CHAPTER TWO

THE NGINDO:
EXPLORING THE CENTER OF THE MAJI MAJI REBELLION

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The common tribal characteristics (Zusammengehörigkeit) of the Wangindo, the Wadonde of Liwale, and the Wandendeuli of Schabruma, who are located from Kilwa on the coast to [Lake] Nyassa, are another reason for the rapid expansion of the movement outside of the narrow confines of the Kichi and Matumbi mountains.¹

Long before Maji Maji conflict ceased, the Colonial Economic Committee was gathering evidence about its causes. In the evidence submitted, the perception offered in the quotation above was unique. It is a perception that this essay attempts to explore in detail, beginning with a survey of what might be understood by a Ngindo ‘collectivity’ in the later nineteenth century. It then embarks on a series of interlocking journeys through the Ungindo region. They take us to its central portion, Undonde; to the land bordering Ungoni, Mgende; to Mpanga in the Rufiji Valley; and to Utete, south of Mpanga, where we join the Dantz geological expedition of 1899. The rich documentation produced by this expedition allows us to establish 1899, the year in which the Germans set in place a nominal district administration, as an historical baseline. These progressions enable us to tease out the diversity of Ungindo, while the baseline helps us to establish the role of medicines, disease and the wild rubber trade in leading to outbreak of war.

The five years following our baseline are characterized by a German attempt to create alternative economic activities in anticipation of a perceived ecological destruction of the wild rubber habitat, a fear heightened by the unexpected collapse of the millet harvest hit by disease in 1900–01. This evolving economy policy was shaped in the context of proposed investment in a trans-colonial railroad to run through

the heart of the South. As increasingly dirigiste district administrations ratcheted up control over the Ngindo-speaking areas after 1903, disquiet spread among Ngindo leaders as well as the general populace. This uncertainty provided the climate in which an evolving apocalyptic promise of German destruction could be welcomed. In this climate, a previously obscure character, Abdallah Mapanda, would become the principal Ngindo leader of resistance. The essay then examines the events and strategies leading to the initial attacks on Madaba, Liwale and Mahenge, as the conflict spread beyond the Matumbi hills. The final section then briefly looks at the reshaping of Ngindo demographics over the next four decades and places these in the context of other popular movements in the South that employed elements of the spiritual toolkit also employed in the 1905 conflict.

On Being Ngindo

The obvious element of the Ngindo Zusammenghörigkeit is a linguistic one. Early in the nineteenth century there would have been Ngindo-speakers situated in across the south, between the coast and Lake Nyasa; the Rufiji and Rovuma rivers would have defined northern and southern boundaries of distribution. In the 1840s the incursion of Ngoni groups created two decades of competition and conflict that left one large Ngindo-speaking group, ‘the Wandendeuli’, under Ngoni control and another smaller group, the Ndwewe, in a tribute relationship. Around 1865 a large Ndendeule section, which had now assimilated Ngoni military structures and technology, moved north to the lower Kilombero (Ulanga) valley where they were to form a powerful raiding entity known as the Mahenge or Mbunga confederacy.2 In the southeast, other Ngindo groups in the coastal hinterland were the targets of slave raiders and were observed by a French ethnologist on Indian Ocean sugar plantations.3

Beginning in the 1870s the new stability of the Ngoni and Mbunga states precipitated an increasing number of raiding parties eastwards as far as the coast. Had an individual been able to draw a straight

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