SECTION FIVE

THE AFTERMATH: MEMORY AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

The diversity of regional and social circumstances revealed in previous chapters cautions us against assuming too readily that unity of purpose reigned among those who fought the Germans. It suggests that if Maji Maji was, as John Iliffe wrote, Tanzania’s “first collective political experience,” it became so only after the war through a retrospective process of memory and interpretation. In this final chapter, Felicitas Becker considers the aftermath of Maji Maji. She explains how the societies of southeastern Tanzania found new forms of interconnection after the war, particularly through Islam. She concludes with a fascinating example of oral storytelling about Maji Maji. Like oral accounts of Maji Maji discussed in several earlier chapters, the story presented by Becker does not rest easily alongside scholarly historiography. Its conflation of events challenges the nationalist tradition in Maji Maji historiography.

Becker also examines the possibility that Maji Maji was the cause of southeastern Tanzania’s marked underdevelopment throughout the twentieth century. She carefully points out, however, that while scholars have sometimes contended that the economic and demographic catastrophe of 1905–07 retarded development in the region, its long-term impact is not easy to disentangle from subsequent events. As she shows, the economic policies of the post-First World War British administration were probably equally responsible for consigning the southeast to deep impoverishment and reliance on labor migration.
SUDDEN DISASTER AND SLOW CHANGE:
MAJI MAJI AND THE LONG-TERM HISTORY OF
SOUTHEAST TANZANIA

Felicitas Becker

Maji Maji continues to occupy a special place throughout the war region. While the First World War was similarly devastating, Maji Maji stands alone as an attempt to get rid of colonial occupation by violent means. By contrast, the subsequent history of this region has been quiescent. The region was not at the forefront of demands for colonial reform and independence. Economically, it sank to the status of a ‘Cinderella region’ within Tanganyika during the colonial period and has remained marginal ever since. Because it fundamentally changed political relations that had unfolded themselves over several decades beforehand, Maji Maji can be considered as the genuine end of the political independence of this region. Moreover, the war was devastating enough to lead some observers to suspect it of being a main cause of the quiescence that followed. Still, however necessary it is to show the devastating effects of this war, as a cause of subsequent events it should not exclude other factors. Just as research into the war has rightly emphasised that it had long and varied antecedents, and that many dynamics within the societies of the region came together to give it its strength, the after-effects of the war deserve similarly complex treatment.

Focusing on the eastern half of the area affected by the war, the present chapter shows how Maji Maji interacted with both change and continuity. It shows, on one hand, that the ways in which people sought to cope with the aftermath of the war replicated older patterns. On the other hand, the difficulties of overcoming the aftermath were compounded by larger economic shifts attendant on colonisation and by colonial policy. At another level, religious movements in the decades after Maji Maji provide evidence of change as well as persistence of faith. Already during the war, the prophetic element represented a quest to renew society. This need for renewal continued after the war, as is evident both in the adoption of Islam and in the