From Performing Provenance Research to Community-Centred Engagement: Flinn Works and the Ancestors in Boxes

Konradin Kunze

As a child, I occasionally visited my father at his office at the University of Freiburg, where he worked as a professor. I enjoyed strolling through the building. I favoured the rooftop terrace, which offered a good view of my picturesque hometown with the medieval cathedral tower and the adjacent mountains of the Black Forest. I also liked the libraries, especially the old books and archives. I never went to the cellar of the building (I likely would have been denied access); had I done so, I would have encountered hundreds of ancestors in boxes. Like many universities and museums in Europe and North America, the University of Freiburg holds a so-called skull collection: remains of ancestors from many parts of the world, largely appropriated during the German colonial period. Had I seen them, I possibly would have asked questions like, Who are these people? Why are they here? Why are they stored in boxes? Where did they come from? Who took them and for what reason? Maybe I would have even thought of their friends and families, wondering if they miss them.

Many years later, once I learned of the existence of these ancestors, I was led back to libraries and archives in a quest to find answers to these questions. By then, however, I had chosen a profession that is not usually practiced in academic venues but instead in other bourgeois temples. In Freiburg, the city's theatre is situated just opposite the university. Here, first as a child, I began my career as an actor.

In order to ask these questions without having met the ancestors in the cellar, I had to learn about the racist colonial practice of trafficking ancestral remains in other ways. I could have learned it in school, but all I remember about German colonialism in history class was a world

map with a few brown spots indicating German colonies. We were not told what happened there. We believed that Germany had colonies 'only for a few years' and that the British and French had many more spots on the map. This assumption was not an exception in my history classes; to this day, many Germans still think this way. I did not learn anything about the genocide against the Herero and Nama communities in so-called German Southwest Africa (today's Namibia), 1904–8, nor did I hear anything about the biggest anti-colonial movement on the African continent and its violent suppression, the Maji Maji War that took place in parts of so-called German East Africa (today's Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi) between 1905 and 1907. My ignorance about German colonial history led to a shock when I travelled to Tanzania and, for the first time, heard stories about the brutal colonial regime and the atrocities committed by Germans more than a hundred years ago. Although those who told me this history never blamed me as a descendent of the colonizers, I felt deeply ashamed. I felt ashamed of the violence of the past but even more of my ignorance in the present. How come every schoolchild in Tanzania knew more about this history than I did?

Maji Maji Flava

Shame and shock can lead to a state of paralysis and defensiveness. In my case, it led to the beginning of a confrontation with the past and a long-term collaboration with the Tanzanian performer, musician, dancer, and choreographer Isack Peter Abeneko. My partner and artistic director of Flinn Works, Sophia Stepf, and I met Isack during a theatre workshop on our first trip to Tanzania, in 2009. Our conversations about colonial history and the different levels of knowledge and awareness in our respective countries led to a common project by Flinn Works and Asedeva (Isack's Dar es Salaam–based company): a dance, theatre, and music performance called *Maji Maji Flava* about the Maji Maji War, highlighting the different perspectives on our shared history. It was first staged in 2016 at the Staatstheater Kassel, in 2016 and 2019 at the Sophiensæle Berlin, and in 2017 in various spaces in Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo, Tanzania.

During research for *Maji Maji Flava*, I eventually encountered the ancestors in the boxes in the basements of German institutions – not in person but through media reports and the work of NGOs like Berlin Postkolonial or alliances like Völkermord verjährt nicht! (No Amnesty on Genocide!). We were determined to include the issue of the so-called skull collections in our performance but soon realized that it was far too complex to be touched upon as a marginal note in the performance. So, we decided to create the lecture performance *Schädel X* (Skull

Jan Beyer, Isack Abeneko, and Konradin Kunze in the *Maji Maji Flava* performance at Staatstheater Kassel, 2016. © Nils Klinger

X) as an accompanying project of *Maji Maji Flava*. Nevertheless, we included a dance scene in *Maji Maji Flava* in which we tried to portray the brutal act of cutting off heads after executions. In the performance, which was first staged 110 years after the Maji Maji War, we referred to the hangings of more than sixty leaders in Songea on February 27, 1906, at the end of the war. We had visited the mass grave of the Ngoni leaders in the Majimaji Memorial Museum.[1] Yann LeGall described this scene as a re-enactment of 'the bloody quest for morbid war trophies', but with a twist, since it wants to 'challenge the objectifications of the formerly colonized'. He concludes, 'After centuries of ellipses and concealment in the archives and reports, of gaps between the journals written by colonial officers and the museum receipts acknowledging delivery of human remains from German East Africa, headhunting finally stands in the spotlights'.[2]

Audience reactions to our performance varied. In Germany, the shock and shame of being confronted (often for the first time) with one's own colonial history was the major theme in, often emotional, talks and statements by audience members after the performance. Some elderly audience members were clearly irritated and left the performance as soon as we opened the floor for discussion. Others blamed the school system and the German government for neglecting this history. During our research in

[1] The grave for Songea Mbano on the premises of the Majimaji Memorial Museum is separated from the mass grave. The tomb is divided into two parts; the upper, narrower part reminds us that the body is buried here, but the head is still missing today.

[2] Yann LeGall, 'Remembering the Dismembered: African Human Remains and Memory Cultures in and after Repatriation' (PhD diss., University of Potsdam, 2020), 220–21.

Tanzania, we never encountered any upfront anger or accusations. On the contrary, interview partners sometimes even highlighted positive aspects of the German colonial legacy, such as railroad tracks or still-solid colonial buildings. However, after the performance of *Maji Maji Flava* in Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo, most audience members expressed the need for an apology and further action by the German government. *Maji Maji Flava* even made it to the Tanzanian Parliament, where, just one week after he had seen the performance in the National Museum and House of Culture in Dar es Salaam, a member of parliament (MP) asked the Tanzanian government to demand reparations from Germany.[3]

During research for *Maji Maji Flava*, we met Nkosi (chief) Zulu Gama V, a descendant of one of the hanged leaders, who also leads the yearly Maji Maji commemoration in Songea. His words were included in the performance, narrated by one of the performers, and in an interview excerpt that was screened after the show. The team of *Maji Maji Flava* fervently wished to help him with his demand to repatriate the head of Songea Mbano, but to this day, we have not been able to find any trace locating him in any Western institution. Nevertheless, we were able to arrange a trip of Zulu Gama V to Berlin to speak on a panel with Mnyaka Sururu Mboro at the conference 'Prussian Colonial Heritage. Sacred Objects and Human Remains in Berlin Museums'.[4] The voice of a descendant of the hanged leaders of the Maji Maji War was, thus, heard for the first time in the former colonial metropole.

Schädel X (Skull X)

The common definition of scientific provenance research does not even try to answer all the questions that I, or likely any child, would have asked when encountering the ancestors in boxes. It is often narrowed down to the best possible answer to the question of how and from where 'the object' came into the collection.[5] In this sense, Flinn Works' *Schädel X* (Skull X) could be regarded as portraying provenance research on ancestral remains, highlighting its complexity and obstacles. But more than that, the performance triggered a search for a missing ancestor, a

[3] Konradin Kunze and Timo Grampes, 'Scham und Vergessen gegenüber Tansania', *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, February 24, 2017, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/deutsche-kolonialgeschichte-scham-und-vergessen-gegenueber-100.html.

[4] The conference was organized by Berlin Postkolonial. See 'Panel V – Tanzania Headhunting: Mnyaka Sururu Mboro (TZ/DE) and Zulu Gama V (TZ, tbc)', posted May 15, 2018, YouTube, 57 : 13, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=080r2yfUoAo.

[5] Often, in scientific practice, ancestral remains are still framed and treated as objects, while in most communities of origin they are regarded as subjects – that is, individuals. In my opinion, insisting on objectifying language and practices is a continuation of colonial violence.

reversed provenance research, that went much deeper than the research necessary to devise the performance. Provenance research usually starts from an existing subject of investigation. Our search began from a void, from a place where someone is missing.

Although *Schädel X* evolved as a side project of *Maji Maji Flava*, it premiered before it, in 2016, at Sophiensæle Berlin, followed by a series of presentations at various festivals and venues in Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, and Tanzania. It was realized with a relatively small budget, funded mainly by the Berlin Senate. The funds limited the number of performers to just one – me. We chose the format of a lecture performance with a mobile technical set-up, which meant it could be performed in venues such as universities, museums, and auditoriums, especially those with a historical or present connection to 'skull collections'. Our hope was to extend the discourse on the ancestors in boxes and their repatriation to a wide audience – beyond academic conferences, diplomatic backroom talks, and activist interventions.

Lecture performances mimic the techniques and gestures of a scientific lecture while often presenting made-up content. It is part of the genre to leave the audience in the dark about what is fact and what is fiction. Using this genre for such a sensitive issue as ancestral remains might seem inappropriate, but it offered the opportunity to question the methods and techniques of scientific knowledge production (including provenance research) by artistically re-enacting them. Almost the entire narration presented in *Schädel X* was based on facts; the only false pretence was that I myself had inherited a skull. A skull formed the centre of the performance. This was not a real skull, although some audience members assumed it must be the inherited one. Two biographical stories revolved around the skull, augmented by archival material, sound recordings, and recent or historical images that were projected onto it.

Konradin Kunze in Flinn Works' lecture performance *Schädel X (*Skull X), 2016. © Flinn Works / Julia Gechter

The first story was that of Gerhard Ziegenfuß, a retired teacher living in Ennigerloh, Germany. Ziegenfuß inherited a skull from his great-uncle, a Catholic missionary in what was called German Southwest Africa, today's Namibia. He suspected this skull to be a Herero ancestor and feared that it was taken during the genocide at the beginning of the twentieth century. His

attempts to repatriate the anonymous ancestor turned into a long odyssey involving physical anthropologists, historians, ambassadors, and Herero activists. It was shaped by many unexpected twists and turns, which serve as an – at times entertaining – example of the difficulties and limitations of provenance research and repatriations. Owing to the fact-fiction character of a lecture performance and the absurdity of the story, some audience members assumed that it was made up, despite the use of original audio recordings of Ziegenfuß's meetings with scientists, experts, and the Namibian ambassador.[6] The fictive element in this part of the lecture resulted from the mingling of Ziegenfuß's story and that of the performer – that is, my own biography. For the duration of the performance, with Ziegenfuß's joyful approval, I pretended to be his son, calling myself Konradin Ziegenfuß. We invented the passing of the skull to me on the occasion of my audition (for *Hamlet*) at the drama department at the University of Hannover, and from then on, it stayed with me. Gerhard Ziegenfuß featured in the performance as himself in recorded phone calls with me as his 'son'.

I told the real story of Gerhard Ziegenfuß's quest as if it happened to me – for dramatic reasons but also to let the audience project their feelings onto the performer. This opened the possibility for the audience to reflect on their own reactions and relationships to the person onstage, his actions, and his relationship to the skull. After the first few performances of *Schädel X*, we added a scene in which the alleged skull itself used a supposed technical glitch to protest its use as a prop and projection surface for the white man's performance. This was possible because, for most of the performance, the audience wore headphones. They heard everything from the acoustic perspective of the skull itself (we attached microphones inside the skull): When, in a re-enactment of racist anthropological practices, brain capacity was measured using dried beans, the audience heard the beans inside their own heads. When a bone sample was taken for a DNA analysis, the sound of a drill resonated in their own skull bone. And in the above-mentioned scene, voices in their heads asked the audience to protest and leave the performance. Some did so and thus missed the performance's end, although most came back for the after-show talk. The performance's ending varied, especially to reflect developments concerning the ancestor in Ziegenfuß's custody. Eventually, in 2018, this ancestor was repatriated, together with other

[6] We could use the uncut material of the radio feature by Bernhard Pfletschinger, 'Warum Herr Ziegenfuß nach Afrika muss', *Hörspiel und Feature*, November 19, 2016, https://www.hoerspielundfeature.de/kolonialismus-warum-herr-ziegenfuss-nach-afrika-muss-100.html.

ancestors, to Namibia. Ziegenfuß and I attended the repatriation ceremony in the Französische Friedrichstadtkirche in Berlin.

The other story that was told in *Schädel X* neither blended with the performer's biography nor contained any fictive elements. It concerned the missing head of the Chagga leader, Mangi Meli, of Moshi, in today's Tanzania. In the search for a story that would illuminate the quest for ancestors through descendants, I came across a newspaper article posted on a Facebook page about the village Old Moshi, situated in the foothills of Kilimanjaro and just a few kilometres from Moshi, the centre of the region and a hotspot of the safari and mountain-climbing tourism industry. An article from *Arusha Times* cited Isaria Anael Meli, grandson of Mangi Meli: 'the Old Moshi community has been making several attempts to follow up their historical Chief's skull since 1968 for the sake of restoring it back for essential traditional ritual procedures but their efforts have ended in vain'.[7]

In 2016, Sophia Stepf and I visited Isaria Anael Meli at his home. We were warmly welcomed, and after we explained the reasons for our visit, he led us to the graves of German officers of the so-called Schutztruppe, the German colonial army. Despite his advanced age, he kneeled to wipe of the red earth from the tombstones with his handkerchief. Then he showed us the place close to his own house where the Germans built their military station on the ruins of Mangi Meli's former *Boma* (homestead). Only then did Isaria lead us to the hanging tree, an acacia on the roadside. There, he told us, on March 2, 1900, his grandfather Mangi Meli, son of Mangi Rindi Mandara, together with other leaders, was hanged by German colonizers. With the villagers of Old Moshi, Isaria's grandmother, Masinde, one of Meli's wives, had to watch while he was fighting death on the rope for several hours. According to Isaria's grandmother and other testimonies, Meli's head was cut off and then carried to the sea, where it was supposedly shipped to Germany. Unlike for the German soldiers, there was no grave or memorial for the executed Mangi of Moshi at the time of our visit. 'I tried to build a grave here, but now it is gone. I want to build another one', Isaria told us and added with a smile, 'Now we are no longer enemies, we are friends. Thank you for that. When you go to Germany, send my greetings'.[8]

The video recordings of Isaria Meli telling the story about his grandfather featured prominently in *Schädel X*. So did the testimonies of

[7] Valentine Marc Nkwame, 'Chagga Want Chief Meli's Skull Back from Germany', *Arusha Times*, November 5–11, 2005.
[8] Isaria Anael Meli, interview by Konradin Kunze, February 2016, Old Moshi, Tanzania.

different stakeholders who described their numerous attempts to find the missing head of Mangi Meli. These included Mnyaka Sururu Mboro from Berlin Postkolonial, who was born in a neighbouring village near Kilimanjaro, before he came to Germany in the 1970s on a scholarship. Mboro's grandmother, although not related to Meli, gave her departing grandson the task of bringing back Meli's head. This laid the foundation for his ongoing, relentless fight for the repatriation of ancestors and for a culture of remembrance for the victims of colonialism and racism. Another more spontaneous attempt to find the head of the Chagga chief was made by a niece of Isaria in the United Kingdom, who flew to Bremen, where, according to an incorrect newspaper report, all skulls from Tanzania were sent. She believed she could 'just grab the skull and take it home'. But obviously, it turned out to be not that easy. In *Schädel X*, the search for the head of Mangi Meli has no happy ending; the need to find and repatriate him lingers in the room after each performance. After the 'thrilling investigation', according to one review, 'we still don't know where the skull comes from. At least, its deathlike aesthetic has now become familiar, human'.[9]

As previously mentioned, the main goal of *Schädel X* was to expand the discourse on ancestral remains and to raise awareness of the 'skull collections' in German museums and universities. Thus, the target audience was everyone who was not yet aware of this issue. Technically, the audience number was restricted to sixty people, which mostly consisted of passionate theatre-goers without prior knowledge of the subject, as well as activists, students, and scientists and experts in the field of ancestral remains. Sometimes audience members who themselves, or their institution, held ancestral remains came to me after the performance, seeking advice on how to deal with them. *Schädel X* also served as an occasion for experts to exchange knowledge.[10]

In addition to these outcomes of the lecture performance, we received praise and also criticism from audience members. The criticism centred on the non-distinction between the performer and the real events. This was despite hints in the performance, such as the different last names of character and performer, and the fact that we always

[9] Yann LeGall, '*Schädel X*: The Echoes of German Colonial History in a Skull', website of Postcolonial Potsdam, March 3, 2020, https://postcolonialpotsdam.org/en/2020/03/03/skull-x.

[10] For example, after one performance Mnyaka Sururu Mboro and his co-founder of Berlin Postkolonial, Christian Kopp, told me about Herero initiatives in the United States. This led to a visit of a Herero delegation to the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) to see the Herero ancestors in the boxes. Later, in a US federal lawsuit, in which Herero groups sought to hold Germany legally and financially responsible for the genocide, those ancestors in the AMNH were to serve as evidence. Daniel A. Gross, 'The Troubling Origins of the Skeletons in a New York Museum', *New Yorker*, January 24, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-troubling-origins-of-the-skeletons-in-a-new-york-museum.

revealed the fictional parts and the artificial nature of the skull during the post-show talks. A further criticism was the issue of the white male narrator, presenting the white man's story live onstage, while Black voices and the opinions of descendants were only heard and seen as recordings. We tried to address this by inserting a scene in which the ancestral skull itself claims agency, but that did not solve the problem of unequal representation. The biggest risk of the performance, however, was that it might retraumatize audience members, especially BIPOC. We did not want to hide the violence of historical and racist supposedly scientific practices, and we intended to shed light on the ethical concerns about today's scientific practices of provenance research (e.g., invasive methods). The scenes in *Schädel X* could nevertheless be shocking. A trigger warning was issued, but that could, of course, only serve to exclude.

Schädel X was designed to have an impact on German audiences, and to some extent it did. But what about people in Namibia and Tanzania? We were not involved in any efforts to repatriate the ancestors in Ziegenfuß's custody. He was eventually able to return the head, albeit not to the community of origin (to our knowledge, it is still kept in a box in the cellar of the National Museum in Namibia). Regarding Tanzania, we could not leave Isaria Meli without promising him to try to find his grandfather's head. His various attempts to trace it and have it returned ended at the local authorities or at the German embassy. In 2000, the ambassador replied that he had asked German museums, but they could not trace Mangi Meli's head. Our promise was the start of an ongoing search, which would result in further Flinn Works projects and shape no small part of my working time in the years to come. I was not the first one to promise. Isaria had dreamed about the decapitated Mangi in the 1950s and since then saw it as his task to find the missing head. Mnyaka Sururu Mboro promised the same to his grandmother. In 2004, the German mathematician Christina Helbig met Isaria by chance, after she climbed Kilimanjaro, and she promised him to search. Together with Mike Nelson, a Tanzanian tour guide, she contacted several museums in Germany, often without any, or only negative, responses. They found a skull at the Charité Berlin with an inscription containing 'Mandara', Meli's family name; however, it turned out to have entered the collection a decade before Meli's death, and the inscription pointed to a subordinate of Mandara, not a direct family member. Christina Helbig handed over their findings to me. In the following years, we found traces of Mangi Meli in reports of the colonial officers, in the diaries of the missionaries, and in songs and stories. We also found historical pictures and later even objects that belonged to Meli. But we still did not find his head.

Mangi Meli Remains

When we showed *Schädel X* at the Goethe-Institute in Dar es Salaam, we invited Isaria Meli to be our guest of honour. He came with Gabriel Mzei Orio, a tour guide who had just established his company Old Moshi Cultural Tourism Enterprise. After the performance, they asked me, 'How can we make your research accessible to the Old Moshi community?' Given their ephemeral nature, one or two performances of *Schädel X* in Old Moshi would not be sustainable. Thus, a new project was envisioned, this time on the initiative of the descendants: *Mangi Meli Remains*. The idea was to depict the biography of Mangi Meli, to highlight the need for the return of his head, and to create a place of remembrance in Old Moshi. First, we thought of an animated film, then of an exhibition. Eventually we combined them in an exhibition with historical photographs and a video sculpture with an animated film. *Mangi Meli Remains* consists of three chapters: 'Life', 'Death', and 'Thereafter'. It explains how Mangi Meli was fought by the German colonial forces, because in contrast to his father, he did not welcome the colonizers in his territory; how he was able to defend their attack in 1892, and how he was defeated a year later; how the Germans forced his people to build a military station on the place of his destroyed *Boma*, and how, in return, he was allowed to maintain his position as Mangi under the control of their guns and cannons; how he was finally betrayed (or slandered) by his long-time enemy, accused of conspiring against the Germans; how on March 2, 1900, he was hanged, together with eighteen other Chagga, Arusha, and Meru leaders; how his head was chopped off and likely sent to Germany at the request of scientists such as Felix von Luschan for their racist research; and how the head is still missed by his descendants in Old Moshi.

Unlike for *Schädel X*, for *Mangi Meli Remains* Flinn Works was able to team up with artists, curators, and consultants from Tanzania or those with Tanzanian family ties. The film script aimed at including both oral history and (colonial) archival sources to reconstruct the story. Often, they complemented or confirmed each other; in case of doubt, unanswered questions were left open in the narrative. The first drafts of the script were written by me, on the basis of my research, and then revised by Sarita Lydia Mamseri. Inspiration for the main

Isaria Meli, grandson of Mangi Meli, with young visitors in the *Mangi Meli Remains* exhibition in Old Moshi, 2019. © Sarita Mamseri

character and storyteller of *Mangi Meli Remains* was Isaria Meli's grandson, who approved the script. Historical photographs by colonizers such as Hans Meyer or German missionaries served as models for the visual artwork by Amani Abeid and Cloud Chatanda, which was again redrawn by the animators when transformed into moving images.[11] Thus, the film had multiple authors, and each image was redrawn several times, as in a palimpsest.

In the exhibition, the animated film is projected on an empty, broken clay pot – a reference to the traditional Chagga burial rites and a placeholder for the missing head of Mangi Meli. In pre-Christian times, Chagga communities would place the skulls of their ancestors in the banana groves, protected by such a pot. There, descendants would give offerings and remember the deceased. The video sculpture forms the centre of the exhibition. Visitors can choose between three languages: Kiswahili, English, and German. Re-examined historical photographs and documents complement the exhibition.

Mangi Meli Remains was first shown in 2018 as part of the exhibition *The dead, as far as [ ] can remember* at the Tieranatomisches Theater (TA T) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. *Deutschlandfunk* reported,

> *The exhibition is above all about changing perspectives. This is shown particularly impressively in a room that deals with a personal search, the search of a grandson for his grandfather's skull. [. . .] The actor and director Konradin Kunze, together with Tanzanian artists, has processed the story of this search into an [. . .] animated film projected onto the half-broken shell of a clay pot. [. . .] An empty space that hurts. But who has the interpretive authority at the end of the story? In the exhibition, Mangi Meli himself seems to provide the answer to this question. His almost life-size portrait hangs on the wall: powerful, youthful, he stands there, looking condescendingly into the face of his photographer. This is not the look of a subjugated person.*[12]

After the exhibition in Berlin, which was well received by the (professional) public, the press, and Black and Afro-diasporic visitors, *Mangi Meli Remains* was shown in the historical old *Boma*, at the Dar es Salaam Centre for Architectural Heritage (DARCH), before being inaugurated

[11] See Schayan Riaz, 'As a German, I Can't Describe Things from an African Perspective', website of the Goethe Institut, May 2018, https://www.goethe.de/en/uun/pub/akt/g18/21289669.html.
[12] Christiane Habermalz, 'Ausstellung der Humboldt-Universität Berlin: Koloniale Gewalt und menschliche Überreste', *Deutschlandfunk*, November 8, 2018, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/ausstellung-der-humboldt-universitaet-berlin-koloniale-100.html. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations by Konradin Kunze.

Inauguration of the Mangi Meli Memorial below the hanging tree in Old Moshi, 2019. © Konradin Kunze

as a permanent exhibition in Old Moshi on the anniversary of Meli's death. The exhibition room is set in the old court building in Tsuduni village, Old Moshi, next to the hanging tree. On the occasion of the opening, a crowd-funded memorial of Mangi Meli was opened to commemorate the hanged leaders.[13] The Old Moshi community now holds a yearly Mangi Meli commemoration. The exhibition, managed by Old Moshi Cultural Tourism Enterprise, is open and free for all.

The *Citizen on Sunday*, a Tanzanian newspaper, saw the exhibition as a call to have Mangi Meli's head returned:

> *The return of the stolen human remains is a moral obligation to heal spiritual wounds in the Tanzanian society. The exhibition 'Mangi Meli Remains' is a mediation service in this sense. It tells the story of one of the most important leaders in the resistance against the German*

[13] 'Spendenaufruf für das Denkmal Mangi Melis in Moshi', website of Tanzania-Network, accessed May 25, 2023, https://tanzania-network.de/node/35.

> *colonial power and makes it accessible to German and Tanzanian society. In the inaugurated exhibition [. . .] the legacy and search of chief Meli's remains have been keenly reflected on through the critical mining of photographs and documents in colonial archives.*[14]

The exhibition, Isaria Meli's statements, and Mnyaka Sururu Mboro's activities with Berlin Postkolonial all contributed to growing media attention. International newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV channels reported on Mangi Meli and the search for his head and/or the exhibition, including the *East African*, the BBC, ZDF *heute journal*, *Die Zeit*, and *Der Spiegel*.[15] In addition to the exhibition, a film version of the installation was shown globally at several international film festivals.[16] Gabby Orio and I also created a virtual tour on Mangi Meli for the website of Dekoloniale, a project that aims to reappraise Berlin's colonial history.[17] *Mangi Meli Remains* thus helped to raise awareness at home and abroad of Meli's story and the need for the return of his head. But what about the search for the head?

Since my first encounter with Isaria Meli, I continuously searched for traces of Mangi Meli and his remains in numerous archives. The results of the research are partly reflected in Flinn Works' projects but are more extensive than can be represented in these. The most promising trace was that of a German colonial officer, Lt. Moritz Merker. Merker was involved in the fight against Meli and became deputy chief of the German military station in Moshi (today's Old Moshi). With the chief of the station, Capt. Kurt Johannes, he conducted several so-called punitive expeditions against the communities in the Kilimanjaro and

[14] Elisha Mayallah, 'In Moshi, Anti-colonial Hero Mangi Meli Is Reawakened', *Citizen on Sunday*, March 17, 2019.
[15] Caroline Uliwa, 'Exhibit Brings Mangi Meli of Old Moshi Back to Life', *East African*, January 25, 2019, https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/magazine/exhibit-brings-mangi-meli-of-old-moshi-back-to-life-1411106; 'Executed Tanzanian Hero's Grandson Takes DNA Test to Find Lost Skull', *BBC*, November 20, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46277158; 'The Search in Germany for the Lost Skull of Tanzania's Mangi Meli', *BBC*, November 13, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-45916150; Timm Kröger, 'Koloniales Schicksal in Tansania', *ZDF heute journal*, July 4, 2019, video, 3:00, https://web.archive.org/web/20190704203951/https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/heute-journal/koloniales-schicksal-in-tansania-100.html; Xaver von Cranach, 'Wo ist Mangi Meli?', *Die Zeit*, February 8, 2020, https://www.zeit.de/2020/07/kolonialismus-mangi-meli-schaedel-tansania-stamme-shaeuptling-afrika; Katja Iken, 'Wo steckt der Kopf des Mangi Meli?', *Der Spiegel*, March 28, 2021, https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/deutscher-kolonialismus-in-afrika-wo-steckt-der-kopf-des-mangi-meli-a-1e5ab093-222a-4453-93d3-597e8aea417c; Oliver Noffke, 'Museen und ihr koloniales Erbe: Das Verbrechen', *rbb*, February 2, 2020, https://www.rbb24.de/kultur/beitrag/2020/02/kolonialzeit-stiftung-preussischer-kulturbesitz-mangi-meli.html.
[16] 'Mangi Meli Remains', Flinn Works Production in co-production with the Ethnological Museum Berlin and Tieranatomisches Theater at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, posted November 7, 2019, Flinn Works, Vimeo, 12:00, https://vimeo.com/flinnworks/mangimeliremains.
[17] Konradin Kunze and Gabriel Mzei Orio, 'Mangi Meli (1866–1900) – Tanzania | Germany', website of Dekoloniale Memory Culture in the City, 2020, accessed May 25, 2023, https://dekoloniale.de/en/map?kind=stories&categories=biographies#Mangi%20Meli%20%5B1866-1900%5D.

Arusha regions. When in 1900, Meli and other Chagga, Meru, and Arusha leaders were arrested, Merker led the interrogations, which resulted in their hanging the next day. While Chagga ancestral remains were verifiably stolen by several German colonizers before (among them Hans Meyer, August Widenmann, and Otto Ehlers), the first Chagga remains mentioned in the archival sources after the executions of 1900 were sent by Merker to Berlin, at the request of Felix von Luschan, in 1901. Merker was head of the military station by then, since Johannes had been ordered to Dar es Salaam. In the following few years – until he, too, was transferred to Dar es Salaam – Merker sent dozens of ancestral remains from Moshi to Berlin. He continued exchanging letters with Luschan and published 'ethnological' books about the Wachagga and Wamaasai, before he died in 1908, in Mwanza. In his letters, he often gave details about the individual remains, sometimes with name and age. Since most of them were young and middle-aged men, and Merker had access to this personal information, it can be assumed that some of them were executed or died as prisoners. For the first shipment of skulls (two boxes of skulls labelled as 'Chagga' and 'Maasai'), in 1901, neither a letter with names nor any further information could be found in the archives. The shipment reached the Royal Museum of Ethnology in Berlin and Luschan, where they were even given S-numbers, as was common practise in the museum. But the remains can no longer be found in any of the collections.[18] Nevertheless, the connection between Merker and Luschan proved to be the most promising lead.

Already in 2016, I contacted the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, SPK) on behalf of Isaria Meli. The SPK with its Museum of Prehistory and Early History was responsible for the so-called S-Sammlung (S-collection), which it took over from the Charité in 2011. Isaria's request was the first they received, and they were initially reluctant to do provenance research. Despite this, growing pressure from Berlin Postkolonial and other NGOs, as well as media reports, led to the establishing of a provenance research project on ancestral remains from East Africa. On our initiative, Isaria Meli and Gabby Orio were invited to Berlin to attend the study day of the NGO Tanzania-Network. Thus, at the age of almost ninety, Isaria boarded a plane to leave his country for the first time. In a meeting with the president of the SPK, Hermann Parzinger, a DNA sample from Isaria

[18] Bernhard Heeb, Charles Kabwete Mulinda, and Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, *Human Remains from the Former German Colony of East Africa: Recontextualization and Approaches for Restitution* (Paderborn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022), 246.

was taken to be compared with that of six skulls in the collections, to see if there was any match. Later, two more samples were taken from descendants of executed leaders of 1900. The results of the tests were all negative. This led to the SPK's statement that Mangi Meli's head 'is not in the collections of Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz', although it cannot be ruled out that he is among the hundreds of still-unidentified ancestors in SPK's boxes.[19]

During the research project, I was in regular exchange with the scientists involved, and we shared documents and interim research. Meanwhile, we reached out to other institutions, and a few approached Mboro proactively. In some cases, our requests and research resulted in research projects, such as at the University of Göttingen: in addition to the well-known 'Blumenbach Sammlung' (Blumenbach collection), the university holds the former collection of ancestral remains from what was then the Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg (now the Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt, MARKK), as I learned from the latter's director when I performed *Schädel X* there. When I searched for Mangi Meli's remains in Göttingen, I found indications of several ancestors from Tanzania but not from the Kilimanjaro region. Since several ancestors clearly had a colonial context, I urged the custodian to inform the respective communities and begin to research the provenance. Eventually, the university started a provenance research project on both collections.[20]

Marejesho

Mangi Meli Remains triggered further enquiries to us from descendants. We also gained knowledge through our research and had access to information that went beyond the individual case of Mangi Meli. This led, in 2022, to Flinn Works, Berlin Postkolonial, and Old Moshi Cultural Tourism Enterprise joining forces to create the mobile research exhibition *Marejesho asili mila utamaduni wetu* – or *Marejesho* for short – funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation. The title indicates the overarching goal of the project: the return of cultural heritage – that is, the ancestral remains and objects from the Kilimanjaro and Meru regions that are held in European and US institutions. In the absence of communication between these institutions and the communities in

[19] 'Chief Mangi Meli's Skull not in Collections of Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz', website of Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, September 20, 2019, https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/en/news-detail/article/2019/09/20/schaedel-des-mangi-meli-nicht-in-spk-sammlung0.html?sword_list%5B0%5D=meli&no_cache=1.
[20] 'Press release: Sensible Provenienzen', website of Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, September 27, 2022, https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/3240.html?id=6818.

the Kilimanjaro and Meru regions, the project aimed at a knowledge exchange initiated by civil society and the arts. We collaborated with three museums in Germany: the Ethnological Museum Berlin, the GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, and the Linden Museum Stuttgart. During the first phase in Germany, the core team engaged in provenance research, searched the archives, and visited the respective museum depots to see and eventually select the objects. The Tanzanian members also requested to see the ancestors in the SPK and the GRASSI Museum. For the first time, a Tanzanian delegation was able to encounter the ancestors in these institutions. However, the respective institutions handled the encounters very differently. In the SPK, the encounter was a rather irritating experience, since our team strongly felt that the ancestors were treated and presented in an inappropriate manner, without due respect for their dignity. In contrast, at GRASSI Museum, our Tanzanian team members were the first ones to use a newly established, specific room for such visits, which enabled a dignified encounter.

Visitor of the *Marejesho* exhibition in Kibosho holding a colonial photograph of his ancestor Laigwanani Saroni of Arusha, 2022. © Konradin Kunze

Before travelling with the exhibition, Mboro, Gabby, and I went on a preparation trip to the villages to inform the traditional leaders and the descendants of the Mangis about our findings and ask them for permission to display the historical photographs of their ancestors and pictures of their objects. In sometimes larger, sometimes more intimate meetings, we showed historical photographs of the respective Mangis that we had found in archives. We also informed them about the objects and the outcome of our provenance research. In most cases, those items that could be traced back to individuals were those of the Mangis. Among them were an earring and a bust of Mangi Mareale of Marangu, in the Ethnological Museum Berlin; several personal items of Mangi Meli of Moshi appropriated by German officers on the day of his

defeat (but ironically declared as 'gifts' in the archive), in the GRASSI Museum; and a headdress and blanket of the Mangi of Kibosho (likely Mangi Molelia or his father Mangi Sina), in the Linden Museum. Many of the objects could also clearly be identified as war booty – for instance, shields with bullet holes, jewellery, or garments of killed Chagga soldiers. Almost all of these objects are inscribed with a violent appropriation; they can tell of the cruelty of German colonial rule but also of resistance against it.

The mobile, temporary architecture of *Marejesho* for the Kilimanjaro and Meru tour was conceptualized as an easily accessible *Baraza* (an open terrace for meetings) by Dar es Salaam–based APC Architectural Pioneering Consultants.[21] During six weeks in August and September 2022, *Marejesho* travelled to five villages in the Kilimanjaro region and one in the Meru region, stopping on open lawns at or near historical sites of the respective chiefdoms. It consisted of the video sculpture from *Mangi Meli Remains* to address the issue of ancestral remains, historical photographs of Mangis or leaders, and banners with pictures of selected objects from the region. An audio station with 120-year-old recordings of Chagga songs and a display with a video of our visit in a German museum depot were set up. Filmmakers from the Bagamoyo film collective (Bafico) conducted video interviews with members of the communities and edited them on the spot to display them within the exhibition. The visual artists Amani Abeid, Cloud Chatanda, and Masana joined *Marejesho*, creating live drawings and paintings. The artwork served as a bridge between the past and the present, artistically connecting today's villagers with the ancestors and their objects. The accompanying programme of *Marejesho* consisted of public discussions, film evenings, dance performances, and the obligatory traditional sharing of banana beer (*Mbege*).

Certainly, the format of such an exhibition was new to most of the villagers, and some raised doubts about our intentions, wondering whether there was a possible 'hidden agenda'. Although the vast majority of our team was Tanzanian and some of them identify as Chagga, some people regarded the project as a foreign initiative. We also realized that the widespread Christian belief system sometimes harboured strong reservations about engaging with (pre)colonial history and practices. All these aspects prevented some people from even entering the exhibition or engaging in talks. Some descendants of certain Mangis may

[21] See 'Marejesho Travelling Exhibition', Kilimanjaro Region, Tanzania, 2022, on the website of APC Architectural Pioneering Consultants, accessed May 25, 2023, https://www.apc-tz.com/work#/marejesho-travelling-exhibition.

also have shied away from visiting *Marejesho* because their ancestors had collaborated with the German colonizers. Despite those obstacles, *Marejesho* attracted many interested and curious visitors.

Mboro formed the heart of the project, with his profound knowledge of colonial history and his understanding of both Chagga and German societies. Often surrounded by crowds of all ages, he guided visitors through the exhibition, explaining, discussing, commenting, and asking questions from morning until nightfall. We learned that the absence of the remains of the hanged Mangis was well known, at least among the families of the descendants; however, the trafficking of the remains of members of the Chagga community, other than those of the leaders, did not seem to have been part of the oral tradition. The reason for the massive appropriation of the ancestral remains – that is, the demand of European anthropologists to use them as objects for racist 'scientific' research – was also not known and is still hardly believed. As for the objects, no one we met knew about them being stolen and stored in European museum depots, which came as a surprise, especially to the descendants of the Mangis. This was partly true for the historical photographs as well. The special moments when descendants discovered pictures of their ancestors in the exhibition or, for instance, heard their grandfather's voice in an old audio recording linger in the memory. Of course, we shared copies of the pictures with them. In each locality, we presented special banners depicting items that originated from that village. These banners were then left for display at the village offices after our exhibition moved to the next place.

The majority of visitors stressed the need for all ancestors to be repatriated to Kilimanjaro, in accordance with the still-existing practice of being buried in the homeland. Despite the efforts of Christian missionaries in colonial times to establish cemeteries, the Wachagga, to this day, bury their deceased on their own homesteads. This holds true even for Wachagga in the diaspora, with descendants sometimes raising funds within the communities to finance the repatriation. Visitors mostly supported the return of the objects, to educate the younger generations about the past (and present) Chagga traditions. However, we encountered different views on how and where the ancestors and their objects should be buried, kept, and remembered. Our project could only mark the beginning of a necessary debate within the communities.

During the six weeks of *Marejesho*'s presence in the Kilimanjaro and Meru regions, the team was temporarily accompanied by external film teams. Also, the ethnologist Isabelle Reimann joined us for provenance research on the ancestral remains, and the lawyer Sarah Imani from the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR)

held several initial talks with descendants of hanged leaders to explore potential legal interventions.

Also important in the *Marejesho* project were political activities and the establishment of a network within the Chagga and Meru societies, within which the Umoja wa Machifu (chiefs union), as the representative body of the traditional leaders in Tanzania, played a significant role. Several meetings were held during our project phase, resulting in a letter urging the Tanzanian government to take action to officially demand the repatriation of the Tanzanian ancestors from Germany and other countries holding them. In addition, Mboro and I, together with the Kilimanjaro secretary of the Umoja wa Machifu, travelled to Dodoma for a visit to the parliament, where we talked with MPs as well as the minister of culture about this issue. The minister asked us to write a report summarizing all the available information about ancestral remains and objects in European and US collections. The report was handed over to the ministry in November 2022. As of July 2023, the Tanzanian government has initiated talks with the German government about repatriation, restitution, and, to a certain extent, also reparations.

Apart from these political effects of *Marejesho*, our provenance research yielded new information about the whereabouts of some individuals. We were able to trace the head of Mangi Nkunde of Kibognoto and thirty anonymous individuals from Old Moshi to the University of Strasbourg, France (during the era of German colonialism, Strasbourg was German). We could also trace the remains of the historically significant trader Hassan bin Omari (aka Makunganya), who was executed in November 1895 in Kilwa. Today, his remains are kept in the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York, while some objects attributed to him are held by the Ethnological Museum in Berlin. In consultation with the SPK and at the wish of the descendants, we took DNA samples of several family members from the Meli, Molelia, and Ngalami families to be compared to eight skulls in Berlin – all of the forefathers had been hanged in 1900. In some cases, individuals were named differently by the German colonizers and the Chagga or Meru communities, as in the case of Mangi Lobulu. At an early phase of our research in the archive of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, I came across a letter by Lt. Moritz Merker to Felix von Luschan containing a list of individuals from Kilimanjaro whose remains had been sent from (Old) Moshi to Berlin, among them 'Meru-Häuptling Kiwosso, c. 25 Jahre alt' (Meru chief Kiwosso, about 25 years old). In the Meru community, nobody could relate to Kiwosso as a name of a person, but reports by German Lutheran missionaries mention a 'Kiwoso' as

the son of Matunda and Mangi of Meru, who was hanged as one of the main suspects of the 'conspiracy from 1899' together with Mangi Meli. I learned from the descendants and written sources that until then, there was only one Mangi of Meru at a time, always belonging to the same line, the Kaaya family. All this information taken together strongly suggests that Kiwos(s)o and Lobulu are the same person. During our *Marejesho* preparation trip, I shared my findings with the Kaaya family. Shortly after the trip, the AMNH confirmed that they hold a skull and skeleton catalogued as 'Kiwosso'. An examination of the remains also revealed a label with the inscription 'Kiwosso, Merker'. The family asked me to negotiate the conditions of repatriation with the AMNH and the Tanzanian authorities.

A year after we collected DNA samples from descendants during *Marejesho* at Kilimanjaro, we received the results: to our surprise, the DNA of four of the eight tested ancestors matched with the DNA of living persons and could be assigned with a very high probability to two families. Thanks to the combination of knowledge within the families and archival material, the ancestors can likely be identified as an *Akida* (minister) of Mangi Meli of Moshi, namely Sindato Kiutesha Kiwelu, as well as Mangi Molelia of Kibosho and his brother, all of whom were hanged together with Mangi Meli in 1900.[22] The fourth ancestor is not in a direct paternal line to Molelia family members but instead turned out to be a more distant relative, potentially the *Akida* Mrekereke, who is said to have been hanged together with his Mangi Molelia. The SPK celebrated this match as scientific news even before the descendants had been informed.[23] But without the DNA request by the descendants and *Marejesho*, the ancestors would have remained unidentified. The *Marejesho* team informed the descendants about the results via video call in September 2023. On the same day, the latter demanded the fastest possible repatriation of both identified and unidentified ancestors to the families and communities respectively. They demanded an apology from the German government and the involved institutions for the colonial crimes and the trafficking of their ancestors. And they asked for all the *Mangi*'s belongings to be restituted and for talks about reparations

[22] Katja Iken, 'Der Schädel meines Großvaters muss zurück nach Tansania. So schnell wie möglich', *Der Spiegel*, September 9, 2023, https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/kolonialzeit-der-schaedel-meines-grossvaters-muss-zurueck-nach-tansania-a-eb47098a-af82-4ff8-939a-aae87e02db4f.
[23] Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 'Menschliche Überreste aus Tansania: Erstmals Bestätigung von Verwandtschaftsverhältnissen zu lebenden Personen', press release, September 5, 2023, https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/pressemitteilung/artikel/2023/09/05/menschliche-ueberreste-aus-tansania-erstmals-bestaetigung-von-verwandtschaftsverhaeltnissen-zu-lebenden-personen.html.

to be initiated.[24] These demands and the voices of the communities feature in the Berlin iteration of our exhibition, *Marejesho: The Call for Restitution from the Peoples of Kilimanjaro and Meru*, at TA T (Tieranatomisches Theater) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, which opened in October 2023.[25]

I am curious to witness the return of Mangi Lobulu, Mangi Molelia, and his brother, Akida Sindato Kiwelu, and eventually all ancestral remains to Tanzania. I am not sure whether this will be an act of healing or repair. For me, it is difficult to imagine what it would mean for the descendants. Is it of significance to a young child when finally their great-great-grandfather is freed from the boxes and the depots and travels back to rest in peace in the soil of his homeland? How will Isaria Meli feel when hundreds of ancestors return to Tanzania, but Mangi Meli is not among them? What I know is that Emanuel Kaaya, at over a hundred years old, was moved to tears when he received the message that Mangi Lobulu was found.

[24] European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, 'After DNA-matching: Relatives at Kilimanjaro Demand Early Return of Their Identified Ancestors and Apology from Germany', press release, September 11, 2023, https://www.ecchr.eu/en/press-release/nach-dna-abgleich-angehoerige-am-kilimanjaro-fordern-baldige-rueckkehr-ihrer-identifizierten-ahnen-und-entschuldigung-von-deutschland.
[25] For more information about the exhibition, *Marejesho: The Call for Restitution from the Peoples of Kilimanjaro and Meru*, see https://tieranatomisches-theater.de/project/ausstellung-marejesho_2023_de.

Dithugula tša Malefokana, installation view at the 10th Bamako Encounters, *MaBareBare: Telling Time*, Bamako, 2015. © George Mahashe