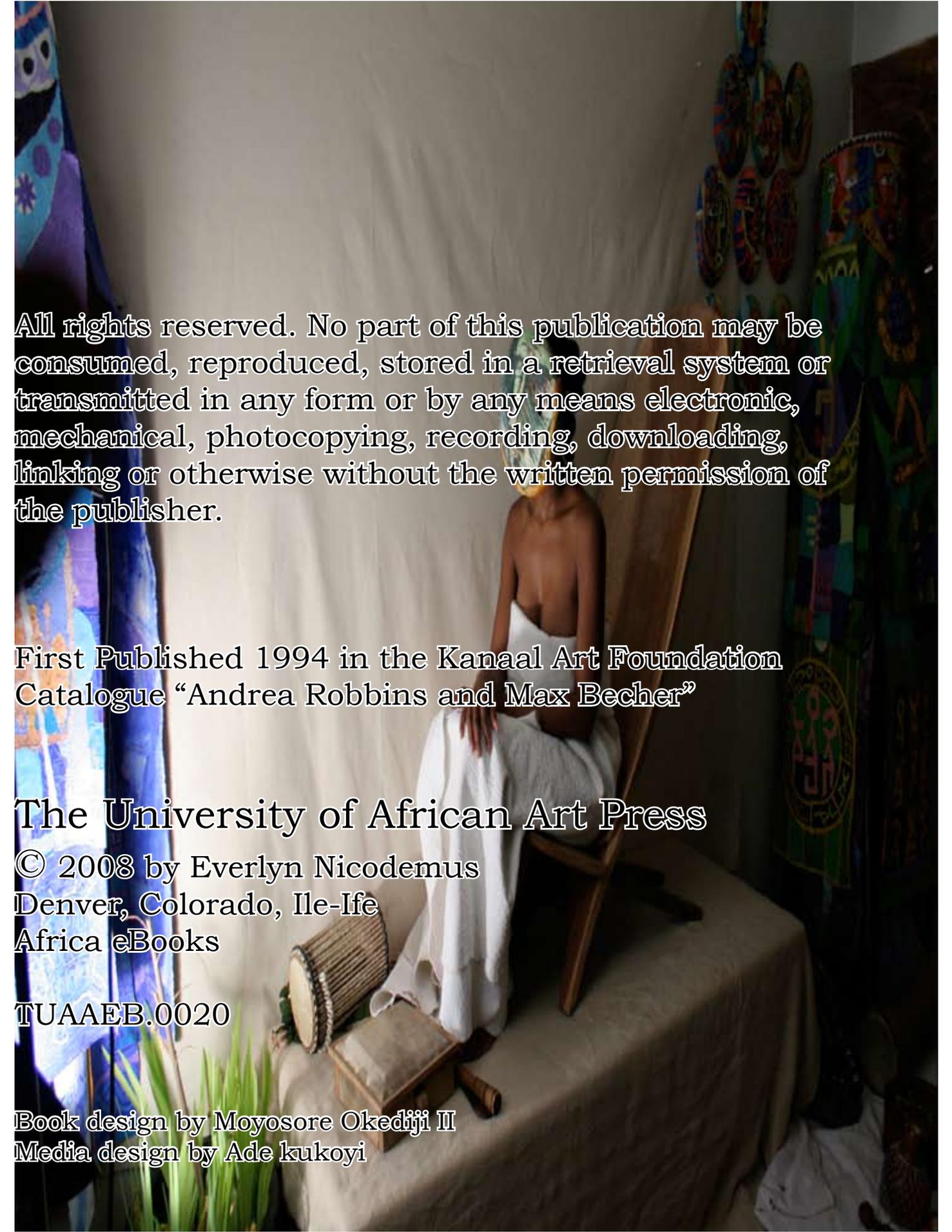
A person is shown from the back, wearing a large, colorful mask. The mask features a grid of red and blue squares, a yellow border, and a sun-like shape on the right side. The person's back is covered in intricate black and white tattoos. The text "Everlyn NICODEMUS" is overlaid on the top half of the image.

Everlyn
NICODEMUS

**carrying the sun
on
our backs**



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CARRYING THE SUN ON OUR BACKS

BY

EVERLYN NICODEMUS

(.....) a procession of men and women slowly walks to touch the graves of famous chiefs. Many of the chiefs died in a major war of resistance against the so-called German protection force.....

Every year on August 23, or the Sunday after, the Hereros gather from all over the country at their old center Okahandja, which means “the place rich in love,” to commemorate those who died in a major war of resistance against the Germans.

Today the dress of many Herero women is visibly influenced by the 19th century Victorian dresses that the German colonialists brought with them.

I have long contemplated the photographs of Andrea Robbins and Max Becher depicting these Herero women dressed in red clothes to honor a memory. Beyond the memory is German colonialism. It connects their history and mine. What the photos tell me is that they have been able to

keep it alive, while I have to search for much of the corresponding history of my people and country.

I am thinking of my Chagga sister Jagodja. Had I known enough of my own history, I would have dressed in red like them and gone to a gallows situated outside my home town Moshi in Kilimanjaro. It was erected by the German Reichskommissar Carl Peters, when he hanged Jagodja. I would have gone there to touch it and to talk to her.

- You were hanged because you loved the man of your choice.

Enslaved and raped and used by the intruder, you kept your dignity and continued to meet in secrecy Mabruk, the man of our own people, whom your heart had selected...

I would think about the lewd rake Carl Peters, who flogged African men when they refused to deliver females to him; who talked about blacks as animals “who do not think at all” while telling obscenities to his fellows at officers’ parties; who later on, commenting upon Mabruk’s execution, said about himself: “I am a quiet, serious son of a vicar from Lauterbach an der Elbe, but to use the same hole as that swine doesn’t suit me.” – Reichskommissar!

I would think about the proud contempt that Mabruk as well as Jagodja demonstrated to their murderers when taken to the gallows.

- You don't understand what a Chagga woman can be, I would say to the gallows. You thought you had curbed us and scared the daylight out of us. Queen Mashina, the strongest and most intelligent of Chagga leaders, commanded two successful wars and brought by her ingenious diplomacy the longest peace in our history. King Rongoma, who murdered her, had to send his servants to climb Mount Kilimanjaro to bring the ice from its top, the only thing that could bring him peace of mind, said her curse. He died without that peace...

- You and those who erected you know nothing about the role that women have played in Chagga history, as in many African societies, the examples they have given of pride, courage, and wit...

Jagodja, this woman of our history whom few among us black women know about or remember, was not led to her execution like a lamb. Together with other Chagga girls from Carl Peters' enforced harem, she managed to escape and seek refuge with one of our kings. He refused to deliver the girls back to their tormentors. But Peters sent his Sudanese soldiers to burn down the King's houses...

The girls were brought back and flogged until the blood flowed through their loincloths. Peters sat on a bamboo chair looking on. Then Jagodja was put in chains. She refused to give up and made a second attempt to

escape, but it failed. Jagodja was condemned to death in January 1892 by Peters and his gang playing court martial. She was hanged in the entrance gate of the fortified German camp. The prisoner showed until the last moment a supreme indifference, a witness reported. Jagodja, full of contempt, mounted by herself the beer case acquired for the hanging.

After the execution, Peters erected his shameful monument, a gallows, outside the camp. I saw it when I was a child. “The Germans hanged our people there,” I was told...

Deep inside me is hidden as an incitement to rebellion not only the example of our Chagga women but also the fact that the German intruders never succeeded in subjugating the peoples of Kilimanjaro. They had to negotiate a kind of coexistence with them, an armed and distrustful peace, now and then broken by clashes.

The force of resistance of the Chaggas sprang very much from their way of life. As in many cases of popular resistance, in Africa and around the world, the material and spiritual culture that they had developed to sustain life also served to defend it. Sophisticated techniques of irrigation and of terracing the mountains, invented when the Chaggas cultivated Kilimanjaro, as well as their highly developed organization of productive cooperation, provided them with experience that could be

applied to defense in wartime. Clever systems of messengers and signals enabled them, for instance, to elude an enemy who conquered by creating divisions. And huge systems of secret underground passages were used for hiding. On occasion, enemy troops were lured down there and suffocated.

Technology combined with a history of internecine wars (as in medieval Europe) had made the Chaggas a proud people. This explains how King Sinna could tear the German flag into pieces, then throw them on the ground and pierce them with his spear. It also explains why the fate of Jagodja and Mabruk did not remain unavenged. The scornful challenge symbolized by Carl Peters' gallows, boasting his acts of cruelty, did not stay unanswered. The following year, when Peters himself had left for Europe – eventually to be dishonorably removed from office - his successor was killed by the Chaggas.

Jagodja first entered my life in January 1989. Meeting her meant both identification and recovered history. She helped me to see myself and my own position more clearly. There is rape that is not physical but which is equally painful and humiliating. There exists between the whites and blacks, surrounding a black woman living in a white society an atmosphere of unspoken violence and exploitation with sexual overtones, palpable and abstract at the same time. Jagodja's quiet resistance gave

sharp contours to the picture of his exposure.

When I found her story, I saw that nearly a century ago, a radical paper, *Vorwärts*, talked about her executioner Carl Peters as a “raging ‘Aryan’ who would like to exterminate all the Jews and who, in the absence of Jews, shoots African Negroes to death like sparrows and who hangs Negro girls for the pleasure, after they have served his lust.” There a track reappeared. I had already started to try to see my colonial background in a wider perspective and as part of humanity’s common fate,

In Europe, I am a warrior and a hunter; I have become accustomed to hunting knowledge in libraries and archives, in newspapers and periodicals, in bookshops and with editors. It is with palpitations of a sportsman out in a foreign wild game savannah that I follow the tracks. I still remember how in my childhood I stole an issue of *National Geographic* forgotten on a church bench and carried it away inside my underpants. How it opened a window! I searched and I found some scattered issues of this remarkable vehicle of knowledge in libraries at home, and I used them as secret lookouts towards the world. Who among the admass society’s spoiled citizens can understand the excitement I felt?

I also remember the dizziness I experienced the first time I stood among the brimming bookshelves in a European library, all that

information, all that power! I felt dizziness - and anger. I knew that the knowledge that had been collected from and about my continent had never been shared with us or scrutinized and criticized by us. Neither had the documents extracted from our lives been brought back to our own archives.

Sometimes, I felt like a spy in hostile country. Sometimes, I stopped and asked myself: What am I hunting? And I saw how some of the footprints led from where I was hunting to the lands of my fellow 'others,' and how other, crossing prints led from the knowledge appropriated from us into these storage places and factories to be processed. In what kind of processes? What does the notion of Eurocentrism mean in terms of persisting power and one-eyedness, and when will it be relived by a polyperspective world and dialogue.

I realized that, belonging neither here nor there, I am pursuing these points as well as my own tracks, still searching for lookouts but into the world that I am, that is me, the world in which I am an exile and a nomad.

One specific track had appeared the year before I met Jagodja. It so happened that my husband had brought me an old volume from a flea market in Alsace, *Deutsch-Ostafrika gestern und heute* (German East Africa Yesterday and Today) by Dr. Wilhelm Arning first published in

1936, then a second, enlarged edition published during World War II by the Reichskolonialbund in Berlin. I had not the slightest idea that I could have been born in a Nazi-ruled German colony.

In the new preface dated June 1941, I read about my native country Tanganyika, then a British mandate since 1920, now independent Tanzania: “Today, since our German sword, our victorious army, wielded by our Führer and commander in chief, has forged the new Gross-Deutschland, we see with unspeakable delight in our heart the moment draw near when once again the German flag will fly over this German land.”

Looking through its pages, I was frozen by its cold rationality, by all the mappings, tabulating, calculations, statistics, timings, and detailed plannings covering East Africa with a tightly pulled net; strategic facts about geography, economy, demography, communications, and so on. Suddenly, I saw a scene in Claude Lanzmann’s film *Shoah*, where a German railway clerk tells about the meticulous efficiency of his work in organizing the transportation to the concentration camps. The rationality of evil, wrote the Jewish author Zygmunt Bauman talking about the film. Rationality means obeying: obeying means rationality. For the executioners and for the victims...

What triggered my associations and brought my thoughts to the edge of the pit was an additional piece of paper stating the Nazi race politics planned for the African colony when re-conquered. All mixed marriages were to be forbidden. Those with mixed blood were gradually to be eliminated...

This track leads me back to my Herero sisters and brothers. In the summer of 1990, some months after the independence of Namibia, the Herero king, Kuaima Riruako, went to Germany to meet with the foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, claiming indemnity for the attempted genocide of the Herero people, which was carried out by German troops in the early years of this century. He went in vain. As a German paper explained it, how could Germany pay for atrocities committed such a long time ago, about which few Germans today had even heard?

But the **ignorance** is part of a bigger pattern of repressed memory, of the amnesia that oppressors seem to keep as their privilege. The Herero genocide in German-occupied Southwest Africa by the military and its building of concentration camps were nothing less than the rehearsal of the Endlösung that the Nazis staged some thirty-five years later against the Jews. This African background to Nazi atrocities and genocide politics has until recently been kept dark. I had to seek for nearly a year to get hold of

the texts containing the whole horrifying landscape.

When Germany in the mid-1880s claimed Southwest Africa and started to act as a colonial power (its missionaries and business had long since settled in the region), the appointed Reichskommissar immediately adopted the double game of signing protection treaties and using the tactics of divide and conquer. He exploited a complex situation and created enormous problems for the many peoples and ethnic groups living there.

In the beginning, many of the African leaders took the Germans at their word and assumed that accepting the protection they offered simply meant acquiring an ally against their own enemies. The Germans aimed at nothing but protecting their own interest and building up their power by getting the Africans under their flag and law.

There was a dynamic of two opposite movements. In the North, the pastoral Herero peoples with their big herds of cattle had been looking southward for fresh grazing land. Up from the South, several groups of Nama peoples, cattle breeders but also cattle raiders and cattle traders, had been heading for the north but found their way blocked by the Herero land.

Peoples of an old Africa and peoples of a new Africa confronted each

other. The proud Hereros had a traditional way of life handed down through generations and structured by the veneration of their cattle. The Namas, more fair-skinned, had trekked into Southwest Africa from the Cape Colony in the first half of the century. Descended from centuries of mixing between Dutch settlers and black peoples, they were nicknamed “Hottentots,” a label the Europeans still use for them.

The Namas might be characterized as belonging to a new category of Africans consisting of former slaves from captured slave ships, the so-called recaptives, freed slaves who had returned from Great Britain and America, as well as descendants of early colonial ‘interracial’ contacts. They were part of this uprooted, alienated, new Africa from which, a British historian writes, the first emancipated Africans originated. Hendrik Witbooi, the leader or Captain of one of these Nama peoples, the Witboois, who was to play a central role in the events, certainly fits into the picture, an African Christian intellectual.

How did my fellow Africans at the time see through all the treacherous manipulations of the colonizers? All tricks of an intruding foreign power that called itself “peace bringer” while taking advantage of existing antagonisms threw the African peoples into humiliation and servitude.

The humanly eloquent and highly analytical letters that Hendrik

Witbooi wrote to the different actors in the political drama, to enemies and allies, to fellow Africans and to Europeans, tell much about it. They have been collected and published in recent years as a book called Africa to the Africans. In reading them, it becomes perfectly clear that the “primitive and savage barbarians” in this context were the German colonizers.

Hendrik Witbooi wrote to his principal adversary, Kamaharero, king of the Hereros, in May 1890. The Hereros had already lost their illusions about German so-called protection and canceled the treaty. But when German troops began to pour into the country, Kamaharero had let himself be talked into signing a new treaty. “My very dear Captain Maharero Tyamuaha,” Witbooi wrote, “(...) that you have submitted to the government of the whites and even think that you have acted wisely, this fact will be to you as if you were carrying the sun on your back. I really don’t know if you have reflected sufficiently upon and if you have understood the significance of the whole thing, what it means that you have put yourself under German protection. I do not know if you and the Herero people will understand the customs, the laws and the ways of acting of this government and if you will remain untroubled and in peace for any longer time under this mastery.”

Thirteen years later, the son of Kamaharero, Maherero, was to

write a letter to Captain Witbooi, when, after many bitter experiences, he launched the Herero war against the Germans. Let us die fighting rather than die as a result of maltreatment, imprisonment or some other calamity. Tell all the Captains down there to rise and do battle.”

This letter with its call to join forces, never reached Witbooi, it was to be delivered by a messenger from the mixed ethnic group called the Rehoboth Basters. But this messenger handed it over to the Germans.

Seen from the African point of view, these thirteen years marked a period when the colonial power step by step revealed its brutality, as the European “scramble for Africa” went on with increasingly ruthless methods. The first step was taken after the failure of the German divide and conquer tactics, when the two principal African parties, Maherero and Witbooi and their peoples, in November 1892 made peace, realizing who was their common enemy was, nervousness ran high in the German camp. Some months later, their troops made an unprovoked blitz attack on Witbooi’s encampment in Hoornkrantz while the people there still were asleep, murdering seventy-eight women and children and dragging another fifty away as prisoners. The mask of ‘protectors’ had definitely been thrown off. Germany and the Germans were at war with the Africans of the region.

The Germans altered cultural and religious pressure with Maxim machine guns and diplomatic fraud. The first object was to split the Namas from the Hereros. When they at last had forced Witbooi to capitulate, they tricked him into a treaty that left him with his weapons and horses to keep law and order for them among surrounding groups. But at the same time they forced him to settle in an area farther to the south, which soon proved unsuitable to sustain the life of the cattle and of his people, thus allowing him to survive only by providing the Germans with auxiliary troops, as source of income which they cunningly left open.

The Kaiser himself, to make doubly sure, had a codicil added to the treaty, forcing the Witboois to collaborate against the Hereros despite their peace treaty. And what if Maherero's letter had reached Witbooi? All we know is that later; after the Herero war, the Witboois rose up against the Germans. Hendrik Witbooi was killed in October 1905.

Meanwhile, the Germans continued in their attempts to manipulate the Hereros, Their vast land and rich herds were a booty that the Kleinbauern, the German boers dreamed of. After the death of Kamaharero, the colonial bureaucracy had successfully conspired with the missionaries to have installed as his successor, what they counted on as their puppet, the Christianized younger son, Maherero, although he did not hold the

precedence or have the father's blessing.

For several years, the German strategy seemed to pay off. As a Christian, Maherero considered himself exempt from the traditional beliefs and laws that forbade selling Herero land. He played the Germans' game, being paid to coerce other Herero groups to sell their land, thus helping to turn over in a decade a quarter of the Herero territory to German settlers.

In effect, this meant selling his people to the devil. From those settlers the cries of hatred would soon be heard, urging the military to take action, calling for annihilation. Both Maherero himself and Hendrik Witbooi complained in letters to the British authorities and others about the ruthless cruelty of the German settler, who treated the Africans worse than animals. "He personally punishes our people to death for debt. (...) He flogs people in a shameful and cruel manner, for he stretches people on their backs and flogs them on the stomach and even between the legs, be they male or female, so Your Honor can understand that no one can survive such a punishment. "

The colonial judicial system gave the Africans practically no rights at all. To outweigh the word of a white demanded, for instance, at least seven black witnesses. So the settlers, who were building up their

property by every means, felt free to rob, threaten, and swindle the Africans in order to grab their cattle.

A rinderpest sweeping down from the north cut the Herero herds by half as the Germans kept the inoculation technique for themselves. This caused misery among the Herero peoples and drove them into the hands of the white tormentors, asking for credit or submitting themselves as cheap labor.

Meanwhile, the German military, the so-called Schutztruppen became more and more openly provocative, cynical, and brutal. After having crushed an uprising among some smaller groups, preceding the Herero war, they brought the women and girls to Windhoek and used them in brothels. And in the jails, they began to systematically to kill off Herero prisoners.

It was now that Maherero, whom the Germans had counted on for their dirty business, finally took a stand and decided to unite the Africans in a war against the intruders, however desperate such a revolt might seem; he had no choice. The Germans planned a railway line that would lay open all the Herero land to the colonizers. The existence of his people and its culture was in danger.

It was now he wrote to Witbooi the letter that was never delivered -

“Let us die fighting!” - and urged him “to make your voice heard so that all Africa may take up arms against the Germans.”

Who can tell beforehand if a fight is desperate and doomed?

Did ever a people who rose again and again against oppressors, intruders, and dictators know if they would succeed or fail in overthrowing them?

Did the revolutionaries know if they would carry through the revolution?

Do I as an individual and a black artist know if the dominance of the white art world that keeps me out should be considered beforehand too mighty to be challenged? Is there any answers to all these questions other than that which tells of our strong conviction and sense of justice, that is, of our tidings? Following the tracks of history, those of the oppressors and those of the oppressed, I explore the boundaries to my freedom, which I must transcend.

Over and over again I have heard Europeans talk about African ‘tribalism’, about our alleged inability to unite. Was it then just a pipe dream when Maherero made his appeal that all Africa should take up arms against the colonizers? Curiously enough, that condescending talk about our ‘tribalism’ has recently died away. Why? Has it perhaps something to do with the events in central Europe, in former Yugoslavia and elsewhere?

But as a former Tanzanian citizen, I must answer no, Maherero did not

give way to wishful thinking. One of our African historians suggests that there might be a connection between the Herero war and the Maji-Maji war in German East Africa. This is still to be proved by further research. But the simultaneity is there. While the fighting was still going on in Southwest Africa, the baton was changed to East Africa, and the peoples there rose against the Germans.

And here the prejudiced talk about our seeming disunity has indeed been put to a shame. What is today Tanzania contained innumerable peoples and ethnic groups with different languages and cultures. But when the call for unity and for war against the oppressors spread like wildfire in the summer of 1905, nearly all of them joined and fought together. It is true that the end was to be cruel, that the Germans were going to apply the scorched-earth war technique, killing a third of the population, between 200,000 and 300,000, leaving vast cultivated land to be reconquered by the bush and the plague of the tsetse fly to spread. Nevertheless, it is from the achieved unity and spirit of resistance that much of the country's national identity and will has grown.

When our own historians took over after independence and explored our oral tradition, interviewing survivors from the Maji-Maji war, the Western campaigns of lies about the events could at last be corrected.

The old version consisted of gibberings about witchcraft and naive superstitions. It reduced the war to a tall story about a ‘crazy’ medicine-man who made people believe that by using his Maji medicine - maize and millet in water - they would become invulnerable to the German bullets. It was a colonial version about cheated ‘primitive’ Africans and a suicidal uprising.

It still haunts many Western studies. But they overlook the fact that the man they consider just another ‘witch doctor’, Kinjikitile Ngwale at Ngarambe, is documented as having been a remarkable leader and a strategist with a clear aim. And his magic, however deeply rooted in belief and however seriously it was taken by believers, was at the heart of his strategy.

The fear of the German weapons was probably, there and then, as paralyzing to the mind as half a century later was the fear of nuclear weapons. Kinjikitile’s magic medicine was a political device that might be compared to that of Mao Tse Tung when he declared the atomic bomb a “paper tiger.” It took away the paralytic fear. It enabled Kinjikitile’s fellow Africans to think unity and resistance.

And once this step had been taken, nothing could stop the dramatic mobilization behind Kinjikitile’s appeal for war against the Germans. It

was soon drastically proved that the Maji medicine didn't work. But the disillusionment of the insurgents did not stop the war. It spread, only its tactics changed. And even when the magic was gone, new groups joined, like the Makonde people because what united the peoples was not just the medicine but their common suffering under German colonialism.

Judged from this perspective, Maherero was not a dreamer. His vision, in the letter to Witbooi of African peoples joining against the Germans was to become true, only some 2.500 kilometers to the east. No less clear-sighted was his analysis of the necessity for his fellow Africans not to let themselves become dehumanized by the German example. When uniting the Herero peoples and planning the uprising, he drew up an order that was made law among the insurgent Africans, the aim of which was to keep their dignity as humans and as warriors according to African ethics.

“We decided that we should wage war in a humane manner and would kill only the German men who were soldiers.” it reads. “We met at secret councils and there our leaders decided that we should spare the lives of all German women and children. The missionaries too were to be spared, and they, their wives, families, and all possessions were to be protected by our people from all harm.”

When the war broke out simultaneously all over Herero land, it took

the Germans by surprise. They couldn't imagine that peoples whom they considered inferior, hardly human, would be able to organize themselves and dare to rise against them, against these same Europeans who had tried to whip into their minds that their first duty was to consider every white person as their superior.

If there existed any 'superiority', it soon proved to be in the muzzles of the German machine guns. Again it became clear that the much-vaunted European dominance was just a brutal fact of modern weaponry not shrinking back from genocide. The machine gun, which had been developed in the Western armorers' workshops since the 1860s and was to become the great killer of whites in World War I, was tested in these years in the colonies and in the Russo-Japanese War, just as the Gulf War was recently used to test and promote contemporary military technology. The total firepower of the Herero army, which mustered several thousand soldiers with rifles (but rifles that were old-fashioned and slow), was outweighed by the five new and five old machine guns that the Germans then had at their disposal.

In one of the first clashes, when the Hereros were close to winning their surprise attack, the Maxims changed the situation. An account tells us: "In a desperate attempt to overcome German firepower by raw courage, the

Herero warriors twice charged straight into the muzzles of the German guns. The courage of the men was sustained by the wild chanting of the women, who shrieked over and over again: ‘Who owns Hereroland? We own Hereroland!’”

The Herero army soon learned not to engage in battle unless in thick, thorny bushes, where the Germans’ weaponry was useless. Just as the Maji-Maji warriors later, the Hereros developed the guerrilla tactic of using their intimate knowledge of the land. It worked. The same account stated, “The greatest military machine in the world had ground to an inglorious halt.” It could as well have been an irritated American report home from Vietnam.

The last chapter in this ferocious history of how genocide was planned and executed - a history blacked out by the same part of the world that tells us that we black Africans have no history- begins with Kaiser Wilhelm II’s appointment of Lothar von Trotha, one of his most cunning and crude generals and the butcher from the Boxer Rebellion in China, to crush and annihilate the Hereros. Von Trotha’s pincer tactics to encircle and exterminate would later become the German classic maneuver in both world wars.

The Hereros retreated to the North, in the direction of the good grazing

land around Waterberg, a long buttelike mountain ending in the arid Omaheke desert. It was now the dry season of heat and thirst. The Hereros had to care for their cattle and to protect their women and children. The German general ordered his troops to follow them when they moved into the Waterberg region and then encircle them.

Two of von Trotha's own officers protested the diabolical aim of his strategy. As the only weak point in the German pincer was to the Southeast, any Hereros who managed to break out could end up only in the deadly desert. They saw that he was making a pact with the desert in order to exterminate a whole people. Von Trotha paid no attention to protests; instead, he ordered the waterholes along the borders of the desert to be poisoned. No one would survive the trap.

In a German traveler's guide to Namibia from 1992, Waterberg is described as a popular plateau park. It is a paradox that Western mass tourism, while setting out for the exotic, often ends up looking in the mirror of the familiar and nostalgic. At Waterberg, German tourists are invited to roam about in the mountain as Wandervögel or to relax for a family weekend.

“At a walk,” the guide says, “reminiscences from history will be called forth.” But it is not the history that my Herero sisters and brothers

venerate. The reminiscences aimed at consist of German memorials and the graves of those who participated in genocide. Alte Kameraden and survivors from the Schutztruppen as well as relatives of white South African military and younger generations of Boy Scouts meet there annually, according to the guide.

Exactly ninety years ago, on August 11, 1904, the encircled area south of the mountain Waterberg where the Herero people had taken refuge contained more than 50,000 human beings and at least as many cattle, packed together, invisible among the thorny bushes. The German warhorse von Trotha had brought a heliograph up the mountain in order to direct from there the artillery and coordinate the actions of the different sections of his troops.

Then he needed only to shoot ahead into the living mass among the thickets. Where no escape was possible, where Herero soldiers with muzzle-loaders had scarcely any ammunition left and most of the young men were unarmed, where the women and children were unprotected and where their cattle were mercilessly exposed. “To a people who loved their cattle, the sight and the sound of hundreds of wounded and dying or panic-stricken animals must have been as demoralizing as the loss of human life that day” says a penetrating study by John Swan, published in

an American review of military history. His was one of the key texts I long searched for.

During the night, Maherero and the other leaders gave orders to break out. The only direction left for them was towards the Southeast. And there, says the German general staff paper, “the arid Omaheke was to complete what the German Army had begun: the extermination of the Herero nation.”

Von Trotha gave a formal order not to kill the children and women left behind but the German soldiers seemed to have rightly understood his intentions: no quarters! “After the battle” recounts an eyewitness who served as a guide for the German troops, “all men, women and children who fell into the hands of the Germans were killed without mercy.” The chasing and killing went on, in the veld, along the roadsides, wherever the hereros tried to hide or escape.

“The Germans (...) killed thousands and thousands of women and children along the roadsides. They bayoneted them and hit them to death with the butt ends of their guns, (...) I saw this every day; I was with them,” a witness stated under oath. And testimony by the general’s groom, also under oath confirms that the German soldiers passing on the road simply slaughtered every exhausted Herero they discovered: “Returning

from Waterberg with von Trotha and his staff, they came upon an old woman digging wild onions at the side of the road. A trooper named Konig jumped down off his horse and shot her dead; but before he pulled the trigger, he put the muzzle against her forehead and said, ‘I am going to kill you’; she looked up and said, ‘I thank you’.”

Most of the Hereros who escaped into the desert died from thirst. Some small groups, and Maharero himself managed to cross through the burning hell into Bechuanaland. Those who tried to escape the torture of the desert and turn back found its borders guarded and the waterholes poisoned. And two months later, in order to make sure that the extermination of the Herero people would indeed be the final solution he aimed at, Von Trotha proclaimed that any Herero found within the borders of the German protectorate, with or without a gun, man, woman, or child would be shot or driven away.

When at last protests from missionaries and from Social Democrats back in Germany as well as fear of reactions from other countries resulted in a reluctantly raised finger from the Kaiser to stop the raging killing (an imperial decree that now was welcomed even by the German settlers because they feared they were going to lose all their cheap labor), Von Trotha was said to have reacted like a child deprived of his candy.

In this brain trained in the evil rationality of mass murder, a new idea now took shape. Not by guns, not by desert and thirst, but by working the Hereros to death in forced labor, the killing could be made to go on in “civilized forms” and even be economically exploited. That was the terrible heritage Von Trotha left behind, when he was called back to Germany in late 1905.

The strategy was first applied to the construction of the railway line through Herero land. Emaciated Hereros now allowed back in their own country. They died like flies. It later developed into camps of forced labor, predecessors of Nazi concentration camps like Mauthausen. The Hereros were forced to wear numbers sewn to their clothes, like the numbers subsequently tattooed on prisoners in the Nazi camps.

For a decade, Germans here learned to squeeze the last working capacity out of dying humans, while forcibly reducing them to non-humans and humiliating them by flogging and constant rape.

Colonizers and colonized are chained together. Peoples and cultures have been violently subdued in mankind’s history, although I have learned that this can also be seen as part of the process of change and renewal on the big journey. Even the conquista and colonialism, amidst all their brutality, have had such a perspective but the escalation and interaction of

industrial rationality, instrumentalized racism, and unhesitating, ruthless genocidal politics in the period through which my track has taken me, have made the process utterly destructive; this colonialism belongs to the dark chapters that have made a deep wound into mankind, rotting our human dignity from the inside. I follow the track to reconnoiter my own lost human and cultural rights, which I nonetheless always will go on claiming.

It is clear that both colonized and colonizers become dehumanized. The case I have cited of Germany's colonialism is in no way exceptional. A clear pattern of destruction and brutalization emerges from reports of its rampagings in Cameroon, Togo, Southwest and East Africa. All of which have the same abhorrent ingredients of killing, flogging, and sexual abuse. They provoked scandals back in the Vaterland, it is true. But did these mobilize the people behind democratic and humanist values, thus strengthening a political opposition? Did they create a strong anti racism? It rather seems that their inherent message of raw materialism and master race, ideology infected the minds and created poisoned opinions that made World War I possible and, surviving the Weimar period, prepared the ground for Nazism. We, the Africans, have had to carry the sun on our backs. The Germans, in due time, were to carry the sun on their sleeves:

the swastika.

It is in Southwest Africa that one can find at least two direct, personal links between the African genocide and the Nazi Holocaust. One of them is the fact that Hermann Göring's father was the first Reichskommissar sent to the colony, the one who called for troops and started the whole brutal process there. The other link has been meticulously documented in an important book that sent a shiver down my back when I read it. Its title is *Murderous Science*, and it is about how German geneticists, anthropologists, and psychiatrists prepared for and assisted the Nazi race politics and its implementation in the Holocaust. The author is a courageous German professor in Cologne, Benno Müller-Hill. When I tried to find the book, I discovered that it had been taken off the market as too revealing, so I have the author himself to thank for having got a copy.

In the first decade of the century, the rediscovered ideas of Mendel about heredity stirred up a lot of smug interest in white Western societies about human genetics and race hygiene, purity and cleansing. What the Austrian monk had simply observed as hereditary patterns in peas, the anthropologists rushed to apply to human 'races', thus giving a new turn to old racist prejudices.

In 1908, this thinking was well established in German Southwest Africa.

All existing mixed marriages were annulled and such marriages were forbidden in the future. Germans married to Africans were deprived of their civil rights. A main target for this aggressive thinking was the old collaborators from the days of von Trotha, the so-called Bastards from Rehoboth. As a homogenous group of descendants of more recent mixed relations, as mulattoes and children of mulattoes, they were now stamped as worthless beings and made into guinea pigs for anthropologists who wanted to prove the preconceived idea that the offspring of mixed parents are inevitably inferior individuals.

A thirty-four year old lecturer from Freiburg, Eugen Fischer, made his desperately needed career by a trendy study, *The Bastards of Rehoboth and the problem of Miscegenation in Man*, about, *Bastardisierung*. In the book, he recommended the “radical” solution, clearly inspired by von Trotha’s legacy of providing the mulattoes with a minimal amount of protection, letting them as an “inferior race” survive “only as long as they are useful to us.”

Dr. Fischer developed his racist ideas in a textbook on human genetics and race hygiene in collaboration with some like-minded colleagues. We now know that Hitler read it while imprisoned in Landsberg and that it inspired his racial thinking in *Mein Kampf*, which he was then writing.

Eugen Fischer was one among many German scientists who welcomed the Nazi Machtübernahme. He soon became one of the central figures in the collaboration between his sector of science and the Nazis. This subsequently resulted in doctors and anthropologists saving as selecting authorities on the railway platforms of the Nazi extermination camps, which at the same time functioned as farms providing human guinea pigs for their lethal ‘scientific’ experiments.

The two links I mentioned were tied together in 1941, the same year that the revealing volume on German East Africa was published, where my track appeared. The Nazi mouthpiece Professor Fischer argued in that year before his colleagues in occupied Paris that the Endlösung was a scientific necessity, referring to the Jews as inferior beings of another species. And on July 31, Hermann Goring, the son of the former Reichskommissar, who had become Hitler’s Reichsmarschall, signed a letter ordering the “total solution” of the Jewish question, entrusting it to Heydrich.

On August 27, last year, I stood together with Andrea Robbins and Max Becher in the concentration camp in Dachau outside Munich. My track ended here, where a kind of bitter equality appeared, a common fate in the human tragedy. Looking at the horrifying photos and documents

in the museum, I realized what fate could have awaited us. To be “the slaves of the slaves,” writes Primo Levi “who all can give order to, and our name is the number which we carry tattooed on our arm and sown on our jacket.” And then for many of us: extermination. With the racism and xenophobic violence raging anew in Europe today and fascism reappearing, I was deeply shaken. I realized that what should never have been allowed to happen, can happen again.

I had come to Munich searching for my history. When I was standing at the foot of the vertiginous stairway of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, my thoughts were not with the grandeur of this former “capital of the Nazi movement” that so had attracted the Nazi leaders who looked on themselves as superhuman. I was thinking of the young Munich students who - with the same cry in their hearts as the Hereros: “let us die!” - opposed the ruthless totalitarian machinery of the Third Reich and were executed. Had my sister and brother Sophie and Hans Scholl thrown their leaflets of underground resistance down these stairs?

Their refusal to be passive accomplices made me think of what Zygmunt Bauman wrote: “The inhumane world which has been created by the tyranny of genocide has dehumanized both its victims and those who passively looked on, seeing the discrimination, by letting both use

the instinct of self-preservation as absolution for a moral insensitiveness and inaction.”

And I recalled how the great black thinker, Frantz Fanon, quoting another great black author, Aime Cesaire, tried to grasp the mechanism in Europe of repressed memory and blocked insight: “And then, one lovely day, the middle class is brought up short by a staggering blow: the Gestapo are busy again. (...) People are astounded, they are angry. They say: ‘How strange that is. But then it is only Nazism, it won’t last!’ And they wait and they hope and they hide the truth from themselves: it is savagery, the supreme savagery (...) yes it is Nazism, but before they became its victims, they were its accomplices (...) they closed their eyes to it, they legitimated it, because until then it had been employed only against non-European peoples.”

Facing the supreme savagery, this cry from the same source: “And more than anything, my body, as well as my soul, do not allow yourself to cross your arms like a sterile spectator, for life is not a spectacle, for a sea of sorrow is not a stage, for a man who cries out is not a dancing bear...”

There was a further text to be written about all the crossing tracks; a counter-discourse about the network of appropriations extended in all directions around the world; Ideas, experiences, and solutions taken and given, to and fro, in confrontations between peoples and continents; curiosity and growth. The rich heritage of knowledge, art, and new means for survival learned and brought home from the colonized peoples by the colonizers (whose descendants still against all evidence claim to own the Enlightenment). Mutually shared technological knowledge which has been there in spite of the European denial and superiority complex, obstinate to such an extent that one refused until recently to accept that the skillfully constructed Zimbabwe stone edifices were at all African. Exchange of expressions through clothes, a variety of mutual adaptations as well as a proud takeover by the oppressed of status symbols of the oppressors, contesting their monopoly of them. We may for instance imagine some of the African heroes in the sad history retold above as they sometimes appeared in reality: dressed in impeccable three-piece suits. And also we may try to see before us the exasperation manifested among the whites caused by the fact that the black didn't look and behave like "true African savages." Is that history? Frankly, is not the refined African gentleman or intellectual still an offense to a certain European thinking? Are we

Africans not supposed to be the eternal 'primitive'?

My exploration into the world of reciprocal appropriations would not have included only the beautiful 'Victorian' dresses by which my Herero sisters express their pride and protest. It would also have taken me deeper into my own background. I made my studies in school in two languages. The one connected me to Shakespeare. The other, Swahili, is a rich fruit of encounters and appropriations, veins of Arabic, Persian, Hindi, and Hebrew merged into a Bantu tongue. It is a reminder of a culture based on a world exchange beyond the colonial enclosure, when East Africa was Oriental Africa.

Could there possibly also be strains hidden in my cultural background and in the back of my head of a German way of working with thoughts, embedded somewhere in the colonial buildings left in my home landscape or perhaps in the Lutheran churches and in their services, today structured exactly as if in some German provincial parish? The German presence didn't mean only military arrogance. It also meant, among other things, the first schools where the world of reading was opened. Countertracks like that were what I wanted to follow. But at last I couldn't. The falling together of a frightening imperial past and a frightening present has made such an adventure impossible to me - for the time being.

Among the texts that have been stationed on the initial journey recounted here are: Eckhard Groth, *Galgen am Kilimanjacharo*, *Die Zeit*, no.4, 1989; Wilhelm Arning, *Deutsche-Ostrafika gestern und heute*, Berlin, 1941. Key texts were: John Swan, *The Final Solution in South West Africa*, in *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, Vol. 3, No.4; Benno Müller-Hill, *Murderous Science*, Oxford, 1988.

Also should be mentioned: Hendrik Witbooi, *Afrika an den Afrikanern*, Berlin-Bonn, 1982; the Chagga history in Swahili: C.C.F.Dundas, *Asili Na Habari, za Wachaga*, London, 1932; Karl-Martin Seeberg, *Der Maji-Maji-Krieg gegen die deutsche Kolonialherrschaft*, Berlin, 1989; *Express Reisehandbuch Namibia*, Leer, 1992; Primo Levi, *The Truce*, London, 1987; Zygmunt Bauman, *Auschwitz*, 1989; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London, 1990 (1952); and Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, New York, 1972 (1955)

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Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Man*, New York, 1989; Urs Bitterli, *Die Entdeckung des Schwarzen Afrikaners*, Zürich, 1970; and Hans Georg Steltzer, *Die Deutschen und ihr Kolonialreich*, Frankfurt, 1984.

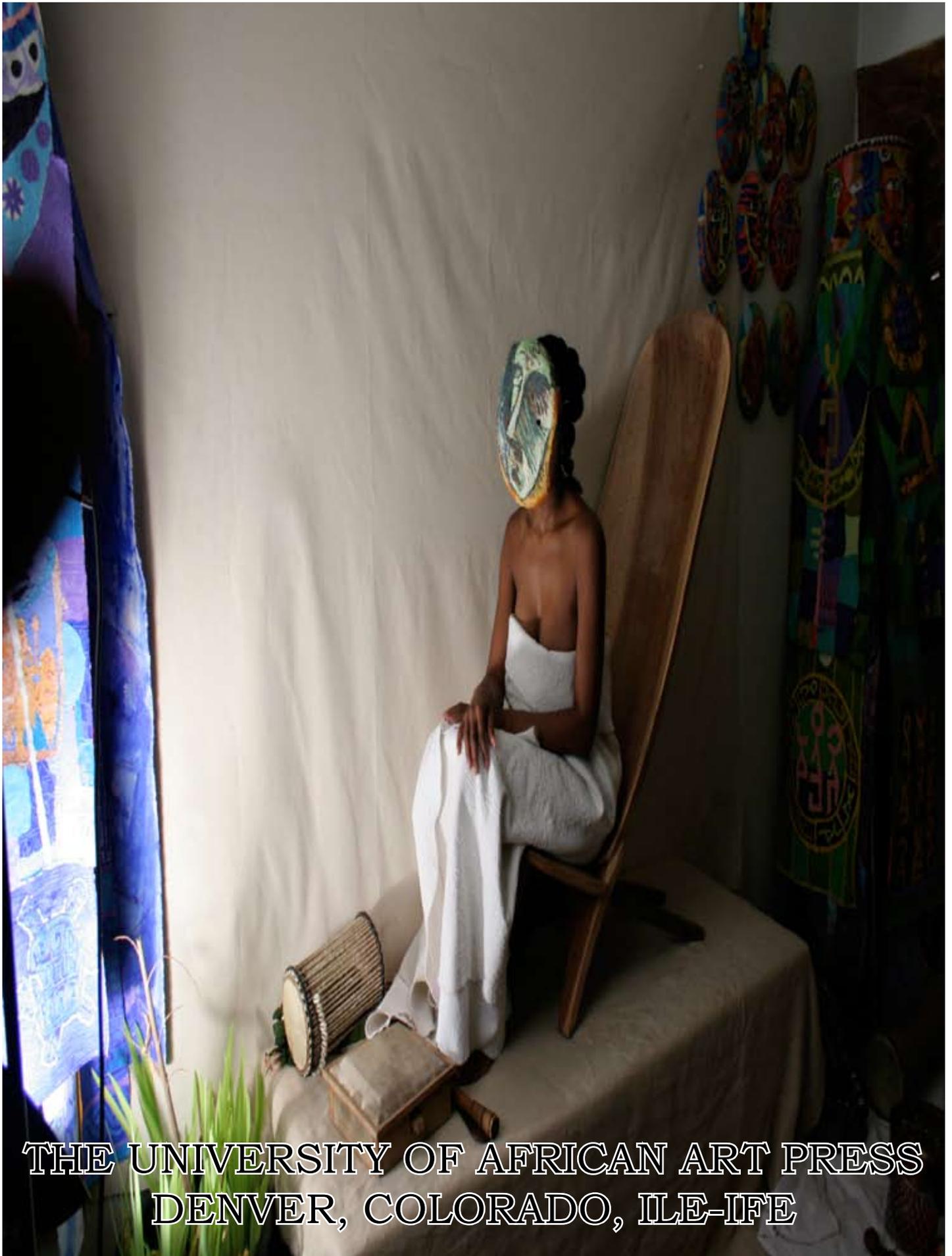
Among sources for unwritten part: Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*, Berlin, 1990 (1955); O.F. Raum, *Geist und Aufbau der Erziehungswesens in Afrika*, Stuttgart, 1965; and Jack Weatherford, *Indian Givers – How the Indians of the Americas transformed the world*, New York, 1988.

For the culture and history of the Chagga people: several works by Bruno Guttmann, especially *Das Recht der Dschagga*, München, 1926; and Kathleen M. Stahl, *History of the Chagga People of Kilimanjaro*, London, 1964; and further from the perspective of the missionaries: Martin Weishaupt, *Ostafrikanische Wandertage*, Leipzig, 1913; and Sabine Rückert, *Christus macht die Seelen weiss*, in *Die Zeit*, no. 22, 1993.

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