

MAJI MAJI: THE TANZANIAN PEOPLE'S WAR OF NATIONAL LIBERATION AGAINST GERMAN COLONIALISM, 1904-1907 (1984)

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1. *Programme for the Play Kinjikitile - Maji Maji*, produced jointly by Sahemu ya Utungaji and Takhto Arts. Sehemu ya Utungaji, 7-10 June, 1984. 6pp
2. *Maji Maji iliikomboa Tanzania* [Kiswahili translation of No 21, above] *Taifa Leo* (Nairobi) May 26, 1984.

Eastern Africa can truly be proud to have given birth to two of the most important anti-colonial mass movements the Maji Maji in Tanzania and the Mau Mau in Kenya. Each of these made important contributions to ideologies and practices of anti-colonial warfare for people of the third world. The impact of these two wars of national liberation were and are felt far beyond the borders of the East African region. In its own time each made a contribution which is felt generations later. Each has changed the history not only of Africa, but of colonialism as a whole.

As we approach the 80th anniversary of Maji Maji, it is appropriate to look back to examine this first organised, mass movement to emerge in this part of the world.

German colonialism attacked what is today Tanzania in 1885 and claimed the land as their 'territory' through force of arms. In every part of Tanzania there was resistance to this colonial invasion. German colonialism won against the people for two reasons: their superior weapons and their colonial tactics of appointing homeguards, who in Tanzania were known as *Akidas* and *Jumbes*. The resistance of the people could not, however, be stopped. In the early period of colonialism, every nationality (like the Wazaramo, the Wamatumbi, Wangindo, the Wangoni, the Wakichi) fought the colonialists separately. It was comparatively easy for German colonialists to overcome this resistance, for although they had only a small number of their own soldiers, they made use of local homeguard soldiers and agents. These forces would be concentrated against the particular nationality that was actively resisting at a particular time.

On this foundation, colonial oppression grew. By the beginning of the twentieth century, production of cash crop had been introduced for export. The conditions of the people grew worse. The objective conditions for the Maji Maji War were being prepared: the people's very livelihood was being threatened. The high taxes imposed on the people were hitting the people hard, but they still managed to survive.

The introduction of cash crop cultivation by force however deprived people of the labour to cultivate their own *shambas* on which they produced food. Many men refused to work on the foreign controlled farms. They were severely beaten, and their labour was replaced by that of their wives and children, thus further depriving the food producing areas of their labour.

The objective conditions were strengthened by bad weather and drought of 1903 and 1904. The people's conditions grew worse. Often there was no food at all, many being driven to eat wild roots. The fame was caused by the German forcing cash crops on people instead of food crops.

All this helped to create the subjective conditions as well. The people had always been ready to resist colonialism. More and more people began to refuse to work on cash crop farms of the foreigners. By 1905, many headmen homeguards were punished by their masters, the German colonialists, because they could not force the peasants to cultivate cash crops on the plantation: this had become a common way of resisting colonialism. The headmen were imprisoned in chains or in solitary confinement. These hateful activities of forcing the peasants to give their labour increased, yet the peasants continued their refusal to work. Their main cry was to remove such suffering. But how was this to be done? Every Tanzanian nationality that had risen against German colonialism had been suppressed by the enemy's superior weapons. The people themselves were not united. Their major need was for a united organisation which could unite all the forces opposed to the German rule, provide correct military and ideological guidance, and lead them to war. All this also needed the right kind of leadership.

When these needs were met, the objective and subjective conditions were ready. The result was the Maji Maji War of national liberation, led by Kinjikitile. The major contradiction in the society just before the outbreak of hostilities was between German colonialism on the one hand and the Tanzanian people on the other. The German colonialism represented the interests of the German ruling classes and European imperialism. They were helped in Tanzania by the loyalist interests consisting of the *akida* and the *jumbe*. These were the traitors to the Tanzanian people. One of the purposes of the imperialist intrusion in Africa at this particular time was the search for raw material especially cotton. Their traditional source of cotton (U.S.A.) was no longer stable as U.S.A. itself entered the world market as a competitor. The European manufacturers had to find alternative source of raw material. These were in Egypt, Uganda and Tanzania. The German established a school in Mpanganya on the Rufiji where peasants were taught methods of growing cotton, books on cotton growing were published in people's languages. It is thus significant that Maji Maji Movement grew along the Rufiji where the colonialists had sought to grow cotton. Indeed he forced growing of cotton became one of the causes of the Maji Movement.

The Tanzanian people's basic struggle was their right to own their land and control the products of their labour. As their economic interests were related to land, their initial resistance was also organised along their nationality lines. In face of the German forces, the patriotic forces made a transition when all the nationalities united to confront their enemy. Objective conditions demanded a unity of all nationalities in order to defeat imperialism, which exploited them all equally. This transition was a major historical development in the history of resistance of third world people to colonialism. This basic lesson in unity had important implications for the struggle of peoples of Eastern Africa for the period right up to independence.

The important fact about the rise of the Maji Maji Movement is that it arose as a result of the threat to means of survival of the people. The people had been struggling for generations against nature to produce their basis necessities.

German colonialism made the struggle against this new enemy the main contradiction in society.

The Birth of Maji Maji

The first phase of the Maji Maji struggle dealt with planning and organization. A movement of such a magnitude cannot be seen in isolation from its leadership. The foremost leader who organized the whole movement was a peasant, Kinjikitile Ngwale. Based on his own bitter experiences at the hands of German colonialists and their henchmen, Kinjikitile began organizing in 1904. Over the years, the peasant-based oral medium of communication had brought news of the resistance of numerous nationalities of Tanzania to German colonialism. The brutal suppression of these had taught valuable lessons which he was to apply in his organization.

The first need was to unite all the different nationalities who had previously sought to face German colonialism on their own. Kinjikitile sent his cadres to distant areas with the message of unity and commitment to struggle. Through patient work, an organization was built up; the unity was based on the peasant oath of water (Maji). The whole movement was held together through a well worked out ideology. This ideology taught that German colonialism could be defeated on the basis of the unity of all the oppressed people; that their strength lay in their central organization which would guide their military and political actions.

For the first time, a people's movement was built up based on Kinjikitile's teachings. The Maji Maji Movement became a people's movement and *all* worked together. The workers in urban centres supported the peasants. The concept of a people's war as we know it today did not exist then, but the Maji Maji Movement certainly was one in its elementary form.

Besides the aspects of unity and a people's organization, the ideology of the Movement emphasised correct leadership and leading cadres were chosen from among the trusted supporters. They were trained in political and military aspects

of the struggle and travelled over large areas organizing people for the coming war.

Although a mass movement, the discipline of its supporters ensured that total secrecy was maintained. The German colonizers in fact knew nothing about it, even when violence broke out. It was only later that a few collaborators with German colonialism betrayed it. All communications have been conducted through oral medium and a special code language had been invented.

The movement was enriched by the experiences of all those who took part in it. In turn it responded to the needs of all oppressed people. While its overall universal message of unity and resistance applied to the country as a whole, it accommodated the particular situations and needs of different people as well. This was reflected, for example, in the use of different languages in different areas to carry the message of the movement. In addition, it resolved the particular contradictions in different areas in different ways so as to suit local conditions. This also explains the popularity of the movement over such a wide geographical area. The movement also made use of different weapons of war, learning from peasants as well as from the Germans.

The Armed Stage

The basic teaching of Kinjikitile and of the movement was that imperialism could only be defeated by an armed war. Military training, acquiring, of weapons, and general preparations for an armed struggle had been going on right from the beginning.

The armed stage of the war started in July 1905. Although Kinjikitile and other leaders felt that they were not yet ready to start war, many young and inexperienced cadres could not wait. To a certain extent, local initiative for war was in the hands of such cadres. Once the first battle was fought in one area, the news spread and activated the whole organization which was spread from Dar-es-Salaam and Kilosa in the north, West to the shores of Lake Malawi and along the border with Mozambique to the South.

Different military tactics were used, ranging from attacks on plantations, burning of towns and villages, attacks on all foreigners and homeguards, police and missionary posts. Tactics of guerrilla warfare were used when the superior German weapons could not be matched in conventional warfare.

The active stage of war lasted from one to two years in different areas. That the Maji Maji warriors could survive so long was a reflection of their strong organization and support of the people. The German military commanders accepted their military failure on the battlefield. Captain Wangenheim who led an army to fight the patriotic forces in Magenge in 1906 said, "military actions (against the Maji Maji army) will remain more or less a drop in the ocean". This failure of the military war machinery of German colonialism is even more remarkable in that large consignments of additional arms and military personnel had been brought to Tanzania to answer the might of the Maji Maji, whose armies in single battles could number well over 10,000 armed combatants. For example, the Germans brought two cruisers and their marine complements from China and the Pacific to Dar-es-Salaam. And yet in the capital there was "a fear bordering on panic" and German volunteers drilled each evening outside the railway station.

As Maji Maji victories increased with the fall of more important towns throughout the country, the Germans began to look to non-military solutions for they could not hope to defeat the Maji Maji army in a guerrilla war, although they took full advantage of their superior firepower and brutally murdered all who stood in their way. But as some leaders of the movement were killed in action, others took their position.

Just as was to happen 50 years later in Kenya during the Mau Mau war of national liberation, so in 1906, the German military used famine as a weapon of warfare. The German officer quoted earlier gave his non-military solution, thus in effect accepting defeat on the battlefield. He said, "only hunger and want can bring about a final submission. The people will be compelled to abandon their resistance completely only when the food supplies now available have been

consumed, their houses have been destroyed by constant raids, and they have been deprived of the opportunity to cultivate new fields". The German colonialists thus started a new stage of warfare in which military engagements were secondary to seizure of food and destruction of crops.

But the Maji Maji warriors did not give in easily even to this brutal, inhuman attack of the enemy. They seized food from loyalists and maintained and defended safe, liberated bases in which to cultivate. Here they were firmly supported by the people.

This stage of war continued up to August 1907 when the man-made famine finally brought the war to an end. The people had paid heavily for their fight to run their own lives. The population of Tanzania in 1905 was 4 million. Out of those, about one million occupied the areas of active warfare of Maji Maji. One estimate puts the total dead at 300,000, most of them from famine. The destruction of land was also catastrophic.

The End?

Was the war lost? Many of us are told so. And yet no people who have achieved final victory can claim to have done so without sacrifice. It is only the initial setbacks in a long journey that ensure final victory. The spirit of the Maji Maji, the unity, the victories in thousand small battles and the sacrifice all contributed to the final independence of Tanzania. It was a lasting inspiration to oppressed people of the world. As President Julius Nyerere explained, "They rose in response to a call to rebel against foreign domination". That call is as irresistible and urgent today as it was in 1904. The very response to this call is an act of patriotism in which any sacrifice is justified.

Meanwhile, Maji Maji resistance continued. After the active warfare ended in 1907, the Wamatumbi still refused to work on cotton plantations, declaring that "they would rather die of starvation in the bush than work for foreigners". During the first imperialist war (1914-18), the Wamwera attacked Germans bitterly in revenge for sufferings brought on them by the Germans during the Maji Maji war.

In the 1950's the Wagindo were still singing Maji Maji songs condemning homeguards who had refused to take the Maji oath of unity.

People's resistances will not end so long as there is foreign domination, exploitation and oppression. Small battles may be lost, but final victory is certain. Maji Maji was followed by Mau Mau which will be followed by other, even more powerful liberation movements. There is no end to resistance until exploitation ceases.

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