German History” (working title) will open in the Pei Building of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, covering a surface area of 560 square metres. The exhibition will focus on outstanding portraits of historical figures, featuring above all works that possess great intrinsic value and have an emblematic impact. Both the subjects depicted and the formats will be as diverse as possible. Princes, statesmen and stateswomen, key figures from industry, business, science, sport, culture, etc. will be represented, but also lesser known individuals, if compelling portraits of them have been preserved. An encounter with these portraits will open doors to history, reflecting the diversity of people living and working in Germany in past and present, individuals across the political spectrum from right to left, victims, perpetrators, displaced persons and expatriates, farmers, academics, refugees and immigrants, Protestants, Jews and Catholics, homosexuals, etc.

The portraits in the DHM’s extensive collections form the foundation: the museum’s own holdings offer numerous outstanding portraits in their great diversity, drawn from the museum’s long history of collecting and now on display in their opulence for the first time. Moreover, the exhibition will be expanded and complemented by works from other collections and museums. The principle of diversity also applies to formats and media. A variety of genres will be brought together, ranging from video installations and caricatures, holograms, photographs,

drawings, medals, coins, banknotes and stamps, and on to oil paintings, busts and statues. The exhibition aims to foster a deeper awareness of the significance of the people living in Germany who, under diverse circumstances and in all manner of roles, have shaped German history in both grand and intimate ways.

The exhibition is curated by Julia Voss and Christopher Clark.

Pei-Building, 1st floor