



THE LONG WAY TO UTANI

In Memory of the Resistance
against German Colonial Oppression

A film by Frank Glücklich and Bertram Rotermund

LOGLINE

What remains of a history that has never truly passed? On her journey through Tanzania, Sauda Simba encounters the memories of the descendants of the anti-colonial resistance and discovers the long road to Utani – a path on which remembrance can lead to dignity and listening can lead to reconciliation.



BRIEF SYNOPSIS

In Germany, the German colonial era has largely been forgotten. In Tanzania, however, for many people it is not a distant past. It lives on in family histories, commemorative rituals and the memories of the descendants. As long as the stolen skulls of their ancestors do not return to their homeland, for many a wound remains open.

The narrator, Sauda Simba, travels to the sites of anti-colonial resistance and meets descendants of the victims, chiefs and historians. From their personal memories emerges a multifaceted picture of loss and pain, but also of dignity. Stories that continue to resonate to this day. The Maji Maji War is thus portrayed not merely as a historical event, but as the origin of a shared sense of identity and an early sense of belonging.

‘The Long Road to Utani’ is a film about people who have preserved their history, about the quest for recognition, and the hope that being heard, remembrance and the return of their ancestors’ stolen skulls will open the way to Utani – a path towards mutual respect and reconciliation.



LONG SYNOPSIS

For many people in Tanzania, the German colonial era has not been forgotten. It lives on in family histories, commemorative ceremonies and memories of the resistance. Names, places and stories are passed down through the generations – as is the hope that the stolen skulls of their ancestors may one day return to their homeland.

The narrator, Sauda Simba, embarks on a journey through her country, following in the footsteps of the anti-colonial resistance against German rule. She visits former sites of resistance, meets people at historic locations and takes part in commemorative ceremonies where remembrance remains an integral part of community life to this day.

In Moshi, descendants of the Chagga leader Mangi Meli recount stories that remain vivid to this day. In Iringa and Kalenga, Sauda traces the sometimes contradictory legends surrounding

the Hehe ruler Mkwawa, whose resistance continues to shape identity to this day. In southern Tanzania, she follows in the footsteps of the Maji Maji War, the uprising in which numerous ethnic groups that were once enemies united for the first time against a common colonial oppressor and which is still regarded today as the origin of a shared national identity.

From her encounters with descendants, chiefs, historians and cultural representatives emerges a polyphonic mosaic of personal memories. Their stories speak of loss and violence, but also of dignity, solidarity and a vibrant culture of remembrance that does not regard history as a closed chapter, but understands it as part of the present.

Of particular significance is the repatriation of the skulls of tribal leaders and resistance fighters killed by the Germans. Many of their human remains are still held in German museums and

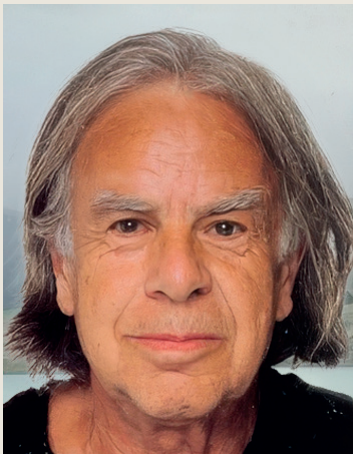
academic collections. For their descendants, this is not merely a historical or political issue. According to their cultural tradition, their ancestors can only find peace and their grief can only be laid to rest once they have been fully buried in their homeland. The return of the remains thus becomes a symbol of recognition, dignity and a respectful approach to their shared history.

‘The Long Road to Utani’ accompanies people who have preserved their memories and share them with great openness. The film does not tell the story of a past that is now closed, but of the living present of a history that continues to have an impact to this day. It explores the hope that listening, shared remembrance and the acknowledgement of historical injustice can open up the long road to Utani – a path towards mutual respect, dignity and reconciliation.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



FRANK GLÜCKLICH



BERTRAM ROTERMUND

When we began to explore German colonial history in Tanzania, we wanted to make a film about a largely forgotten chapter of German history.

It has become a film against forgetting, which derives its particular intensity and authenticity from the fact that it lets people tell their stories – people for whom this history has never been a thing of the past.

In conversations with descendants of the resistance fighters of that time, chiefs, historians and participants in the annual commemorative ceremonies, we encountered not a distant past, but living memories. Pain and grief, but also dignity, pride and hope, are passed down through the generations and continue to shape the self-image of many communities to this day.

Together with our Tanzanian partners and the narrator Sauda Simba, we have created a film that follows the voices of those whose families have preserved this story to this day.

During our research, archives and historical documents were repeatedly surpassed by something we had not expected: people's stories. They revealed that, for many, the German colonial era is not a closed chapter of the past but remains very much alive. Commemorating the resistance against the oppressors and the search for the stolen skulls of their ancestors shows that remembrance is not merely a historical or political issue, but a profoundly human one.

'The Long Road to Utani' therefore describes more than just a journey through Tanzania. It represents a journey on which listening becomes more important than explaining, and shared remembrance becomes a prerequisite for recognition and mutual respect.

We do not see our film as an indictment, but as an invitation to listen to people's voices. For we are convinced that shared remembrance is the first step on the long road to Utani.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The Long Road to Utani' began with a question – and led us to a completely different one.

The starting point for the project was the idea of making a film about Hamburg as the former capital of German colonialism. Yet even during our initial research, it became clear that the real story lay where the descendants of the victims live, and where their memory remains alive to this day: in Tanzania.

As German filmmakers, we made a conscious decision to shift our perspective. Together with our Tanzanian partner David Kyungu, we travelled to the sites of anti-colonial resistance and met descendants of the leaders of that time, chiefs, historians and cultural representatives.

Initial reserve gave way to trust. Time and again, we heard the wish that these stories should not be regarded as a historical footnote, but should be heard as part of a living culture of remembrance.

During our research, it became clear to us that whilst archives and academic sources provide historical facts, the true story lies in people's memories. They spoke of ancestors who, to this day, have not been able to be properly laid to rest, of annual commemorations, and of a resistance that continues to shape their identity today.

In Sauda Simba, we found a narrator who openly embarks on a quest for these memories and connects historical places with their significance for the present.

Thus, a film about German colonial history became a film about memory, pain and grief, but also about dignity and the question of how recognition and shared remembrance can open up the long path to Utani – a path towards mutual respect and understanding.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

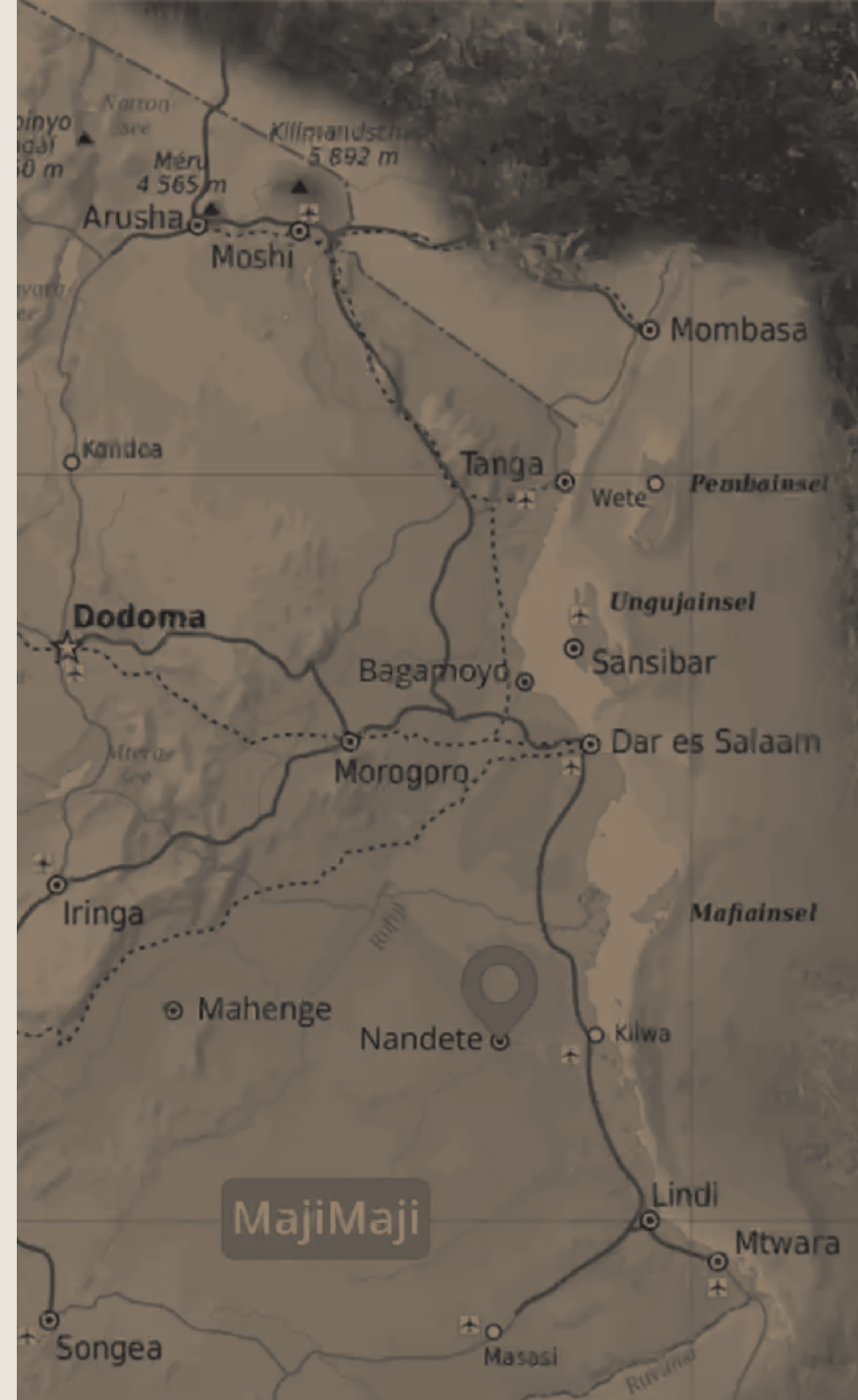
German colonial rule in German East Africa (1884–1918) is one of the least well-known chapters in German history. For many people in Tanzania, however, it is not a distant past. Its consequences live on to this day in family histories, commemorative ceremonies and a vibrant culture of remembrance.

The Maji Maji War (1905–1907) in particular marks a turning point in Tanzanian history. For the first time, numerous ethnic groups that had once been hostile to one another rose up together against the German colonial power. The uprising was crushed with extreme violence and cost hundreds of thousands of lives. To this day, it is regarded as a symbol of collective resistance and as a key origin of Tanzania's national identity.

Another unresolved issue concerns the skulls of slain Africans brought to Germany during the colonial era, which were used for racist research and anthropological collections. Many of these human remains are still held in museums or academic institutions.

For the descendants of the victims, their return is far more than a historical or political issue. According to their tradition, the deceased will only find peace once they have been fully buried in their homeland. The search for the stolen ancestors therefore represents a longing to bring an end to mourning and to heal the open wounds.

'The Long Road to Utani' examines the colonial rule in German East Africa – which, from today's perspective, largely constitutes war crimes – through the voices of the people. Their memories show that history does not end with the past, even if it is forgotten by many, but lives on in the present – and that shared remembrance can be the first step on the long road to Utani..



QUOTES FROM THE INTERVIEWS

” People are commemorating the deaths of the leaders – the 19 people who were hanged. There is still a great deal to be done so that they can find healing. ... When you speak to ... the descendants, the pain is still there.

Aika Makindara (descendant of Mangi Meli)

” My grandfather said the children were made to stand at the front, with the ladies behind them and the men at the back. Terrifying!”

*Dr Steven Sharra (descendant of Mangi Meli)
on the hanging of the leaders*

” ...the cargo had already been loaded onto the ship when all the porters had their heads cut off and taken away! That’s how cruel the Germans were!”

Mzee Kiwelu (attendee at the memorial ceremony for Mangi Meli)

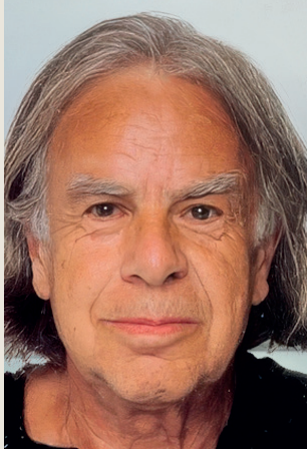
” ... for the German government of the time, he was a hero because he managed to suppress the Africans’ resistance ... But from the perspective of Tanzanian Africans, he was as diabolical as one can possibly imagine, even more diabolical than Carl Peters ...

*Prof. Dr Bertram Mapunda (historian at the University of Dar es Salaam) on
Theodor von Hassel, captain of the German colonial force in Mahenge*

” To this day, if someone does something bad, people say, ‘Are you a German or what?’ That means a cruel person, a person without compassion!”

Angelus Likwembe (former cultural officer in Mahenge)

BIOGRAPHIES



BERTRAM ROTERMUND

Lives in Hamburg; he has been a documentary filmmaker for 40 years and is the owner of the company 'Rotermundfilm'.

1978–1991: Founding member of the 'Medienwerkstatt Freiburg' (media centre and production group).

Since 1991: Documentary film producer in Freiburg. Has produced various films and television programmes in Germany, Nicaragua and the USA.

Since 1998, he has been a documentary filmmaker for television and independent productions in Hamburg.

Member of "Abbildungszentrum" e.V.

Lecturer at the DFFB Berlin and HFBK Hamburg.

Recent films:

„Bis die Gestapo kam - das Chinesenviertel auf St.Pauli.“

„Bindung - der Schlüssel zur psychischen Gesundheit“

“The Long Road to Utani”



FRANK GLÜCKLICH

Lives in Hamburg and works as a freelance consultant.

He served for many years on the board of the Vocational Training Foundation and later as chief executive of the Hamburg Chamber of Skilled Trades.

From 2008 to 2020, he headed the 'Dual Apprenticeship Training System' (DATS) programme in Tanzania. During this time, he developed a close personal and professional connection to the country, its culture and the local people. The encounters and conversations about history, memory and identity became the starting point for the idea behind The Long Road to Utani.

For Frank Glücklich, the film is an attempt to create a space for encounter and mutual listening. He is particularly interested in the question of how shared memory can contribute to recognition, respect and understanding.

FILMOGRAFIE BERTRAM ROTERMUND (SELECTION)

The Long Road to Utani (2026, 93 mins)

A documentary about the culture of remembrance, anti-colonial resistance and the search for dignity and reconciliation in Tanzania.

Bindung – Der Schlüssel zur psychischen Gesundheit (2024, 45 mins)

A documentary about the importance of early attachment experiences for the psychological development of children and adults.

...bis die Gestapo kam – Das Chinesenviertel auf St. Pauli (2020, 58 mins)

A search for traces of the almost forgotten history of the Chinese community in Hamburg during the Nazi era.

Die Alsterdorfer Passion (2018, 58 mins)

About the history of the Alsterdorf Anstalten in Hamburg between 1945 and 1979 and how they dealt with exclusion and social responsibility.

Den Nazis ein Dorn im Auge (2016, 45 mins)

The history of the Jewish Hospital in Hamburg during the Nazi era and its significance for the Jewish community.

Mitten unter uns (2014, 55 mins)

A documentary about forced labourers and prisoners of war in Sulingen between 1939 and 1945, and the traces of their history in the present day.

Zukunft schenken (2012, 30 mins)

A portrait of the 'Awassa Children Centre' orphanage project in Ethiopia and the people who are opening up new prospects for the children.

Das verordnete Geschlecht (2001, 62 mins)

A documentary film, co-directed with Oliver Tolmein, about intersex people and society's approach to gender identity.

FILMSTILLS



Sauda vor Old Boma in Bagamoyo



Gedenkfeier fürMangi Meli in Moshi



Mezee Kiwelu erzählt von den Grausamkeiten der deutschen Kolonialherren



Chief Adam Mkwawa II vor dem Schädel seines Urururgroßvaters in Kalenga



Sauda bei Segnung durch Chief in Nandete Höhle



Verfallendes MajMajii Denkmal in Nandete



Grab von Hauptmann Theodor von Hassel vergessen in einem Maisfeld



MajiMaji Krieg Gedenkfeierlichkeiten in Songea



Grab von Songea Mbano

CREDITS & CONTACT

THE LONG ROAD TO UTANI

A film by Frank Glücklich and Bertram Rotermund

Dokumentarfilm | Drehort: Tansania | 93 min | 2026

Englisch & Suaheli mit deutschen Untertiteln

Directed by Bertram Rotermund and Frank Glücklich

Written by Frank Glücklich and Sauda Simba

Narrator Sauda Simba

Camera Uli Fischer

Sound Bertram Rotermund

Editing Sarai Bieber

Music John Kitime

Production Manager Frank Glücklich

Tanzanian Production Co-ordination

David Kyungu

Sound Design & Post-production

Tonhaus Hamburg

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Sponsoren



Sponsors





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History does not
end with the past.
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