

# ‘THE EVILS OF LOCUST BAIT’: POPULAR NATIONALISM DURING THE 1945 ANTI-LOCUST CONTROL REBELLION IN COLONIAL SOMALILAND

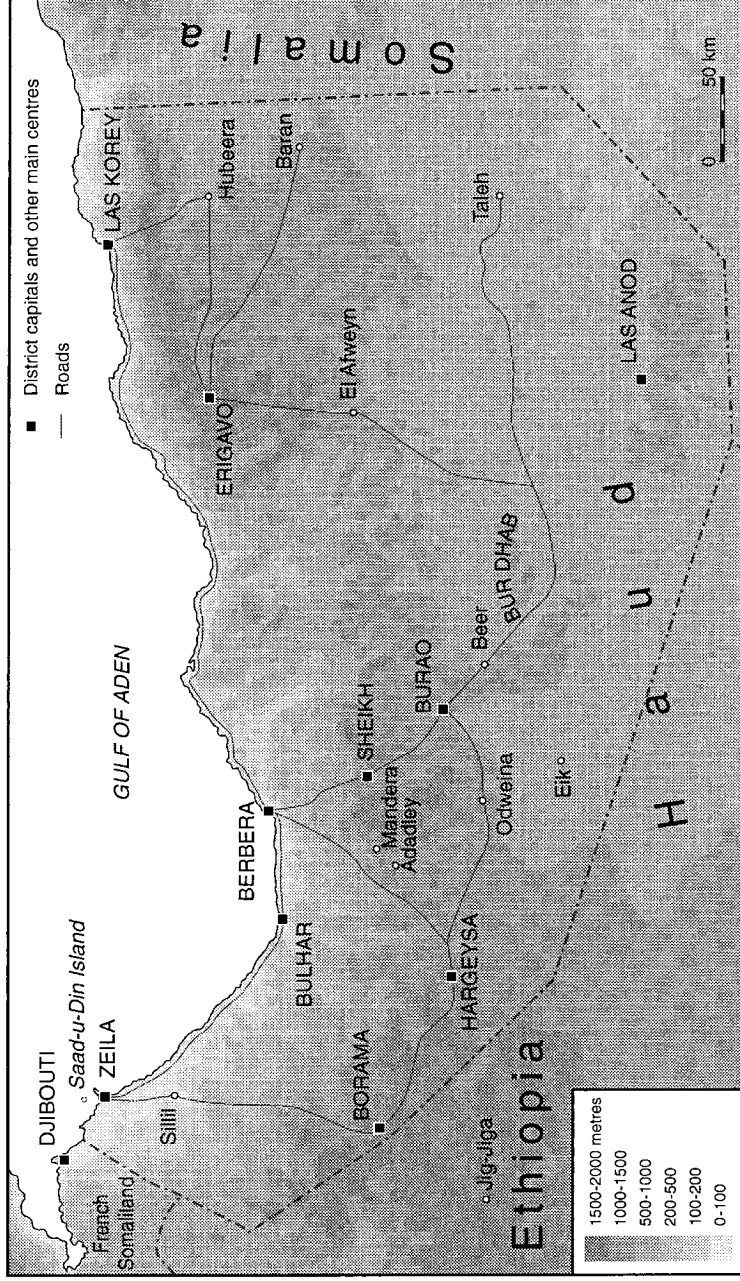
## I

Since the 1960s, students of working-class politics, women’s history, slave resistance, peasant revolts and subaltern nationalism have produced a rich and global historiography on the politics of popular classes. Except for two case studies, popular politics have so far been ignored in Somali studies, yet anti-colonial nationalism was predominantly popular from the beginning of colonial rule in 1884, when Great Britain conquered the northern Somali country, the Somaliland Protectorate (see Map).<sup>1</sup> The British justified colonial conquest as an educational enterprise because the Somalis, as Major F. M. Hunt stated, were ‘wild’, ‘violent’, ‘uncivilised’, without any institutions or government; hence the occupation of the country was necessary to begin the task of ‘educating the Somal in self-government’.<sup>2</sup> The Somalis never accepted Britain’s self-proclaimed mission. From 1900 to 1920, Sayyid Muhammad Abdulla Hassan organized a popular rural-based anti-colonial movement.<sup>3</sup> From 1920 to 1939, various anti-colonial resistance acts were carried out in both the rural and urban areas, such as the 1922 tax revolt in Hargeysa and Burao,

<sup>1</sup> This article is based mainly on original colonial sources and Somali poetry. The key documents are district weekly reports sent to the secretary to the government, and then submitted to the Colonial Office. These are the ‘Anti-Locust Campaign’ reports, and I include the reference numbers and the dates. I also use administrative reports, and yearly Colonial Office reports. All original sources are from the Public Record Office, London, and Rhodes House Library, Oxford, England. There is no historiography to discuss with respect to the rebellion, since there are no studies on the anti-locust control resistance in Somali studies. There is not even a single reference in Somali studies to the events of May, June and July 1945. In general there are so far only two articles on popular politics in Somaliland: Jama Mohamed, ‘The 1944 Somaliland Camel Corps Mutiny and Popular Politics’, *History Workshop* 51, no. 50 (Autumn 2000); Jama Mohamed, ‘The 1937 Somaliland Camel Corps Mutiny: A Contrapuntal Reading’, *Internat. Jl African Hist. Studies*, xxxiii (2000).

<sup>2</sup> Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO), CO 78/3726, Major F. M. Hunt, memorandum to the earl of Kimberley, June 1884.

<sup>3</sup> See I. M. Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy* (London, 1961); Said Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1982).



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the 1922 and 1937 mutinies in Burao and Hargeysa respectively, and the 1939 riot in Burao. From 1930 to 1939 a number of organizations were formed that articulated Somali nationalism, such as the Somali Islamic Association, founded by Haji Farah Oomar in 1933 in Aden. And from 1939 to 1960 a range of resistance acts took place, such as the 1944 mutiny, the 1945 rebellion, the 1952 strike, the 1952 anti-local-government riots, and the 1958 strike, as well as the anti-colonial politics of the nationalist associations and parties.

The context of these heterogeneous resistance acts varied according to periods: from 1900 to 1920, Somalis responded to the imposition of colonial rule; from 1920 to 1939, they resisted specific colonial policies such as the imposition of taxation in 1922, or the expansion of educational institutions in 1939; and from 1941 to 1960, they reacted to a changing world and local contexts. During the war different colonial powers (Italy and Great Britain) fought over and occupied the country with large forces of troops, and in 1954 the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement (which reconfirmed the 1897 Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty) was signed, in which one-third of Somaliland was ceded to Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup> Nationalist politics in the late colonial period focused on the recovery of the lost territory, the unification of the Somali country under various colonial powers — Somaliland (Great Britain), Somalia (Italy), Djibouti (France), and the Haud (Ethiopia) — and the independence of the Somali territories. Improvements in media and communications, the expansion of education and the growth of the built environment and population of the towns in the late colonial period to a great extent made possible the development of a large enough public sphere in the towns for these issues to be debated in a modern fashion.<sup>5</sup>

A persistent theme in anti-colonial resistance throughout the colonial period was the suspicion that the administration had secret designs to depopulate the country and introduce settlers, as the British had done in East Africa. Somalis travelled the

<sup>4</sup> For a history of the treaties and their impact on Somali society, see Jama Mohamed, 'Imperial Policies and Nationalism in the Decolonization of Somaliland, 1954–1960', *Eng. Hist. Rev.* (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> See Mohamed, '1944 Somaliland Camel Corps Mutiny', for a discussion of the development of nationalist politics in the 1940s. See also I. M. Lewis, 'Modern Political Movements in Somaliland', *Africa*, xxviii (1958); Abdi Ismail Samatar, *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia, 1884–1960* (Madison, 1989); Sadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963).

world, and knew about the impact of colonial rule and settlement on other societies. As early as the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Somalis expressed palpable fear about European conquest of the land. For example, on 10 April 1825, the brig *Mary Anne*, a British merchant ship, visited Berbera, which aroused the suspicions of the population about British motives, and so they sacked the ship, killed two crew-members and wounded the master of the ship, Captain William Lingard.<sup>6</sup> In 1854, Richard Burton made his famous journey, as Haji Abdulla, an Arab sheikh, from Zeila to Harar to Berbera without any adverse incident. In 1855, he returned to Berbera with a large entourage that aroused the suspicions of the townsfolk, particularly after they discovered that he was not, after all, an Arab sheikh, and so on 19 April 1855, 350 Somalis made a well-planned attack on Burton's camp, killed Lt Stroyan, wounded Burton, looted the camp, and captured Lt Speke, whom they asked 'what business the Frank [i.e. British] had in their country'.<sup>7</sup> One year earlier Lt Speke had visited Las Korey, where he found the 'people very suspicious'. For ten days he stayed outside the town for his own safety while the townsfolk 'debated whether the traveller was to be permitted to see the country. The voice of the multitude was as usual *contra*, fearing to admit a wolf into the fold'.<sup>8</sup> In 1855, to take another example, Haji Shermarke, the Somali governor of Zeila, refused to sell to M. Rochet, the French agent at Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), a house in the town, knowing 'how easily an Agency becomes a Fort, and preferring a considerable loss to the presence of dangerous friends'.<sup>9</sup> Even Somalis were not beyond suspicion if they worked closely with Europeans. In June 1870, the Aden government commissioned Subedar Mohamed (Isaaq), who worked for the British administration at Aden for twenty years, to persuade the Somalis of Berbera and Bulhar of the importance of relations between the British and the Somalis. When Subedar Mohamed landed at Berbera on 8 June rumours spread that he represented British colonial interests, and the townsfolk, alarmed at 'the

<sup>6</sup> Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa: or, An Exploration of Harar* (London, 1856), i, 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 104.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 116.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 14. The French exacted revenge against him. In June 1859, the French consular agent at Aden, M. Lambert, kidnapped him and confined him to a lock-up in a French ship where Shermarke lost his mind and died in 1861. PRO, FO 78/3185, Mr Colquhoun to Lord Russell, 6 June 1861.

prospect of losing their independence', 'resorted to arms' and rioting the next day, 'in which one Somalee [*sic*] was killed and several persons were seriously wounded'.<sup>10</sup>

By 1884, the wolf had entered the fold, so to speak. Thereafter, Somalis were concerned about maintaining their traditional ways of life, and particularly their control over the land. In 1884, for instance, Farah Nur, who witnessed the scramble over the Somali country by imperial powers, represented it in eschatological terms: imperial subjugation of the land and the people would destroy the country and its inhabitants.<sup>11</sup> The end of time, the final destiny, the apocalypse, is a powerful theme in Islamic thought and popular Muslim culture.<sup>12</sup> It was a central theme in Haji Adan Afqalooc's 1945 poem 'Raqdii Bashir' ('The Corpse of Bashir'): colonial policies had the object of turning the people into slaves, and handing over the 'place where you pasture *Daawad* [the land]' to 'a man who owns a car and an aeroplane [settlers]'. The result would be the extermination of the Somali people. The fears of the people about colonial rule were articulated in various ways: rumour as well as poetry.<sup>13</sup> A good example

<sup>10</sup> PRO, FO 78/3186, government of India, foreign department, to the duke of Argyll, secretary of state for India, 10 June 1870. In 1870, the Egyptians began their attempt to control the coastal towns, particularly Berbera, Bulhar and Zeila. By the end of 1870, they were able formally to declare their conquest of the towns as well as of Harar. But this was a matter of the waving of flags rather than actual control. As early as 1866, the Egyptians attempted to assert control over Berbera by distributing 'money amongst the elders of the tribes in the hope of securing an expression of allegiance. But the Somalles showed no signs of surrendering their independence . . . On the contrary those who were questioned on the subject professed their readiness, if need be, to fight in defence of their rights. To the hoisting of a foreign flag they attached no importance'. PRO, FO 78/3186, Lt-Col. Merewether, political resident, Aden, to the secretary to government, Bombay, 24 Feb. 1866.

<sup>11</sup> 'Ingriis, Amxar iyo Talyani / way akeekamiye / arladaa la kala boobayaa kii u itaal roone / ana waa ii akhuru sabaa iligyadiisiye.' ('The English, Italians and Ethiopians / are scrambling over the land / each taking according to might / as for me / this is the end, the apocalypse.') B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis, *Somali Poetry: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1964), 57.

<sup>12</sup> Yet the issue has received hardly any interest in Islamic studies. Julia Clancy-Smith, 'Saints, Mahdis, and Arms: Religion and Resistance in Nineteenth-Century North Africa', in Edmund Burke III and Ira Lapidus (eds.), *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements* (Berkeley, 1988), 60. See also P. Von Sivers, 'The Realm of Justice: Apocalyptic Revolts in Algeria, 1849–1879', *Humaniora Islamica*, i (1973).

<sup>13</sup> The role of rumour in popular politics in Somaliland has been briefly discussed in Mohamed, '1944 Somaliland Camel Corps Mutiny'. Other scholars have dealt with the role of rumour in popular politics. Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* (Durham, NC, 1999); James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven, 1985); Jean-Noel Kapferer, *Rumors: Uses, Interpretation, and Images* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1990). For a recent book that includes the key essays and debates on subaltern

is the 1944 Somaliland Camel Corps mutiny, in which the fear about 'East Africanization' justified the mutiny and popular support for the askaris. Rumour or the 'war news' had always been an important weapon of the weak: an 'anonymous tale without author but many retailers' that embodied an ideological 'critique of things as they are as well as a vision of things as they should be'.<sup>14</sup> The critique of 'things as they are' by rumours, as by poetry, articulated anxieties about colonial policies and intentions that legitimated popular anti-colonial protest.<sup>15</sup> The same thing can be said about popular nationalism in Somaliland that Gareth

(n. 13 cont.)

politics see Nvinyak Chaturvedi (ed.), *Mapping the Subaltern and the Postcolonial* (London, 2000). See also the contributions to the study of rumour by Luise White, 'Tsetse Visions: Narratives of Blood and Bugs in Colonial Northern Rhodesia, 1931–1939', *Jl African Hist.*, xxxvi (1995); Luise White, 'Vampire Priests of Central Africa: African Debates about Labor and Religion in Colonial Northern Zambia', *Comparative Studies in Society and Hist.*, xxxv (Oct. 1993); Ann Laura Stoler, "'In Cold Blood": Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives', *Representations*, no. 37 (Winter 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 22, 282, 23. Scholars analyse rumour in different ways. White and Stoler, for instance, read rumour 'conservatively' because they reject the idea that there is correlation between rumour and political activities. Europeans were represented in colonial central Africa during the 1930s as 'banyama' (vampires) not because they were vampires but because Africans were confused about European rituals in Catholic churches. (White, 'Tsetse Visions', 238.) Rumours, then, were ways in which Africans debated and consumed modernity. (White, 'Vampire Priests'.) Stoler also argues that rumours could not be 'easily and neatly read', because they 'occupied a charged cultural space for planters, military personnel, and civil servants'. As such they did not represent any consciousness of the colonized or anti-colonial resistance. (Stoler, 'In Cold Blood', 153; italics hers.) But other scholars, such as Adam Hochschild, read politically the representation of Europeans in the Belgian Congo between 1885 and 1910 as cannibals. Africans represented them as cannibals because colonial rule brought about the death of at least ten million Africans. Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York, 1998), 166. Scholars who try to reconstruct popular consciousness by reading rumour and other speech acts of the popular classes take a 'phenomenological approach'. Rumour produced by the popular classes articulates a political consciousness in cases involving unequal power relations. (Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 42, 46.)

<sup>15</sup> Frank Furedi, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third World Nationalism* (London, 1994), 41. See also T. O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896–7* (London, 1967); T. O. Ranger, 'Connections between "Primary Resistance" Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa', 2 pts, *Jl African Hist.*, ix (1968); T. O. Ranger, 'Resistance in Africa', in Gary Y. Okihiro (ed.), *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History* (Amherst, 1986); Charles Van Onselen, *Chibaro* (London, 1976), 227, who maintains that everyday politics formed the 'woof and warp of worker consciousness'; John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester, 1993), who argues that nationalism is a form of politics in opposition to the state, colonial or otherwise.

Stedman Jones said about working-class identity: politics over land produced nationalist consciousness.<sup>16</sup>

## II

In early May 1945, locust swarms descended upon Somaliland. The Locust Control Department responded with an energetic campaign of locust control in which it attempted to distribute and 'set poisoned bait for young hoppers' throughout the countryside.<sup>17</sup> The popular classes in both the rural areas (pastoralists) and urban areas (new poor migrants to the towns from the countryside) resented the campaign because they 'attribute[d] losses of stock to the poison [bait] — in some cases with justification, due to careless laying of the bait — and disorders resulted'.<sup>18</sup> 'Violent demonstrations were staged throughout the Protectorate' as far east as Baran, and as far west as Zeila, where 'bait-dumps were burned and employees of the Locust Control Department attacked'.<sup>19</sup> Popular resistance to the anti-locust campaign began in Burao, where in mid-May a large crowd demonstrated against the spreading of poison bait on the 'grounds that it is poisoning stock and infecting pastures, and water supplies'.<sup>20</sup> The resistance then spread to Berbera, where demonstrations against the anti-locust programme erupted, in which 'women took the leading part', stoning the senior police officer and wrecking his car. At the end of May, the resistance spread to Hargeysa where various groups petitioned the district commissioner, and demonstrations and rioting took place against the distribution and use of poison bait. For instance, in late May in Hargeysa, after a Friday prayer, religious leaders lectured the 'crowd on the evils of "locust bait and prostitution"'. The crowd, which consisted of a 'couple of thousand', rushed into a quarter of the town where a few prostitutes resided, and 'started looting their houses' for an hour and a half, and then attacked the police with stones, which urban

<sup>16</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class* (Cambridge, 1983), 19.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Laurence, *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (Toronto, 1988), 241.

<sup>18</sup> Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Colonial Office Annual Report on the Somaliland Protectorate, 1948* (London, 1949), 31.

<sup>19</sup> Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration of the Occupied Territories in Africa during the Years 1941–1947* (London, 1948), 481; Colonial Office, *Colonial Office Annual Report*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> PRO, CO 535/141/9, G. T. Fisher, Anti-Locust Campaign, 5 June 1945. The remainder of this paragraph and the next are based on this document.

Somalis affectionately refer to as the 'missiles of the weak' (*madfac al-masakin*). No one was killed during the riot but some members of the police were injured and the skull of the commissioner of the police, Colonel Leslie, was fractured. Those at the vanguard of the rioting were women, children, unemployed youth, and members of the disbanded Somaliland Camel Corps. The attack on the prostitutes — the most vulnerable group of women in the town — as well as the nationalist narratives that ignored the role of women in the revolt, were a central part of the processes that gendered the nationalist movement, as I will discuss in some detail in section III below.

The people's fears and anxieties about the anti-locust control policy were expressed through 'very wild and exaggerated rumours' which 'have gone so far as to suggest that it is the government's policy to destock the country in the interests of soil conservation, by deliberately spreading bait to kill stock. Further the polluted meat is said to be dangerous to human life, and that its effects only appear months later'. The administration attempted to repress such 'mischievous propaganda'. On 4 June, for instance, the district commissioner of Burao, Major Chambers, met with priests and some *aqils* (tribal chiefs), 'to warn them that to attribute such motives to Government was seditious, and persons found guilty of fabricating or repeating such stories would be tried and punished'. The administration was confident that by adopting a threefold strategy the rumours and the disturbance could be 'stifled at birth, or even prenatally', at the same time continuing with the anti-locust campaign. First, the number of political officers and administrators in the country was to be increased. The object was to send to each district at least one 'administrative officer to devote his whole time reassuring the people' that the campaign was not directed against the pastures, the stock, or their health. Second, the religious leaders were to be arrested and persecuted as they were suspected of inciting the resistance. Third, the locust destruction squad was directed to act carefully in the storage and laying of poison bait, and any cases of loss of stock attributable to poison bait were to be quickly investigated and compensation paid where appropriate. Despite these precautionary measures designed to reassure the people, put an end to the rumours, and stifle the disturbance quickly, the administration was painfully aware of the inadequacy of the measures, since 'any question touching the live-stock of Somalis



is dangerous', and so the administration 'prepared beforehand for widespread agitation which may be violent in some localities'. The administration was convinced that the priests would play the key role in such 'widespread agitation' in an attempt to re-establish their 'influence and power over the people'. They considered, the report added apprehensively, 'the time favourable to give us [the administration] a demonstration' of their power.

The administration was apprehensive about the priests because of the tradition of priestly involvement in popular politics, to which they gave a common language, themes, imagery and objectives.<sup>21</sup> The priests never formed a privileged clergy, for like the rest of the population, they were embedded in everyday life activities: some were pastoralists, others farmers and traders, and many often political leaders of lineages; in fact there is a brotherhood, the Timaweyn ('Those with long hair') in the Nugal region, which is a purely trading brotherhood.<sup>22</sup> Overall, priests played both sacred and profane roles: they led the prayers in the mosque, oversaw religious celebrations, assessed compensation for injuries, mediated conflicts, blessed the sick, and solemnized marriages.<sup>23</sup> Occasionally, a charismatic figure, such as Sayyid Muhammad Abdulla Hassan, emerged to articulate the resentment, fears, and grievances of the people, and unified popular resistance to colonial rule. Because of such a tradition, the administration anticipated a 'trial of strength between the wadads [priests] and Government, particularly as it has not been uncommon in such cases in the past history of the country for the wadads to win'.<sup>24</sup> The 'previous victories' of the priests in 1922, when they forced the government to change its policies with respect to taxation, and in 1939, when

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy*, 213; Said Samatar, *Oral Poetry*. Such involvement includes that by the Sayyid, Sheikh Isman Nur and Sheikh Mohamed Nur, to mention just a few. Only the politics and poetry of the Sayyid have been subjected to extended analysis. The other figures have so far been ignored in Somali studies. Sheikh Isman Nur was an important figure in the resistance to the anti-locust control programme in the Hargeysa district. He is mentioned below, but not discussed in detail. Sheikh Mohamed Nur was a key figure in the 1939 riot in Burao. All were Sufis, and played key political roles in the country.

<sup>22</sup> There are no studies on the Timaweyn brotherhood, who were distinguished physically by their long hair that reached down to their shoulders. The main object of the brotherhood was trade; all recruits were given lessons in the scripture and in the art of trade. Their commercial headquarters was in Burao, while their religious base was in a settlement in the Nugal region. They owned shops, trucks, and large stores (*bakhaar*).

<sup>23</sup> Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy*, 213–15.

<sup>24</sup> PRO, CO 535/141/9.

they succeeded in defeating the educational policies of the government, must not be allowed to take place again. In this 'trial of strength', the government must not back down, and the anti-locust campaign must continue with 'full vigour'. Each locust-laying party must be accompanied by members of the police, a tribal representative (*aqil*), and a pro-government priest 'selected from the local tribes' who would 'be paid for his work'.<sup>25</sup> The administration was thus prepared to proceed with the locust control programme, and to persecute the priests in order to pre-empt any role that they might play in inflaming resistance.

If the administration was apprehensive about popular nationalism, the rural folk were suspicious about the policies and aims of the administration. In the late colonial period, the administration ended the old policy of 'care and maintenance' and initiated social and welfare policies in the rural as well as urban areas, and so the 'old days of the coast administration based on Berbera' were 'gone for ever'.<sup>26</sup> One area the new development policies targeted — which is relevant to the context of the revolt — was the protection of the ecology of the country. The traditional Somali economy was based predominantly on camel and sheep farming, which depended heavily on a 'pulsatory movement' in which pastoralists moved their flock in the rainy seasons to the Haud and back to the interior plateau in the dry seasons.<sup>27</sup> The imposition of borders during the colonial period and the long pacification wars against the Sayyid (1900–20) disrupted the old pulsatory movement of the pastoralists, who were forced as a result of the insecurity created by the colonial wars to concentrate their livestock in the interior plateau. The result was, as Ismail Mire put

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> PRO, INF 1/567/339, deputy principal information officer, Hargeysa, to principal information officer, East African command, 4 July 1944; I. M. Lewis, *The Modern History of Somaliland* (New York, 1965), 132.

<sup>27</sup> H. B. Gilliland, 'An Approach to the Problem of the Government of Nomadic Peoples: With Special Reference to Experience in Eastern British Somaliland', *South African Geog. Jl*, xxix (1947), 51. There are four ecological zones in the country: the coastal zone (Guban), the mountain range (Golis), the interior plateau (Oogo) and the southern forests and plains (Haud). The coastal zone is driest; the mountain range wettest. But the mountains were not suitable for camel herding, and so pastoralists preferred the Haud and the interior plateau which had excellent pasture areas until the colonial era. Unlike the interior plateau, the Haud has no permanent water, and so pastoralists could pasture their stock there only during the wet seasons when livestock used rainwater. The pulsatory movement protected the ecology in the pre-colonial era because neither zone was ever overused, as both zones were always given time to recover from pasturing and exploitation.

it in 1925, a 'great disaster'.<sup>28</sup> Overgrazing, soil erosion and ecological degradation weakened the rural economy and increased rural poverty. By the late colonial period, the pastoral economy was experiencing deep crisis because the countryside that used to 'yield fine grazing' became a 'barren, dusty, wind-swept waste'.<sup>29</sup> The 1945 report on rural poverty, for instance, made a direct connection between ecological decline, rural poverty and short-distance migration from the countryside to the towns.<sup>30</sup> The administration adopted two policies to protect the ecology: first, the reduction of livestock by encouraging its export to the Arabian market, and second, the imposition of grazing control. For the pastoralists the first policy posed no danger at all, as the export of livestock to the Arabian market had been increasing since the 1930s.<sup>31</sup> But the second policy was viewed with suspicion and resentment since grazing restrictions meant that the pasture areas available for livestock were to be further reduced and, ironically, led to more intensive overgrazing in the unrestricted areas. What made the rural folk even more suspicious of government intentions in 1945 was the use of poison bait, which killed livestock, and which they used as incontrovertible evidence of government policy to reduce livestock by any means necessary. As already pointed out, the rumours made a direct connection between soil conservation and destocking, which expressed, above all else, an undercurrent of fear and apprehension about the viability of traditional life. As everyday life in the rural areas deteriorated, and as development policies became more interventionist, the fears of the pastoralists became increasingly apocalyptic. For them the decline of traditional life signified the end of time, but the administration ignored the deeper frustrations and fears of the pastoralists, and wrongly assumed that the rumours

<sup>28</sup> Ismail Mire, 'A Hoopoe Rebuked', in *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, trans. B. W. Andrzejewski, with Sheila Andrzejewski (Bloomington, 1993), 52–3. He composed the poem during the 1925 drought, and depicted a world in which livestock and the wild animals, even the vultures, perished of hunger, and in which people hitherto rich in livestock became 'too weak to rise at the assembly ground'. 'In the vale that used to yield fine grazing', he added, 'No beast now blows'. This 'great disaster' continued to haunt the imagination of the population up to the 1940s and beyond.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*; PRO, WO 230/94, Col. F. R. W. Jameson, commander of civil affairs, East African command, 'Tour Impressions', 5 Sept. 1943.

<sup>30</sup> Rhodes House Library, Oxford, 751.14.S.2/1945, Major G. E. Curtis and Capt. E. J. Lang, 'Report of Committee Enquiring into Pauperism in British Somaliland, 1945'.

<sup>31</sup> Abdi Ismail Samatar, *State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia*.

about the intentions of government policies were formulated and fanned by the priests alone.

On the afternoon of 5 June, for instance, the police arrested six priests in Hargeysa suspected of being leaders in the demonstrations, among whom was Sheikh Bashir, who came from Burao to Hargeysa in order to fan the fires of discontent. After the arrest of the priests, the police were 'followed by a crowd who rushed the station, and took them [the priests] away'.<sup>32</sup> Immediately after, another police patrol headed by the district commissioner was organized to rearrest the six priests removed from police custody. The patrol arrested only one priest. Yet again the police patrol was followed by 'excited crowds' intent on freeing the priest. The crowd threw stones at the police. The district commissioner ordered the crowd to disperse, but the crowd ignored him, and he responded by ordering the police to fire at the crowd. One man was killed and three others wounded, after which rioting subsided and the police were able to apprehend another three priests rescued by the crowd. Only Sheikh Bashir and Sheikh Mohamed Nur were not arrested: Sheikh Bashir escaped to Beer, and Sheikh Nur to the Reserve Area. Moreover, the police arrested over forty people accused of rioting.<sup>33</sup> Through tough policing measures, the administration was able by 9 June to end rioting in the urban centres.

Once urban resistance ended, the anti-locust campaign team confidently began to lay poison bait throughout the countryside. On 12 June, for instance, the anti-locust team accompanied by two *aqils* and eight armed rural police officers laid bait at Haleya, ten miles from Hargeysa. The next day, another team laid bait at Hora Hedle, thirty miles north of Hargeysa, with the co-operation of the local population. In other rural areas, however, the resistance to the anti-locust campaign was just beginning. On 8 June a crowd of pastoralists in Dila (Borama district) destroyed 130 bags of bait valued at Rs (Indian rupees) 2,000; and on 17 June, there was 'further demonstration at Dila' against the anti-locust campaign. But 'the mob was tactfully handled by Lieut. [Mathew] Edminson',<sup>34</sup> even though throughout the Borama district the pastoralists 'were all prepared to take up their

<sup>32</sup> PRO, CO 535/141/9, report by military governor's office, 6 June 1945.

<sup>33</sup> PRO, CO 535/141/9, Anti-Locust Campaign (hereafter ALC), ref. no. MG-262/3104, 9 June 1945.

<sup>34</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-266/116/3104, 19 June 1945.

spears and massacre every locust officer in the area'.<sup>35</sup> Lt Edminson visited Dila, where the most intense reaction to the programme emerged, in order to explain to the people why the government undertook the anti-locust campaign. When he arrived there a meeting was arranged with the pastoralists that ended in discord: the pastoralists demanded the immediate cessation of the locust control campaign, and Lt Edminson refused to take such action; the pastoralists threatened him, but he remained unmoved. Once the meeting ended and he went to his camp, the pastoralists 'made up their mind to kill him'. At dawn, they attacked his camp, but just before the attack commenced, he slipped out of the camp, and escaped in the direction of Zeila. The pastoralists entered his camp, but could not find him; furious that they were 'cheated of a victim', they 'burned the tents, slashed his clothes and even speared his bush hat'.<sup>36</sup> They then quickly followed him, and caught up with him in a teashop on the road to Zeila. 'It was too late for prolonged talk', and Lt Edminson, cornered in an isolated area, and facing men committed to killing him, improvised in order to save his life. He told his hostile audience: 'If this locust poison does not kill a man, will you believe it won't kill your camels?' They were intrigued, and so he 'scooped up a handful of the poisoned bran and ate it himself'. Curious, they waited for the effect. Nothing happened. He did not die; and so they dispersed, convinced by the demonstration that the poison bait was not so harmful after all.<sup>37</sup> And so Lt Edminson was able to reach a signed agreement with the leaders of the pastoralists that henceforth they would co-operate with the anti-locust campaign, after which the destruction of hoppers proceeded normally.<sup>38</sup>

Lt Edminson's success in defusing resistance in the district was not replicated in other areas because district commissioners were neither as daring nor as imaginative. On Sunday, 10 June, for instance, Major Hare and Captain Henfrey, who were involved in the anti-locust campaign, were 'suddenly attacked by four Somalis, one of whom was armed with a knife, a few miles outside Hargeysa' who robbed them of money and other valuables. According to the report, this act of robbery did not reflect the

<sup>35</sup> Laurence, *Prophet's Camel Bell*, 241.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-266/116/3104, 19 June 1945.

general 'feelings of unrest in the districts'.<sup>39</sup> But that was an understatement, for the robbery in fact did reflect the general feeling of unrest in the country, and symbolized the challenge of the rural folk to British authority. The criminal acts of the social bandit were as political as the activities of the rest of the protesters against the anti-locust programme, as both represented an act whose objective was nothing but the dismantling of the structures of power and the restoration of the viability of traditional life.<sup>40</sup> The politics of the protesters took different forms, such as robbery, demonstration, rioting, preaching, the spread of rumours and the composition of poetry. For instance, in both Eik, thirty miles south-west of Burao, and Odweina, fifty miles south-west of Burao, demonstrations were held against the treatment of the land with poison bait. In Odweina, the 'population was hostile to Locust Control', and refused to co-operate with the anti-locust campaign so much that 'escorted labour' for the laying of bait was sent from Hargeysa, and even then the district commissioner of Burao could not 'guarantee guards' and security for them.<sup>41</sup> In other areas, the pastoralists attacked, sacked and looted locust control property in, for instance, Mahgule and Warable in the Burao district. Accompanied by Lt Dalziel and Captain Davis, as well as by police armoured cars, the district commissioner of Burao, Major Chambers, moved his headquarters into the interior near Odweina in order to tackle directly the resistance to the anti-locust campaign.<sup>42</sup> Major Chambers adopted three tactics to settle the district: a demonstration of force through armoured police cars, persuasion and political pressure.

Politically, he put 'administrative pressure on the Aqils' of the district to co-operate with the anti-locust programme and to 'guarantee that there would be no further trouble; that they would tour the country and instruct other sections to co-operate; that they would report individuals or sections likely to make further trouble; and further, offer labour for the campaign if required', accept liability for the losses of bait and rations, and 'bring in

<sup>39</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-264/3104, 13 June 1945.

<sup>40</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (New York, 1959); Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People* (London, 1998), 210.

<sup>41</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-269/302/3104, 4 July 1945; PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-264/3104, 13 June 1945.

<sup>42</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-266/116/3104, 19 June 1945.

men wanted for rioting and burning'.<sup>43</sup> But the *aqils* were not in a position to influence the people to co-operate with the policy. Unlike 'headmen' in colonial South Africa<sup>44</sup> or warrant chiefs in Nigeria, *aqils* had no institutional power in Somaliland because indirect rule, which has been defined by A. E. Afigbo as 'total conquest through [indigenous] institutional control',<sup>45</sup> was never established. The object of indirect rule, according to Lord Lugard, was the creation of a 'community of interests' between the administration and the local 'rulers' (chiefs) so that 'the personal interests of the rulers must rapidly become identified with those of the controlling power'.<sup>46</sup> Indirect rule relied on local customs of rule, which the British took the *aqils* to represent, even though it 'was not founded on Somali custom'.<sup>47</sup> The Egyptians introduced the *aqil* system in the 1870s, when they controlled, albeit tenuously, Berbera, Zeila, Bulhar and Harar, and appointed 'tribal representatives who are still described as Aqils . . . with the . . . intention of undermining the inconvenient and then considerable power of tribal chiefs'<sup>48</sup> in the interior, who refused to recognize or collaborate with the Egyptians. The British inherited the system and at first assumed that it was an institution with a long tradition, but it soon became obvious that the *aqil* system was not only of recent origin but ineffective as well. From 1900 to 1920, for instance, the administration sought to increase the power of the *aqils* in order to use them as a mobilizing force against the Sayyid Muhammad Abdulla Hassan. The administration formed 'tribal militia' and 'a civil organization of the tribe[s]'<sup>49</sup> which was to include only 'men of proven

<sup>43</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-262/3104, 9 June 1945; PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-266/116/3104, 19 June 1945.

<sup>44</sup> Colin Bundy, "'We Don't Want Your Rain, We Won't Dip': Popular Opposition, Collaboration and Social Control in the Anti-Dipping Movement, 1908-16', in William Beinart and Colin Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* (London, 1987), 209.

<sup>45</sup> A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929* (London, 1972), xii; Obaro Ikime, 'The Establishment of Indirect Rule in Northern Nigeria', *Tarikh*, iii (1970).

<sup>46</sup> Frederick D. Lugard, 'The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa: Methods of Ruling Native Races', in Roy Richard Grinker and Christopher B. Steiner (eds.), *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation* (Oxford, 1997), 582.

<sup>47</sup> PRO, WO 32/10863, annual report on the administration of British Somaliland, 1943.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> PRO, CO 879/87, acting commissioner H. E. S. Cordeaux to Mr Lyttelton, 23 Aug. 1905.

influence and authority among the sections [tribes]'.<sup>50</sup> But neither the 'tribal militia' nor the 'civil organization' of the 'tribes' produced any results. The 'civil organization' ended up consisting only of the *aqils*. Since indirect rule could not be constructed on the slim influence of the *aqils*, the administration used direct rule, or as one report noted, 'drift[ed], quite unwillingly, from a Protectorate into a certain sort of [colonial] Administration',<sup>51</sup> in which the district commissioner became a 'tribal Sultan wielding arbitrary powers according to what he thought was a reasonable compromise between local ideas of customary right and his own European ideas of moral justice'.<sup>52</sup> The only function of the *aqils* within the framework of direct rule was to serve as intermediaries between the government and the people, but without any institutional power.

During the disturbance, however, Major Chambers had no choice but to use the *aqils*, who assented to all his demands. But since they were constrained by their limited institutional role within the society, their promises came to naught. For example, once Major Chambers and the police moved to the interior, another riot took place on 15 June, just 'outside Burao in connection with grazing restrictions'.<sup>53</sup> As mentioned already, a link was made in the circulating rumours between the grazing control policies of the government — which rumours depicted as a policy whose object was to destock the country — and the treatment of the pastures with poison bait; besides, the pastoralists resented the restrictions imposed on their grazing rights.<sup>54</sup> In general, the resistance to the district administration in the areas around Odweina and Eik, and throughout the interior of the Burao district, led to an impasse between the district administration and the people: the pastoralists attacked, harassed, and intimidated the Locust Control Department staff, which severely limited the ability of the staff to treat the land with poison bait.

<sup>50</sup> PRO, CO 537/44, memorandum by H. E. S. Cordeaux on Somaliland, 30 June 1906.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Rhodes House Library, Oxford, MSS Afr.S.1104, Capt. A. C. A. Wright, 'The Interaction of Various Systems of Law in British Somaliland with Particular Relation to the Payment of Blood Money and the Infliction of the Death Sentence, 1942'.

<sup>53</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-266/116/3104, 19 June 1945.

<sup>54</sup> See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton, 1996), 194–5, for a discussion of resistance throughout Africa inspired by rejection of restrictions imposed by governments on the rights of people to pasture their livestock in 'nature' reserves.



By 15 June, the disturbance spread eastwards to the Erigavo district where 'unruly mobs' staged 'serious riots at El-Afweyn' and in Erigavo against the locust control programme.<sup>55</sup> The most serious riot in the Erigavo district took place in El Afweyn on 29 June, when a party of bait-layers protected by a police armoured car was attacked. The police opened fire, which led to the death of one demonstrator who was 'believed to have been a minor mullah of some standing'. Even though by 30 June 'active opposition was decreasing' at El Afweyn, nonetheless 'there were no signs of co-operation'.<sup>56</sup> The people of El Afweyn did not just riot and demonstrate but also sent delegations to other areas, such as the Las Anod district, where there was co-operation with the anti-locust campaign: on 26 June a letter was sent by '[t]he Muslims of El Afwein [Afweyn]' to the people of Las Anod in which they urged them to 'resist [the] spreading of bait'; they also sent two emissaries to Jig-Jiga 'for the same purpose'.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the people of El Afweyn adopted various strategies in opposing the locust control policy: they used rioting, and non-cooperation, and attempted to create unity across districts, and even across borders, in opposition to the locust control policy. It was at this critical juncture, when there 'were no signs of co-operation' with the administration in either the Burao or Erigavo districts, that Sheikh Bashir yet again intervened in this 'wide-spread revolt'.<sup>58</sup>

### III

Little is known about the background of Sheikh Bashir, because there are no studies on his life or politics. He was born in 1913 at Taleh, the headquarters of the dervishes; he was a nephew of the Sayyid.<sup>59</sup> According to the Somali novelist and historian Farah Cawl, the Sayyid had an important influence on Sheikh Bashir: he grew up in Taleh and as a young boy probably listened to his poetry and conversations, an influence that impelled him to a 'war against the British'.<sup>60</sup> He opened a Sufi *tariqa* (religious

<sup>55</sup> Colonial Office, *Colonial Office Annual Report*, 31.

<sup>56</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-269/302/3104, 4 July 1945.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration*, 481.

<sup>59</sup> Farah Mohamed Jama Cawl, *Garbaduubka Gumeysiga* [Colonial Oppression] (Mogadisho, 1978), 139; Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration*, 481.

<sup>60</sup> Cawl, *Garbaduubka Gumeysiga*, 139.

order) in Beer, a small village ten miles south-east of Burao, sometime in the 1930s, where he preached, and taught the Koran and the Hadith. His ideology was characterized by a millennial bent. 'The essence of millenarianism', wrote Eric Hobsbawm, is the 'hope of a complete and radical change in the world shorn of all its present deficiencies'.<sup>61</sup> First, he rejected the 'evil' of colonial rule; second, he actively sought to bring about radical change through war — he had been preaching since 1939 'that the end of the world is approaching, and that a religious war should be started' to hasten it;<sup>62</sup> and third, he taught his followers 'to resist any Government policy'.<sup>63</sup> The 'end of the world' signified for him the end of the colonial world — the 'evil' of colonial rule — and so resistance to 'any' and every government policy was central to the ideology and politics of his *tariqa*.

He first 'achieved prominence in 1939',<sup>64</sup> an eventful year in Somaliland because the administration adopted two ambitious policies: the opening of schools and the disarming of the pastoralists. Both policies failed. The 1939 riot in Burao in which Sheikh Bashir played a 'prominent' role brought an end to the educational policies of the administration.<sup>65</sup> The disarmament policy was also opposed and frustrated by Sheikh Bashir, who 'organised a band of some hundred armed tribesmen who encamped themselves at Ber [Beer] near Burao' and essentially dared the administration to enforce the disarmament policy.<sup>66</sup> The administration ignored the challenge because it did not want to 'draw attention to his importance' in a period when it was 'fully occupied by the German war' and preparations for the anticipated Italian invasion of Somaliland.<sup>67</sup> During the middle of 1939 'climatic conditions had ensured the dispersal of his very organised body guard', and at the end of 1939 'he was arrested after careful and secret arrangements had been made', put on trial and sentenced to 'a minor term of imprisonment for political reasons that seemed good at the time'.<sup>68</sup> After the term of imprisonment ended, Sheikh

<sup>61</sup> Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 57.

<sup>62</sup> PRO, CO 535/141/9, addendum to report MG-250, 6 June 1945.

<sup>63</sup> PRO, CO 535/141/9, G. T. Fisher to chief civil affairs staff officer, 3 July 1945.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> PRO, CO 535/141/9, addendum to report MG-250, 6 June 1945. There are no studies on the 1939 riot in Burao.

<sup>66</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-270/323/3104, 9 July 1945.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> PRO, CO 535/141/9, G. T. Fisher to chief civil affairs staff officer, 3 July 1945.

Bashir returned to his *tariqa* at Beer and continued to encourage his followers to oppose all government policies. From 1939 to 1945, he maintained his opposition to the government only in preaching, but in 1945, he decided the time was favourable to 'revive the glory of the late "Mad Mullah"',<sup>69</sup>

One day in May, according to a well-known tradition, he challenged priests in Burao who were fulminating against the British actually to do something about it. The exchange between Sheikh Bashir and the priests has been reconstructed in a poem composed by Yassin Ahmed Haji Nur, 'Muruq Baa Dagaal Gala' ('Muscle Partakes in War'):

Sheikh Bashiir ka daalaco.  
Wadaadii dikriyayee  
daasada uu dhex keenee  
ku daloosha uu yidhi  
diinkay akhriyayeen  
wax kastay du-dubiyaan  
markay diisi waayeen  
waa kii budh doontee  
dam-dagiigan kaga dhigay.  
Dulucdeedu waxay tahay  
muruq baa dagaal gala  
isagaa wax dumin kara.

[Take Sheikh Bashir.  
The chanting priests  
Among whom he placed a can  
And asked them to break it  
With the religious verses they were reading  
After they read everything  
And failed to dent it  
He took a big stick  
And destroyed it with one swing.  
The meaning of the story is  
Muscle partakes in war.]<sup>70</sup>

For Sheikh Bashir, it was muscle rather than empty chants, even if sacred, that would make possible the overthrow of colonial rule. Somali priests such as Sayyid Muhammad Abdulla Hassan or Sheikh Bashir never made 'miracle' the basis of their power.<sup>71</sup> Their claim, just like the discourses that David Edwards described so well in his article, was based on 'metaphor', which allowed

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Yassin Ahmed Haji Nur, 'Muruq Baa Dagaal Gala', composed Jan. 1980, Hargeysa; author's cassette. (The poem was part of the famous poetic series 'Deelleey'.) Translations from Somali poetry are mine.

<sup>71</sup> David B. Edwards, 'Mad Mullahs and Englishmen: Discourse in the Colonial Encounter', *Comparative Studies in Society and Hist.*, xxxi (Oct. 1989).

them to 'domesticate what is strange while also pointing to the moral necessity of pursuing a particular line of political action'.<sup>72</sup> Sheikh Bashir's metaphor was the 'big stick', which provided the 'name for everything'.<sup>73</sup> He wanted the priests to go beyond 'chanting', beyond reading the Koran and Hadith, to become directly active in the politics of the country, to unify anti-colonial resistance, and to overthrow colonial rule. According to Lord Rennell of Rodd, Sheikh Bashir 'utilised' the revolt of the public against the anti-locust campaign 'as a weapon with which to challenge the authority of the Government'.<sup>74</sup> His challenge of course was not purely opportunistic, for he was involved in articulating the fears of the people in public from the beginning of the anti-locust campaign. Moreover, like many other urban activists, he influenced, and was influenced by, rural radicalism because, as in so many areas in colonial Africa, a 'cross-fertilisation . . . took place between radical activists and local peasant communities'.<sup>75</sup> These activists would attempt to rectify some of the weaknesses of rural protest — in particular, the lack of cohesion, central command and a single aim and strategy. Priests and migrant labourers would play such roles; migrants, for instance, often became organizers of resistance in rural areas, or articulated popular resentment in universal (religious or secular) terms.<sup>76</sup> Sheikh Bashir's role was similar in that he articulated the resentment of the people in universal (religious) terms, and attempted through direct action to organize the dispersed resistance of the pastoralists into a 'general uprising'.<sup>77</sup>

His strategy was daring but doomed. First, he decided to begin the rebellion in Burao, his home town. His plan was to attack the prison and free the large number of people arrested for demonstrations against the government, and probably use them to augment his small force; and then simultaneously kill the district commissioner, and sack all administrative offices. Second, to wage a war against the government in the rural areas: his hope was that his action would lead to a 'general uprising' against colonial rule. On 2 July, he collected twenty-five of his followers

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 661.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Berkeley, 1991), 100.

<sup>74</sup> Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration*, 481.

<sup>75</sup> Allen F. Isaacman, 'Peasants and Rural Protest in Africa', in Allen F. Isaacman *et al.*, *Confronting Historical Paradigms* (Madison, 1993), 261.

<sup>76</sup> Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 192–3.

<sup>77</sup> Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration*, 482.

at Wadamgo on the Burao–Erigavo border, and transported them on a lorry to the vicinity of Burao, where he distributed arms to about half of his few followers.<sup>78</sup> On the evening of 3 July the group entered Burao and ‘opened fire on the police guard mounted over’ the central prison, which was at the ‘time overcrowded with prisoners arrested for previous demonstrations’, which led to the death of one prisoner, and the wounding of another; and simultaneously attacked the house of the district commissioner, Major Chambers.<sup>79</sup> Major J. A. Hunt, the survey officer of the protectorate, who was in the vicinity of the house, came to the rescue of Major Chambers when he heard the shots and in the crossfire his car was ‘put out of action’,<sup>80</sup> even though he was not hit or hurt; but Major Chambers’s police guard was killed. According to Lord Rennell of Rodd, there ‘can be no doubt that it was the intention of the band to kill the District Commissioner’. Sheikh Bashir’s small army made the ‘attack . . . suddenly and swiftly and the whole gang succeeded in making good its escape’ to Bur Dhab, a strategic mountain south-east of Burao, in which the Sayyid established many forts and strongholds.<sup>81</sup> Instead of disappearing into the chain of mountains of which Bur Dhab consists, and waging a war of movement, Sheikh Bashir’s small unit occupied a fort and took a defensive position. On 7 July, a party of thirty policemen, under the leadership of Lt Davis of the British Somaliland Police, confronted Sheikh Bashir’s unit at the fort: a ‘brisk action followed’<sup>82</sup> in which Sheikh Bashir and Qaybdiid (Sheikh Bashir’s second-in-command) were killed, another member of the group was wounded and captured, two others were captured unhurt, and the rest escaped; on the government side, only one policeman was wounded, none killed.<sup>83</sup>

The administration quickly learnt the names of all the members of Sheikh Bashir’s followers and insisted that the rural folk voluntarily bring them before the law; but as they were unwilling to collaborate, the district administration invoked the Collective Punishment Ordinance, under which six thousand camels owned by the pastoralists were impounded to be ‘released at 300 for

<sup>78</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-270/323/3104, 9 July 1945.

<sup>79</sup> Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration*, 481.

<sup>80</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-269/302/3104, 4 July 1945.

<sup>81</sup> Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration*, 481.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-270/323/3104, 9 July 1945.

each assailant surrendered'.<sup>84</sup> Since Sheikh Bashir was Habr Jeclo (Isaaq), the district administration impounded the camel stock of the Habr Jeclo, irrespective of whether those who owned the stock knew about, opposed, or supported Sheikh Bashir's rebellion. The government's draconian measure was supported by the *aqils* and traders, or as one report put it, the 'better elements among the people [who] co-operated loyally with the government'.<sup>85</sup> They even asked the government to 'be assessed for compensation to cover the cost of the operations, the loss of Government stores, and considerable expenditure on transport',<sup>86</sup> and managed to collect about £8,000 from the people, which they paid the government as compensation. With their help, moreover, the escaped rebels were arrested, and were transported to the Saad-u-Din Island off the coast of Somaliland. The co-operation of the *aqils* and traders, however, was almost derailed by the government's humiliating treatment of Sheikh Bashir's corpse, which was denied burial, and exhibited in the centre of the town. The administrators knew their *Antigone*: as many of them read Greek tragedies, they decided to impose Polyneices' punishment on Sheikh Bashir, and as it were proclaimed to all that 'no man may hide / in a grave nor mourn in funeral'.<sup>87</sup> The object was to intimidate those who opposed colonial policies and show them the vulgar punishment that awaited rebels. But the ploy backfired, for it turned the exhibitionist violence of the administration into public anger and disgust. Haji Adan Ahmed Afqalooc, like Antigone, protested, and passed over to history the treatment of the corpse of Sheikh Bashir in his aptly entitled poem 'Raqdii Bashiir' ('The Corpse of Bashir'), which he composed in July at Burao as an eyewitness.

Traditional Somali society had no formal hierarchical political system, yet there had always been powerful and influential men in the society: wealthy figures, leaders of war, orators and, especially, poets,<sup>88</sup> who fashioned historical memory through the narratives they composed about the politics, culture, ways of life, traditions, identity and everyday activities of the Somali people. Poets commented on social and political situations, publicized

<sup>84</sup> PRO, CO 535/141/9, G. T. Fisher to 'Sir George', 13 July 1945.

<sup>85</sup> Colonial Office, *Colonial Office Annual Report*, 31.

<sup>86</sup> Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration*, 482.

<sup>87</sup> *Greek Tragedies*, ed. and trans. David Grene and Richard Lattimore, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1960), i, 182.

<sup>88</sup> Said Samatar, *Oral Poetry*, 24.

events, waged 'propaganda for or against some person' or group and influenced 'the opinion of a body of kinsmen or of the public at large'<sup>89</sup> and did so as *acknowledged* 'legislators of the world' whose words had more power than 'weapons or wealth'.<sup>90</sup> For Somalis poetry had always been the highest art form not merely because they loved a perfect turn of phrase, as had been repeatedly stated since Richard Burton,<sup>91</sup> but because narrative had always been of great importance to the identity of the individual and the community. Somalis 'dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative'.<sup>92</sup> In other words, they dreamed or day-dreamed the 'not-yet-completed narrative'<sup>93</sup> of the individual self and the community through poetry and so lived their lives in narrative form.<sup>94</sup> The Sayyid's anti-colonial movement was successful in mobilizing the population precisely because he told poetic narratives about Somali society, the dangers that colonial rule posed to the country and the people, and the necessity of resistance.<sup>95</sup> The theorizing of a resistance in literature in Somaliland as in Ireland was no different from starting one,<sup>96</sup> and that was why, for instance, Yeats could ask 'Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot'.<sup>97</sup> The intervention of Haji Adan Afqalooc in the politics of the rebellion in July, then, was not extraordinary, for as a poet, and particularly as a great poet, he was indeed expected to give the events of the rebellion and the death of Sheikh Bashir narrative unity and coherence. Haji Adan Afqalooc was one of the 'old poets': born at the end of the nineteenth century, he left the country probably during the Sayyid period and moved to Aden where he worked and survived on odd jobs. Mohamed Kaahin Feedoole, a migrant labourer in Aden, created

<sup>89</sup> Andrzejewski and Lewis, *Somali Poetry*, 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, i, 82, stated that the Somali 'country teems with poets . . . the fine ear of this people causing them to take the greatest pleasure in harmonious sounds and poetical expressions, where a false quantity or a prosaic phrase excite their violent indignation'.

<sup>92</sup> Barbara Hardy, 'Towards a Poetics of Fiction: An Approach through Narrative', *Novel*, ii (1968), 5; cited in Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, 1981), 211.

<sup>93</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 223.

<sup>94</sup> To paraphrase MacIntyre, see *ibid.*, 212.

<sup>95</sup> Said Samatar, *Oral Poetry*, 144.

<sup>96</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London, 1995), 196.

<sup>97</sup> W. B. Yeats, 'Man and the Echo'; cited in Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, 196.

an unflattering representation of Somali migrants in Aden in the early 1940s in his poem 'Tolow Ha Lay Dhoofsho' ('Kinsmen Help Me Return Home'). To take an excerpt, he said:

Talaatiin gu' qaar joogey baan  
Toob u xaasline  
Tana xoogsi kama soo taraan  
Taana laga waaye.

[Thirty years here (Aden)  
Yet they don't own a thing  
Without useful employment here  
And absent over there (home).]<sup>98</sup>

Haji Adan Afqalooc probably shared the same experiences with the other migrants portrayed in the poem. Though he did not 'own a thing' when he returned to the country in 1944, nonetheless his poetic talent allowed him to participate in public discourses; in addition, the exilic experience enriched his vocabulary and made it possible for him to articulate nationalism in a universal secular imagery and within the context of world anti-colonial movements.<sup>99</sup> Haji Adan Afqalooc said in 'Raqdii Bashiir':

Duhur baa Bashiir lagu shanaqay, daar agtiina ahe,  
dahriga iyo laabtay rasaas, kaga daloosheene,  
isaga oo dem iyo dhiig leh, oo maro ku duu-duuban,  
dacsad iyo ahaaniyo cag baa, loogu sii daraye.  
dadkii uu nebcaa iyo kufirga, daawasho u yimide,  
meydkii oo Daahir ahayn, markii debedda loo tuuray,  
ee aaska loo diiday, waad wada dul joogteene.

Dar kaloo ciyaar lagu dilay iyo, dawgal baa jirey e,  
oo aanay deero deero u hiridiyin, dadab galkoodiye  
ma duugoobin Qaybdiid, lafuhu waana duhanayaane  
da'dii u ahaa baa Faarax, jeelka loo diraye  
imminkuu siduu dayro yahay, debedda meeraaye  
loo diid dadkii uu dhaliyo, duunyaduu dhaqaye  
dad oo idil soo eri, ninkii daalinka ahaaye.

Ingriis wuxuu dooni jirey, reer India diidye,  
daarihii Banjaab iyo ka kace, dahabkii hoos yiile,  
daymada hadeeray indhuhu, dib u jaleecaane  
damaashaadku waa Mohamed Ali, loo dabaal degay e  
waa duubey Franciis, dhulkii Suuriyuu degey e  
daristii Lubnaan iyo ka kace, degelkii Beyruute.

<sup>98</sup> Mohamed Kaahin Feedoole, 'Tolow Ha Lay Dhoofsho' ['Kinsmen Help Me Return Home'], in *Suugaan: Dugsiga Sare, Fasalka Labaad* [Literature: Book Two] (Mogadisho, n.d.), 17–19.

<sup>99</sup> It has been asserted since Lord Acton that 'exile is the nursery of nationalism'. For a recent discussion of the issue, see Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons* (London, 1998).



Dekedaha maraakiib shixnadan, baa ka soo degeye,  
daadxoorta oo idil, halkanaa lala damcaayaaye,  
halka daawad xeradeedu tahay, gaaladaa degiye,  
nin dayuurad iyo gaadhi laa, beer idiin dirane,  
durgufkiina soo hadhay, waxaan doonayuu garane.

[Sheikh Bashir was hanged in daylight, at a house near you,  
His body torn out by bullets,  
And still covered with wet blood,  
They kicked and insulted him  
Then watched him with contempt  
When the unwashed body was thrown outside,  
And refused burial, you were all a witness.

There were others killed playfully,  
About which nothing was done  
The body of Qayb-diid<sup>100</sup> is still warm  
Though an old man, Farah<sup>101</sup> was sent to jail  
And now like a beggar he roams the outside world  
They refused him rights over his family and wealth  
The unjust man (British) is punishing everybody.

What the English always wanted, the people of India refused  
The houses of Punjab and the gold that they hoarded there  
have been denied to them  
Now they look back at them with nostalgia  
The celebration is for Muhammad Ali (Egypt)  
And the French are leaving Syria that they conquered  
They withdrew from Beirut, and Lebanon.

Many ships will arrive at our ports,  
They will bring here (Somaliland) those thrown out by the  
stream of shit,<sup>102</sup>  
The place where you pasture *Daawad* (the land), the infidels  
will settle,  
A man who owns a car and an aeroplane will force you to  
work on his farms,  
Few would survive such humiliation.]<sup>103</sup>

The first stanza deals with the ‘corpse’ of Sheikh Bashir which for the poet would be the symbol both of the oppressive practices of the British as well as of resistance. The poem called the people to avenge Sheikh Bashir and ‘others killed playfully’ by the British. But the poem went beyond the call for revenge. The motif of the poem was the necessity of doing what other nations, such as India, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, had done, namely, to fight for independence. If you do not resist colonial rule, the poet concluded, then settlers will take over the land — the ‘place

<sup>100</sup> Sheikh Bashir’s second-in-command.

<sup>101</sup> Haji Farah Omaar.

<sup>102</sup> The reference is to settlers. ‘Daad xoor’ is the dirt carried by floods.

<sup>103</sup> Haji Adan Ahmed Afqalooc, ‘Raqdii Bashiir’, in *Suugaan: Dugsiga Sare, Fasalka Labaad*, 49–50.

where you pasture *Daawad*’ — and you will be turned into slaves; when that takes place, very few will ‘survive such humiliation’. By making reference to other struggles, as well as to the danger posed by colonial rule in Somaliland, the poet shows a ‘consciousness of the larger arena within which’ popular resistance took place.<sup>104</sup> For the poet, therefore, the rebellion must not be limited to a mere rejection of the locust bait, but must be expanded into a total rejection of, and resistance to, British rule. The object, declared the poet, should be nothing but independence, which was also the theme of his second poem during the disturbance. Haji Adan Afqalooc was imprisoned in the Burao jail for composing ‘Raqdii Bashiir’. At the time of his arrest, the jail was full of people arrested for rioting in the town. (As already pointed out, Sheikh Bashir attempted unsuccessfully to free them.) In jail, Haji Adan Afqalooc composed another poem, ‘Gobanimo’ (‘independence’), which was addressed to the prisoners as well as to the outside world, for like all the works of prison detainees, it served as a ‘critical and sustaining link between the prisoners inside and those struggling outside the prison walls’.<sup>105</sup> As Ngūgĩ put it, prisoners write and compose essays, novels, autobiographies, or poetry, so that ‘some world sometime may know’.<sup>106</sup> Haji Adan Afqalooc said:

Gobanimada hawl yari, nina kuma helaayo e  
 Haasawe iyo jiif midna kuma timaado e  
 Habeen nimaan u guurayn, hoo lama yidhaahdo e  
 Nimaan aaro loo yeelin, hebel kuma tidhaahdo e  
 Halkay taalo wax kaa xiga, halaf iyo dab weeye e  
 Hore inaad u jiidhaa, hadafkeedu yahayoo  
 Hamada iyo ujeedadana, dhaxal hadhaya weeye.

Halka aynu caawa joognana, ragbaa loo hagaajaye  
 Haamaanada gala, laga haybadaystao e  
 Nin sidayda hawl kari, hihba kama yidhaahdo e  
 Haweenka iyo caruurtaa, ka halaa-halaayo e  
 Haytin iyo Gaandhi baa, beryo lagu hor joogay e  
 Halayyigii Nakruma iyo Jamaal baa u hoydaye  
 Haadbiidhiga iyo birta, habro looma tumanine  
 Nin haraati diidaba, hogaankeeda weeye  
 Higamada iyo bustaha xumi, ka haggagsan ruumiye  
 ‘Hadhuudhkayga ii keen’, halna maaha xaalkuye.

<sup>104</sup> Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (London, 1987), 46. Harlow makes reference to poets such as the Angolan Viriato da Cruz, who in his poem ‘Black Mother’ honoured ‘the struggle in three continents’.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 127–8.

<sup>106</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 126.

[Independence is never attained with ease  
 Nor with indifferent chit-chat  
 It is never bestowed without struggle  
 And it never recognizes the man that was not hurt for it  
 Fire and heat surround it  
 It wants you to go through that and appear somewhere on the  
 other side  
 The desire and the struggle are for posterity to remember.  
 This place (jail) has been prepared for men  
 It hosts only feared world-historical figures  
 A man like me never complains about it  
 Only children and women fear it  
 Haytin and Gandhi were here  
 The hero Nakruma and Jamal slept there  
 The chain and iron were not moulded for women  
 But for men who refuse subjection  
 This ugly blanket (upon which we sit) is better than the best  
 Persian carpet  
 We must never complain.]<sup>107</sup>

The poem consists of two stanzas that address the symbolic significance of the prison, and the struggle for independence. The first stanza represents the struggle for independence as a quest for historical recognition, which can be achieved, according to the second stanza, only if the struggle goes through the prison — the most visible sign of colonial oppression — and ‘appears somewhere on the other side’. The prison was the privileged site of the struggle because it was a ‘place’ constructed only for world-historical figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Kwame Nkrumah who had already been through the Burao jail. The poet pointed out, in an imaginative act of recognition and reconstruction, the places in the jail where they slept, squatted, or sat. Of course none of them ever saw the inside of the Burao jail, but they slept nonetheless in similar places; after all, the experience was a global one shared by many anti-colonial world-historical figures as well as by lesser-known but equally important spirits. Here the poet showed not merely a world-historical consciousness, but also universal ‘shared legends, language, and memorials’ by detainees about prisons.<sup>108</sup> Both poems — ‘Raqdii Bashiir’ and ‘Gobanimo’ — were ‘historical documents’<sup>109</sup> that expressed the struggle against colonial rule and oppression. The link between discursive resistance (poetry and rumour) on the one hand, and non-discursive resistance (violence) on the other, was the apoca-

<sup>107</sup> Haji Adan Ahmed Afqalooc, ‘Gobanimo’, composed July 1945; author’s cassette.

<sup>108</sup> Harlow, *Resistance Literature*, 128.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

lyptic imagination of the people.<sup>110</sup> The representations of Sheikh Bashir (the world is coming to an end and the process must be hastened through war), Haji Adan Afqalooc (the people will be turned to slaves and that will lead to the extermination of the Somali people) and the rumours (the government wants to poison the land and water in order to destock and depopulate the country), used the same discursive symbol. (As discussed earlier, the social context of the apocalyptic representation of colonial policies was the decline of traditional life.) Unfortunately we have no direct evidence, for instance, as to how the people reacted to Haji Afqalooc's poem when he performed it in Burao in July; we do know nonetheless that the administration reacted to the poem and arrested him for composing it because it incited resistance; and we also know that riots erupted in Hargeysa, other towns and rural areas as a result of the sermons and the rumours.<sup>111</sup> Haji Adan Afqalooc's poems were not isolated from the other discourses but rather articulated the concerns of the people in the highest Somali art form as poets were expected to do. But he did so in a gendered way. Even though nationalism was as much 'women's work'<sup>112</sup> as that of the men, the nationalist narrative nonetheless represented the anti-colonial movement as masculine: only the men were involved in the struggle, only the men were 'world-historical figures', while the women were not, because they feared the 'iron' moulded for 'men' — even though of course they did not.

Meanwhile, in the Erigavo district, Sheikh Bashir's challenge had a profound impact.<sup>113</sup> (By 29 June, as discussed above, rioting and non-cooperation had limited the treatment of the land with poison bait in the district.) Before he was killed, Sheikh Bashir sent a message to religious figures in Erigavo informing them that the 'time was ripe for a general uprising'.<sup>114</sup> No evidence exists that the letter directly inspired resistance in the district; nonetheless it is likely that the publicity that his death received, particu-

<sup>110</sup> See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford, 2000 edn).

<sup>111</sup> For the significance of performances of poetry and the way it influences its audiences, see Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry* (Bloomington, 1977), 214.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Susan Geiger, 'Tanganyikan Nationalism as "Women's Work": Life Histories, Collective Biography and Changing Historiography', *Jl African Hist.*, xxxvii (1996). Women played a key role in the rebellion as well as in the 1944 riots in Burao: Mohamed, '1944 Somaliland Camel Corps Mutiny'.

<sup>113</sup> Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration*, 481.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

larly after the administration refused him burial and Haji Adan Afqaloo composed 'Raqdii Bashiir', stirred further resistance in the district. The administration assumed, as indeed it did throughout the rebellion, that priests were 'responsible for much of the intrigue and trouble in the district', who had been reminding the people, for instance at Baran, of the 'glories of the Mullah';<sup>115</sup> and so the administration arrested the two leading priests in the district. The administration also sent reinforcements of *illalo* (rural constabulary) from Hargeysa and Burao to the district. But the imprisonment of the priests yet again had no negative effect on popular resistance to the anti-locust campaign, for it was the pastoralists rather than the priests who led it anyway. Near Erigavo township pastoralists attacked the first group of *illalo* reinforcements; the rural constabulary did not resist but 'handed over their rifles to the attackers'.<sup>116</sup> (The police later recovered the rifles through negotiations.) The 'tribes' such as the Musa Ismail around Erigavo were so opposed to the locust control campaign they even planned 'an immediate attack on Erigavo'. In Baran — about eighty miles east of the Erigavo township — 'bands of tribesmen have collected with the expressed intention of forcibly preventing the spread of bait'. Captain Gilliland, who was involved in pastoral research in the eastern part of the protectorate, was 'threatened at Baran by about 70 tribesmen armed with spears'. Captain Kitson, who was working in the anti-locust campaign in the Hadeed plain south of Erigavo, 'had his camp surrounded by some 300 tribesmen who said they were determined to prevent the spreading of bait'. And near Hubeera, north of Baran, the people 'created an efficient road-block to prevent the passage of bait trucks'.<sup>117</sup>

In response to the crisis, the central administration sent more reinforcements of troops, police, armoured cars and automatic weapons, and even made an aircraft from the Royal Air Force (based at Aden) 'available at very short notice' to the district administration; the district administration also recalled all British officers in the interior in order to make 'efficient and concerted plans for the continuation of the campaign and the restoration

<sup>115</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-270/323/3104, 9 July 1945; PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-276/302/3104, 24 July 1945.

<sup>116</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-273/302/3104, 16 July 1945.

<sup>117</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-276/302/3104, 24 July 1945.

of Government authority'.<sup>118</sup> The *Gerad* (Sultan) of the Wersangeli — who was 'wholeheartedly on the side of the government'<sup>119</sup> — was persuaded, in addition, to convince the 'tribesmen' to end their opposition to the anti-locust campaign. The administration also used Radio Hargeysa to influence the pastoralists. For instance, as early as 13 June, the administration persuaded a well-known trader to describe on Radio Hargeysa anti-locust work he had seen in other countries such as the Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Locust control campaigns in those countries, he stated, were popular and, if anything, people demanded bait.<sup>120</sup> The pastoralists, however, cared very little whether the people of Egypt welcomed bait-laying or not since the key issue for them was the defence of their traditional life which they thought was threatened by secret government plans to poison water and pasture, and to destock and depopulate the country.

The campaign to restore 'government authority' began on 22 July when Major Wood — the district commissioner of Erigavo — and Lt Taylor of the police force departed for the Hadeed plain and Hubeera respectively at the head of a police force and armoured cars. Major Wood and his bait-laying party were 'attacked the same evening by 300 Wersangeli' who had previously threatened Lt Kitson. Major Wood ordered the police to open fire, which led to the death of two men and the wounding of three among the pastoralists; Lt Taylor's party was also attacked at midday on 23 July at Hubeera, which also led to two casualties among the pastoralists. Even though the pastoralists suffered losses, their attitude remained 'unsatisfactory, and more force was considered necessary': their attitude was 'unsatisfactory' to Major Wood, because they continued to resist the anti-locust campaign, and so more troops and police armoured cars were dispatched to the district.<sup>121</sup> Yet the district administration failed to gain the co-operation of the people; and finally, at the end of July, the administration abruptly ended the anti-locust campaign, and the 'trouble rapidly subsided'.<sup>122</sup> As the last weekly

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* For a discussion of the role of the Royal Air Force in colonial Africa, see David Killingray, "'A Swift Agent of Government': Air Power in British Colonial Africa, 1916–1939", *Jl African Hist.*, xxv (1984), which makes references to the role of air power in early colonial Somaliland.

<sup>119</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-276/302/3104, 24 July 1945.

<sup>120</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-264/3104, 13 June 1945.

<sup>121</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-276/302/3104, 24 July 1945.

<sup>122</sup> Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration*, 482.

report on the anti-locust campaign stated, the 'situation in the districts' was quiet by the end of July.<sup>123</sup> Even though the situation in the districts became quiet, locust infestation remained undiminished.<sup>124</sup> The administration simply ended the whole anti-locust campaign, because the use of force failed to end resistance and to compel the people to co-operate.

Popular suspicions and resistance to locust control never ceased in Somaliland. In March 1950, for instance, another locust swarm invaded the country. The 'Experimental Unit' of the Anti-Locust Research Centre attempted to control the locust invasion, while conscious that the pastoralists 'never regarded locust control with favour'. But B. P. Uvarov, the head of the unit, considered the campaign of 'great importance' and proceeded with it because the unit was undertaking 'insecticide trials' in the country which were 'expected to produce results of immediate value for planning the anti-locust campaign required for the protection of East Africa'.<sup>125</sup> Unlike Uvarov, Gerald Reece, the governor of the territory, did not 'fear that the widespread disturbances of 1945 will recur'.<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, he wanted to proceed with caution and suggested to the experimental unit the use at the initial stage of 'harmless bait' in order to convince the population that the bait was not dangerous, but the unit ignored his advice. Once the poison was used and livestock died, the 'feeling against the anti-locust campaign . . . increased'.<sup>127</sup> On 30 March, for instance, a truck carrying bait was attacked near Sillil with stones and a round of gunfire; at Bulhar a 'hostile mob of three or four hundred persons' threatened a bait-laying party that consisted of Lt Millan, one *aqil*, three police officers and a member of the rural constabulary, and when the *aqil* attempted to 'pacify the crowd' he was attacked; and on 31 March at Dacarbudhuq a crowd stoned the locust control officer and his staff.<sup>128</sup> On all three occasions the police fired at the 'threatening crowds'. As Reece put it, 'I think a good deal of this trouble would not have occurred had it not

<sup>123</sup> PRO, ALC, ref. no. MG-270/3104/G.1, 31 July 1945.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> PRO, CO 535/148/1, B. P. Uvarov, Anti-Locust Research Centre, London, to Lt-Col. Holman, Colonial Office, 23 Mar. 1950.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, governor, Somaliland Protectorate, to secretary of state for the colonies, 17 Mar. 1950.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Extract of Letter from G. Reece to Mr. C. E. Lambert', 2 Apr. 1950.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, governor, Somaliland Protectorate, to secretary of state for the colonies, 1 Apr. 1950.

been for the fact that at the beginning they [the anti-locust unit] allowed some poison to be distributed instead of the harmless bait which we told the people was being used'.<sup>129</sup> At the end of March, opposition to the campaign died out because, unlike in 1945, locust infestation lasted for a short period in 1950, and so the campaign needed to combat the infestation was also short. To a great extent the 1950 drought, *Seega Case* (Season of Red Winds), shortened locust infestation because the drought had already devastated the pastures and when the locusts devoured whatever pastures the drought spared, they moved quickly to greener fields further south. In addition, the weak economic position of the towns and the rural areas prevented the involvement of urban activists in the anti-locust resistance, and thus made any concerted resistance highly impractical. It must be added, nonetheless, that the administration never pressed the issue as it had done in 1945.

#### IV

The rebellion gives us an insight into the concerns, fears, and politics of the popular folk, and the various ways different sections of the folk interacted with one other. A good example is the concerns of the priests, the urban poor and the rural folk. The priests, for instance, contributed to the resistance to the anti-locust campaign in three ways. First, they conferred cultural legitimacy on the resistance. Second, they circulated, but did not formulate, the rumours about the dangerous effects of the poison bait. The rumours were the 'spontaneous social productions' of the folk; the priests, however, aided in the circulation of the rumours through their preaching. Third, some of them, like Sheikh Bashir, sought to transform the resistance to the anti-locust campaign into a general uprising whose object was not merely to defeat one policy, but to unify rural resistance, and to overthrow the whole colonial system. Other urban radicals such as Afqalooq articulated 'a secular equivalent of the church',<sup>130</sup> so to speak, through poetry. In general, the resistance continued despite, for instance, the killing or the arrest of the priests and

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Extract of Letter from G. Reece to Mr. C. E. Lambert', 2 Apr. 1950.

<sup>130</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Past and Present Publications, Cambridge, 1983), 271.



the poets; even the death of Sheikh Bashir did not bring an end to the rebellion.

The real 'trial of strength' was between the administration and the pastoralists. The pastoralists were convinced that the anti-locust campaign was directed against the land and their traditional way of life: livestock, pasture, water supplies, and even the population. In the end, popular resistance to the campaign was an attempt by the people to defend the land and traditional life. As the administration was well aware, any question touching on the land was dangerous. But the pastoralists were not content merely to resist the laying of the locust bait: their concerns were related to other national issues. In getting involved in popular politics and nationalism, peasants do not make abstract arguments, but rather relate, for instance, concrete issues such as the defence of the land and traditional life to larger issues such as the defence of the 'nation', as articulated by Afqalooq and Sheikh Bashir. The symbiotic relation between microscopic (defence of the land and traditional life) and macroscopic (defence of the 'nation') issues had been expressed in heterogeneous ways: rumours, poetry, and sermons — which gave advance justification for resistance — as well as non-cooperation, rioting and outright rebellion. As E. P. Thompson put it, resistance is 'usually a rational response, and it takes place, not among the helpless or hopeless people, but among those groups who sense that they have a little power to help themselves'.<sup>131</sup>

*Jama Mohamed*

<sup>131</sup> E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York, 1993 edn), 265.