



People in their Worlds
The New Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum
Cultures of the World

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Contents

Greeting 6

Foreword 8

The New Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum: Cultures of the World 10

The Hallmark Exhibit of the New Museum: Rice Barn: 16

Creating the Right Mood: Music 22

Introduction 24 / Gamelan 27 / Shadow Plays 30 / Dance Theatre 33

Encounter and Appropriation: Crossing Borders 34

Introduction 36 / Wilhelm Joest: World Traveller, Collector, Ethnographer 41 /

Max von Oppenheim: Explorer, Collector, Diplomat 48

The Distorted View: Prejudices 58

Introduction 60 / ... rural? 63 / ... servile? 64 / ... in need of help? 65 /

... childlike? 66 / ... cannibalistic? 67

The World in a Showcase: Museum 68

Introduction 70 / The Ethnographic Object: Collecting and Preserving 76 /

The Ethnographic Object: Reception and Interpretation 80

A Matter of Perception and Opinion: Art 82

Introduction 84 / The Human Figure 88

Living Spaces – Ways of Living: Living Places 116

Introduction 118 / Turkey – Welcoming Guests 122 / Plains – Several

Generations Living Together 126 /Tuareg – Life in a Barren Environment 130 /

Asmat – Men and Women in the Community 134

The Body as a Stage: Clothing and Adornment 138

Introduction 140 / Origins and Home 146 / Male and Female 150 /

Life Cycle – Wedding 154 / Descent and Family 158 / Power and Wealth 162 /

Magic and Religion 170 / War and Head-Hunting 174

The Staged Farewell: Death and the Afterlife 180

Introduction 182 / Funeral Rites – Entombment in Tana Toraja, South

Sulawesi 186 / – Cremation of the Dead on Bali 192 / – Re-burial of Bones

among the Ngaju-Dayak, Borneo 198 / Continuation of Life – Grave Goods

form Peru 204 / Exerting Influence – Ancestor Worship in Indonesia and

Nigeria 208 / Honouring the Dead – Honouring the Dead in New Ireland 214 /

Remembrance – The Festival of the Dead in Mexico 218

Diversity of Belief: Religions 220

Introduction 222 / Buddhism 226 / Representations of the Buddha 228 /

Bodhisattvas 232 / Buddhist Laity and Monastic Communities 234 /

Hinduism 236 / Shiva 238 / Vishnu 242 / The ‘Great Goddess’ 246

Intermediary Worlds: Rituals 250

Introduction 252 / Diversity of Masks 256 / Coming of Age – Initiation Rites

of the Uramot-Baining on New Britain 272 / For Women and Fields – Fertility

Rites of the Bwaba, Burkina Faso 274 / Illness and Demons – Healing Rituals

in Sri Lanka 278 / Balancing Good and Evil – Barong and Rangda on Bali 280

Annotations 284

List of Authors 286

Photo- and Copyrights 287



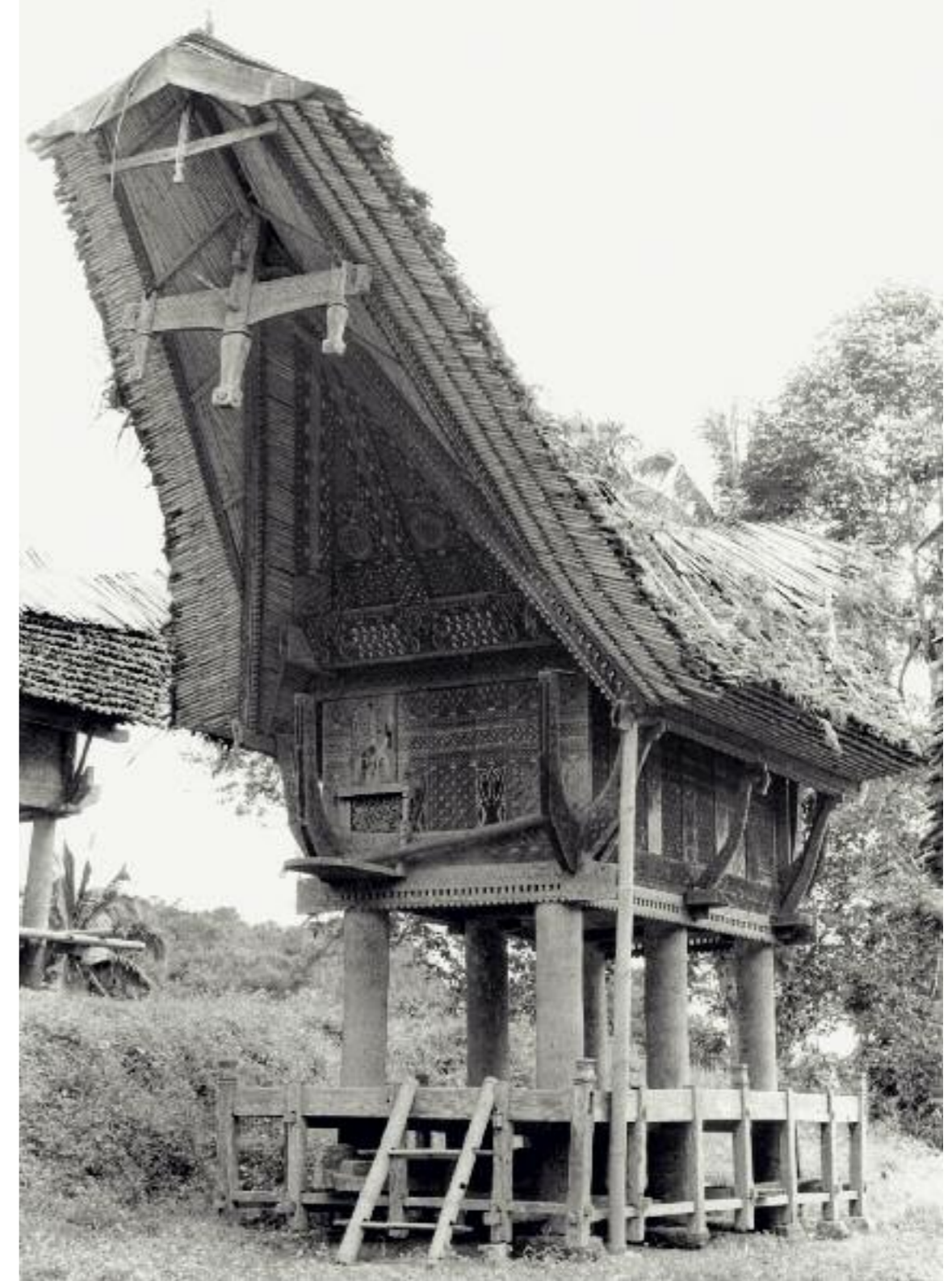
Hallmark Exhibit of the New Museum Rice Barn

The hallmark exhibit of the new Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum is the largest exhibit in the collection: a magnificently decorated traditional rice barn from the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. With its wide projecting roof, the barn, constructed without the use of a single nail, is an impressive testimony to the traditional architecture and craftsmanship of the Sa'dan Toraja.

In the villages of the Toraja, the dwelling house and rice barn form a unit – the house, known as ‘mother’, is private in character, while the platform of the barn, known as ‘father’, is the place where people meet to work together, celebrate and rest. Here too, guests are received and given food and drink, newborn children are officially welcomed into society, and the deceased are bid farewell. The house and barn together form the social and religious centre of the family unit known as *rapu*. The number, size and decor of the buildings indicate the wealth, status and traditional world view of the community. Opulent carvings and colourful painting are the privilege of high-ranking families.



Leisure time in the shade of the rice barn
Gantiri, Tana Toraja, Indonesia,
Southeast Asia, 2007



Rice barn *alang sembang*
Pantanakan Lolo, Kesu' region, Sa'dan Toraja,
South Sulawesi, Indonesia, Southeast Asia, c. 1935
Wood, paint, bamboo, rattan; h. 750 cm
Carved by Ne'Kambane
Restored by the Kalker Werkstätten, Cologne
with generous financial support from the Kölner
Kulturstiftung der Kreissparkasse Köln
RJM 56000

**The rice barn of the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum
before it was dismantled**
Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi, Indonesia,
Southeast Asia, 1983

Max von Oppenheim Explorer, Collector, Diplomat

The varied life's work of Max Freiherr von Oppenheim, who was born in Cologne in 1860, is characterised by his all-dominant fascination with the Orient. What was then the Ottoman Empire was for many years at the centre of his life, research and activities. He spent the second half of his life mainly in Berlin editing his scientific work.

Instead of going into his father's bank after taking his doctoral degree in law, Oppenheim spent more than 15 years in the Near East. Alongside his activities as a correspondent at the German Consulate General in Cairo from 1896 onwards, Oppenheim, who spoke perfect Arabic, devoted himself to the study of the Bedouins and archaeology. He used his knowledge and contacts in the First World War to agitate on behalf of Kaiser Wilhelm among the Arab population against Britain and France. In Berlin he founded the propaganda institute "Intelligence Agency for the Orient". In the 1920s he created a large oriental library, a research institute and a museum for his excavation finds from Tell Halaf. Oppenheim died in 1946 in Landshut.



Max von Oppenheim



Room in Oppenheim's house in Cairo
c. 1900

Max von Oppenheim in the Orient – Diplomat, Collector, Explorer

In 1896 at the age of 36 Oppenheim was appointed attaché to the German Consulate General in Cairo. It was his task to report to Berlin on the Muslim Arab world. In the 13 years of his accreditation, Oppenheim wrote over 500 reports and memoranda. As a result of his numerous journeys and multitude of contacts to influential local politicians and dignitaries, he was on a number of occasions suspected of acting as a spy by several European diplomats.

In Cairo Oppenheim led an enigmatic double life. In his professional life he moved in western circles, privately, however, he lived like an Arab and even had his own harem. His house reflected his life on the boundaries between cultures. Apart from European furniture, it contained a constantly growing collection of Chinese and European porcelain, oriental weapons, furniture, metal objects, Islamic measuring instruments, marquetry work, pictures, manuscripts, jewellery and textiles. At Oppenheim's legendary soirées in the style of the 'Arabian Nights', guests dressed frequently in his splendid Ottoman robes. On Oppenheim's return to Berlin his collection comprised several thousand objects.

In his memoirs, which he later wrote in Berlin, he described his time in the Orient in the following words:

*"... a wonderful time. 13 years in the dream country of Egypt, a dream life lasting 13 years, on the one hand in international diplomacy, on the other within the local world, which I understood and which understood me."*¹⁴

Oppenheim's interest in the Bedouins rested on a meeting with Faris Pasha, a sheikh of the Shammar Bedouins, whose hospitality Oppenheim enjoyed for several days in 1893 during an expedition from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. A fraternal bond in writing with this influential leader enabled Oppenheim in subsequent years to make contact with other Bedouin groups whose way of life and attitudes he admired and whom he wished to understand better. He noted down the nomadic movements and kinship relations of more than 240 tribes and sub-groups with meticulous accuracy. His photographic documentation with photographs of his own and photographs bought from other photographers is also extensive. His complex findings were published

Prejudices, stereotypes and clichés are a worldwide phenomenon. They serve among other things to integrate the ‘unknown’ into one's own world view, to reduce fear and to define and dissociate oneself from the ‘other’.

In 1962 Federal President Heinrich Lübke is said to have greeted people waiting for him in Liberia with the words, “Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Negroes”. This is now thought to be an urban legend. However, people agree that words of this kind might have been expected from him considering that in 1966 on another state visit to Madagascar, he said “People must also learn to be clean.”¹ That was a long time ago, people might object, but if one looks at how Africa and its peoples are represented in everyday culture today, one still finds the old prejudices. No continent is still characterised in such a stereotypical and clichéd way as the African continent.

Prejudices, stereotypes and clichés are present worldwide. It is problematic, however, when unequal power relationships are manifested in prejudices. Thus Africa is never presented as equal to Europe, but as morally, technologically and culturally inferior. Africa, the ‘black’, the ‘dark’ continent represents the prototypical other, which exerts a certain attraction but which also arouses fear. This is underlined by the use of a certain terminology. When people speak or write about Africa they often use words such as ‘natives’ and ‘tribes’ instead of ‘indigenous population’ or ‘nations’, which are used automatically in reference to other parts of the world.

Some people claim that they do not know that these words are derogatory or insist that they do not mean them in a racist sense. These words all have a history, though, in which ‘tribes’ and ‘natives’ quite intentionally point to the alleged primitive and uncivilised nature of African peoples. When people speak of ‘tribal conflict’ instead of civil war, they still intend to underline that this has nothing to do with serious political conflict. Our language is inseparably linked with our thinking and actions and thus has a direct bearing on our behaviour towards people of African origin, who, especially recently, have increasingly been the victims of racist violence.

Modern genetics has refuted the division of humanity into ‘races’. On a genetic level two people from different continents may be more similar than individuals from a specific group with, say, the same skin colour. ‘Races’ are an invention of the late 18th and 19th century, based on the idea of a fundamental inequality between peoples. Humanity was categorised hierarchically into



Cartoon, Matthias Kiefel, 2007.

“I’m French. That’s why I’m wearing a beret.” – “I’ve got sauerkraut on my head. Guess where I come from.”



Postcard, Cameroon Exhibition, 1906
Museum für Völkerkunde Frankfurt, Germany

The collections of German anthropology museums contain a disproportionate amount of weapons, usually collected during the colonial period. Presented in a fan-shaped arrangement, they encouraged the cliché of the ‘wild’ African.



Liebig collector cards
Series 387, Card 12, 1898
Series 449, Card 9, 1900

At the end of the 19th century collector cards contributed to the dissemination of romantic clichés about ‘peoples’ and ‘races’. In a subtle way they supported the idea of a hierarchical division of humanity.

‘lower’ or ‘primitive’ and ‘highly developed’ or ‘master races’. The white European was at the head of this hierarchy. In the context of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, Europe invented its ‘uncivilised, primitive other’ which it could choose to ‘save’ or destroy. This construct led to the fact that colonialism was supported by the majority of people in Europe. Disseminated via the media, politics, culture, the educational system and language, and supported by a lack of public engagement with colonial history, this discourse continues to be dominant to the present day.

Specific cultural characteristics continue to be attributed arbitrarily to biological differences such as skin colour. Such racist thinking devalues people on the basis of external characteristics. ‘Race’ as a category is still important in a political, cultural and social context. White people rarely reflect on the colour of their skin as they believe that whiteness is the normal thing and anything else an aberration. Nevertheless, whiteness is also a racist construct. Although whiteness only gains definition in contrast to blackness, ‘race’ is associated widely only with blackness in contexts where whites are in a majority, as though whites had neither ‘race’ nor colour. Since the invention of ‘races’, in this country whites have positioned themselves outside this category in order to study and dominate the other from this outside perspective. When whites speak about their own identity, they usually mention aspects such as profession, age, sex, and religion without mentioning that they are white. They are convinced that the colour of their skin says nothing about them. When characterising people of African origin they give pride of place to skin colour.

The categorisation and judgement of people on the basis of their skin colour has its counterpart in the total denial of such differences. This denial is also called ‘colour blindness’. The intention is to undermine racist patterns of perception and the positive emphasis on whiteness. Such people refuse to perceive people via skin colour. Statements such as “All people are equal” or “I consider my white skin to be unimportant” are perhaps evidence of good intentions. This ‘colour blindness’, however, leads to the fact that the discrimination actually experienced by people of African origin is not taken seriously or is dismissed as an individual case.

There are also stereotypes that are supposedly positive. When for instance it is claimed that Africans are fast runners, good at playing the drums and are good dancers, these can be seen at first glance as positive attributes. But people of African origin rightly resist being stereotyped in this way, with their abilities being restricted to seemingly ‘natural’ body-oriented activities.

White people are rarely aware of their privileged position. When they look for work or for a flat or in their contacts with officialdom they expect to be treated with respect; they do not have to deal with racism if they do not want to. The situation is quite different for people of African origin. They are confronted day in and day out with racism and are forced to come to terms with it. This affects black Germans in a specific way, as every day they are made out to be the ‘stranger’ or the ‘other’ as a result of their skin colour. They are confronted with comments such as “Your German is really good!” or they are asked which country they come from. Being German is still implicitly equated with being white. ‘Othering’ people can also turn into violence. There are frequently racist assaults whereby people are injured or even murdered. Even if these acts of extreme violence are presented as exceptions to the rule, everyday racism is still expressed in many areas of life.

As long as the images of Africa constructed during the colonial period survive, nothing much will change in people’s attitudes. Latent or even overt racism against people of African origin will not disappear, either.



Cartoon, Tom, 2002

“Go back to where you came from!” –
“What should I do in Dortmund?”

... rural?

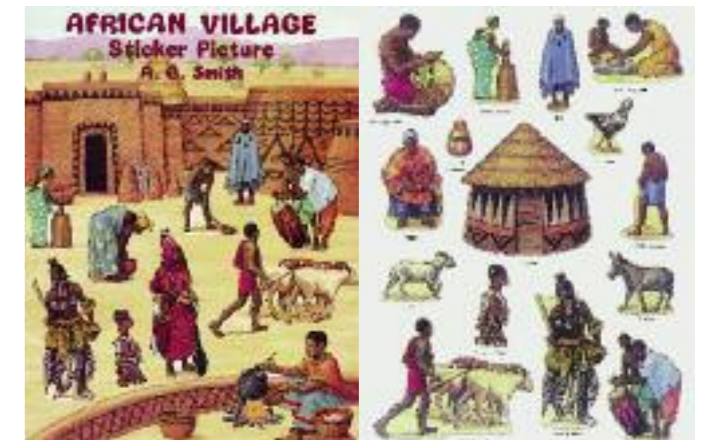
At the end of the 19th century colonial appropriation was partly justified by the alleged backwardness of the African continent. The village of straw-covered huts was represented as the typical type of African settlement. From early on, African straw-hut villages decorated objects of everyday German culture. Little has changed to this day. ‘Folklore’ dominates the representation of Africa – you can make your own ‘authentic’ African village with a present-day booklet of stickers which hardly differs from its tin predecessors of around a hundred years ago. Now, as in the past, the objects do not represent an actual village in a specific African country, but are the product of the imagination of their European creators. Modern Africa hardly features in the media, even though major cities such as Lagos or Johannesburg with their sky scrapers, traffic and populations in the millions are in no way inferior to their European counterparts.



Group of figures “African Village”
Germany, 2008
after a model from c. 1890
Tin, pigment; h. max 3 cm
RJM 63885



Johannesburg, South Africa, 2004



“African Village” stickers’ booklet
England, 1998

The Human Figure

Figure of a deity *dinonga eidu*

Nukuoro, Caroline Islands, Micronesia, Oceania,
19th century
Wood; h. 51 cm
Acquired from C. Jeschke, Zehden/Oder, 1920
RJM 34029

The anthropomorphic figures from the tiny Micronesian atoll of Nukuoro are among the most impressive works of art from Oceania. Artists reduced the human body to its basic shapes. Eyes, ears and mouth are omitted and arms and legs are presented only in their most rudimentary form. The shoulders are decorated with a delicately incised pattern which corresponds to the tattoos of Nukuoro chieftains and their families. The sculptures represent deities and deified ancestors. They were “wrapped in cloth”, as one European traveller noted in the second half of the 19th century, and were kept and worshipped in cult houses or in cult places. On the occasion of a major annually recurring festival, the inhabitants of the island, who were of Polynesian origin, gathered around the figures, which had been specially adorned for the celebration,

and offered fruit and other food as a sacrifice. There is not much information on the religious context of these rare figures. The activities of Christian missionaries, who began converting the inhabitants of Nukuoro towards the end of the 19th century, consigned the old religious concepts and practices to oblivion.

Sculptures from Africa and Oceania were a source of inspiration for expressionist and surrealist artists. The Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966) copied non-European art in pencil to “get a clear idea of what I am seeing”, as he put it.⁴ In an edition of the French art journal “Cahiers d’Art” from 1929, he found numerous examples of art from Oceania. A photograph of the Nukuoro figure shown here, published in the journal, was chosen as a model for one of his drawings.





Malekula, Vanuatu, Melanesia, 19th century
Wood, paint; h. 26 cm
RJM 31254



Witu Islands, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia,
c. 1900
Wood, paint; h. 59.5 cm
RJM 20767



Sulka, New Britain, Papua New Guinea,
Melanesia, early 20th century
Cane, pith, cassowary feathers; h. 73 cm
Restored with funds from the State of North
Rhine-Westphalia and the City of Cologne,
2008
RJM 24802



Elema, Papuan Gulf, Papua New Guinea,
Melanesia, early 20th century
Barkcloth, cane, paint; h. 132.5 cm
RJM 35759



Northern New Ireland, Papua New Guinea,
Melanesia, 19th century
Wood, barkcloth, plant fibre; h. 107.5 cm
RJM 4442



New Caledonia, Melanesia, c. 1900
Wood, feathers, human hair; h. 140 cm
Restored with funds from the Börner Foundation,
Cologne
RJM 19879

Coming of Age – Initiation Rites of the Uramot-Baining on New Britain, Melanesia

The transition from child to adult is celebrated in many societies with special rituals. The initiation ceremony marks the transition of young people to adults. Often ancestor or spirit masks appear to accompany the ritual.

The Uramot-Baining inhabit the mountainous region in the northeast of the Melanesian island of New Britain. Their livelihood depends on hunting and horticulture. After a phase of segregation of the young male initiates, a spectacular nocturnal fire dance forms the climax of the initiation rites. The masked dancers allude in their performance to spirits which may be dangerous for human beings. Little is known about the initiation of girls which is also accompanied by masked dances. As in the male initiation rites, the girls are initiated into the secrets of the female mask in a concealed ritual site in the bush unknown to the other sex.³

The initiation of boys is not the only occasion for a fire dance. Nowadays it is also performed in the context of community projects, on festival days and for tourists.



Nocturnal dance of the Uramot-Baining
Gaulim, New Britain, Oceania, 1982



Kavat mask
Uramot-Baining, New Britain, Oceania,
20th century
Barkcloth, rattan; h. 111 cm
RJM 53002

Kavat masks appear at the nocturnal fire dance of the Baining. After the onset of darkness, the black and white painted mask wearers, adorned with tufts of leaves, appear on the dance ground. They dance around and through the fire accompanied by song and the rhythmic

pounding of stamping tubes. The masks, made to the exclusion of women, are presented to the initiates in their camp in the bush before the performance. However, they are still not permitted to wear them.