

## **Back to Nature: Addressing the German Nudist Movement's Colonial Past and Its Repercussions**

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**Abstract :** The idea of 'being close to nature' and the ways of achieving this proximity are socially and historically constructed, as are notions of nakedness and nudity. During the colonial period, nudity and clothedness functioned as instruments of racial domination. Nakedness became central to the colonialists' thinking, to their binary of the 'civilized' and those 'close to nature', therefore turning the level of perceived unclothedness into a measurement of 'civilization'. While being 'one with nature' continued to be a criterion of backwardness in the colonies, it emerged as a futuristic and avant-garde endeavor in the metropole: In Germany, at the height of its colonial expansion, the Life Reform Movement (Lebensreformbewegung) called for the liberation of the white body from the 'constraints of civilization', for its 'return to nature' via practices like nudism. Despite this simultaneity, the scholarship of the life reform and the nudist movement in particular does not address the colonial past of the movement or its repercussions in the present. Taking the biography of prominent life reformist Hans Paasche (1881 - 1920) as a starting point, this paper explores the work of imperial legacies in the history and present of the German nudist movement. Paasche started his career as a German colonial officer, participating in the brutal obliteration of the Maji-Maji uprising (1905/06) that claimed the lives of nearly 200.000 people. Once a passionate game hunter, he later became a known nature conservationist; once a self-proclaimed explorer of Africa, he later became one of the most prominent advocates of nudism and vegetarianism. The paper joins conceptual and historical research in order to address the German nudist movement's colonial past and understand its repercussions in the present.

**Keywords :** Germany, life reform, colonialism, archives, nudity, nature

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