

TRADERS, 'BIG MEN' AND PROPHETS:
POLITICAL CONTINUITY AND CRISIS
IN THE MAJI MAJI REBELLION IN
SOUTHEAST TANZANIA

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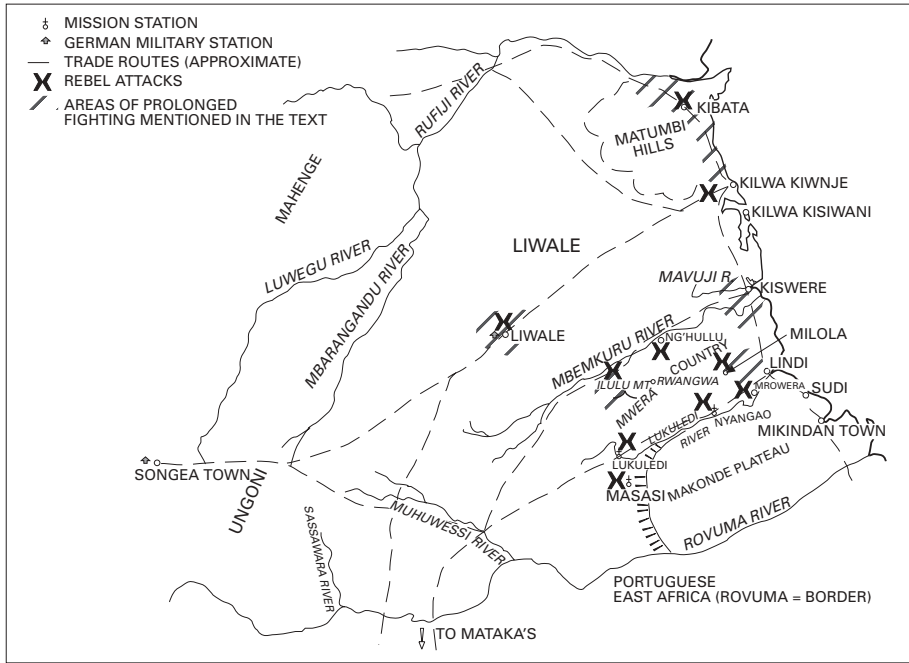
ABSTRACT: This article places the origins of the Maji Maji rebellion in Southeast Tanzania within the context of tensions between coast and interior, and between 'big man' leaders and their followers, which grew out of the expansion of trade and warfare in the second half of the nineteenth century. Without discounting its importance as a reaction against colonial rule, the paper argues that the rebellion was driven also by the ambitions of local leaders and by opposition to the expansion of indigenous coastal elites. The crucial role of the 'Maji' medicine as a means of mobilization indicates the vitality of local politics among the 'stateless' people of Southeast Tanzania.

KEY WORDS: Tanzania, rebellion, trade, politics.

THE Maji Maji rebellion, which shook German East Africa in 1905–7, was among the most dramatic and catastrophic anti-colonial uprisings in early colonial Africa. In its largest battles, the rebels counted in thousands. The German colonial government, although caught unawares, soon put together a brutal response. The number of dead, more often from the effects of German scorched earth strategies than from fighting, is unknown, but certainly reached tens, and possibly hundreds, of thousands. From its outbreak, the causes and organization of the rebellion became subject to intense speculation, prompted not least by the role in it of the 'Maji'. This medicine, apparently connected to a water cult on the Rufiji River, was administered to the fighters by priest-like messengers from its shrines.

Research on the Maji Maji rebellion has developed fitfully over the last 35 years. In 1967–9, the Maji Maji research project, a collaboration between Tanzanian students and British scholars, established a base line for its historiography.¹ Beginning with the amazement of contemporary observers at the unity of purpose and persistence in struggle displayed by the rebels, many of whom belonged to peoples considered 'unwarlike' and parochial, research focused on the motivation and organization of the rebellion. The interpretations followed many leads, but centred on yearning for political independence as a central motive and the unifying role of the 'Maji' medicine cult and its messengers.

¹ Gilbert Gwassa and John Iliffe (eds.), 'Papers of the Maji Maji Research Project' (MMRP) (2 vols.) (Dar es Salaam, 1968–9).



Map 1. Southeast Tanzania in 1905/6.

After the accounts of the rebellion based on this project were published,² the topic lay almost untouched until the 1990s when Marcia Wright, Thaddeus Sunseri and Jamie Monson set out new interpretations of the rebellion in sub-regions of the area it affected.³ These regional studies elaborated on many aspects of Maji Maji present in the earlier research, especially the grievances against German rule which motivated it, its continuity with earlier conflicts and the various local antecedents of the 'Maji' medicine. In addition, they challenged the previous emphasis on the innovative qualities and the unifying capacity of the Maji cult, sometimes to the point of questioning the importance of the medicine altogether. The criticism culminated in the claim that the earlier historiography had misrepresented the rebellion as a form of proto-nationalism, in effect furnishing material for the ideological foundations of the independent Tanzanian state.

² Most relevant here, John Iliffe, 'The organisation of the Maji Maji rebellion', *Journal of African History*, 8 (1967), 495–512; Gilbert Gwassa, 'Kinjikitile and the ideology of Maji Maji', in Terence Ranger and Isaria N. Kimambo (eds.), *The Historical Study of African Religion* (London, 1972), 202–18; John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge, 1979), 168–98.

³ Marcia Wright, 'Maji Maji: prophecy and historiography', in David Anderson and Douglas Johnson (eds.), *Revealing Prophets: Prophecy in East African History* (London, 1995), 124–42; Thaddeus Sunseri, 'Famine and wild pigs: gender struggles and the outbreak of the Maji Maji war in Uzaramo (Tanzania)', *Journal of African History*, 38 (1997), 235–59; Jamie Monson, 'Relocating Maji Maji: the politics of alliance and authority in the southern Highlands of Tanzania', *Journal of African History*, 39 (1998), 95–120.

The attempt to tone down the quasi-nationalist overtones of former interpretations focused on three aspects of the rebellion. First, Wright, Sunseri and Monson all questioned the pivotal role of the central sites and prophets of the Maji cult, by suggesting alternative, local or domestic, origins and interpretations of the medicine. Secondly, they emphasized local and practical grievances against German rule, rather than Maji messengers and quasi-nationalist ideology, as a motivating force. Thirdly, they emphasized the continuity of the rebellion with earlier wars in this region, as opposed to what they saw as an excessive emphasis in the earlier writings on central organization, conscious innovation and ideological commitment among followers of the Maji.

Arguably, the greatest merit of this second wave of research lies in opening the way towards highlighting the importance of conflicts and tensions among the peoples of the region, rather than presenting the rebellion as a conflict of colonized against colonizers. This is the starting point of the following reconsideration of Maji Maji in the southeast, an area not studied by Monson, Sunseri or Wright. It focuses on regional rather than local dynamics and links them to tensions among different strata of indigenous society. In addition, it does not share all their reservations about the first wave of Maji Maji research. While the contemporaneous ideas of modernization and nationalism undoubtedly influenced Gwassa's and Iliffe's writings on Maji Maji, much of the information presented in later interpretations, especially on the local dynamics of the rebellion, is fully compatible with their accounts. Moreover, the roots of Maji in agricultural or healing practices do not rule out the possibility that it also functioned as a means of political mobilization.

This article seeks to relate the Maji Maji rebellion to the politics that grew up around the expansion of trade and warfare in Southeast Tanzania in the nineteenth century and to the attendant struggles for survival and opportunity, symbolic and material, that these circumstances produced.⁴ The fifteen years of German rule that preceded the rebellion had sufficed to make the Germans an enemy to most people in the area, but not to obliterate the social and political dynamics that predated their arrival. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Southeast Tanzania had been an insecure environment, subject to periodic invasions by migrant Ngoni warriors and traversed by slave caravans destined for the biggest slave-exporting port of the era, Kilwa. Its inhabitants had had to adjust to living with a mixture of danger and opportunity epitomized by the Ngoni on one hand and the wealth of coastal patricians on the other. Political leadership had become bound up with the ability to manipulate resources along the trade routes and alternately to protect and exploit one's followers.

THE 'BIG MEN': WAR, TRADE AND POLITICS IN SOUTHEAST TANZANIA BEFORE MAJI MAJI

The area dealt with here is roughly circumscribed by the coast in the east, the Rufiji River in the north, the Luvegu River in the east and the Rovuma River

⁴ See Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (Portsmouth and London, 1995).

in the south.⁵ In contrast to the highly organized Ngoni to the west, and to the centralized polities to the northwest, the people here had a loose, small-scale social organization of a kind often referred to as 'stateless'. With the exception of the Matumbi, inhabitants of the eponymous hills in the Kilwa hinterland, they were at the time of the uprising also considered quite unwarlike and weak; this was especially true for the Ngindo, the inhabitants of Liwale, the open woodlands between the Luvegu River (which in the south formed the border with Ngoni territory) and Kilwa.

Raids by the Ngoni or Magwangwara (ethnically less clearly defined bands employing Ngoni techniques) were regular occurrences in this area from the 1850s.⁶ These raids form the starting point for many oral accounts of local history.⁷ Ngoni migrants formed the northernmost expansion of the wave of migration that had begun in South Africa in the 1820s. They reached the northern shores of Lake Nyasa in the 1850s and settled in the area henceforth known as Ungoni. Their military organization and techniques made them fearsome opponents. Today, informants explain their weakness against the Ngoni with reference to armament. The defenders' arrows were useless against the Ngoni's cow hide shields and no match for their clubs and stabbing spears. Raids were seasonal rather than year-round and normally affected only part of the frontier area in any given year. There was some safety in flight and in the defendants' better knowledge of their environment. Nevertheless the attacks were extremely destructive, unsettling and terrifying. As late as the 1890s, German observers described razed villages and depopulated areas all along the Ngoni frontier from the Rovuma River to the Kilwa hinterland. The population of Liwale was especially thin and unsettled.⁸ Further south, the second half of the nineteenth century also witnessed a gradual and not always peaceful in-migration of Makua and Yao people from Portuguese East Africa. They encountered the Makonde on the eponymous plateau, the Mwera in the hinterland of Lindi town and a number of other groups – Marava, Matambwe and Nindi – living in pockets throughout the region.

⁵ A more complete description of conditions in this area at the time can be found in Felicitas Becker, 'A social history of Southeast Tanzania, ca 1890–1950' (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 2002), ch. 1.

⁶ A short account of the major Ngoni raids, as far as they became known to Europeans at the time, can be found in Edward Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa: Changing Patterns of Trade to the Later Nineteenth Century* (London, 1975), 249–58. Alpers is also the main printed source on the slave trade on the southern coast.

⁷ E.g. interviews with Selemani Omari Nachunga, Mnero-Miembeni, 9 Oct. 2000; with Pauli Sylvester Mbunda, Mnero-Ngongo, 13 Sept. 2000; with Mohamed Kawambe, Mnacho-Nandagala, 3 Sept. 2000. All interviews cited were conducted by the author in July to Dec. 2000. The tapes and transcripts are in the author's possession.

⁸ Officer of the *Schutztruppe* (the German colonial army) Zelewski to *Reichskolonialamt* (German Colonial Office), Berlin, 29 June 1891, Deutsches Bundesarchiv, Berlin (B'arch) R 1001/279, 16; *Bezirksamt* (District Office), Kilwa (Officer Leue?) to Colonial Office, Berlin, 5 June 1892, B'arch R 1001/214, 4; *Gouvernement* (German colonial government) Dar es Salaam to Colonial Office, Berlin, 22 Sept. 1894. B'arch R 1001/284, 141; Georg Lieder, 'Reise von der Mbampa-Bai am Nyassa-See nach Kisswere am Indischen Ozean', *Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten* (Communications from the German Protectorates), 10 (1897), 95–142, and *idem*, 'Zur Kenntnis der Karawanenwege im Sueden des deutsch-ostafrikanischen Schutzgebietes', *Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 7 (1894), 277–82.

This mixture of shifting, at times uprooted, peoples was one reason for the perception of this region as lacking political control. Another was the nature of political authority. The notion of 'statelessness' can be misleading if used to evoke the image of independent peasants disdainful of all authority beyond their own homestead. Instead, in 1890, the Germans encountered a network of power brokers of varying size throughout this region. They were, however, more often spoken of as 'sultans' than as chiefs. A lack of common ethnic affiliation between rulers and followers and of local ancestry was characteristic of these rulers. For instance, one of the most formidable and persistent opponents of the original imposition of German rule was the 'sultan' Mchemba in the hinterland of Mikindani, a Yao who had arrived in this area in the 1870s and controlled mostly Makonde dependants.⁹ Along the main trade route from Lindi into the interior and south to the Rovuma River, the power brokers included Hatia, a Makua governing Makua, Mwera and Makonde subjects; Nakaam, a man of Makua immigrant ancestry who preferred to be spoken of as a Yao immigrant, and Matola, a Yao with a mixed, predominantly Yao and Makua following who had grown powerful by manipulating an alliance with the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) station at Masasi.¹⁰ These were only the most accessible, hence best-known to German sources, of these rulers. Others were not immigrants, but nevertheless not dynastic rulers, either. An example was Selemani Mamba, who survives in the German record only as the leader of the attacks on Benedictine mission stations during the Maji Maji rebellion. Informants describe him as *mpiganaji hodari*,¹¹ an accomplished fighter, and *kiongozi mkubwa*,¹² a great leader, who had organized resistance to Ngoni invasions among the Mwera in the northwestern hinterland of Lindi before the onset of colonialism. Although his following was ethnically more homogeneous than that of the 'sultans' along the trade routes, none of the informants found it necessary to give him a distinguished ancestry. His position was founded on personality, on *akili za kuzaliwa*, that is, in-born intelligence. The personal quality he needed to survive as a leader is expressed in the observation that he was *mtu mwenye madawa makali*,¹³ a man in possession of strong medicine, which was not inheritable. The belief in medicine, however, is the only identifiable institution on which Mamba relied.

⁹ The most important published sources on Mchemba are the reminiscences of the first resident representative of the German East African Company in Lindi: Rochus Schmidt, *Aus kolonialer Fruhzeit* (Berlin, 1922); also the accounts of Chauncy Maples, missionary at the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) station at Masasi, in 'Masasi and the Rovuma district in East Africa', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographic Society*, 2 (1880), 338–53; and of the *Schutztruppe* officer Ernst Nigmann, *Geschichte der kaiserlichen Schutztruppe fuer Deutsch-Ostafrika* (Berlin, 1911). On all these rulers see Becker, 'A social history', ch. 2.

¹⁰ On Matola and his dynasty see Terence Ranger, 'European attitudes and African realities: the rise and fall of the Matola chiefs of Southeast Tanzania', *Journal of African History*, 20 (1979), 63–82.

¹¹ Interview with Sigismund Makota Mpandamila, Mnero-Ngongo, 13 Sept. 2000.

¹² Interview with Xaveri Karlo Makota, Mnero-Ngongo, 13 Sept. 2000.

¹³ Interview with Ibrahim Nassoro Bakari Kimbegu, Rwangwa, 18 Nov. 2000, and with Hassan Mohamed Chilimbo, Rwangwa, 18 Nov. 2000.

The origins of this practice of self-made leaders, whom I have termed ‘big men’,¹⁴ are lost in the unknown past. Nevertheless, by the time the German colonizers appeared on the scene, they were all entangled in a network of political, commercial and military relations that connected the raiding frontier in the west with the trading ports on the coast, focused on but not limited to the long-distance trade routes. Their ways of engagement with this network differed. For instance, Mchemba sheltered escaped slaves from the plantations of Lindi patricians, while also raiding villages for slaves and selling them through the port at Sudi. He was said to control the smuggling of powder from Portuguese East Africa, kept the Magwangwara raiders off the Makonde plateau and repeatedly duped the colonial officials at Lindi and Mikindani in negotiations. The nearby Hatia, meanwhile, charged tribute from caravans heading for Lindi. Selemani Mamba controlled the distribution of guns in his part of Mwera country and traded with the coast (probably in slaves) as well as organizing the defence against raiders. All of them occasionally dressed in the style of coastal patricians, in black silk robes, turban and umbrella.¹⁵ The big men survived on a range of often contradictory stratagems that included slave trading and harbouring escaped slaves, raiding and diplomacy, extortion and intimidation, as well as patronage and the ceremonial display of power and wealth. Still, they all participated to varying degrees in both warfare and trade.

The arms, slaves, forest produce and luxury goods they traded in moved within two distinct if overlapping trading networks. One connected Kilwa with Songea and the Ngoni frontier, the other connected the powerful Yao ‘sultanates’ of Portuguese East Africa, especially that of Mataka, to Lindi and Mikindani. Kilwa was at this time the biggest supplier of the Zanzibar slave market, while all the ports on this stretch of coast supplied slaves, ivory, grains and forest produce such as gum copal to external markets. Ngoni also traded with Lindi and Yao with Kilwa, but methods of control and the relative influence of the players differed between the two networks. The difference between the two, and the ways they changed under increasing German influence, again serve to elucidate why political relations in this area were volatile.

THE ONSET OF GERMAN CONTROL

A chronology of German encroachment on the networks of Southeast Tanzania’s power brokers has to begin with the German colonial rulers establishing themselves in the coastal towns in 1890. On the southern coast this takeover was less violent and destructive than in Bagamoyo, Pangani and Saadani, where the so-called ‘Arab uprising’ took place.¹⁶ Slave exports from

¹⁴ The term ‘big men’, originally from Oceanian ethnography, was made useful for African history by Jan Vansina, in *Paths in the Rainforest: Towards a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (London, 1990). See also Becker, ‘A social history’, chs. 1 and 2 and introduction.

¹⁵ On Mataka’s performance, *Bezirksamtmann* (District Officer) Zache, Lindi, ‘Report on journey to the Rovuma’, 23 Jan. 1900, B’arch R 1001/220, 14; on a similar display by Hatia, another *Schutztruppe* officer: J. Stenzler, *Deutsch-Ostafrika: Kriegs- und Friedensbilder* (Berlin, 1910), 54.

¹⁶ See Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, for a compelling account of the events on the northern coast.

Kilwa to Zanzibar were even said to have increased during the uprising, while the boats patrolling the coast concentrated on the northern ports.¹⁷ Kilwa's oligarchy got off lightly in the investigation following the uprising, in spite of the deaths of two German East African Company (Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft, DOAG) representatives in the town at the hands of rebels. Two men were convicted of the killings and hanged, a small number in the light of the government's readiness to use draconian sentences.¹⁸ In Lindi and Mikindani, the DOAG representative adopted a conciliatory manner, eager to coax back the Yao trade.¹⁹ Coastal notables, well aware of the much harsher fate of the northern towns, tried to oblige the new rulers.²⁰ In 1894, however, the routing of Hassan bin Omar Makunganya, executed in 1895 after at least 18 months of hit-and-run warfare against the Germans and their supporters in the area south of Kilwa, intensified German control of the coastal oligarchy.²¹ When numerous letters from Kilwa were found in his possession at his capture²² the German government decided that the contacts between Hassan and the Kilwa patriciate were treasonous and imposed executions, exile and heavy fines on the town's elite.²³ This was by far the most heavy-handed demonstration of supremacy over the elites of Kilwa on the part of the colonial government since its arrival.

Meanwhile, in the first half of the 1890s, the Ngoni showed little tendency to curtail their raiding despite the German presence. In June 1891, Magwangwara raids into the area between the Matumbi Hills and the Rufiji rapids went ahead as usual.²⁴ Even in 1894, after a German expedition to the area north of Ungoni, the Ngoni proceeded to raid heavily along the Rovuma River and in the Lindi and Mikindani hinterland.²⁵ In 1896, Ngoni raiding parties tore down a German flag and threatened to punish several minor chiefs near the Rovuma, most prominently Undi, ally of the Yao big man Mataka in Mozambique, for accepting German protection.²⁶ In 1897,

¹⁷ Fritz Weidner, *Die Haussklaverei in Ostafrika* (Jena, 1915), 81–2. Weidner was a lawyer preparing to join the German colonial service.

¹⁸ For differences of status and descent in coastal towns more generally, see Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, esp. ch. 5; and District Officer Bagamoyo to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 21 Aug. 1908, Tanzanian National Archives (TNA) G9/46, vol. 1 part 2, 48 *et seq.*

¹⁹ Schmidt, *Aus Kolonialer Fruehzeit*, 145 *et seq.*

²⁰ On the cooperative attitudes of the coastal oligarchies, see the reports of District Agricultural Officer Jochen Schroeder from Kilwa in TNA G8/19; and of District Officer Ewerbeck, Lindi, in 'Report on slavery in Lindi district', 14 Sept. 1897, B'arch 1001/1004, 105.

²¹ For an account of the conflict, see former Governor Wissmann, Dar es Salaam, to German Chancellor Hohenlohe-Schillingsfuerst, Berlin, 1 Oct. 1895, B'arch R 1001/286, 86; on his earlier activities, Stenzler, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, 54 *et seq.*

²² Hans Zache, 'Shairi la Makunganya: Das Makunganya-Lied', *Mitteilungen des Seminars fuer Orientalische Sprachen*, 1, no. 3 (1898), 86–114, is the source for the details on the investigation in Kilwa after Hassan's capture.

²³ Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, to Colonial Office, Berlin, 16 Dec. 1895, B'arch R 1001/287, 9.

²⁴ Officer Zelewski to Colonial Office, Berlin, 29 June 1891, B'arch R 1001/279, 16.

²⁵ Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam to Colonial Office, Berlin, 22 Sept. 1894, B'arch R 1001/284, 141.

²⁶ District Officer Engelhardt, Kilwa, to Colonial Office, Berlin, 'Report on the expedition to Songea', 2 Aug. 1897, B'arch R 1001/288, 202.

however, another German expedition, this time to Ungoni itself, forcefully demonstrated German military power. With the establishment of Songea military station,²⁷ freewheeling Ngoni military power was broken. Considering the significance of the Ngoni threat to the societies of the southeast for decades before, German conquest marked a sea change. But the people in the region could not be sure of its extent or its duration. The German missionary Adams found the western Ngindo still in terror of their Ngoni neighbours in 1898.²⁸ Still, some people were quick to test the new waters. Over the following years, the traders, rubber collectors and Ngindo peasants who had been the most vulnerable to the Ngoni threat began to travel or even settle on the former Ngoni frontier in a way hitherto unimaginable.

With the Kilwa oligarchy humiliated and the Ngoni subdued, German control of the hinterland began to be a reality. During the eight-year period from the subjection of the Ngoni in 1897 to the outbreak of the Maji Maji uprising in 1905 a vast array of people, from military strongmen to petty traders, struggled to carve out, seize or rebuild opportunities. German officials thought in simple terms of 'us' (legitimate rulers) against 'them' (illegitimate troublemakers), but they were demolishing a network of power brokers based on shifting loyalties and internal competition. Two developments especially fed the rising tensions: extended participation in upcountry trade with increased security and the legal consolidation of slavery combined with half-hearted attempts to suppress the slave trade.

TRADE AFTER 1897: INCREASING PARTICIPATION

Long-distance trade along the routes in Southeast Tanzania differed from that along the central route. Unlike the Bagamoyo route, dominated by the Nyamwezi, there were few professional porters in the Kilwa trade. Slaves from Kilwa as well as free Ngoni from Songea worked as porters.²⁹ But according to the District Office, the majority of porters in Kilwa belonged nowhere:

As there is no porter stock around here comparable to the Nyamwezi in the north of the colony, the traders depend for transportation of their loads on people hired from among the population of the coast ... for the most part they are individuals without any other occupation, who prefer the lazy life of the caravan to any other activity. Obviously, they are the worst elements of the populace.³⁰

In Lindi, the situation was somewhat different. In 1899, the District Office wrote about porters in Lindi and their wage negotiations with coastal traders: 'These people, who all come from the interior, pursue portering as a profession and are well versed in the choice and value of textiles ... often

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Alfons Adams, *Im Dienste des Kreuzes* (St Ottilien, 1899), 132. Alfons Adams was a German Catholic missionary.

²⁹ J. F. Elton, 'On the coast country of East Africa south of Zanzibar', *Journal of the Royal Geographic Society*, 44 (1874), 227–52 at 249; District Office, Kilwa, to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 19 Nov. 1899, TNA G 1/35, 169; District Office, Lindi to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 11 May 1899, TNA G 1/35, 138.

³⁰ District Office, Kilwa, to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 19 Nov. 1899, TNA G 1/35, 169.

negotiations lasting several days are necessary to achieve an understanding'.³¹ Throughout the 1890s, the largest caravans reaching Lindi were those under the patronage of Mataka, which included hundreds of people all from the interior. The difference between the rootless Kilwa porters who struck the District Officer as such rabble and the more purposeful Lindi porters relates to the degrees of insecurity and violence along these routes.³² In the hinterland of Lindi, Macheмба kept Ngoni raids at bay, and the big men along the route to Lindi, Hatia and Matola especially followed less predatory methods of exploitation than the Ngoni. Moreover, Mataka made good use of his allies on the Rovuma and of the German administration's eagerness to curry favour with him and make sure he sent his caravans to their ports rather than to northern Mozambique.³³

Along the routes to Kilwa, meanwhile, there were no big men of comparable importance, and local people were extremely vulnerable to raids as well as to abuses by caravans. The people of Liwale were worst placed to profit from trade, even though it passed through their territory for much of the way between Songea and Kilwa. Yet caravans could not but depend on the areas they were passing through for shelter, water and often for food. Thus, even the Ngindo had a modicum of bargaining power. Conditions changed year after year, in tune with raiding and harvests, on which the food trade with caravans depended.³⁴ There is some indication, too, that relations with the Ngoni included more than those of hunter and prey. Located closer to the coast than the Ngoni, there was some scope for Ngindo to act as intermediate traders and suppliers to passing raiding parties.³⁵ Still, by removing the need for military strength among caravans in 1897, the colonizers threw open the door to the hinterland to new traders. As they noted: 'Sufficient financial means and increased confidence have helped the relatively risky caravan trade, geared mostly towards obtaining rubber, grow to significant proportions. Almost three-quarters of local imports are carried up country'. And

The character of Lindi's trade has changed. Even two years ago the Manyan [Indian traders] and others remained at the coast or only ventured into nearby places. Now 4-5 Manyans are touring the interior, go even as far as the middle Rovuma, one has opened his shop at the Ilulu mountain, a sign of the peaceful state of the south.³⁶

The most important produce driving the expansion of trade was rubber. The importance of the 'rubber frontier' has been noted before, with emphasis on the Mahenge area.³⁷ Closer to the coast, British observers had noticed

³¹ District Office, Lindi, to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 20 Dec. 1899, TNA G 1/35, 179.

³² Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*, ch. 7, esp. 219-29; Elton, 'On the coast country', 230.

³³ See the files of the District Office Lindi for 1900-3 for the attempts of the District Office to persuade Mataka to move to German East Africa by offering him Tunduru under the name of 'Neubrandenburg', B'arch R 1001/220, 14-125.

³⁴ Lieder, 'Zur Kenntnis der Karawanenwege', 277-82.

³⁵ A. R. W. Crosse-Upcott, 'The social structure of the Kingindo-speaking people' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1956), ch. 2.

³⁶ Jahresbericht ueber die Entwicklung des Ostafrikanischen Schutzgebietes fuer 1897, *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* (1898, *Beilage*), 88.

³⁷ Wright, 'Maji Maji', 124-43.

rubber collection in the 1870s in northern Kilwa and Mikindani districts. In 1891, District Officer von Behr in Mikindani observed rubber collection on the Makonde plateau.³⁸ In the same year, the Lindi District Office reported that about 50,000 pounds of rubber had been brought into Lindi during the June to August season, with 350–400 people coming into town each month to sell rubber.³⁹ Liwale, meanwhile, was experiencing something akin to a boom. In 1898, the German missionary, Adams, found people in western Liwale living scattered in poor huts and still terrified of the Ngoni, but well dressed thanks to the rubber trade.⁴⁰ Its growth can be gauged partly in conjunction with the growth of trade overall. The caravan trade from Kilwa grew from 6,615 loads in 1899 to 11,334 in 1903. During this period, rubber made up about half of the exports from Kilwa.⁴¹ Rubber exports from Kilwa grew in value from 443,980 German Marks in 1902/3 to 664,532 German Marks in 1903/4.⁴² In Mikindani, rubber was the most important export product in 1907.⁴³

Rubber was different from other high-value trade goods. It could be collected by anyone with a knife in a forest, a stark contrast with hunting elephants or slaves. Concomitantly, the traders who bought rubber in the interior often were small, independent entrepreneurs.⁴⁴ Also, rubber vine, a perennial plant, was not subject to the vagaries of the rain to the same extent as other agricultural produce. With demand booming, rubber was a reliable and accessible source of income. In an area where political control had long been bound up with control of trade, it was an unusually democratic trade good. Contemporary German observers noted the social repercussions of the trade, such as increased participation in the monetarized economy and in money-lending.⁴⁵ Liwale's good record as a tax-paying province was attributed to its wealth in rubber.⁴⁶ The fact that this hitherto impoverished and vulnerable area experienced an influx of cash due to rubber underscores the point that this trade good was partly independent of the established circuits of goods which the big men exploited. There is no direct evidence of their views on the rubber trade, but they are likely to have observed it closely and with mixed feelings.

³⁸ Leutnant von Behr, 'Geographische and Ethnographische Notizen aus dem Flussgebiet des Rovuma', *Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 5 (1892), 15–20.

³⁹ 'Bezirk und Station Lindi', *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* (1891), 262.

⁴⁰ Alfons Adams, 'Vom Nyassa-See nach Upogoro und Donde', *Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 11 (1898), 251–4.

⁴¹ Paul Fuchs, 'Die wirtschaftliche Erkundung einer Ostafrikanischen Suedbahn', *Beihefte zum Tropenpflanzer*, 6, nos. 4–5 (1905), 273. ⁴² *Ibid.* 277.

⁴³ Eugen Werth, *Das Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Kuestenland und die vorgelagerten Inseln* (Berlin, 1915), 94.

⁴⁴ 'Schadensprotokolle' (damage reports) of traders who suffered losses in Maji Maji, TNA G3/73, *passim*. Typically they were caught out by the uprising at the house of a local contact.

⁴⁵ Walter Busse, 'Forschungsreise durch den suedlichen Teil von Deutsch-Ostafrika', *Beihefte zum Tropenpflanzer*, 3 (1902), 93–119, esp. 100; Leutnant von Behr, 'Die Voelker zwischen Rufiji und Rovuma', *Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 6 (1893), 69–87, esp. 78; *Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Zeitung*, 22 (1905), TNA G1/136. On the limits of the use of money and hopes to extend it, see District Office, Mikindani, to colonial government, Dar es Salaam, 'Report on the caravan trade', 1 Apr. 1899, TNA G 1/35, 145.

⁴⁶ Adams, 'Vom Nyassa-See nach Upogoro und Donde'.

Rubber vines were not ubiquitous; they were scarce in Masasi and western Mwera country.⁴⁷ But other forest and agricultural produce also made important contributions to trade, namely beeswax,⁴⁸ sesame and grain, especially millet; ivory, too, still played a role.⁴⁹ In 1902/3, millet exports from Lindi reached 4,782,064 pounds, maize 209,682 pounds.⁵⁰ In one centre of peasant grain trade, Ndumbwe near Sudi south of Lindi, the turnover during the four-month trading period was said to reach 20,000 Rupees.⁵¹ There is no record of centres of production further up country. Still, the trader who set up shop in Ilulu in 1900 most likely depended on a mixture of grain, forest produce and maybe the occasional ivory tusk to get by. Thus, across Southeast Tanzania, the last years of the nineteenth century witnessed efforts to open up new trading opportunities, even by people with very limited means. The dozens of traders who reported losses of goods worth less than 50 Rupees after the Maji Maji rebellion bear witness to the same development. Comparing the routes centred on Kilwa and those centred on Lindi, the latter experienced a good deal more continuity. Along the routes to Kilwa, political control was more fragmented; the actual and potential implications of curtailing Ngoni raids were greater and less predictable.

AMBIGUOUS CHANGES IN SLAVERY

The establishment of German rule officially brought slave trading to an end, but it continued along both the Yao and the Songea routes in the 1890s, if on a much reduced scale. There were several suppliers. Irked by the German presence, a few Kilwa slave traders intensified their cooperation with Ngoni raiders. On his military expedition in 1894, the German commander Schele met a number of traders from Kilwa living in the Ngoni sphere of influence.⁵² He appointed the most prominent of them, Rashid bin Masoud, as *akida* for this region. When Rashid and other coastal traders met the German expedition to Ungoni in 1897, the officer in charge stated:

A significant proportion of the human loot [of recent Ngoni raids], mostly young women, has been sold to the many Arabs and Swahilis, mostly Kilwa natives, who live here ... The coastal people have partly sold them on, mostly to the same port. The *akida* Rashid, Mohamed bin Said, and almost all the coastal people ... are said to have participated in the slave purchase.⁵³

⁴⁷ Most explicitly in interview with Muhamed Athuman Mwindi, Mnero-Kitandi, 15 Sept. 2000. Also interview with Alois Ali Gomea, Mnero-Ngongo, 13 Sept. 2000, and with Saidi Bakari Matupulango, Mnero-Kipara, 23 Sept. 2000.

⁴⁸ The product mentioned most frequently by informants, e.g. interviews with Xaveri Karlo Makota, Mnero-Ngongo, 13 Sept. 2000; with Ismail Mkwenya, Mnero-Kitandi, 15 Sept. 2000.

⁴⁹ Interview with Alois Ali Gomea, Mnero-Ngongo, 13 Sept. 2000; Leutnant Engelhard, report on expedition to Ngoni, 2 Aug. 1897, B'arch R 1001/1004, 88.

⁵⁰ Fuchs, 'Suedbahn', 277. These figures comprise peasant and plantation production.

⁵¹ District Officer Berg, 'Das Bezirksamt Mikindani', *Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 10 (1897), 206-13.

⁵² Gouverneur Schele, Dar es Salaam, to Colonial Office, Berlin, 27 Mar. 1894, B'arch R 1001/184, 54.

⁵³ Leutnant Engelhard, 'Report on Expedition to Ngoni', 2 Aug. 1897, B'arch R 1001/1004, 88. The 'human loot' were captives of the raids in the preceding years, especially 1894, into the Lindi hinterland and along the Rovuma.

Up until at least 1897, then, new slaves still arrived in the Kilwa area. In Lindi, the District Office's observations make clear that the administration tolerated covert slave trading. In September 1897, District Officer Ewerbeck estimated that since 1890 about 1,000 slaves a year had been absorbed into agriculture on the coast between the Rovuma River and Kiswere, half way between Lindi and Kilwa. A few hundred a year were exported by sea and some brought to Kilwa for sale.⁵⁴ A large number of these slaves were brought to Lindi under the aegis of the Yao sultan Mataka. Abd el Kader, the most eminent patrician in the town of Sudi and Mchemba's ally on the coast, was also known to be a slave dealer.⁵⁵

In 1897 reports from Lindi noted that 'slave exports seem to be put on hold at present, to the benefit of agriculture, to which Arabs and Blacks turn increasingly'.⁵⁶ While studies of Zanzibar and the Mrima coast further north also document the development of slave-based plantation agriculture,⁵⁷ the movement of Zanzibaris to the mainland coast during Seyid Barghash's reign affected the southern coast as well. Some time in the 1870s, Nassor bin Halfan, brother of the notorious Zanzibari slaver Rumaliza, established himself in Mroweka, a village on an eponymous creek about 40 km southeast of Lindi.⁵⁸ There were others like him, if on a more modest scale, in nearby locations.⁵⁹ Reputedly the wealthiest man in Lindi, Ahmad bin Amar, was said to have owned about 800 slaves at the time of his death in 1882. Two other major owners had recently lost 80 and 120 slaves respectively in mass escapes.⁶⁰ The planters at Lindi were, in effect, part of a moving frontier from Kilwa. Since the opening up of land was a laborious operation, slaves were used to drain the ground in Mroweka valley, to cut the forest and possibly even to deepen the channel of the stream for ease of transport.⁶¹ They also planted labour-intensive crops, such as rice and sugarcane.

In the 1890s, the southeast regularly exported large quantities of grains and oilseed.⁶² While peasants supplied some of these products, the figures related to them are the most concrete indicator of the plantation sector's substantial size. Kilwa's patriciate controlled a great deal of land near the coast. The observations of Jochen Schroeder, a German agricultural extension officer in

⁵⁴ Ewerbeck, 'Report on slavery', B'arch R 1001/1004, 105.

⁵⁵ Former Governor Wissmann, Dar es Salaam, to Chancellor Hohenlohe-Schillingsfuerst, Berlin, 19 Oct. 1896, B'arch R 1001/287, 87.

⁵⁶ Ewerbeck, 'Report on slavery', B'arch R 1001/1004, 105.

⁵⁷ The main reference is again Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, ch. 3, esp. 96–106.

⁵⁸ Interview with Mohamed bin Halfan bin Nassor bin Halfan al-Barwani, Mingoyo 17 Aug. 2000.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; interviews with Mzee Juma Sudi bin Juma, Mingoyo, 9 Aug. 2000 and with Mohamed bin Halfan, Mingoyo, 17 Aug. 2000.

⁶⁰ Ewerbeck, 'Report on slavery', B'arch R 1001/1004, 105.

⁶¹ Interviews with Mzee Juma Sudi bin Juma, Mingoyo, 9 Aug. 2000, with Mohamed bin Halfan, Mingoyo, 17 Aug. 2000, and with Mzee Hamidi bin Musa bin Swalehe bin Shehe, Mingoyo, 13 Aug. 2000.

⁶² *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* (1902), 285–90; E. Obst, 'Der Handel in Deutsch-Ostafrika als Ausdruck der Wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung', *Koloniale Rundschau* (1913), 449–85; Statistische Daten ueber Ein- und Ausfuhr des Deutsch-Ostafrikanischen Schutzgebietes, *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* (1893), 340–7, (1894), 538–45, (1895), 608–15, (1896), 354–65, (1897), 364–73, (1898), 336–45, (1899), 196–399, (1900), 316–19; Fuchs, 'Suedbahn', 277.

Kilwa, provide some information on them. In 1892–3, he found plots near town, which belonged partly to the sultan of Zanzibar and partly to small local landowners, badly kept.⁶³ However, Schroeder was full of praise for the 'halfcaste Arab' Uledin Mputa, a large landowner north of Kilwa. It took Schroeder an hour to walk through Mputa's plantations, which supported c. 10,000 coconut palms. He also praised the 'discipline' of Uledin's 'workers', which suggests that Mputa's slaves were driven by a fairly harsh regime. Evidently, stratification among landowners was marked and not all were very productive. It appears that the larger owners were better placed to extract labour from their slaves.⁶⁴ Overall, the plantation sector was active and growing, despite the official outlawing of the slave trade.

Moreover, there were enterprising individuals who sought to expand slave plantation agriculture much further into the hinterland.⁶⁵ For instance, German records from the 1890s repeatedly mention Saidi Makanjira in the area of the Mbemkuru River, variously described as a cousin of a Kilwa trader, a friend of Yao 'sultan' Mataka and a pioneer of intensive agriculture in the hinterland.⁶⁶ German sources also mention him as a landowner at the mouth of the same river,⁶⁷ a location that harboured many slaves. In the northwestern hinterland of Lindi, the present inhabitants identify the town of Ruponda as his onetime home base, still marked out by his mango trees.⁶⁸ While Makanjira's grandson preferred to think of his slaves as people who had been arrested for trying to steal cassava,⁶⁹ a less partisan informant revealed that some parents sold children to him, 'so they might work for him'.⁷⁰ A man of many connections, Makanjira apparently survived in an unstable situation by forging alliances with the powers of the day: Mataka as well as the Ngoni and later the Germans. Further up country, Arabs around Rashid bin Masoud were experimenting with slave agriculture, including labour-intensive sugarcane.⁷¹ Meanwhile, German legislation enforced and enshrined the legal status of master and slave in a new way. By recognizing slavery as a legal status, the administration threw open the door to self-serving interpretations of the law by others. In 1897 District Officer Ewerbeck reported

⁶³ Reports by Jochen Schroeder, Kilwa, to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, TNA G8/19, *passim*, esp. Schroeder to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 21 Sept. 1893, TNA G 8/19, 47–55.

⁶⁴ The large number of relatively independent, tithe-paying slaves near Kilwa was noted by Weidner, *Haussklaverei*, 21–2.

⁶⁵ Interviews with Sigismund Makota Mpandamila, Mnero-Ngongo, 13 Sept. 2000, with Omari Bakari Kulungu, Mnero-Mwandila, 16 Sept. 2000, with Issa Nnegerea, Marambo, 8 Oct. 2000; District Officer Ewerbeck, Lindi, 'Report on a journey through the district', 14 Apr. 1897, B'arch R 1001/288, 104.

⁶⁶ *Schutztruppe* officer Fromm to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 18 Aug. 1896, B'arch, R 1001/1040, 2; Lieder, 'Zur Kenntnis der Karawanenwege', 277–82; District Officer Zache, Mikindani, to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 23 Jan. 1900. B'arch R 1001/220, 45.

⁶⁷ Lieder, 'Zur Kenntnis der Karawanenwege', 277–82; Ewerbeck, 'Report on slavery', B'arch R 1001/1004, 105.

⁶⁸ Interviews with Monica Hassani, Mnero-Ngongo, 15 Sept. 2000, with Meinulf Joseph, Ruponda, 25 Sept. 2000, with Rashid Salum Matumburo, Ngunichile, 20 Sept. 2000. ⁶⁹ Interview with Rashid Salim Ali Matumburo, Ngunichile, 20 Sept. 2000.

⁷⁰ Interview with Hassan Ahmed Chindenya, Ruponda, 7 Oct. 2000.

⁷¹ Lieder, 'Reise von der Mbampa-Bai'.

from Lindi that:

It happens often that people claim their own relatives as slaves ... on the upper Mbemkuru and on the northern border of the district, there were recently seven cases against one jumbe, who had attributed reputed freemen to someone else as slaves. Jumbe Ali bin Salim ... has declared about two hundred people slaves within the last three years, who for many years ... had not been in a servile position. In one case there were almost thirty members of one family, mostly women and children.⁷²

Terence Ranger has pointed out that agricultural workers on Matola's plots during the Maji Maji uprising were, in effect, slaves.⁷³ Matola's rival, Nakaam, owned 122 slaves in 1914, according to the District Office.⁷⁴ How many of Hatia's 'followers' were slaves is impossible to say. In the Lindi hinterland, slavery was thought of as an outcome of clan relations and obligations: slaves were 'paid' for bad debts, for killings or in exchange for food. But slaves were also 'stupid' or 'weak' people who gave up their autonomy in return for protection or fell under the spell of medicine-wielding strongmen.⁷⁵ Thus slavery formed part of the big men's forms of control over people, and German policy, while it sometimes interfered with the practice of slavery, did little to challenge it in principle.

The expansion of rubber production and trade also made the means to purchase slaves more widely available. Before the German conquest, the Anglican missionary Chauncy Maples at Masasi, on the route from Lindi to Lake Nyassa, had connected an increase in slave holding by Makonde villagers with the rubber trade, as they invested revenue from rubber sales in slaves. A similar observation in 1905 referred to Liwale: 'The inadequacy of the administrative staff is proven by the fact that recently ... over fifty slave children were picked up here, who had been sold to local natives mostly in the course of the last year, almost under the eyes of the administration, by Yao coming from the lake [Nyasa]!'.⁷⁶ That the Liwale region, recently a hunting ground for slavers, should have imported slaves in 1905 was quite a reversal of fortunes, indicating the changes that followed the imposition of German rule.

THE COURSE OF THE REBELLION IN THE SOUTHEAST

The Maji Maji uprising began when Matumbi rebels sacked the cotton plantations near Kibata, northwest of Kilwa, on 28 July 1905.⁷⁷ On 15 August Ngindo rebels burned down the 'Boma' in Liwale town and killed its garrison, including a German non-commissioned officer and a German

⁷² Ewerbeck, 'Report on slavery', B'arch R 1001/1004, 105; Weidner, *Hausklaverei*, 88.

⁷³ Ranger, 'European attitudes and African realities', 72.

⁷⁴ 'A letter came from Herr Wendt, says he has been able to arrange for the redemption of Mzee Nakaam's Slaves for R 4325. He sent a list of 122 slaves'. Masasi Parish Diary, Apr. 1914, Library of the University of Dar es Salaam.

⁷⁵ Interview with Hassan Mohamed Chilimbo, Rwangwa, 18 Nov. 2000.

⁷⁶ *Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Zeitung*, 22 (1905), TNA G 1/136.

⁷⁷ Where no other source is given, the account follows that given by John Iliffe. See John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge, 1979), 168–98.

planter who had sought refuge there. On 26 August, a German detachment on the way from Songea to Liwale was wiped out along with its German officer.⁷⁸ South of Kilwa, the members of an expedition intended to repair the telegraph line to Lindi were killed in the early days of September.⁷⁹ In Lindi district, Mwera rebels destroyed the Benedictine mission station at Lukuledi on 28 August along with Mkomaindo, the UMCA mission station at Masasi.⁸⁰ The next day, rebels from the same area under the command of Selemani Mamba pillaged the Benedictines' station at Nyangao. The attackers then moved on to Mroweka, the trading settlement on the edge of Lindi creek, where they killed four Arab inhabitants. In the western reaches of Lindi district, however, the advance of the rebels was checked after the sacking of Lukuledi mission by the *akida* of Masasi, a former member of the German colonial army, and his troops. In the following weeks, Matola of Masasi and Nakaam counter-attacked, seizing crops and people with German encouragement.⁸¹ The Mwera fought back, led by Nachinuku, a big man from Mnacho in southern Mwera country.⁸² The only people south of the Lukuledi River to join the uprising were a handful of Makonde *majumbe*, local German-appointed administrators, and remnants of Mchemba's followers on the northern edge of the Makonde plateau, who were quickly kept in check by the stationing of a detachment of askaris.

The early successes of the rebels were followed by piecemeal guerrilla warfare, as the *Schutztruppe* took the initiative to retaliate and 'pacify' the area. Still, the rebels continued to stage major attacks on German troops. The biggest battle in Mwera country occurred as late as 1 December at a place known as Nghullu or Muhuru in the Ilulu region; the German governor at the time, Graf Goetzen, cites an estimate of 2,000 rebels involved.⁸³ Although the rebels left 81 behind, this battle was followed by two major skirmishes at Mbemba on the Mbemkuru River and south of it in Mnero valley.⁸⁴ In the Kilwa hinterland, a band of about 1,000 rebels was stopped outside Kilwa on 26 September⁸⁵ and in November, a fortified station at Liwale, serving the supply line for an expedition to Ungoni, was attacked for five consecutive days.⁸⁶ Along with these battles, constant hit-and-run attacks took place against troops on the march in Kibata, Matumbi, Liwale and the Lindi hinterland. Nevertheless, after numerous expeditions Lindi district and Matumbi were declared largely quiet by the end of 1905. A campaign to stamp out unrest in Liwale was only started in late April 1906, but before that date the region had already been subjected to the abuses of passing troops for months.⁸⁷ After three weeks of 'energetic activity' by a *Schutztruppe* detachment, the area was declared calm in May 1906. Still, a second campaign in June 1906, chasing after retreating Ngindo rebel leaders, again met serious resistance.⁸⁸ With its conclusion, however, fighting in this

⁷⁸ Nigmann, *Geschichte der Schutztruppe*, 97.

⁷⁹ Graf A. von Goetzen, *Deutsch-Ostafrika im Aufstand 1905-7* (Berlin, 1909), 92.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 90-1. ⁸¹ MMRP 7/68/1/1 and 7/68/2/1; Goetzen, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*.

⁸² Interview with Ismael Chikwakwa Mtapule, Mnacho-Nandagala 2 Sept. 2000; MMRP 7/68/2/1. ⁸³ Goetzen, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, 164; MMRP 7/68/1/1 and 2/1.

⁸⁴ MMRP 7/68/1/1/ and 2/1; interview with Alois Ali Gomea, Mnero, 13 Sept. 2000.

⁸⁵ Goetzen, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, 93. ⁸⁶ Nigmann, *Geschichte der Schutztruppe*, 115.

⁸⁷ Goetzen, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, 225. ⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 229.

region ceased. The after-effects of the brutal suppression continued to be felt for years.

THE CENTRES OF UNREST IN RELATION TO
THE BIG MEN'S NETWORKS

The geographic spread of the rebellion coincides roughly with the division between the trading network connected to Kilwa and that linked to Lindi and Mikindani. All the regions crossed by trade routes to Kilwa joined in, whereas the main route to Lindi, along the Lukuledi valley, formed the southern limit of the extension of the rebellion. Of the big men who joined the uprising, those on the border between the two areas were the least enthusiastic.⁸⁹ Matola in Masasi, Mataka's allies on the Rovuma and Nakaam, Hatia's neighbour to the south, did not take part. All these big men had reasons for staying out of trouble. For Mataka, good relations with the German colonial government were essential while his position with the authorities of Portuguese East Africa was becoming difficult.⁹⁰ Matola had for many years profited from his alliance with the UMCA missionaries.⁹¹ Generally traders and big men with connections south of the Rovuma had less to fear from German encroachment than those whose interests lay in the network connecting Kilwa and Songea, as they had the option of shifting their trade south of the border.

But the regional boundaries of the uprising also suggest continuity with the earlier tensions in the Kilwa-centred trade network. On the face of it, strife had been diminishing. Liwale, enjoying unwonted security from Ngoni raiding and an influx of cash thanks to the rubber boom, made an unlikely epicentre of rebellion. In Lindi district, too, the heaviest fighting took place in the northwest near Mount Ilulu, a sub-district that had profited from the subjection of the Ngoni and was remote from the intrusions of the colonial administration in Lindi.⁹² When the Lindi District Officer crossed the Mwera plateau in the last days of July 1905, he had found the villagers welcoming and had taken the opportunity to reassure them that forced cotton cultivation would end.⁹³

Both the first and the second wave of research into the Maji Maji rebellion highlighted the hardships arising from colonial occupation as a reason for the rebellion. Yet if anything distinguished the regions that began and sustained the rebellion, it was not a particular depth of despair at colonial oppression.⁹⁴ This is not to deny that colonial rule was oppressive. The themes of resentment against tax collection and forced labour recur in both written and oral sources on the background to the rebellion; oral sources also document German brutality. But while these grievances were real, they

⁸⁹ MMRP 7/68/2/1 and 1/1, interview with Mwalimu Bonifasi Mchekenje Mpanda, Ndanda-Njenga, 6 Sept. 2000.

⁹⁰ Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*, 243–53; District Office, Mikindani (Zache), to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, n.d. (1900/1), B'arch R 1001/220, 94–6.

⁹¹ Ranger, 'European attitudes and African realities', 63–82.

⁹² District Office, Mikindani (Zache), to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 'Report on a journey through the district', 23 Jan. 1900, B'arch R 1001/220, 55.

⁹³ District Office, Lindi, to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 15 Sept. 1905, B'arch R 1001/723, 59.

⁹⁴ John Iliffe stated this fact in his account of the rebellion in *idem*, *Modern History*.

were not limited to this part of the colony; hence they cannot explain why the rebellion occurred here. On the other hand, some improvements had occurred in Liwale and other rubber-exporting locations during the earliest years of German rule. This observation, paradoxical if the rebellion was a response to colonial oppression, may help to explain its direction and strength. From this perspective, the rebels' aims were not only defensive. Rather, fighters tried to seize a promising moment so as to secure or extend the benefits they had reaped or hoped to reap from the ongoing changes in commercial, political and military relations. Their attacks focused not only on the German presence, but also took on local actors who threatened to take advantage of them in the ongoing struggle for opportunity.

In their first attacks, the rebels targeted so-called communal cotton fields in Kibata, north of the Matumbi Hills. The reaction against forced labour on 'communal *shambas*' is among the best-established causes of the rebellion.⁹⁵ The main organizers and beneficiaries of these *mashamba* were the *maakida*, literate district administrators whom the colonial government had appointed. But the importance of these men preceded German rule and colonial administrators tended to choose *maakida* from among coastal men considered influential and well versed in the affairs of the hinterland. The *akida* in the Mbemkuru River region was a coastal man who had at first been put in charge of a number of villages on the Makonde plateau after Machemba's expulsion. After a shootout with locals that left one of his entourage dead, he was transferred to Ilulu to help conquer the area. In Songea, one of the main slave dealers, Rashid bin Masoud, was made an *akida*. While not all the *akidas* had such a mercenary background, they were part of the push of coastal colonizers up country.

Moreover, Kibata, the first target of the rebels, was situated in a heavily commercialized area. It lay on the way from Mahenge and Liwale rubber areas to the coast, one of a network of small trading settlements that also participated in the grain trade from the Rufiji River. It also lay on the border with the Matumbi Hills, the independent stronghold supplying forest produce and occasional labourers to Uledin Mputa's fields. During the uprising, Matumbi coming down from their hills devastated coastal coconut plantations as well as the 'communal *shambas*'. Uledin Mputa did not survive the uprising; his fields were pillaged.⁹⁶ All down the coast, the western reaches of the plantation belt were foci of unrest. Along the Mavuji River, former hideout of the Kilwan rebel Hassan bin Omar, troops were needed to defend loyal *majumbe* and *maakida* against the rebellious ones.⁹⁷ The restive and independent villages where Hassan had found his support were evidently still in place. Another focus of unrest lay on the border of Kilwa and Lindi, near the mouth of the Mbemkuru River.⁹⁸ This area was home to many slaves and to the settlements of the ambitious planter Saidi Makanjira.

⁹⁵ At the time the problem was stated in John Booth and W. Schmitz, 'Nachtrag zur Denkschrift ueber die Ursachen des Aufstandes in Ostafrika', 10 Dec. 1905, B'arch R 1001/726, 163-8.

⁹⁶ List of damages to his properties by his heirs, in 'Schadensprotokolle' (reports on losses suffered in the Maji Maji rebellion), TNA G3/73.

⁹⁷ Goetzen, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, 135-6.

⁹⁸ District Office, Lindi to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 19 Sept. 1905, B'arch R 1001/723, 56.

Further south, near Lindi town, an attack on Mroweka village left four Arab settlers dead. Mroweka was the trading settlement associated with a focus of Arab settlement, especially the plantations of a member of a leading Zanzibari slave-trading family, Nassor bin Halfan. Bands of rebels were said to be 'burning and pillaging' their way along Noto plateau, 30–40 km north of Lindi and just west of the coastal belt.⁹⁹ South of Noto lay Milola, whence the Maji was taken to some of the villages in western Mwera country that participated in the sacking of the mission stations at Nyangao and Lukuledi.¹⁰⁰ In the Milola area the first German military expedition from Lindi had its first serious encounter with the rebels.¹⁰¹ At the end of 1905, Goetzen claimed that the coastal hinterland from Lindi to the Mbemkuru was the only area within Lindi district to have suffered serious damage from the uprising.

The thrust of the rebellion, then, was not merely against 'communal *shambas*' and colonial forced labour, but against the encroachment of coastal landownership and labour relations in whatever guise. Some of the participants were self-conscious, self-assertive 'backwoodsmen' defending an independent way of life, looting and striking back against coastal people. This is true for the Matumbi, who had so long held on to their independence in spite of their proximity to Kilwa. It is also evident in Libaba's¹⁰² account of the warriors from western Mwera country on their way to Nyangao, robbing every trader they could find. Moreover, the attacks on the mission stations and on Mroweka all have this character.

Yet *majumbe* from the area bordering on, but not controlled by, the plantation economy were also involved in the fighting. The mosaic of loyal and rebellious administrators in the Mavuji area, where German troops had to protect the former against the latter, was not exceptional. *Majumbe* from the coastal hinterland served in the first German expedition from Lindi.¹⁰³ German records list payments to loyal local leaders, and prizes paid to those who captured rebels.¹⁰⁴ In Kilwa, one 'Swahili' person, a headhunter for the government, delivered two rebel leaders to the Germans within a space of weeks.¹⁰⁵ Saidi Makanjira, the Yao with relatives in Kilwa who had tried to settle as a planter amidst up country people, reportedly shot himself after the Maji had been forced on him. The uprising tore apart existing economic and political networks. This polarization among local leaders may partly explain the persistence of fighting even at times when the German forces were bound up elsewhere.

The particular problems of the Liwale area help to illuminate this argument. In part, the protracted fighting here had the same cause as the area's earlier pre-eminence as a target for Ngoni raids; it lay on a major route, this time of German troops to the interior. But the scramble for opportunity had been particularly intense here during the preceding eight years, since the

⁹⁹ Goetzen, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, 85.

¹⁰⁰ MMRP 7/69/1/1.

¹⁰¹ Jacob B. Nyangali, *Habari za Wamwera* (Ndanda, 1990), 61–3; MMRP 7/68/1/1.

¹⁰² MMRP 7/68/2/1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ District Officer Ewerbeck, Lindi, to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 18 Oct. 1905, TNA G3/70, 58.

¹⁰⁵ District Office, Kilwa, to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 24 Feb. 1906 and 22 Mar. 1906, TNA G3/70, 297, 317.

subjection of the Ngoni in 1897, because of a high level of political fragmentation and competition for leadership. Oral tradition holds that local leaders from Liwale asked the Germans to build a military station in their area for protection against Ngoni raids, and that several of them, including future Maji rebels, profited greatly from cooperation with the Germans.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, they eventually began to resent the limits the German presence put on their ambitions. Thus, the uprising in Liwale fed off the tensions surrounding this struggle for opportunity, overshadowed by the increasingly felt German presence and the threat of a return of the Ngoni raiders.

Iiffe has stated that Ngindo from Liwale became the most dedicated supporters of Maji Maji.¹⁰⁷ Their attempts to promote unity among the rebels are understandable in the light of the area's vulnerability to attacks by African neighbours as well as German troops. According to Iddi Kinjalla, grandson of the *hongo* (Maji messenger) Omari Kinjalla, who carried the Maji from Liwale to Ungoni, Ngindo leaders were aware of the danger of Ngoni raiders returning to attack Liwale when they made the decision to rebel. They sought to recruit Ngoni as allies in an attempt to avert this outcome.¹⁰⁸ The figure of Omar Kinjalla, who carried the Maji to the Ngoni, was emblematic. He took on his mission only under threat of death from fellow rebels in Liwale. Yet once in Ungoni, he asserted his role as prophet actively, donning special robes and commanding various privileges, including a large share of the loot. As the rebellion began to founder, he tried to maintain his role by increasingly extravagant promises of the successes his powers would secure. Eventually he was killed by his Ngoni followers. With its mixture of prophecy and cynicism, his career exemplifies the extremes of vulnerability and dogged self-assertion that had characterized his home region in the period before the rebellion.

THE ROLE OF THE MAJI

The questions that have been raised in the 1990s about the importance of Maji aimed above all to dispel the suggestion of a consciously super-tribal and anti-colonial 'ideology of Maji Maji'. Nevertheless, the role of Maji in the rebellion remains an important issue. The questions surrounding it concern its origins and meanings as well the ways it was spread and used, especially the role of the original prophets. A separate paper would be required to do full justice to the elements of cultural continuity and innovation, of local tradition and unifying ideology in the Maji and of local improvisation and far-reaching coordination in its cult. But most important here is the role of the Maji in galvanizing political tensions and the way it related to the particular political practice of the big men.

¹⁰⁶ Interviews with Mzee Chande Hassan Kigwalilo, Liwale, 11 Oct. 2000, with Iddi Abdallah Omari Kinjalla and Mzee Mpunga, Liwale, 12 Oct. 2000.

¹⁰⁷ Iiffe, *Modern History*, 172.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Mzee Iddi Abdallah Omari Kinjalla, Liwale, 12 Oct. 2000; on Kinjalla's career also R. M. Bell, 'The Maji Maji uprising in the Liwale district', *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 42 (1950), 38-57.

In describing the aims of the Maji Maji rebels in terms of decades-old political tensions, the present study concurs with those by Monson and Wright. But it disagrees with their minimizing the importance of Kinjikitile, the best-known prophet of the Maji, and of his shrine at Ngarambi and others nearby. While long-running tensions in the region made conflict in the course of the imposition of German control likely, the extent and intensity of the uprising are impossible to explain without the Maji and its messengers. As outlined above, Southeast Tanzania was very fragmented politically. Relations among local leaders and between them and the colonial administration were ambiguous, changeable and pragmatic. They did not present a clear-cut opposition of colonizers against colonized. At least in the Southeast, it took a catalyst, i.e. the Maji and *hongo* messengers from the shrine, to transform these manifold tensions into widespread war.¹⁰⁹

To understand the effectiveness of Maji as a means of mobilization in Southeast Tanzania, it must be acknowledged that Maji, as a medicine, was a carrier of a multitude of social meanings. As recent studies have emphasized, while the Maji medicine was a weapon, similar medicines were also used for crop protection, for healing and harming, to explain the rootlessness of slaves and to explain and legitimate the power of big men.¹¹⁰ Medicines came from the forest. They were products of the wild, originating at the margins of society. While big men were credited with the ability to extract strong medicines from the wilderness, they did not have exclusive control of such resources. Maji was a case in point. It was a resource that circulated outside the big men's established networks and could be spread by visionaries and self-appointed prophets. It could speak without mediation by big men to people from all sections of the societies of the interior.

An indication of the Maji's popular appeal was the millenarian enthusiasm that accompanied it. The gatherings at Ngarambi, Kinjikitile's shrine, were held in a spirit of intense anticipation. It was said that visitors to Kinjikitile had seen their ancestors. There was also talk of all people becoming freemen after the uprising: 'we will all be the Sayyid Said's'.¹¹¹ Also, mass conversions to Islam preceded the rebellion in Liwale and parts of Mwera country.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ It should also be noted that the timing of the first attack on Kibata suggests an element of planning: it occurred after Kinjikitile's arrest, but before his hanging, i.e. at a time when his supporters had a lot to win by liberating him. See the account of the sequence of events in Otto Stollowsky, 'On the background to the rebellion in German East Africa', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 21 (1988), 677-96.

¹¹⁰ Gilbert Gwassa, 'African methods of warfare during the Maji Maji war', in Bethwell A. Ogot (ed.), *War and Society in Africa* (London, 1972), 123-49, has the fullest discussion of the Maji as war medicine. Wright, 'Maji Maji', and Sunseri, 'Famine and wild pigs', emphasize its protective and healing aspects. On the uses of Maji by elders, interview with Mzee Ibrahim Nassoro Bakari Kimbegu, Rwangwa, 18 Nov. 2000; with Shehe Ali Hassan Mnajilo, Mnacho-Ng'au, 20 Nov. 2000.

¹¹¹ Iliffe, *Modern History*, 169. The expectation of the coming of the Sayyid's government is also mentioned in 'Die Reise des hochwuerdigen Herrn Bischof Thomas Spreiter nach Matumbi und Kwiro', *Missionsblaetter von St Ottilien*, 13 (1909), 51-66, 81-7, 97-123.

¹¹² *Bezirksnebenstelle* (Sub-District Office), Liwale to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 5 Dec. 1912, TNA G 9/48, 93; Thaddeus Sunseri, 'Maji Maji and the millennium: Abrahamic sources and the creation of a Tanzanian resistance tradition', *History in Africa*, 26 (1993), 365-78.

This readiness to embrace Islam while attacking Muslim intermediaries of colonial rule indicates that people in the interior hoped to achieve something better than the *status quo ante* by participating in the rebellion. They wanted to acquire a new status, defined with reference to coastal society, as Muslim freemen. In this manner, 'backwoodspeople', ordinary villagers, displayed their awareness of the context in which the big men operated and expressed the hope of using it to their own ends.

For the big men, Maji could be both a means to assert their authority and a threat to it. Oral sources from the southeast describe two ways of obtaining it: through *hongo* messengers and through the initiative of established local leaders who went to the shrines to fetch it and applied it to their followers. *Hongo*, messengers of Maji, most of whom originated from or had visited the original Maji shrines on the Rufiji River, spread the call to arms and were closely involved in organizing the fighting all across the area considered here. Many *hongo* were obscure figures. Informants from the southern Mwera plateau described a short, red-eyed, fierce man known only by his title, who had arrived from Matumbi via Milola in the immediate coastal hinterland.¹¹³ In the Ilulu area in northwestern Mwera country, although five well-established local leaders are said to have obtained Maji directly from Kinjikitile,¹¹⁴ the chief *hongo* was someone different, a man named Mnwele. He was vaguely related to Selemani Mamba.¹¹⁵ This was a general pattern: while experienced local leaders led fighting, the experts on Maji were different people.¹¹⁶ One informant said that he was administered by the Maji twice, once by his father, and once by Selemani Mamba.¹¹⁷ Here it appears that Selemani Mamba had to recapture the initiative by repeating under his own aegis a ritual that someone else had already performed. Big men like Mamba, having built their position on providing protection against Ngoni and other threats, and accustomed to the use of demonstrative force, could scarcely afford to ignore an opportunity such as the Maji. Commoners were well placed to force them into action. Waging war had long been part of what made a big man, so that Selemani Mamba probably did not need much persuading. Still, the elusiveness – from a big man's point of view – and accessibility – from that of other aspiring leaders – of Maji might have made it difficult for him to stay out of the war. By extension, the dynamism of the Maji's spread may be understood as an effect of the efforts of many big men and would-be big men to stay ahead of each other.

Diverging opinions on who started the war – locals or strangers, leaders or commoners – are an intriguing aspect of later accounts of the uprising. In Liwale, records collected during the colonial period firmly place the blame with local *majumbe*, some of whom were said to have forced reluctant followers into war with the threat of death.¹¹⁸ Later accounts described the

¹¹³ MMR P7/69/1/1 and 2/1.

¹¹⁴ MMRP 7/68/1/1.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Issa Makolela, Rwangwa 18 Nov. 2000.

¹¹⁶ District Office Kilwa to Colonial Government, Dar es Salaam, 24 Feb. 1906, TNA G3/70; Iliffe, *Modern History*, 168–202.

¹¹⁷ MMRP 7/68/2/2.

¹¹⁸ Bell, 'The Maji Maji uprising', 45.

decision to go to war as much more consensual.¹¹⁹ In Mwera country, it was easy to blame strangers, i.e. Ngindo, but beyond that there is very little agreement on who fought the war and what it was about.¹²⁰ The change in Liwale reflects the informants' deference to the political context; they could not be expected to tell colonial officials that the rebellion had popular support. But the vagueness of later claims as to who fought and why also echoes the ambiguity characterizing the relationship of big men and their followers.

CONCLUSION

The Maji Maji rebellion has been connected to the struggle for independence as well as to precolonial, domestic and symbolic struggles. The argument above further highlights two debates: on East Africa's intensifying relations with the wider world on the eve of colonial occupation and on the encounter between the colonial state and local African politics. The rebellion was in part an attack of the interior on the coast, but it did not just pit conservative 'backwoodspeople' against forces of change from the coast. It was so forceful because all sides in it, rebels and loyalists, leaders and commoners, had long been involved in networks of control that connected the coast and the interior. Here, the rebellion illustrates the depth of the region's involvement with the forces of the wider world before colonization, the struggle to use and manipulate them and the deep-seated ambiguity in the relations of this region with the forces from beyond its borders.

The uprising also highlighted the ambiguity in the relations between big men and their followers. Hope, fear and cynicism were inextricably mixed in the motivation of the rebels. While the fates and roles of local leaders in the rebellion were very mixed, the history of the rebellion underscores the importance of distinguishing between statelessness and the absence of political leadership. The rebellion did not occur simply because the stateless people of the interior were born rebels or because social tensions ran high. It took the Maji to transform manifold tensions and discontent into action. Once started, the rebellion polarized the networks through which the big men had exercised their personal control over their followers, forcing them to take sides. In effect, the Maji Maji rebellion ended the era of independent big men. Still, it did not do away with all the elements of precolonial big man politics, such as the disdain for dynastic authority and the importance of personal networks. This was part of the heritage that this region carried over into the colonial period.

¹¹⁹ Mr Buru, Afisa wa Utamaduni, 'Wamagingo Wapinga Kutawaliwa na Wageni Liwale', Liwale, District Office of Culture, *c.* 1980; interview with Mzee Chande Hassan Kigwalilo, Liwale, 11 Oct. 2000; with Mzee Iddi Abdallah Omari Kinjalla, Liwale, 12 Oct. 2000.

¹²⁰ E.g. interviews with Tekla Abdalla Ngajuwe, Mnacho-Chimbila, 31 Aug. 2000; with Paulo Silverster Mbunda, Mnero-Ngongo, 13 Sept. 2000, with Madina Omari Ngaweje, Mnero-Kipara, 23 Sept. 2000.