

TWISTED HISTORY

The Third World's omission from Second World War historiography, using the example of Africa

*Lecture by **Karl Rössel** (recherche internationale e.V., Cologne, Germany) held at the University of Lucerne (Switzerland) in 2011, revised and updated for the presentation of the exhibition "The Third World in World War II" in South Africa in 2017.*

The Third World's omission from Second World War historiography is explained by Professor Kum'a Ndumbe, a political scientist from Cameroon, as follows: "The history of the Second World War, like any history, is written by the victorious powers, but also by the owners and the wealthy. In spite of their defeats, Germany and Japan are ultimately counted amongst the winners of the war as they are perceived as people of equal rank, even though both countries' historiographies had to endure critical examination and revision. But the ones who were forgotten after the war, as if they hadn't existed while it was in progress, the ones who are forced to re-learn its history together with their children without finding their own deeds recorded, they are the ones who can be counted amongst the truly defeated. Defeated and without a voice of their own, this is how hundreds of millions of people and their descendants are still living today, in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Australia and throughout the Pacific."

This suggests that the economically dominant powers not only defined the course of Second World War history, but also its subsequent documentation.

This is because the world was still largely colonised at both the start and end of the war. All belligerent powers used colonies for military means. Yet the strategic importance of these colonial regions during the course of and for the conclusion of World War II did not receive the recognition it deserved in the history books. Cameroonian political scientist Professor Kum'a Ndumbe has the following explanation:

“Researchers from the wealthy countries are consciously or unconsciously suffering from a silent racism which causes them to regard any events outside their own ‘centre of wealth’ as almost irrelevant to their work. This creates a body of literature on the Second World War, which is mainly concerned with the rich nations. Whoever has the means also determines the topics, theories and lines of research. This is why victims from the periphery don’t count. And the victims themselves learn and read the literature on the Second World War as published and distributed worldwide by the centres of the wealthy, and in it do not recognise their own history.”

(Kum'a Ndumbe, professor at Yaoundé University in Cameroon, in his preface to the book “Unsere Opfer zählen nicht – Die Dritte Welt im Zweiten Weltkrieg” (Our Victims Don’t Count – The Third World in WWII), Rheinisches JournalistInnenbüro / recherche international e.V. (Hg.), Berlin/Hamburg 2005.)

Eradicating half of history

In books, films and newspaper articles about Europe’s liberation from Nazi terror, we still generally see only pictures of American, French, British or Russian soldiers, and almost exclusively white faces. Photographs of black combatants are rare exceptions to this rule, despite more than one million Afro-Americans serving in the US armed forces alone.

If *their* deeds in the Second World War have been largely ignored in the writing of history, then those of combatants from Africa, Asia, Oceania, South America and Central America remain well out on the periphery. And we're not talking about marginal roles that could perhaps have been overlooked, this is a key – if perhaps forgotten – chapter of history. The Third World fielded more soldiers in World War II than Europe (without the Soviet Union) and suffered more losses than Germany, Italy and Japan combined. Vast areas of the Third World served as battlegrounds: From the coast of Latin America via West, North and East Africa and the Middle East, through to Asia and the Pacific Islands. The warring powers required food for their troops and raw materials for their arms production on all continents of the world, which had far-reaching consequences for the affected countries and their populations. Consequences that in many places are still being felt today. That also – and especially – applies to Africa.

Joseph Ki-Zerbo, a historian from Burkina Faso, had the following to say when I interviewed him as part of our research in Ouagadougou:

“Ever since the slave trade and the carving up of the continent at the hands of the colonial powers at the Berlin Conference in 1884, no event has affected Africa more devastatingly and lastingly than the Second World War.”

Europe's perception of Africa

In the 1960s, Joseph Ki-Zerbo was the first historian to write his continent's history from an African perspective and, in doing so, he dispelled the common misconception in Europe that before colonisation Africa was a “continent without history”.

In the introduction to his book, Ki-Zerbo cites ample evidence of the ignorant, often outright racist attitude stemming from colonial arrogance that European writers and thinkers have held for centuries when it comes to Africa. Such as – to name but one example – that of German philosopher Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel. In his “Lectures on the Philosophy of History” from 1830, he stated:

“Africa is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it — that is in its northern part — belong to the Asiatic or European World... What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World’s History.”

Europe’s perception of Africa in historical academia has been littered with derogatory attitudes such as this right through until the very recent past. According to Ki-Zerbo, a historian writing in the “Revue de Paris” as recently as 1957 described Africa as a “land with no history”. Half a century later, during a speech in Dakar on his first trip to Africa in 2007, then French President Nicolas Sarkozy claimed that “the African has not fully entered into history”.

In the 750 pages of his book, Ki-Zerbo gives evidence of social and cultural development in Africa that for a long time was well ahead of that in Europe. According to Ki-Zerbo, the 12th to 16th centuries were Africa’s “golden era”. During that time societies emerged in many parts of the continent with comparatively advanced technology and economies, as well as a rich cultural life. But then Europe’s plunderers and slave-drivers invaded Africa and with the help of spiritual and mind-boggling poisons – i.e. Christian missionaries and alcoholic drinks – shook the great African civilisations to their very foundations.

The Africans were typically hospitable in welcoming their European guests. A momentous mistake given the previously unimaginable greed displayed by the European invaders when it came to gold, power and slaves.

A Portuguese trade company had committed to delivering “10,000 tons of Negroes”. White traders tore their slaves’ children away from them, and threw them to the hyenas. Men and women were fattened up before they were sold and stuffed full of drugs, so they would fetch a higher price in the slave auctions. The slave ships were, according to Ki-Zerbo, “specially equipped with shackles, bolts and chains, decks and steerages, in order to use up as little space as possible in accommodating the human cargo.” On the crossing to America, the slaves were lashed so they would dance for their white overseers. Anyone who got sick or died on the journey was simply thrown overboard. “It is reasonable to assume that since the 15th century, Africa has lost at least 50 – but probably around 100 – million people,” Ki-Zerbo wrote. The continent has never recovered from this “bloodletting”. The entire wealth of Europe, on the other hand, can be attributed to it. The slave trade brought European companies profit increases of 300 to 800 percent and this laid the financial foundation for the industrialisation of Europe. It also facilitated the production of new weapons and ultimately explained the military superiority of the European invaders in Africa. Wherever the European conquerors infiltrated the continent, they recruited native accomplices and soldiers for their military campaigns. The forced recruitments contributed, according to Ki-Zerbo, to “aggravating the generally wretched situation”.

(Citations from Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Die Geschichte Schwarz-Afrikas (“The History of Black Africa”), Wuppertal 1979)

African colonial soldiers in European wars

Since the beginning of the 19th century, the colonial powers have regularly conscripted African troops. They were first deployed in Europe in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/1.

Hundreds of thousands of Africans had to fight on the frontline in various continents during the First World War. In the Second World War, there were millions.

Ki-Zerbo, who was also involved in UNESCO's extensive research project into African history, wrote the following concerning the Second World War's consequences for Africa: "An extraordinary war effort was demanded of the African people. There was abject poverty in the large coastal cities. The poorest draped themselves in old cereal sacks. But generally, they bore the burden of war with no great resistance: they suffered in silence. The people evidently felt that they were part of some huge, global drama. Yet the burden of war was sometimes easier for the soldiers to bear. They found themselves eye-to-eye with the Nazi troops and knew who they were fighting against. The anonymous masses of Africans, on the other hand, were made to work and pay for it thousands of kilometres from the battleground."

The British historian David Killingray, one of the few European academics to have extensively studied the Second World War's consequences for Africa, comes to a similar conclusion: "There was barely a community from the Cape to Cairo that was not economically and otherwise shaken to its foundations by the Second World War."

The principal reason for this is that the world – when the Second World War began – was still largely colonised and, Africa in particular, was almost entirely under European rule or – as was the case in South Africa – economically and politically controlled by a former colonial power from Europe.

Colonies at the beginning of the Second World War

As the biggest colonial power, Great Britain with its Commonwealth commanded an empire comprising a quarter of the globe as well as a quarter of the world's population.

France's colonies were 20 times larger than the "motherland" and boasted a population of 100 million. The area of the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia) equalled Western Europe in size.

The USA ruled over the Philippines and over large parts of the Pacific from island bases such as Hawaii and American Samoa.

Japan controlled the North Pacific with Micronesia as well as the Korean peninsula, Formosa and Manchuria.

In East Africa, Mussolini's fascist regime controlled a colonial territory which was several times larger than Italy.

In the wake of the First World War, Germany had to hand over its colonies in Africa and the Pacific to the victors. However, claiming them back was one of the Nazis' declared military objectives.

It took half a century and an African author, however, for these historical facts to first be researched and published in the German-speaking world. This is a good illustration of how historical events that were of great significance to the Third World in general, and to Africa in particular, were deliberately excluded from our post-war history books.

Konrad Adenauer as a colonial propagandist

In the wake of World War I, the German Reich had to hand over "its" colonies to the victorious powers at the Versailles peace negotiations in 1919. Since then, German importers and sellers of colonial goods, as well as industrialists and bankers who had been profiting from the exploitation of the German colonies, were agitating against the so-called "shame of Versailles".

Nationalist-conservative politicians supported this propaganda, as proven by the following quotation from Konrad Adenauer, who, before 1933, was not only Lord Mayor of Cologne, but also Deputy Chairman of the German Colonial Association. It was in this role that Adenauer declared the following:

“The German Empire must pursue the appropriation of colonies by all means. There is not enough room in the empire itself to accommodate the large population. Especially the daring, forward-pushing elements who cannot busy themselves in our country but could find occupation in the colonies are being constantly lost. We need more room for our people and therefore need colonies.”

The Adenauer quote was used at a “Special Colonial Exhibition” at the press convention “Pressa” in 1928 in Cologne to propagate the conquest of allegedly “deserted space” in Africa. Two maps were also displayed: a small, crowded map of Germany, entitled “60 Million Without Space”, and a large, wide map of Africa with the heading “Space Without People”.

Not even the most elementary research has been carried out into Adenauer’s role as a German Colonial Association functionary. Nor does there appear to be any great interest in doing so, with Adenauer having been voted the “most important German politician of all time” in a newspaper survey several years ago. Any evidence of the National Socialist regime being able to build on colonial propaganda such as his may be seen as something of an annoyance here.

The colonial plans of the Nazis

The National Socialist party set up an Office for Colonial Policy (KPA) as early as 1933, in order to prepare for the administration of a “Germanic colonial empire” in Africa.

This was supposed to stretch from the Atlantic coast in the West of the continent all the way to the Indian Ocean in the East. Its conquest was one of the Nazis' declared military objectives and was to follow the subjugation of Eastern Europe.

From 1940 onwards, the Nazi regime recruited police and SS personnel for duty "in the tropics" and trained selected men and women to manage plantations and mines.

The African colonial empire was supposed to supply Nazi Germany with nuts, oils, coffee, tea, cocoa, tobacco and fruits, as well as cotton, sisal, tropical woods, ores, metals, gold and diamonds. There were even some "work record books" printed to register the "natives" who were meant to carry out forced labour under German supervision.

And Nazi lawyers drew up a "colonial blood protection law" to prevent any "racial mingling" within the colonies.

Retrospectively, it could be seen as a blueprint for the Apartheid laws introduced in South Africa from 1948 onwards.

As early as July 1941, the KPA was able to announce, "When the Führer, the shaper of the German future, gives the mission order for the colonial territories, he will find the Office for Colonial Policy equipped to carry out his order to the best of its abilities."

Plans for the "final solution" in Madagascar

For the East African island of Madagascar the Nazi regime had a particularly sinister use in mind. It was meant to be the destination of four million European Jews. The Nazis were well aware that such a high number of people couldn't possibly survive on the island. The death of most of the deportees had already been factored in. It was the superiority of the British fleet around the sea routes of Africa which prevented Madagascar from becoming the location of the Holocaust.

“The war against the Soviet Union has opened up the opportunity of providing different territories for the final solution“, as Franz Rademacher, Head of the “Referat für Judenfragen” (Department for Jewish Issues) in the Foreign Office, explained on 10th February 1942 in a letter to his colleague Ernst Bielfeld, Head of the Colonial Department. “The Führer decided that the Jews shall not be deported to Madagascar, but to the East instead. Consequently, Madagascar does not need to be earmarked for the final solution.”

The first academic to carry out research into the National Socialists’ colonial plans was, tellingly, not a German historian, but Cameroonian political scientist Kum’a Ndumbe, who was quoted earlier. He studied in Germany in the 1950s and started researching the topic then, despite his German professors strongly advising him against doing so, as there would supposedly be nothing to find in the archives. In fact, they themselves had never looked for it.

Kum’a Ndumbe was not to be deterred, especially once he was awarded a contract with the magazine “Das Parlament”, who promised to publish the findings of his research. Yet once he presented the facts to the magazine, it was reluctant to publish them. These could ultimately have compromised the incumbent Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and the other former colonial propagandists, who had been able to continue their political careers after 1945 in the Federal Republic unscathed.

In the end, it was Jean-Paul Sartre who first published Kum’a Ndumbe’s findings on the Nazis’ colonial plans in his magazine “Les Temps Modernes” – in French. It was not until 1993 that they first appeared in a book in German, which was entitled: “What did Hitler want in Africa? National Socialist Plans for a Fascist Africa.”

This example shows how important but uncomfortable chapters of the Second World War's colonial history were deliberately omitted from historical discourse in Germany for almost half a century.

French colonies that served Nazi Germany

Another fact that went unnoticed for a long time was that, following French surrender and the ceasefire agreement with the collaborating Vichy government, the Nazi regime enjoyed access to the French colonies in Africa, Asia and Oceania – with fatal consequences for their inhabitants. They were sent into forced labour to provide the German arms industry with raw materials and German troops with food.

The rubber used on the tyres of German military vehicles, for example, came from the French colonies in Indochina – until the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 – and was transported on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

The colonial administration of the Vichy regime also supplied the fascist Axis powers with raw materials for their weapons industries, including 990,000 tons of phosphate and 385,000 tons of iron.

In West Africa, the colonial officials of the French collaboration government were extracting money at the behest of the Nazi regime from 1940 to finance provisions for African prisoners of war in German camps. Farmers from the Ivory Coast region were forced to hand over kola nuts, maize, honey, flour and money to a "Committee for the Subsistence of Prisoners of War".

From February 1941, there was the additional burden of supplying the German panzer divisions in Northern Africa for which further provisions, cars and lorries were seized in the Maghreb.

In the space of one year, Algeria supplied 4,429 tons of grain, 220,000 sheep and 105.6 million gallons of wine whilst the Algerian population were suffering from malnourishment, tuberculosis and typhoid.

The “Afrikakorps” under General Rommel also recruited forced labourers after his arrival in Libya. But, while there are dozens of glorifying books and biographies on Rommel and his Africa campaign, I am not aware of a single piece of historical research that has taken serious account of the consequences of the German-Italian invasion for the populations of Libya and Egypt.

Neither Germany nor Italy has been made to pay any meaningful reparations in the post-war era for the exploitation and destruction of North Africa through the German-Italian campaign. Yet there was sufficient money in the 1950s to erect a gigantic war memorial, which was unveiled in the Libyan Desert by 200 Afrikakorps veterans in the presence of Nazi General Rommel’s widow, to remember their “fallen comrades”.

Today there are countless memorials for German, Italian and Allied victims in El Alamein, Tobruk and other former Second World War battlegrounds in the region. But, to my knowledge, no one remembers the fascist Axis powers’ forced recruits and forced labourers who were abused to death, or the hundreds of thousands of colonial soldiers who fought under British command in North Africa, thousands of whom were killed there. These included Indians, Australian Aborigines, Maoris from New Zealand, Pacific Islanders, soldiers from the Caribbean and troops from all of the British colonies in Africa at the time, as well as from former colonies such as South Africa.

Racism within the South African armed forces

335,000 South African soldiers served in World War II, including black and white combatants as well as so-called “coloureds”. In 1941, 60,000 of them fought the Wehrmacht’s “Afrikakorps” in the North African desert. On 21st November, the fifth brigade of the “Cape Corps” was engaged in a costly battle against German panzer divisions and fighter planes during which 3,000 South Africans were captured by the Germans and 224 killed. The survivors buried their dead side by side in a mass grave. But the South African High Command had the bodies exhumed shortly afterwards to bury them again – this time separated according to colour. Apartheid didn’t become an official state doctrine in South Africa until 1948, but the military already practised strict “racial segregation” during the war.

The persecution of North African Jews

Another fact that long went unnoticed in historical research not only in Germany, but also in France, was that after the ceasefire agreement between the French collaboration regime under Marshall Philippe Pétain and the Nazi regime in June 1940, the approximately 500,000 Jews in France’s North African colonies were also faced with mortal danger. As recently as May 1940, 1,350 Algerian Jews had given their lives in the French fight against the German Wehrmacht. But with the transfer of the colonial administration to the Vichy regime, the Jews in Algeria lost first their citizenship and then any public offices or functions they held. After the “Statute on Jews” of 3rd October 1940, it was illegal for them to work for example as journalists or teachers, and from June 1941 the ban was extended to lawyers, traders, insurance agents and businessmen.

The French colonial officers finally forced the Jews to sell their businesses and residential properties at knocked-down prices and banned them from schools and universities.

Together with their French collaborators, the German and Italian fascists operated over one hundred labour camps in North Africa, where members of the political opposition and inmates deported from Europe were also joined by thousands of Maghrebian Jews who were taken there. 562 detainees were worked to death in a single camp in Giado in [Libya](#), then an Italian colony.

In Eastern Morocco, 7,000 forced labourers had to lay the tracks for a planned Trans-Saharan Railway which was to extend all the way to the Niger.

The camps in Algeria and Tunisia were mostly located in remote desert regions where tens of thousands of prisoners were exposed to the stifling hot days and the bitterly cold nights without any shelter. This was why the partisan fighter Claudio Moreno described the camp of Hadjerat M'Guil in Algeria as a "French Buchenwald in North Africa".

It is remarkable how little attention the persecution of North African Jews still receives to this day. The immense field of "stelae" in Berlin and the adjacent memorial, for example, only remember "the Murdered Jews of Europe". Any details regarding the persecution of Jews from outside Europe are nigh on impossible to find. There is just one map in the entrance area that stretches down as far as the countries that border the Mediterranean to the south, on which concentrate camps are marked, and there are several dots in North Africa. But no information is provided. And yet, as a result of starvation, abuse and torture in the labour camps, of pogroms such as the one in Tunisia in 1941, and of the deportation to the death camps of the Nazis, between 4,000 and 5,000 North African Jews were killed.

Arab accomplices for the fascist Axis powers

As American Middle East historian Robert Satloff, who carried out research in the region for two years, wrote, the fascist detention camps in North Africa were mostly staffed by native volunteers:

“Numerous testimonies affirm that Arab soldiers, policemen, and workers all played roles – sometimes large, sometimes small – in implementing the designs of the European persecutors of North African Jewry: from the execution of anti-Jewish statutes, to the recruitment of Jewish workers, to the operation of forced labour camps. From the outskirts of Casablanca to the deserts south of Tripoli, Arabs routinely served as guards, watchmen, and overseers at those labour camps. With rare exceptions, they were feared by Jewish (and other) captives as willing and loyal servants of their Nazi, Vichy, and Fascist superiors.”

Robert Satloff actually travelled to North Africa to find Arab resistance fighters and anti-fascists who had saved Jews. He hoped that such positive role models would increase the likelihood that those in Arab countries would take a critical look at National Socialism, the Holocaust and the role of Arab collaborators. Satloff did manage to find some of these Arab “heroes”, such as Tunisian Khaled Abdelwahhab, who hid Jewish women from German occupation officers who wanted to abduct them for their military brothels. But, unlike some other experts in Islamic and Arab matters, Satloff possesses the academic integrity to publish his research findings, even though they contradict his actual objective. He writes that descendants of Arabs who helped Jews in the Second World War have asked him not to publish their names, as their families would be ostracised by their neighbours, if not physically assaulted. This shows what a highly sensitive issue coming to terms with one’s history can be in North Africa.

(Citations from Robert Satloff: Among the Righteous. Lost Stories from the Holocaust’s Long Reach into Arab Lands. New York 2006.)

The SS unit for the extermination of North African Jews

In 2006, historians Martin Cüppers and Mathias Mallmann published the first documents that gave evidence of the Nazi regime having made concrete plans to exterminate the Jews in North Africa and the Middle East. The two employees of the Ludwigsburg research centre for the prosecution of National Socialist crimes establish in their book “Halbmond and Hakenkreuz” (“Crescent and Swastika”) that from the middle of 1942 the SS had a special unit on call in Athens for deployment in North Africa.

The unit – including “seven SS Führer, 17 Unterführer and squads” – was under the command of SS Obersturmbannführer Walter Rauff, who had already been involved in mass murders in Poland. In 1941 he’d had lorries modified to facilitate killing the people inside with the exhaust fumes.

His “familiarity with the process of the rationalised extermination of Jews” predestined Rauff “for the new position as leader of a mobile death squad for the Middle East.”

Rauff’s unit consisted of no more than 100 men, but, as in Eastern Europe, the Nazis counted on finding sufficient local “volunteers” for the annihilation of the Jews:

“As the mood had already indicated for a long time, there was a substantial and in parts already well-organised contingent of Arabs from the local population who offered their services as willing henchmen of the Germans. The main objective of Rauff’s commando, the realisation of the Shoah in Palestine, would have been swiftly put into action immediately after the arrival of the ‘Panzer Army Africa’.”

After the Allies were able to repel the attack of the German-Italian troops in Egypt, the SS Death Commando landed in Tunisia in November 1942, where approximately 85,000 Jews were living at the time.

Immediately after his arrival, Rauff had leading members of the Jewish community arrested and ordered them to mobilise 2,000 Jewish forced labourers by the following day to work on the development of the German frontlines. Should they fail to do so, Rauff threatened “the instant arrest of 10,000 Jews”.

The German occupiers had 30 labour camps built in Tunisia and also forced Jews to continue working in the ports and on the railway lines during the Allied bombing.

In addition to this, Jews had to pay charges amounting to millions which were used to compensate the Arab population following the Allied attacks, as “international Judaism” had allegedly been responsible for them.

In the Tunisian town of Sfax, the SS command planned the construction of a concentration camp, which couldn't be realised due to the advance of the Allies.

(Quotes from: Klaus Michael Mallmann/Martin Cüppers, Halbmond und Hakenkreuz. Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina [“Crescent and Swastika. The Third Reich, the Arabs and Palestine”], Darmstadt 2009.)

The Nazis' plans to exterminate the Jews in the Maghreb and their Arab collaborators' support in finding a “final solution to the Jew issue in all Arab and Muslim countries” were among the grave consequences of the Second World War in Africa. The question remains as to why it took more than six decades until these facts were finally researched by historians and revealed to the public.

One answer to that would be that many regional experts, Islam historians and Middle East academics have shown absolutely no interest in looking into the subject of the region's Nazi collaborators, and continue not to do so. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Some, like employees of the Centre for Modern Oriental Studies (ZMO) in Berlin, haven't even stopped short of deliberately misrepresenting history to make the Nazi collaborators in Arab countries appear to be anti-colonial freedom fighters, while trivialising their sympathy for fascist models of society and the National Socialists' racial fanaticism.

This is demonstrated in publications that were published as part of a ZMO research project lasting several years about "Arab Encounters with National Socialism". Even the title trivialises the matter, as if a few Arabs had waved at some Nazis as they passed each other on the promenade of contemporary history.

High-ranking Nazi collaborators in Egypt

Fascism and the Axis powers' campaign in North Africa found especially widespread support among the elite of North Africa and the Middle East. But this is very much played down by the ZMO. For example, Gerhard Höpp, who was a senior employee at ZMO from 1996 until his death in 2003, published a study on "Germany's Islam Policy between 1938 and 1945", in which he writes that in July 1942 two Egyptian military pilots crossed German-British lines at the behest of King Farouk, in order to present British military plans to the general staff of German troops in North Africa. To prepare for the act of espionage, the Egyptian Consul met SS Oberführer Erwin Ettl and a nephew of Palestinian Grand Mufti Husseini in Istanbul.

The three of them arranged that a successful handing over of British military secrets to the German Wehrmacht should be signalled by the reading of certain Suras from the Quran on the Nazis' propaganda station, which did actually happen on 13th August, 1942.

But Islam scholar Höpp was solely interested in commenting on the use of Suras from the Quran in a German military espionage context.

He didn't find worthy of mention the fact that the Egyptian King and his military collaborated with the SS by disclosing Allied military secrets to the Nazis. His conclusion was as follows: "This episode is somewhat - insignificant in itself; it simply illustrates one of the many failed attempts by Germany to source and ultimately acquire local allies for its military advance into North Africa and the Middle East."

In fact, Nazi Germany was able to find countless "local allies" in Egypt, not only from within the royal house, but across all levels of society.

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, whose following rose from 8,000 to 200,000 in the 1930s, followed the German example by calling for a boycott of Jewish shops and demanded: "Jews out of Egypt and Palestine". This resulted in bomb attacks on a synagogue and Jewish private residences in Cairo in 1939.

The Egyptian government had in fact signed a contract that committed them to fight alongside Great Britain in the event of war. But the British military commanders were not prepared to deploy the Egyptian Army and its 40,000 soldiers on the North African front, as there were doubts over their loyalty. Justifiably so, because Egyptian officers, including the later presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar as-Sadat, were in permanent contact with the command of the German "Afrikakorps" in Libya in 1942 and coordinated their activities with Nazi General Erwin Rommel.

For this, Sadat received radio equipment and 20,000 pounds from German secret agents in Cairo in September 1942.

Sadat later candidly confessed in his book "Revolt on the Nile" that he and other high-ranking military officers had attempted to pave the way for German troops in Egypt.

But the British stole a march on them and arrested Sadat and the German agents. The head of the Egyptian general staff, Aziz Ali el-Masri, was also in the circles of conspirators and wound up in prison.

In July 1942, the King consulted Ali Mahir, the former head of government who had been ousted by the British, on putting together a cabinet that would work with German and Italian occupying forces. Egypt's King Farouk and Sheikh al-Azhar, the head of the Egyptian Muslims, were planning a tremendous welcome for the fascist troops which was to exceed the pomp with which Napoleon himself was once welcomed. The British forces in North Africa prevented this – with the help of tens of thousands of colonial soldiers from around the world. These kinds of facts are nowhere to be seen in ZMO's publications, even though they were published as early as 1966 in a study by Polish historian Lukasz Hirszowicz. Hirszowicz was the first to evaluate the relevant documents from the Foreign Office and other departments of the National Socialist regime.

Whenever the Berlin-based ZMO has held events on Egypt, it has been a lecture by Wolfgang Schwanitz, for example, who looked at the history of the "German Chamber of Commerce in Egypt". He described the healthy German-Egyptian relations in the 1930s, while totally disregarding fascism's rise to power in 1933.

Instead, he considered episodes such as the following one from 1938 to be worthy of mention:

"The Führer and Chancellor of the Reich (Adolf Hitler) generously gave the young King Farouk a Mercedes-Benz Sport Cabriolet to celebrate his marriage to the beautiful Farida."

These ZMO publications prove that many scholars of Islam and the Arab World deliberately blot out uncomfortable chapters of history, because the historical facts may contradict their current stance in the Middle East conflict.

Beginning of World War II in Ethiopia?

Other historians, as Professor Kum'a Ndumbe justifiably criticises, evidently do not attach the same importance to historical events that occurred in Africa as they do to comparable scenarios in Europe.

This is apparent in the handling of the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia, which until then had successfully resisted any attempts to colonise it, where it was expected to be the last country to fall under European rule.

Swiss historian Aram Mattioli, who was one of the few to research and publish work on the Italo-Ethiopian War, termed it a “fascist war of extermination”. The question remains as to why this war is otherwise barely mentioned in Second World War historiography, despite hundreds of thousands of soldiers from 17 countries and from four continents serving in the war until Italian capitulation in 1941. Wouldn't a similar war scenario on European soil have been seen as the beginning of the Second World War? Has the battleground of Ethiopia therefore been ignored because it is situated in Africa and the majority of soldiers fighting there were black?

As part of our research for the teaching material we published on the role of the Third World in the Second World War, I read through countless history textbooks that are used in German schools.

I only found one that mentioned the war in Ethiopia – and even then only a few sentences were dedicated to it. The conclusion in this “*Kursbuch Geschichte*” textbook from 2007 was:

“The Ethiopians were unable to counter the (Italian) attack which was led with modern weaponry, poison gas and extreme brutality.”

In fact, Ethiopia not only possessed an army of 250,000 soldiers, who stood up to the invaders for half a year until the capital Addis Ababa was exposed, but hundreds of thousands of partisans who called themselves

“patriots” also fought a guerrilla war against the occupying forces for a further four years, thus significantly contributing to Italy's defeat in 1941. But African combatants seemingly count for nothing in European historiography. This is also illustrated by how the millions of African colonial soldiers who fought under French and British command are blotted out of European history books.

African colonial soldiers under British command

A total of eleven million soldiers served under the British flag, six million from Great Britain and five million from the colonies.

In Africa, the British Army recruited about one million men – often with the use of force. They fought against Italian colonial troops in British Somaliland and Ethiopia in 1940/41, against German-Italian forces in the border region of Libya and Egypt from 1940 to 1943, against the Vichy regime in Madagascar in 1942 and against Japanese troops in the jungles of the British colony of Burma in 1944. That the Japanese attack on the British Crown colony of India was repelled was to no small degree down to the some 100,000 African soldiers who fought on the frontline under British command.

Yet no one has thanked them: African soldiers received significantly less pay than the British forces, and their meals were a lot worse. The colonial troops were commanded by white officers. They were prepared for their command by a brochure issued by the British High Command which stated that African soldiers had in many respects “the mind of a child”. The colonial soldiers reacted to these forms of racial discrimination by staging protests and mutinies. Many refused to board the ships to India, because they were denied the same bonuses for war missions in Asia that were granted to British soldiers.

The leaders of the rebellions were court-martialled by the British and received corporal punishment and also death sentences. In spite of this, more than 25,000 men deserted in 1944/45 in Eastern Africa alone. British Second World War historiography also omitted the impact of the war on its colonies for decades. John Hamilton, a platoon commander and signals officer in the war in the 81st West African Division, criticises the fact that even the most comprehensive historical report of the Burma Campaign dedicates a mere four lines to the contribution made by the tens of thousands of West African colonial soldiers who fought for the Allies.

The “Memorial Gates Trust” was established in 1998 to raise funds to finally erect a memorial in honour of the million so-called “volunteers” from India, Africa and the Caribbean who fought under British command in the Second World War. British monarch Queen Elizabeth inaugurated the small memorial pavilion on 6th November 2002 – 57 years after the end of the war.

State-imposed historical misrepresentation in France

In France, ignoring the Second World War’s colonial history almost even became a state doctrine ten years ago under President Sarkozy. In February 2005, his government drafted a law stating that history books in France should – quote – “recognise the positive role of French presence in its overseas colonies, especially in North Africa”.

This state-imposed historical misrepresentation was primarily intended to refer to France’s colonial past in Algeria. This triggered a heated public debate. Ultimately, France not only recruited tens of thousands of soldiers in Algeria for the First World War, but also for the Second World War and for its colonial war in Indochina that lasted until 1954.

And French troops killed around a sixth of the population of Algeria (almost one and a half million people) in the War of Independence that its people were forced to fight between 1954 and 1962.

North African immigrants in France reminded Sarkozy in 2005 of the many far from positive aspects of the country's history and a youth revolt in the migrant-populated banlieues eventually derailed the Paris government's plans to gloss over France's colonial past. With their protests, the young people whose families originated from the Maghreb drew attention to the fact that their fathers and grandfathers were drafted to fight wars for France, without ever being paid acceptable pensions or compensation, and that even the children and grandchildren of veterans who helped to liberate France from Nazi terror are still required to apply for a visa to enter a country their ancestors risked their lives for. Many descendants of the liberators of Europe now die on a daily basis in boat accidents in the Mediterranean.

African colonial soldiers under French command

Approximately one million African soldiers served under French command in the Second World War – on changing sides. Following the declaration of war on Nazi Germany in September 1939, the French Republic recruited 500,000 African soldiers from their colonies in Africa. In May 1940, many of them fought on the front line in the North of France, trying to repel the invasion of the German Wehrmacht.

The exact figures are not known, but we can get an idea of how great the number of African soldiers must have been from estimates such as this one from Professor Raffael Scheck, who did research on the German Wehrmacht's massacring of African prisoners of war. At the time of French capitulation in June 1940, 60,000 Africans had already wound up in Germany captivity.

After the French defeat and the truce between the Vichy collaboration government and the Nazi regime, colonial soldiers from West and North Africa had to change sides and fight on the side of the fascist powers, for example in Dakar and the Levant (Syria and Lebanon) against soldiers from Central and Eastern Africa under Allied command and also in North Africa in 1942.

Even General Charles de Gaulle, who called for resistance against the Vichy regime and Nazi Germany from London in June 1940, mobilised his Free French Forces in the colonies. Of the 35,000 French soldiers who, like him, fled to Great Britain, only 2,500 were prepared to fight alongside him in 1940. The rest of them answered the call of Nazi collaborator Pétain to return to Vichy France.

De Gaulle's initial base therefor was Fort Lamy in Equatorial Africa (present-day Chad).

And he later wrote in his memoirs: "In the vast expanses of Africa, France actually managed to recruit a new army to defend its sovereignty (...) and thus reverse the balance of power on the front line. Africa, within reach of the peninsulas of Italy, the Balkan and Spain, served as an excellent launching pad for recapturing Europe."

When the Vichy government lost control over the colonies following the Allied landing in North Africa in 1943, de Gaulle recruited hundreds of thousands of additional soldiers in North and West Africa for the Allied landing troops in Italy and France. African soldiers made a vital contribution to freeing Europe from Nazi rule.

Just as they were by the British military, the colonial soldiers were frequently recruited by force by the French military, often being shipped off to Europe to fight on the frontline without any decent military training. Baba Sy, who became Minister of Defence in the Republic of Upper Volta (modern-day Burkina Faso) in 1979 and who was in the West

African Free French Forces in the Second World War, the *Senegalese Tirailleurs*, explained: “They didn’t give us any kind of political explanation at all... The French simply told us that the Germans thought that Africans were monkeys and by serving in this war we could prove to them that we were humans. That was it...”

Like many other Tirailleurs, Baba Sy was also loaded onto a ship in Dakar in 1943 and sent to fight in the war in Europe. He took part in the Allied invasion of Italy, was injured on Elba and went on to be involved in the Liberation of Strasbourg. “And that’s where we stayed until the end of the war,” he explained. “Blacks were only deployed as far as central France, to repel the Germans.”

General de Gaulle didn’t want to see Africans marching into Paris in big numbers when it was liberated. He wanted to integrate the French Resistance, who he had previously seen as politically suspect due to their left-wing Socialist stance, into his armed forces and to see young Frenchmen being celebrated on the Champs Elysees as the liberators of Paris. Thus, images of mostly white French liberators were deliberately staged during the war to define its historiography thereafter.

Despite the majority of de Gaulle’s Free France troops post-1940 being Africans, it was not until six decades later that the French government officially commemorated African colonial soldiers and invited African veterans to occasions such as the 60th anniversary of the Provence landings.

As for their war and invalidity pensions, the “anciens combattants” from Africa still futilely await equal treatment to their French “comrades”.

Blotting out of French colonial crimes

It also took France's government more than half a century to stop denying the war crimes it committed in Africa, such as the Thiaroye massacre in Senegal.

In November 1944, 1,300 "Tirailleurs Sénégalais" ("Senegalese skirmishers") returned to West Africa after their military service in Europe. Many of them had suffered years of imprisonment and forced labour in German camps.

At Thiaroye, a temporary transfer camp just outside the Senegalese port of Dakar, they were waiting to be given their outstanding pay as well as the demobilisation premiums of 500 francs they were promised. They also demanded the same compensation of 5,000 francs per person that the French prisoners of war were receiving.

The colonial officers on the ground refused to pay out and in addition to this were only willing to pay half the official rate for changing French francs into the colonial currency CFA. This caused a revolt. The Africans took a French officer hostage and only released him after he promised that all their demands would be met.

What happened instead was that French tanks surrounded the camp in the early hours of 1st December and at 5 a.m. opened fire. When the drowsy "tirailleurs" rushed out of their barracks, the French commanders had them shot without mercy.

Depending on the sources, the number of the victims varies from 35 to 300. In March 1945, French court-martials convicted 34 so-called ringleaders of the revolt. They received prison sentences of up to ten years. Five of the men died in prison, the remaining 29 were released in June 1947 as part of an amnesty due to increasing political pressure. News of the massacre of Thiaroye spread quickly throughout Western Africa. It became a symbol of the arbitrary rule of the French colonial

power and provided a boost for the independence movements in the region. A feature film by the Senegalese director, writer and active combatant Ousmane Sembène (“Camp de Thiaroye”) commemorated the event as early as 1989.

The massacre was suppressed from French history books until many years later, as were the events of 8th May 1945 in Algeria, the day the war ended in Europe.

The 8th May 1945 in Algeria – a day of mourning

The 8th of May is still a national holiday in France, but in the former French colony of Algeria it is a day of mourning. Algerian writer Alice Cherki explains why:

"Many men in Algeria voluntarily signed up as soldiers and believed that the end of the war would bring them freedom too, just as the French had promised them. On the 8th of May 1945, the day that signalled the end of the war in Europe, the people of Constantine, Guelma and Sétif therefore went out onto the streets to remind de Gaulle of his promise. It resulted in clashes with French colonists who blindly opened fire into the crowds. The French Army came to their help and even deployed aeroplanes. The result was a horrific massacre of Algerian civilians. Entire families were slaughtered."

Even French government sources have been forced to admit that at least 1,500 Algerians were killed on that day. Some Algerian sources have the figure as high as 45,000 victims.

I have seen photos of that day in the Revolution Museum in Algiers. Some photos were of piles of bodies that had been transported to the outskirts of the cities by French soldiers to be burnt there.

For many people in Algeria, the 8th of May 1945 marks the beginning of the Algerian War of Independence, as de Gaulle's Free France demonstrated on that day with brutal violence that it was not inclined to voluntarily and peacefully give the country its independence. By 1962 another one million-plus Algerians had lost their lives fighting the cause. There have since been several detailed historical investigations and documentaries by both Algerian and French directors looking at the massacre on the 8th of May 1945 in Algeria. But not all of the relevant government archives have yet been made available to the public. The historical documentation of the role of the Third World in the Second World War in general, and Africa's role in particular, continues to be restricted, manipulated and obstructed by government agencies.

Conclusion

Due to forced recruitment and forced labour during the Second World War, large parts of Africa's typically self-sufficient agriculture collapsed. Then came the war's devastation of vast swathes of the continent. Today's Africa is still yet to recover from this war-inflicted upheaval. The war's belligerent powers have shown little interest in remembering this, however.

If the important role that Africa played in the liberation of Europe from National Socialism were to be properly acknowledged in society, it would most likely result in political consequences. For example, the payment of acceptable pensions and compensation, or reconstruction aid and reparations.

Consequences that would accrue costs and which every succeeding government of the countries involved in the war has therefore since tried to avoid.

Anyone who takes a serious look at history must be compelled to speak out for a fairer handling of African countries and their inhabitants from European governments, and also for migrants coming from those countries to be treated with greater respect than is now the case in Europe. If there is currently a case of a debt needing to be repaid, then it is most certainly Europe that needs to repay Africa rather than the other way around.

Against the backdrop of the fact that hundreds and thousands of soldiers from Africa fought from 1939 under Allied command against fascist troops, and not only in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, but also on front lines in Europe (in Italy, France and Germany), then rich Europe should really be ashamed by the hysteria with which it has recently greeted the arrival of refugees from Africa and other continents on the island of Lampedusa, in Greece, and along other European coasts and its borders.

According to reports by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, not since the Second World War have so many people been forcibly displaced from their homes as there were last year. There were 65 million worldwide (and that's just the official figure, the real figure will be significantly higher). The majority of the world's refugees (86 percent!) find refuge in countries in the Third World.

In 2014, for example, 700,000 refugees successfully made the journey to Europe, while 14 million refugees sought new homes in Africa. That's twenty times more.

Even though the wars in Syria and Iraq have meant the number of Europe-bound refugees has increased in recent years, countries such as Lebanon take in approximately 10 times more people per capita than rich Germany, for example.

Even in comparatively poor countries such as South Sudan and Djibouti, the proportion of the population that is made up of refugees is considerably higher than in most European countries.

The German government and Chancellor Angela Merkel's welcoming gesture that was much-praised internationally also only lasted a handful of days. It was simply the prelude to the subsequent debate on measures to secure EU borders and build detention camps along them, on quickly getting laws passed to accelerate the deportation process, on the increased chicanery for asylum seekers and on the forced assignment of places of residence. The military armament continued on the European Union's southern and eastern borders, enhancing the standing of military rulers such as Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt and wannabe dictators like Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey.

The EU Directive that the German government engineered with Erdogan stipulated the military blockade of borders along the so-called "Balkan route" and mass deportations of refugees from the Greek islands to Turkey. Amnesty International has stated that this violates international law. Despite Erdogan already waging war with the Kurds in the east of his country and stomping on democratic rights as he does so, Turkey has been declared a safe third country by the EU and Erdogan continues to receive billions of euros in support.

Europe's leaders are currently making plans for the construction of refugee camps in North Africa, despite even German diplomats stating that the catastrophic conditions in the existing ones, such as those in Libya, reminded them of Second World War concentration camps. Europe's leaders seem ready to use any means and accomplices necessary, as long as it keeps those fleeing war, hunger and poverty away from Europe's borders.

The dreadful consequence of the increased effort to secure the borders of fortress Europe is that, according to UN Refugees Agency estimates, more than 4,000 men, women and children lost their lives in the Mediterranean last year alone.

The Mediterranean has thus become the world's largest mass grave, and many more than 25,000 people have died on Europe's external borders in the last decade.

Approximately half of these victims are from Africa. A lot of them may have had relatives who served in the Second World War, many of whom fought on European frontlines to liberate Europe from fascism.

Taking a global look at history in general, and at the Second World War in particular, should result in Europe showing more solidarity with refugees fleeing war and facing up to its historical responsibility concerning the continents, countries and regions that European powers devastated by colonisation and war.

We hope that our publications and the exhibition on "The Third World in World War Two" will contribute to reaching this long overdue change of perspective, and finally taking the lessons, which can be learnt from the colonial past during this war and using them for the present.

Karl Rössel is a social scientist, journalist and co-author of the book *"Unsere Opfer zählen nicht"* ("Our Victims Don't Count", German Federal Agency for Civic Education licensed edition, Bonn 2014) and the teaching material *"Die Dritte Welt im Zweiten Weltkrieg"* ("The Third World in World War Two", second revised edition, Cologne 2012). He is also curator of the (touring) exhibition *"Die Dritte Welt im Zweiten Weltkrieg"* ("The Third World in World War II"), which has been shown in three different large-scale versions since 2009 in more than 60 locations in Germany and Switzerland, and is shown in South Africa in 2017. He is also responsible for the research project's webpage **www.3www2.de**