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ORAL POETRY AND SOMALI NATIONALISM

Contents

The case of Sayyid Muhammad 'Abdille Hasan

SAID S. SAMATAR
Assistant Professor of History, Rutgers University

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Note on Transcription of Somali Words

In transcribing Somali words, I have adopted the official Somali orthography which has been in use in the Somali Republic since 1972. This orthography uses Latin characters with minor adjustments designed to accommodate Somali phonetic sounds. There are, however, three consonants which do not conform to the new system of Somali spelling: the aspirate 'h', the palatal 'd' and the 'ayn'.

In the new Somali orthography, the letters 'x', 'dh' and 'c' are used respectively to render these consonants. In this book, by contrast, I retain the conventional symbols used to denote them. Thus I adopt:

- h instead of x
- d instead of dh
- ' instead of c

This measure is taken to meet the needs of the English reader who is unacquainted with the official Somali orthography or with Somali phonetic sounds. Where any of the three consonants appear in a Somali author's name or book title, however, I use the official orthography. Bibliographic entries of Arabic names are rendered in Westernized form, while those of Somali ones conform to indigenous designation, i.e. first name comes first.

The glottal stop or Arabic hamza is rendered by a closing inverted comma. The cities of Mogadishu, Hargeisa, Merca and Brava retain their conventional spelling.

Preface

This is a study of the use of oratory and oratorical techniques as a tool to obtain political power in a traditional African society. In an attempt to bring forth the causal linkages between oral poetry, politics and power in Somali society, I have chosen to focus on the political oratory of Sayyid Muhammad 'Abdillahi Hasan, the poet, mystic and warrior leader of the Somali anti-colonial movement at the turn of the century. In selecting the political verse of the Somali leader as a case study, my efforts here aim at several interconnected objectives. One is to investigate the Sayyid's poetic oratory which, aside from its relevance to the politics and strategy of creating a large-scale resistance movement, possesses an intrinsic literary and philosophical interest, and therefore deserves to be studied on its own merits. Another emanates from the need to enquire into the ways and means by which an African resister of imperialism harnessed a remarkable indigenous resource in order to mobilize the public in his favor and against his opponents. Finally, by demonstrating the intimate correlation between the Sayyid's oratorical powers, which he used consciously and consummately to achieve political ends, and the progress (or lack of progress) of the Somali resistance struggle, I hope to add a new element to the study of African resistance in general.

More specifically, it is hoped that the elucidation in this book of the Sayyid's use of oral poetry as a weapon to rid his country of alien rule will encourage others to investigate the indigenous weapons of African resisters of imperialism elsewhere. Such efforts may help to enrich - perhaps revolutionize in some cases - our perceptions of the question of European intrusion and African response.

Though the Sayyid and the Somali Dervishes occupy its central stage, this study seeks to illuminate the quality, extent and influence of oral poetry in Somali life and lore. To facilitate the reader's appreciation of my approach and quirks of style, it may be helpful to interject here an autobiographical note. I was born and raised as a pastoralist in the west
Preface

central part of the Somali peninsula, an area which—with the advent of colonialism and the consequent introduction of European notions of fixed boundaries—was to be split into the Mudug province of the Somali Republic and the disputed Ogaden region.

Growing up a herdsman in the vast, scorched plains of Africa’s Horn presented challenges and opportunities as well as peculiarities of life which it will not do to go into here. I will just mention one feature of my early life which bears on this book. This is that literacy was unknown in the culture of my youth, except to a few roaming holy men (wadiads) who boasted a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic and sacred law. These taught the Qur’an and basics of religious sciences, and conducted marriage ceremonies. However, the wadiads’ literacy, such as it was, had no appreciable impact on the population at large, whose native tongue, Somali, was unwritten and in fact remained so, to all intents and purposes, until 1972. This meant that public and private life was conducted by oral means, a notable medium being oral poetry. Like nearly all of my fellow herdsmen, I aspired to acquire skill in this coveted craft, received informal instruction in the art of verbal composition from established poets, and even myself attempted a few versifications which, I confess, earned their author no notable distinction as an oral poet. Perhaps I quit pastoralism too early—at fifteen I migrated to sedentary culture where I learned to read and write—to witness the blooming of whatever latent talent I may have had in the field.

If the artistic gains of my early association with pastoral poets and reciters remain dubious, the impression they made on me has been quite indelible. In this connection the name of ‘Abdillahi Ali Siigo stands out in my memory. He was a venerable elder who almost every evening after the camels had been milked and secured in the kraal would, by the fireside, chant the poetry of Sayyid Mahamud late into the night before a captivated audience of men, women and children. He was a dramatic character who seemed to command even the attention of the camels which sat nearby, lazily chewing their cud. So the fire crackled, its red flames casting a hazy glow over his silvery beard, giving the elder’s expression a pale, ghostly aspect. Outside the kraal fence the winds howled monotonously, pierced by the occasional roar of a hungry lion. Every now and then this would stir the camels from their dreamy drowsing, causing them to stop chewing and prick their ears, alarmed by the danger outside. Meanwhile, elder ‘Abdillahi chanted ecstatically, seemingly oblivious of everything but his rhymes.

Sayyid Mahamud’s verse—which always has a forceful appeal to a Somali—when dramatized by this elder generated an emotional atmosphere which, needless to say, impressed my adolescent mind. I hope I have succeeded in drawing on something of that experience for the benefit of this book.

The core of the work resulted from a doctoral dissertation submitted to Northwestern University’s Graduate School in 1979. The dissertation itself was based on a 12-month research sponsored jointly by the Social Science Research Council and the Graduate School of Northwestern.

It is not possible to thank all the people to whom credit is due for the writing of this book. Naturally, I am grateful to my advisor, Professor John A. Rowe, for his critical advice, moral support and patient interest in the progress of my work; to Carl Petry and Abraham Demoz of Northwestern University who, as members of the examining committee of my doctoral defense, read the dissertation and gave me much critical insight which helped to refine my focus of the subject and to pinpoint the methodological concerns of my research efforts; I also owe a special debt to the staff of Northwestern’s Africana Library, in particular to Hans Panofsky, Daniel Britz and Barbara Rivers for their help in tracing obscure materials needed for my work.

In London, I owe a debt of gratitude to the two ‘elder statements’ of Somali studies, B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis, who not only gave advice and encouragement during my four months of archival research in England, but read the typescript critically and suggested improvements; I am indebted also to Richard Greenfield of St Anthony’s College who gave similar advice.

In the Somali Democratic Republic, I am similarly indebted to numerous individuals for their advice, kindness and encouragement. Among these I must mention Mr. I. M. Abyan, then the Director General of the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, who helped secure research clearance for me and asked stimulating questions about my work. I must also acknowledge the assistance of Dr Sharif Saalah and Dr Mahamud Aadan, both at that time high-ranking officers of the Somali Socialist Revolutionary Party, who provided me with the necessary authority to move freely about the country and to ask my informants questions of a sensitive nature without bureaucratic and security impediments. Again in Somalia, I am obliged to acknowledge the help of members of the Somali Academy, especially Ahmad F. ‘Ali Idaqayn, Sheikh Jaamun ‘Umar Jise, Yaasin ‘Ismaa Keenadid, ‘Abduallahi H. ‘A Siyaayn, Yusuf Meygaay Samatar, M. H. H. Sheekaa-Harri, who not only adopted me as an honorary member of the Academy but also shared with me their immense knowledge of my topic.

In addition to scholars, other persons have been especially helpful: ‘Ali Samatar Mahamad, M. K. Salaad, M. M. Yabba and my brother, Ismaa’il, gave me much practical assistance while in the field. Their
Preface

support helped to facilitate and promote my work in Somalia; as did the moral support of my friend Donald Jones of Evanston, Illinois.

Many thanks are due to my Cambridge editors Dr Robin Dercourt and Ms Elizabeth Wotton, and subeditor Ms Susan Moore, for their editorial assistance. Finally—and most of all—I want to thank my wife, Lydia, who not only typed the manuscript but has been my companion and co-laborer throughout my research efforts.

Introduction

The distinguishing mark of ‘real art’, Leo Tolstoy wrote in his much debated essay, ‘What Is Art?’, lies in its infectiousness—a potent property, in Tolstoy’s view peculiar to art. This property enables the artist to infect others with his feelings ‘compelling [them] to rejoice in another’s gladness, to sorrow at another’s grief and to mingle souls...which is the very essence of art’. Whatever their merits in the context of Western literary/artistic traditions, Tolstoy’s views of the infectious and invading power of art would probably have been shared by Sayyid Mahammad ‘Abdilé Hasan, who may have expressed a similar sentiment regarding the power of art when he spoke of his poetry as ‘issuing forth with the blinding flash of a thunderbolt’, or, to vary the metaphor, ‘the engulfing darkness of gale winds’. For a poet to attribute an irresistible, almost mystical power to his own creations, as the Sayyid often does, may sound somewhat immodest to a Western audience, but such a claim is permissible in Somali pastoral/literary conventions where the talented poet is viewed with something akin to superstitious awe. Through the power of his poetic orations, the Sayyid, as we shall see, was thought to ‘infect wounds’ on his enemies, and indeed those who were attacked by his literary barbs often responded as if they had received physical wounds.

The Sayyid, moreover, took pains to ascribe the power of his verse to the ‘strengthening’ hand of ‘Divine Truth’, and to a sense of mission which he claimed to have sustained not only his poetry but his person, enabling him to weather the many dangers which his stormy career exposed him to. The mission—with which he gradually became imbued—was to rid his country of alien Christian rule. Thus he sang with evident conviction: ‘I have sought and found the Prophetic guidance [which appointed me] to tell the unbelieving white invaders: “This land is not yours.”’ It must be said at the outset, therefore, that the standard of truth or of excellence by which the Sayyid wished his poetry to be judged
Introduction

was a religious (Islamic) truth, a circumstance which again seems to have the peculiar ring of Tolstoy's controversial proposition that "In every period of history ... it is by the standard of [a] religious perception that the feelings transmitted by art have always been appraised." 8

Elsewhere in his essay, Tolstoy argued that art is "one of the indispensable means of communication without which mankind could not exist," its principal function being to convey the feelings of one man to others. This too would hardly sound strange to Somali ears long accustomed to the use of oral poetry, not only as an important means of communication but also as the principal medium by which Somalis ask the abiding questions: Whence come we? What are we? Whither go we?

In dealing with a historical subject from the standpoint of oratory and rhetoric, this study may be said to have taken an unorthodox approach in historical methodology, for in essence it relies on a branch of literature, notably poetry, as the core of its source materials. What may be unorthodox is not that we seek to utilize literature in order to investigate a historical question—history and literature are known to illuminate each other—but that the type of literature employed for the task should be an oral literature, and an oral verse at that, with its bent to the lyrical and the transient rather than the historical and the permanent. Hence, our reliance on such oral data to explore a historical phenomenon may raise, methodologically, a few eyebrows, in view of the historians' conventional bias in favor of documents and documentary sources for the reconstruction and the interpretation of the past. Yet our recourse to a strong utilization of oral verse in the attempt to chronicle and interpret the history of the Somali anti-colonial movement was not motivated by any flaire for whimsical experimentation in historiographical method. Rather, it was born out of necessity.

Those acquainted with the language and culture of the pastoral Somalis will have appreciated the pre-eminent, sometimes sinister, role which poetry plays in Somali life and thought. Whereas in the industrialized West, poetry—and especially what is regarded as serious poetry—seems to be increasingly relegated to a marginal place in society, Somali oral verse is central to Somali life, involved as it is in the intimate workings of people's lives. For reasons which we hope to elucidate in this study, the pastoral Somalis attach great value to their oral verse and cultivate it with an undying interest. Indeed the one feature which unfailingly emerges even from a casual observation of Somali society is the remarkable influence of the poetic word in the Somali cultural and political scene.

The Somalis are often described as a 'nation of bard's' whose poetic heritage is a living force intimately connected with the vicissitudes of everyday life.

In seeking to account for the unusual hold of the poetic art on the Somalis, some scholars would look to environmental factors for clues. The life of Somali nomads, it is said, is a life of wandering and danger, devoted as it is to eking out a living in a demanding environment. In the great boredom and bleakness of their surroundings, the theory goes, the Somali nomads turn to poetry, the one thing which does not cost them anything and provides them with drama and entertainment. 9 According to this view, without the twin inspiration of their faith and verse, the Somalis would waste themselves in fury and desperation.

This is a quaint argument, though it may have some merits. Environmental bleakness per se hardly makes for poetry or poetic creativity. To interpret the lyric verse of the Somali pastoralists merely as a survival mechanism, a feeble and self-pitying cry designed to mitigate life's cruelties to man, is to miss the significance of the poetic craft in Somali society.

What then makes poetry such a pervasive force in Somali society? To the Somalis the question is not so difficult to answer: poetry is the medium whereby an individual or a group can present a case most persuasively. The pastoral poet is, to borrow a phrase, the public relations man of the clan, and through his craft he exercises a powerful influence in clan affairs. For unlike Western poetry, which appears to be primarily concerned with the group of professionals dealing with, more often than not, an esoteric subject matter intended for the members of what seems an elitist, secret society, Somali pastoral verse is a living art affecting almost every aspect of life. Its functions are versatile, concerned not only with matters of art and aesthetics but also with questions of social significance. It illuminates culture, society and history.

In addition to its value as the literary and aesthetic embodiment of the community, Somali poetry is a principal medium of mass communication, playing a role similar to that of the press and television in Western societies. Somali poets, like Western journalists and newspapermen, thus have a great deal to say about politics and the acquisition of political power. Because it is the language and the vehicle of politics, the verse which Somali poets produce is an important source of Somali history, just as the printed and televised word performs a similar function in the West.

It is the duty, for example, of the Somali pastoral poet to compose verse on all important clan events and to express and formalize in verse the dominant issues of the age—in short, to record and immortalize in verse the history of his people. And since the poet's talents are employed not only to give expression to a private emotion but also to address vital community concerns, his verse reflects the feelings, thoughts and actions of his age.
Introduction

While I have not proposed an explicit theory or model of the relation between political power and oral poetry in Somali traditional (non-literate) society, the general approach of this study— with regard, for example, to the kinds of questions raised, the data presented, the narrative constructed and the conclusions drawn—would seem to entail theoretical implications. Insofar as these may be of interest to students of non-literate societies dealing with questions of power and political communication, they may be expressed as follows: 1) In Somali pastoral sanctions, the power and prestige of the poetic craft must possess universal recognition and acceptance in the community; 2) such power and prestige derive from the monopolistic conditions surrounding the composition and utilization of oral poetry; and 3) in the transmission of ideas, the poetic medium must be persuasive, efficient and easy to grasp and memorize.

The widespread community acceptance of the validity and efficacy of the pastoral medium in social relations seems to stem from pastoral traditions of feud and vendetta, especially the institution of godhoh discussed in chapter 1. Among the various components which comprise the godhoh institution is the concept of speech vendetta—the notion that certain kinds of oratorical forms can be used for slander. To borrow a pastoralist phrase, poetic orations serve the potent task of either ‘violating or embling the soul’ of a person or a group. When poetic formulations are used to wound someone’s honor, a case of godhoh has been generated. The resulting grievance and anger, if it is not redressed or offset by a counter poetic formulation, becomes grounds for violent hostility between persons or groups. Indeed poetic slander has been the source of many a lethal inter-clan feud. For an insult or slander in poetry is considered in pastoral sanctions to have the same effect on the victim as a physical assault.

By the same token, the power of poetry can be (and is) used to reconcile two parties who are on the brink of war. Thus, in pastoral ethos, poetry is both the instrument to precipitate and sustain feuds and a principal channel to bring feuds under control.

The second point making for the power of poetry in pastoral culture concerns the monopolistic nature of the craft. In pastoral society, as in others, a relatively small number of people are endowed with the talent to compose high-quality verse—artistic genius hardly comes in abundant supply. As a result, the inaccessibility of the art to most members of the population makes it a scarce commodity, the exclusive tool of a favored few. The few, aware of the high demand for their skill and the privileged status which their trade confers on them, use their talents to maximize their social and political influence. Hence, the pastoral bard occupies a prominent place in society. Lord of the desert and the dominant voice of the clan, he is envied by his less endowed kinsmen. It is his coveted task to articulate and register in verse the concerns of the community and the noteworthy deeds of his people.

This brings us to the last and perhaps the most important factor to account for the influence of poetry in pastoral Somali society. Given its regular features of alliterative and metrical structure, Somali pastoral verse is easy to memorize, far more so than prose can be. The significance of this fact is easy to grasp if we bear in mind that in an oral culture where writing is unknown, except to a few roving holy men, the only libraries or reference materials men have are their memories. Thus the events which are truly memorable in clan affairs are committed to verse, first so as to underscore their importance and, secondly, so that they can better be remembered. In this way versification enables the pastoralists not only to transmit information across considerable distances but also to record it for posterity. Hence, Somali pastoral verse functions both as a social communicator and as an archival repository.

Owing to the power of their talents in social relations, Somali poets tend to be political manipulators par excellence, using their potent craft to make and unmake politicians and public men. Magicians of words, they have the wherewithal to inflame and persuade the public effectively. Consequently, they are respected and feared, the pride of their clans whose panegyrics they sing and the bane of their enemies whom they slander and discredit through the artful marshaling of their daintier rhymes.

Sayyid Muhammad Abdille Hassan was, or at least perceived himself to be, one such magician of words. Rooted in the pastoral tradition and gifted in the art of political versification, he sought to utilize his oratorical resource as a political weapon in his protracted campaign against three colonial powers and their Somali collaborators. Our aim in this study is to examine what the Sayyid made of his poetic talent and to assess the nature of the impact (if any) of his political verse on the course of the resistance struggle.

Chapter 1 discusses the environment of the pastoral Somalis and the peculiar factors which predispose the society to the pursuit of oratory and eloquence, and goes on to a discussion of examples of prose oratory. Chapter 2 attempts to put forth a modest analysis of Somali oral poetry with emphasis on poetic oratory, its principles and uses. We provide examples of political poets who stove—with notable success—to leave their imprint on society through the eloquence of their words.

Chapter 3 is a 'straight' history, enunciating the onset of colonialism in the Horn of Africa and tracing the origins and growth of the Somali Dervish resistance movement. In this chapter we present evidence that the early phases of the Dervish resistance constituted an indigenous
response of the Ogaden Somali to the imposition of Ethiopian rule in western Somalia, and that the British, who were to bear the brunt of Dervish fighting, became unwittingly enmeshed in what was essentially an Ethio-Somali problem.

Chapter 4 attempts to present an extensive analysis of the Sayid's verse with a view to relating it to the ebb and flow of Dervish fortunes. The Sayid is shown to have deliberately put to use the power of 'my mighty tongue' in his long-lasting efforts to capture the hearts and minds of the Somalis for the Dervish cause. The extent of his success is assessed.

The last chapter begins with a critical review of the literature on the Somali Dervishes and proceeds to a discussion of the multifarious personality of the Sayid - as a political poet striving with utmost sincerity to present the 'truth' of his case to the people, as a Muslim mystic (Sufi), yearning for the quiet and contemplative life, and as a warrior chieftain of a highly militarist organization. The contradictory demands, it is argued, of these 'inner obligations' were responsible for the stormy, at times erratic, behavior that was to mark the later phases of his career.

As well as to historians, this study may be of interest to anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists, and perhaps even more to students of oral literature, communication, oratory and related disciplines with interest in discussions of the organic linkage between language and sociopolitical power. Students of oral literature may, for example, be interested in the discussion of the composition, transmission and distribution of Somali oral poetry, while the place of the poet, especially his influence in group decision-making, may be of relevance to sociologists, and his powers to inform and persuade the public to studies of communication as well as oratory and rhetoric.

The principal focus of this book is however directed to African historians, in particular those interested in what Professor T. O. Ranger has called African 'primary resistance' to European occupation. The example of the versatility of Somali pastoral poetry and the Sayid's utilization of it as a weapon in the resistance struggle may shed some light on other manifestations of African resistance to imperialism. The Sayid's verse, as we shall have occasion to witness, represented a deliberate effort to influence opinion and action through the clever fusion of the aesthetic with the didactic. Aware of the importance of public opinion in an egalitarian society, he used his verse as a forum to inform and persuade the public and to propagate the Dervish cause.

The challenge of winning the support and cooperation of others must have been part of the tasks of every leader of African resistance. In societies with hierarchical institutions where the leader could build on an existing structure of centralized authority, the tasks of persuasion might not have been as formidable or as crucial to the success of the resistance effort. But in segmental societies where egalitarianism or village democracy was the dominant norm, the leader had to rely more on persuasion than on coercion. As the Somali example demonstrates, he had to sell the cause to the people. Propaganda, public relations and other forms of promotional techniques must have been of paramount importance to the progress of the struggle. The promotional effort - if it is to succeed in turn requires a medium to communicate the leader's ideas to the masses, a medium whose power and prestige the people recognize and respect.

In the Somali case, the medium is shown to be poetic oratory. Professor T. O. Ranger showed the importance of religious media in the Shona-Ndebele revolt of 1896-7, though some of his propositions have since been challenged, unsuccessfully in my view. In the Mau Mau uprising, oaths and oathing are known to have played some role. A comprehensive re-examination of the manner in which these and other anti-colonial movements used indigenous tools to obtain mass participation may provide some insights into the phenomena of African responses to European imperialism.
Elements of Somali Pastoral Oratory: Prose

1 THE CULTURAL MILIEU

While a general treatment of the range and categories of Somali oratorical forms and genres along with their cultural significance and social functions is beyond the scope and intent of this study, a precursory look into a few arbitrarily selected themes of pastoral oratory and rhetoric may prove helpful. Although a formal study of Somali pastoral arts of oratory and skill in public speaking remains to be undertaken, few students of Somali language and culture have failed to observe the importance of artistic speech in Somali pastoral life. The works of such scholars as Richard Burton, M. Maimo, Margaret Laurence, B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis refer to the Somalis as a 'nation of bard's.' Their appraisal is echoed by Somali commentators on numerous occasions, most notably by the late president of the Somali Republic, Dr. Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, who spoke of his countrymen's lyric verse as 'one of the two national assets of inestimable value.' The other asset the president had in mind was Islam, and in putting poetry on the same level as Islam, the president paid no small tribute to his country's poetic heritage.

Not also a nation of nomads, the Somalis are a nation in which nomadic pastoralism plays a dominant role in the life of the people. Not only do more than half of the Somali people still continue to pursue pastoralism as the chief mode of economy, but urbanized nomads dominate the modern state. They form the class of people to whom, in another context, I have referred as the 'transitional generation.' These are former nomads who migrated to urban centers within the last thirty years and took over control of government from the departing expatriates in the wake of decolonization. Although bred in the countryside and essentially pastoral in culture, the transitional generation, nevertheless, has a commanding place in the economy and the civil service. And despite the ring of incongruity in the phrase, the long-urbanized Benadirs - who resent the supremacy of the recently-arrived pastoralists - complain of the nation's nomadic bureaucracy.

The prevalence of pastoralism makes Somalia unique in eastern Africa. While animal husbandry seems to be an important economic pursuit in eastern Africa as a whole, it is in Somalia alone that the majority of the population follows pastoralism. Kenya and Ethiopia, Somalia's neighbors, both have a minority of their populations who practice pastoralism, but it is interesting to note that even here a greater part of that minority is of Somali ethnic origin or of closely related peoples.

The distinguishing features of Somali pastoralism with respect to ecology, mode of living, social institutions and kinship systems have been ably brought out by I. M. Lewis (northern Somalia) and Enrico Cerulli (southern Somalia) and it would benefit the interested reader to consult their pioneering works on the subject. I will therefore limit my observations to introductory matters except where a topic of prime relevance to this study (as, for example, the discussion of camels and camel culture) is concerned. With few exceptions, all Somalis belong to one of six kinship groupings which, to adopt I. M. Lewis' term, I will refer to as clan-families. Four of these - the Darood, Dir, Hawiye and Isaaq - are predominantly nomadic pastoralists, while the other two, the Digii and Rahanwaan, are largely agriculturalists. These clan-families and their descendant clans are represented graphically on fig. 1, p. 10 and it would be useful to become familiar with them in relation to fig. 2, p. 11, which shows their territorial distribution. In the course of this discussion, we shall have occasion to refer to them, especially to the pastoralist clan-families and their sub-groupings.

The environment of the Somalis is both demanding and dangerous and, except in a few places, drought and famine, disease and pestilence, predatory beasts, and feud and war are constant threats to the people and their herds. A standard evening prayer after the flocks and herds are securely placed in the homestead kraal says, 'O God, save us from whatever creeps and whatever gallops, and whatever springs up and whatever roars. O God, make us the grain that escapes unharmed between the mortar and pestle.'

Yet this land of seeming danger and desolation is a promised land to the Somalis, and their folklore is replete with passionate yearnings to possess it. 'I speak the truth,' said one of their poets in a curse-attack on Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, whose empire he felt was encroaching on the pastoralists' traditional pasturefields.

I speak the truth: this land is our land.
Hodayo, Wardeer and the plains of Dahare.
Figure 1. Somali clan genealogy. The two agricultural clans of Digil and Rahanwayn are on one side, and on the other, the predominantly pastoral Samaale clan-families: Dir, Daarood, Isaaq and Hawiye. According to tradition, the word ‘Somali’ (properly, ‘Soomaali’) is a derivative of ‘Samaale’, name of the mythical founder—ancestor of the pastoralist clan-families, and etymologically comes from ‘soo maal’, ‘go and milk’, thus stressing the pastoral ethic in the culture. For alternative possible sources of the word ‘Somali’, see J. M. Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, pp. 11–13.

Bold type indicates numerically powerful clans and sub-clans who figure significantly in the events discussed in this book. A dotted line indicates omission of genealogical steps deemed unnecessary for this chart, wavy lines indicate maternal kinship. Parentheses indicate a variant name.

Figure 2. Distribution of major Somali clans and contiguous peoples.
And Hananley, beautiful pastures on the other side of the river. Also the hills of Harodigeet and Daaloo kii vales. And the plains overlooking the corral of Jigjiga. These the confines of my land are.

Thus, Somalis show an ambivalent attitude towards their environment; and nowhere is that ambivalence more apparent than in their folklore: on the one hand, they speak of the land as having a "Prophet curse upon it"; and on the other, as being a "blessed land teeming with mystic herds of camel attended by benediction genies or lavish gifts of stock on the impoverished."

2 THE CAMEL, MOTHER OF MEN

The foundation of the Somali pastoralists' material culture is the camel and it would not be a wrong analogy to say that what cattle are to the Masai and the Nuer, camels are to the Somali pastoralists. The survival and welfare of the Somalis in their demanding environment, the independence of their character, the range of their activity and the frequent occurrence of their wars are in large measure accounted for by the camel. As the following pages will show, the camel is both the source of life and the cause of losing it, and its husbandry is the honorable profession of men. Whereas sheep and goats, and to some degree cattle, which play no mean role in pastoral life, are the charge of women, the camels exercise both the labor and imagination of men as the pastoralists put it: Men and camels thrive on each other ("Waa isku baahan").

Mahmood Abdiile Hasan, whose political oratory occupies the central stage in this study, categorized the relative values of livestock in the following manner:

He who has goats has a garment full of corn:
A milch cow is a temporary vanity;
A he-camel is the muscle that sustains life;
A she-camel - whoever may have her - is the mother of men.

The image of the garment full of corn suggests impermanency and unreliability, as the raising of corn depends on the unpredictable seasonal rains. So is that of the cattle, described as a temporary vanity. Thus, it is the he-camel and she-camel which compete for importance in the life of the nomad. The one is described as the muscle (bullock) which sustains life, the other, the she-camel, as the mother of men.

At the outset, it may be said that the Somalis show no mystical or ritual attachment to their camels of the sort associated with other Eastern

Elements of Somali pastoral oratory: prose

African pasturists. Their interest in the camel and their love of it is entirely pragmatic and if they cherish it, it is because this generous beast does not fail them. To begin with, the camel is the only domestic animal which does not require a large quantity of the one resource which is so scarce in the Somali climate: water. In the hottest, driest period, the camel needs to be watered once every 20–25 days. In the rainy season, given a fresh supply of green pasture, the camel need not be watered at all. Come rain or drought, the camel's generosity to man is crucial to his survival. The she-camel's milk is delicious, refreshing and thirst-quenching; her meat is tasty and tender like veal; her skin is utilized as draperies for the nomadic hut which shelters the Somalis from the elements. The burden-bearing he-camel is the main transport vehicle and carries the children, the aged, the sick and the nomads' belongings for hundreds of miles every year. It may be of interest to note, though, that the Somalis do not ride their camels under ordinary circumstances.

In an uncommonly dry season, the last drops of water in the land are extracted from the stomach of the camel. This is done through a process called "usmirorad" in which the stomach is hung from a tree after being pricked open with a thorn at various places. Liquid filters through these openings and is collected by wooden buckets.

Although Somali camels consist of several species, they are all one-humped dromedaries, but in the absence of a scientific study of them it is difficult to catalogue the various local breeds with accuracy. The Somalis themselves distinguish several varieties of camel which include the Geel-Ad or white camels of the plains and the Gooodir in the mountain regions. The Gooodir are characterized by short, thin fur which is barely visible on the skin. Finally, there are the Boor-A'd or white dust camels of the Haud and the Dagaadi of southwestern Somalia. The most noticeable difference is between the Dagaadi and the plains camels, with the Dagaadi taller, darker but less hardy than the Geel-Ad. The Dagaadi, found in the well-watered region between the Shabelle and Juba rivers, is highly prized and is proverbial for its milk-producing capacities, but requires more frequent watering and is therefore less widespread. Ayaan camels, on the other hand, are the camels of the maritime plains. They are shorter, leaner and tend to be of a more temperamental disposition than the interior camels.

It will be seen from these notes that the differences Somalis note among their camels refer to color, height, temperament and milk-giving capacity. Thus, they are differences having to do with the effect of climate than with species variation. There exist of course several species of Somali camel which, as yet, have not been adequately studied.

At the age of four or five, camels start breeding. Under ideal conditions,
a calf is born every other year, the period of pregnancy being a year and
some days. The new-born camel is, in Somali eyes, a magnificent sight,
with its white silky hair and its lanky, if clumsy, limbs. Within hours of
its birth, it is able to stand on its feet, but is unable to walk for some
days. If the camel-camp is moved before the babies have learned to walk, men
or even boys carry them on their shoulders with the mother following. 24

With negligible supplements of grain and tea, milk and meat constitute
the pastoralist’s diet. Camel milk is thinner and lower in butter content
than either cow or goat milk, but is known to be high in nutritional value. 25
Camels are milked twice (morning and evening) in the dry season, and
times (morning, noon and evening) in the wet. It takes three persons
to milk a camel which has a baby. 26 Milking is done as follows: the baby
camel, kept separate along with other calves during grazing, is brought
to the mother. The fibrous soft band (marati), wrapped around the four
nipples to prevent the baby from sucking the mother during grazing,
is removed. Then the baby is allowed to stimulate (godad) the mother into
letting down the milk by sucking at the nipples. Unless they are igar
(milk-camels without babies), Somali camels need to be stimulated by
their calves to give milk. When the milk-camels releases the milk, a sign
indicated by tautening and enlargement of the nipples, the baby is kept off
by one person, usually a young boy. Then two men, one on each side,
rapidly milk with both hands into a large wooden bucket (toolike).
The bowl is held directly under the udder atop an uplifted knee which,
with one foot resting on the other leg and the thigh, forms a triangular
shape. It is a delicate balance which the baby, eager to suck, will easily
upset unless it is kept off. With some camels speed in milking is essential,
as the flow of milk will stop in perhaps five minutes. (The baby camels
are fed on left-over milk instinctively reserved by a nursing camel for
her baby.) Milk-camels whose babies have died are either trained to
give milk without filial stimulation or are induced to respond to the
stimulation of an alien baby (sidi). Igar is a milk-camel (trained to
respond by a gentle patting on the nipples. Sidi is effected in one of
two ways: one is to put the skin of the dead baby on the back of another
baby of roughly equal size (maqarsaar). This induces the mother
of the dead baby to accept the new one as her own. However, if this
method fails, recourse is had to an operation called ‘collin’ (literally,
‘sewing’). The camel is hobbled down side by side with the alien calf.
A sharp splinter (taarin) of about five inches is driven across the nostrils
to smother her temporarily. The pain and suffocation produce delirium
in the mother and induce her to accept the nursing by the alien calf. The
concept of collin in Somali represents an image of subjugation and servi-
tude and figures prominently in Somali verse as such. Witness, for
example, ‘Ali Jaama’ Haabila’s poem in which the poet ridicules the
Dulbahante for their ‘unquestioning submission’ to Sayyid Mahmad’s
autocratic ways: ‘Let him cant and bluster; for he holds the tyranny of
the piercing taarin splinter over them.’

A good milk-camel, at the height of lactation, produces about two
gallons a day in the wet season, a gallon in the dry. Environment dictates
that for the better part of the year, flocks (sheep and goats) 28 and herds
(camels) should be grazed separately. Camels can range long distances,
as much as a hundred miles within a fortnight, in their search for forage;
but the flocks must be watered every few days and therefore cannot
wander as far afield from permanent watering places. Thus, in the dry
season, the nomadic hamlet—consisting of women, children, married
men and their household effects, the burden he-camels, a few milch-
Elements of Somali pastoral oratory: prose

camels, and the flocks—grazes as a unit, keeping a radius of thirty miles from a water hole.

The rest of the camels are placed in the care of unmarried males ranging in age from about eight to twenty-five. Their task is demanding and their life scarcely envious. In their search for sufficient forage, the camels move far and frequently, which means the young men have to build makeshift kraals from thorn bushes every few days, if not every day. At night the camels have to be put in the kraal to secure them from plundering humans and from animal predators such as lions and hyenas. The young men have to make the long march with the camels to a water-point at least once every month, often over forbidding terrain and in a debilitating climate. Moreover, they have to keep on the look-out for the marauding bands of looters who are often on the loose. Thus, the wilderness and the camels are a training ground for the youths and it is here that the values of courage, endurance and self-reliance are inculcated in them.

The number of nomadic hamlets or camel camps which move together range from one lone household to thirty or forty hamlets, depending on conditions of weather and relations obtaining among the clans. On the whole, the largest concentration of kinsmen occurs on two occasions: when members of two or more clans hostile to each other are forced, for whatever reason, to graze in the same locality or to frequent the same water holes, or when, at the height of the drought, the concentration of water in a few reliable wells brings together many pastoralists. Here kinsmen band together to invest in joint ventures such as digging a well, sharing the scarce camel milk among various households, protecting water or grazing rights. But as I. M. Lewis has, in my opinion, admirably demonstrated, the Somali pastoralists do not maintain absolute ties to localities, and lineages do not correspond to territorial attachment but derive their validity from agrarian relationships (toil). Although clans are identified with certain territories in a general way, land and water are possessed or dispossessed by a contractual principle (beere) a code of customary rules which regulates the behavior of lineages towards one another—and, if that fails, by force of arms. With minor qualifications, I. M. Lewis accurately assessed Somali pastoralist thought and practice.

Table 1 Camel names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Camel</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geel (pl. Geeed)</td>
<td>A popular collective term for camel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodir, Geel-Ad</td>
<td>Collective camel noun but unlike the first group, these refer to camels of particular territories or colors. Thus, 'Geel-Ad' refers to western plains camels, 'Goodir' to Haud camels, 'Ayyun' to maritime camels, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boor-Ad, Ayyun</td>
<td>Camel names used only in poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maydall, Humbi</td>
<td>A general term for a single camel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagoodi</td>
<td>A she-camel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deebbe and Hitto</td>
<td>A she-camel of two to three years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuul</td>
<td>A choice she-camel which is ready to bear a calf at any time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dela</td>
<td>Names which describe dual concepts: as proper nouns, they refer to a particular she-camel, but as abstract nouns, they stand for a herd of camels and are often used in poetry in praise of the camel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qalqal</td>
<td>Popular he-camel names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boor-Ad, Ayyun</td>
<td>A gilded he-camel raised for burden-bearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aawr and Rati</td>
<td>A gilded he-camel raised for meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gore</td>
<td>A strong stallion for servicing she-camels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigir</td>
<td>Baby camels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nirig</td>
<td>A baby she-camel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigir</td>
<td>A baby he-camel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horwayne and Herris</td>
<td>Camels under the charge of unmarried men, as opposed to the milch-camels kept by the nomadic hamlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iman</td>
<td>A general term for camels in lactation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramag</td>
<td>Newly delivered milk-camels whose milk is a special delicacy reserved for honored guests and men of station</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A portable pastoralist house. The ladies are wearing the traditional tobe costume.
Elements of Somali pastoral oratory: prose

with respect to territory when he wrote: 'In conformity with this shifting system of movement and lack of absolute ties to locality, lineages are not based primarily on land-holding, and possession of land has no mystical or ritual value. Political ascendency is not conferred by or symbolized in mystical ties to the earth but derives from superior fighting potential.'

Like the Nuer for their cattle, the Somalis have a multiplicity of names for their camels, and my preliminary investigation has turned up several dozen names referring to various species, stages and developmental stages of camel. Proper names are descriptive and are given in accordance with color, height, beauty, origin, and so on. I sketch graphically in Table 1 a few camel names to show something of their variety and cultural significance. The names proliferate ad infinitum and it would not be rash to conjecture that under careful collation a thesaurus of some size could be compiled on them.

In their songs, as in their serious verse, Somalis address camels and I have sought in vain for a major Somali poet of this century or the last whose work does not in some way address this ubiquitous beast. There is a special category of songs for watering camels, a special category for herding them, another for milking them, another for driving them and yet another for rustling them. When at night camels are secured in the kraals, and campfires are lit, the poetry, banter and bluster carried on endlessly are for the most part about camels: who raidied what camels

and when, the herds of lineage X being superior to those of lineage Y, the merits of lineage A's daughters over those of B because they bring more camels in bride wealth.

The love of and preoccupation with camels is not only the result of their great economic importance, but also of their links with social relationships: a man's station in society is measured by the size of his herd; he pays in camels for a wife or wives; physical damages and homicides as well as redress for slander are calculated on a standard of measurement based on camels. Thus, blood compensation for a man is a hundred camels; that for a woman is fifty. (It will be remembered that in 1975 the government tried to remove the discrepancy and equalize compensation for homicide of men and women, and thus provoked a religious uprising in which ten sheikhs were summarily executed.) Camels are slaughtered for sacrificial purposes so as to impress Allah or the founding ancestors in a special way.

Camels are the cause and compensation of the loss of life and limb which so often is the outcome of quarrels over them: the sanctity of property is rather tenuous in Somali notions of ownership. It seems to reside, although a pastoralist would deny this when confronted with it, in the ability to usurp it or defend it against usurpation, and the Somali saying, 'Camels are in the kraal of him who has power' seems to lend support to the fluidity of ownership in pastoral sanctions. Thus, in the free-for-all attitude towards them, Somalis show no marked compunction against seizing camels on sight, and no small proportion of the wars and feuds Somali pastoralists conduct on each other and their neighbors, such as the Afar and the Oromo, are provoked and sustained by the desire to possess camels. It is a mark of honor to have taken part in a successful camel raid, and poets celebrate such raids in their verse. Thus, the aged Mareehaan poet reminisced: 'I remember the day I rode the heavy-sinewed horse And I made the plan of the battle entirely mine And in the dark I made out the beauty of idli And at a sign from me the boys surged forward rushing the herds. Oh! fine-nipped beast! how she galloped before us. Then we brought her to a well-watered valley where the he-camel serviced her. Oh, how I planned skilful schemes! but now have I not become weak? Lord, of thee I implore the holy water of heaven.' Another pastoralist poet exulted: Peace worsens the condition of my homestead;
I live by Allah's bounty and by raiding camels
And my happiness is the place where the dust of war rises.14

Next to the defeat of the British force under commander Richard
Corfield (which was occasioned by Dervish seizure of herds belonging
to British-protected lineages), the most memorable episodes in the
opinion of many pastoralists concerning the twenty-year struggle against
British colonialism relate to camel raiding. Prominent among such
raids are the DabOoOane camels (30,000 head) seized by Dervishes from
the Habar YoOin Ismaa in 1909, the MiInanO camels (50,000 head)
captured from the Dervishes around 1911 by the Majereen, and the
HagQOoan camels (60,000 head) seized from the defeated Dervishes by
British-protected lineages in 1921.15

Camel culture pervades contemporary society and the influence of
camel vocabulary and concepts on modern life appears to be extensive.
In literature, writers draw their images and inspiration from pastoral
figures denoting relations between man and camel. Thus, the lover in the
modern drama says that owing to unrequited love, he is stricken with jukaaan,16
the disease which camels in drought suffer from. Similarly, the singer of popular song likens the tender sentiment he feels towards
his lady to what a camel feels towards her sucking baby: 'I groan in agony
of love', he sings, 'like a camel whose baby is unjustly sequestered away
from her.'17 For her part, the woman poet admonishes her suitor to
give her 'fine pastures, and pat her gently on the udder so she'd give milk'.
The jealous husband, in his bitter sarcasm and ridicule, points out to
his wayward wife, that it is only the 'camel which enjoys being milked
by two men at the same time, and that not in all seasons, but solely when
she is in full lactation. Anything else of the feminine gender shared
by two men is soon debased',18 he moralizes.

When they gained their independence and the two former territories
of British and Italian Somaliland joined to form the Somali Republic in
1960, the Somalis found it fitting to adopt a camel name ('Maandeeg') to
stand as a symbolic name for their newly-acquired freedom. 'Maandeeg'
means a milk-camel which satisfies the mind through the generosity of
its milk. The well-known northern Somali poet and patriot, Abdillaahi
Tina'Ade, composed a poem which he called 'Maandeeg' to celebrate
the advent of independence, and the term became popular in press and
radio in the heady, euphoric days of the early sixties. In social as well as in
business vocabulary, the camel stalks the city.

The conversationalist says, 'I groaned for your point',19 when meaning
to acknowledge a strong impression of something said, the term 'groan'
(gash) being the sound that a camel makes when coming to water or
joining her young. A person speaks of 'saham' when making a preliminary
investigation of a question or subject, the word 'saham' (scout) being the
one pastoralist use in locating new pastures for the herds. Government
transport (gangiir), the term used to describe the fleet of government
vehicles for personnel transport, is the word the pastoralists employ to
refer to their burden-bearing camels. 'Layli', traditionally used to denote
the breaking of a burden-bearing young he-camel, is nowadays used to
signify exercises in a school workbook. The term 'warfin' (express mail
delivery) derives from the same root as 'waraafl' (shinglet), the old weapon
used to pelt the destructive birds which peck on camels' humps. Similarly,
the scholar acknowledges a debt every time he uses the term 'raadraad' (to
trace something), which is used to denote the word 'research'. The
word is employed by the nomads when tracking lost animals or in tracing
stock thieves. The Marxists too have a debt to the nomads in appropriating
'hugaanka', a pastoralist term for leading a camel by rope, as the modern
term for their bureau of ideology (Hugaanka Ideologiypad).

The camel nomenclature surveyed here represents a fragment of a
fragment, collected as it was in an amateur way by one whose interest in
the subject was only indirect and who, in any case, lacked the linguistic tools
which the tackling of such a subject requires. It is hoped that it serves,
however, as ample demonstration of the extent to which the pastoral
values and habits continue to influence the acts and thoughts of modern
Somalis even if they no longer pursue pastoralism.

3 THE ROLE OF THE PONY IN CAMEL RAIDING

It may be helpful to follow up the discussion of the camel with a few
remarks on the Somali pony before concluding this section. Until recently,
the destinies of the horse and the camel were interlocked. The pastoral
Somalis say the horse and the camel thrive on each other ('Waa isku bahaan'). The observation signifies the importance Somali attach to
the horse as an instrument in camel raiding or defending camels against
raid. The Somali horses are swift ponies which are thought to have descend-
end from the Arabian variety and to have reached the Somali cost with
the introduction of Islam:20

Somalis recognize two breeds of their ponies, the so-called 'Galybeer'
from western Somalia and the 'Bari' or eastern pony. Although the eastern
pony is slightly smaller (thirteen to fourteen hands in height at the should-
er) than the Galybeer, it is preferred to its western counterpart. It is
stronger and harder than the Galybeer on account of its adaptation to the
less well-watered regions of eastern Somalia. Red, grey or beige in color,
the Somali pony is furnished with hard hoofs and a sturdy form which
make it a useful animal in a demanding environment. It can survive, indeed thrive, on poor grazing and a modest supply of water—it requires watering every other day if grass is dry and it is on active duty.

In times of water scarcity when the herds are away in the Haud, the Somalis give their horses a mixture of water and milk, usually two parts of milk to one part of water. At a guess, the daily ration for one pony is the milk of two good milch-camels mixed with a quart of water.

The Somalis show great kindness to their horses, rearing and caring for them with marked meticulousness. A man talks to his mount, sings to it in familiar language and will crawl on stones under a thorn bush to extract for it a bite of something to eat. The horse, like the camel, has been the object of the Somali poets’ serious verse. In this matter, Sayyid Mahammad and his predecessor and kinsman, Raage Ugaas, won a lasting reputation for their brilliant, descriptive praise verse on the horse.43

The pastoral Somali seldom ride their horses for sport, reserving the energies and services of their beloved beasts for the gravest of moments when dear life hangs on a sudden flight or pursuit. Before delivering a raid, the pastoralists will lead their horses for miles, only mounting when the object of their enterprise is in sight. The strategy is to keep the pony rested and in fit condition right up to the time of the action. Then they go into action with lightning speed, rounding up the herds and bolting away with them before the owners of the looted stock have time to launch a counter-offensive.

The Dubabante (from whom the dreaded cavalry of Sayyid Mahammad’s Dervish movement came) are reputed to be the best pastoralist horsemen. In a subsequent section on the childhood life of Sayyid Mahammad, I hope to show that the legendary numbers of the Dubabante ponies are explicable in environmental terms. The climate of the Nugaal, a region which constitutes the heartlands of the Dubabante, is highly suited for breeding and rearing ponies. In addition to the Dubabante, there were numerous Somali clans in whose economy and way of life the pony played a significant role. These include several lineages of the Isaaq, the Ogaden and Warrangali Delaaro and the ‘Umar Mahamud sub-lineage of the Majeerteen clan-family.

The Somali pony has, in recent years, fallen on bad times. Where in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, a small lineage of roughly a hundred fighting men could boast a hundred or so beasts per household, one now sees a few solitary herds in northern Somalia. Some of these in the Nugaal are even no longer domestic. The reason for the astonishing reduction of Somali ponies is not hard to divine. With the establishment of centralized authority, beginning first with colonial administrations and subsequently the national government, feuds and stock theft have been brought virtually to an end. The end of feuds meant in turn the end of the usefulness of the pony. Thus, while there is some pastoral interest in the pony for prestige purposes, it has clearly lost, and probably will not regain, its luster and appeal for the pastoral Somali.

FORMAL SPEECHES AND THE GODOB INSTITUTION OF CUMULATIVE GRIEVANCES

The Somalis are … no mean orators; and to be a man of distinction in a tribe you must have a reputation not only as a fighter and a man of many possessions, but also as a convincing spokesman. The Somali orator is extremely prolix and very histrionic; but, despite this, he is undoubtedly impressive. He possesses the first qualification of the public speaker, namely, self-confidence; and he has the utmost scorn for any rival. The consequence is that, whenever a British officer gives an audience to the leaders of a tribe to discuss any political question, he is faced by the prospect of a feast of oratory, which often lasts for a whole day. The most famous spokesman of the tribe will be the first to hold forth. Careless of repetitions and bored up with a sense of his own importance, he will state his tribe’s case with an unceasing flow of words and gestures. This speech may extend to half an hour. The man whose reputation is only second to that of the first spokesman will then intervene. Convinced that the tribe’s case is being mangled, he will himself proceed to harangue the luckless British officer in almost precisely the same terms. And so it will go on until every member of the tribal deputation has delivered his oration. It may be that the British officer will be impressed by all this rhetoric; but his decision, based on the true facts of the case, will probably have been made before all the purple patches will have fallen on deaf ears. This is the tragedy of the Somali School of Rhetoric.44

It may also have been the tragedy of the British colonial enterprise in northern Somalia. While grudgingly acknowledging the possible merits of Somali pastoral oratory, Douglas Jardine’s words would seem to betray the familiar touch of colonial condescension. Victorian smugness and complacent ignorance—the sort of attitude which hardly boded well for Anglo-Somali relations. What seemed mere ‘histrionics’ and ‘careless repetitions’ to him may, to the pastoralists, have been a carefully constructed form of oratory, each phrase or expression of which was designed to support some aspect of an argument or convey a subtle shade of meaning. Had British colonial officials, to speculate a moment, given
due consideration to the 'histrionic' preachings of the roving holy man whom they splendidly came to dub the 'Mad Mullah', they might have spared themselves – and Somaliland – twenty years of a costly war. But more of this later.

In their speech as in their stock, the Somalis show a marked preoccupation, and as a Somali elder put it, in disemargration of his people's tendency to volubility. 'We Somalis just talk, talk, talk, whether or not we have something to talk about.' Despite the elder's scorn of pastoral verbosity, it can be said that the spoken word is the center of pastoralist life and lore. Language, written or oral, plays a dominant part in the life of any community and, to borrow one writer's phrase, tends to become 'the soul of the nation'. In this the Somali pastoralists cannot lay claim to uniqueness or particularity. But they do seem to belong to those societies in which speech is cultivated as an art, and a man's position in his group depends, to a considerable extent, on his powers of oration. To be able to convince others by the powers of one's diction and flow of words is an asset which many Somalis aspire to and not a few possess.

This emphasis on oratory and persuasion rooted in pastoral egalitarianism seems to be a dominant feature in Somali society. To begin with, the Somali pastoral system is characterized by a marked absence of central authority and a corresponding lack of inherited offices or a hierarchy of chiefs to run it. All claim to be equal and show nothing but scorn and disdain for what, in Western metaphor, may be termed 'duly instituted authority'. But where all are equal, anarchy is not far to seek, and that, at least at a superficial level of observation, is what seems to characterize the relations between Somali clans. On a closer look, however, it becomes fairly clear that some men in fact do wield greater power and influence in society than others and that a high proportion of these men usually have what Somalis call the 'gift of speech' (hibo hadel) – 'gift of the gab' might be a more familiar description of the point but would convey a derogatory, and therefore misleading, impression.

The importance of oratory in political control in traditional society has been duly, if belatedly, noted by contemporary Africains, and in this respect Maurice Bloch's urgent appeal to 'open up discussion' on this 'neglected area' stands out as an eloquent example, as does Asmaram Legesse's notable demonstration of the role of oratory in conflict resolution among the Somali-related Boran Oromo. Somali think much about improving their speaking abilities and they tend to show a passionate preoccupation with 'fine expression'. A number of points can be raised in respect to the prevalence of oratory among the Somalis: the first is that speech is the vehicle of politics in so highly a segmented society as the Somalis', and he who would lead others must persuade rather than coerce. In a non-literate society where the privilege of written communication is either limited to a tiny fraction of the population or wholly non-existent, it is only natural that the spoken word should serve both as a medium for communication and as a means for persuasion. Secondly, the Somali language tends to lend itself, as one scholar put it, to 'dramatic expression'. Although, with the exception of a few coastal areas, Somali was an unwritten language until 1972, it is a highly developed language with a rich oral literature. The images are lively, the expression vivid and one scholar speaks of its 'poetic style', while another likens the Somalis to the ancient 'birds of Greece'.

There is yet another view which attributes Somali over-emphasis on poetic oration to their harsh environment. With a country – the theory goes – barren of almost all materials needed for painting, sculpture, and pottery-making, discouraged by Islam from making gravens images, too unsettled to accumulate artifacts, it is only natural that the Somali pastoralists should turn to the only medium which would cost them nothing, namely, verbal expression. According to this view, poetry compensates the Somali for the 'bleakness of their usual life', and the dangers of drought, disease and hunger can be banished momentarily by the recitation of mellowed lines.

Whatever the merits of these arguments, it is doubtful that any hypothesis attempting to account for the Somali's passionate love for and cultivation of the art of oration which does not take stock of what the Somalis call 'godh' is likely to lead anywhere. For want of a better phrase, I render 'godh' as the institution of 'cumulative grievances'. In a negative sense, 'godh' can also be translated as 'reciprocal vendetta'. This notion is at the heart of class and faction and of the pastoral obsession with stylized speech. In pastoral ethics, a man assaulted physically or verbally has a claim of 'godh' on his offender, a sort of debt of wrongs which has the characteristics of a debt in goods. The offender, like a debtor in commodities, owes much in godh injuries to the victim (creditor).

Godh injuries resulting from a character slander vary from the simple offense (cadaa) which can be rectified by a mere apology, slander (qaad), amendable only by the payment of compensation (had), to the mortal offense (shaahu) which often leads to blood vengeance. In the institution of godh, the victim need not seek redress immediately, as he is often barred by inauspicious circumstances from doing so, but may bide his time indefinitely, so that the resolution of a case of godh may not be effected for generations nor by the participants of the offense, but by the offspring of the participants. Moreover, in the ethos of godh, fifty or even a hundred years may pass before the descendants of a murdered man may move to settle up accounts with their foes by killing one or
Elements of Somali pastoral oratory: prose

several of his descendants or nearest kin. Similarly, if a clan loses property or blood to another, retribution need not be effected in the present generation, but it is bound to be executed. For a debt of godob is one of those unforgettable and unforgivable social transactions which must receive compensation sooner or later.

Somalis recognize two types of godob: a godob resulting from physical injury or usurpation of property, and godob which results from verbal assault. Both are equally damaging in their consequences and the one can be converted into the other. To avoid confusion, I distinguish the two aspects of godob by referring to the one as speech vendetta and the other as blood vendetta.

The pastoral Somalis, egalitarian and lacking an impartial authority to compose differences, readily resort to violence. Battles are fought to safeguard honor, to redress past wrongs, to seize property or defend it against seizure, to protect pasture and water rights, or simply to release pent-up tensions. Where resources are meager and competition for them is high, as it is among the pastoralists, conflicts are frequent and pursued to virulent ends. Moreover, in the absence of an impartial arbiter, the ultimate instrument for conflict resolution is force.

Force is exercised not only in action but also in words. Words are formalized into rhetorical expressions, coined into proverbs or composed into poetic utterances with the intention of discrediting a rival or enhancing one's position and prestige. They are used to fan up hostility or, conversely, to reconcile warring factions, to flatter a powerful enemy and thus deter him from executing an injurious act against one's person and property, and to show self-effacement so as to gain pity (an important feature in clan relationships).

In such a setting where the word is truly powerful and a vendetta in speech can (and does) easily lead to vendetta in blood with disastrous consequences, it should scarcely be difficult to appreciate the role of the orator, the raconteur and the poet as individuals who use their potent crafts for political and social influence. The methods these individuals exercise to maximize their 'power of the tongue' will be treated in detail for the moment, we should illustrate the relation between feud and formalized speech by quoting Ma'alim 'Abdulahi H. Rabah of the Mahamad Sabeer Ogaaden on the subject. What he says of poetry applies to other forms of rhetorical utterance:

Poetry brings evil and dishonor as well as fame and respect. For instance, a clan attacked in poetry, if they cannot find among them a poet to redress their honor, would resort to fighting. Camels and men are inseparable ('Waa isku bahaan'). Camels are looted

and men killed because of gabay (poetry). The more camels a man has, the more men at his disposal, the greater his resources and ability. The more camels a clan owns, the greater their resources. Camels bring men together. If a clan loots camels and kills men from another clan, the injured clan may bide their time and not rise in immediate revenge. But if the victorious clan attempt, as they often do, to immortalize their victory in verse, then the looted clan feels humiliated and would immediately seek to remedy their honor and avenge their wrongs. The looted clan's poet(s) versifies laments, listing their grievances and urging their fellow kinsmen not to eat or drink until they have remedied their honor. Thus, revenge follows revenge and feud, feud.

Theft and raiding of camels are a pastoral pastime; a man may be a camel thief and would admit to, in fact boast of, being one. But let that fact be stated in a formalized oratorial or poetic medium and a godob, a ground for renewed hostility, has been committed.

5 ORATORY AND FORMAL ASSEMBLIES

We have said that the pre-eminence of the spoken word has its roots in an essentially democratic society in which men who wield influence do so mainly through their powers of persuasion rather than coercion. Formalized oration was stated to be important not only in the day-to-day interaction between individuals, families and groups but also in the acquisition and exercise of socio-political control. In Somali pastoral sanctions, to formalize words is to invest them with power—a formidable, almost mystical power—which can be and often is exercised for good or ill. This may be the place to go further into the question of speech formalization. We may begin by asking, at what point does a given utterance become a formalized speech act? How are words used to ennoble or injure someone's honor? The answer requires an analysis, however brief, of Somali notions of rhetoric, oratory and speechmaking.

To employ a simplistic schema for purposes of clarity, the pastoral Somalis distinguish between two types of speech—each of which has a set of principles and rules governing its expression—through which formalization may occur. The one is poetic speech, a form of oratory artistically refined and articulated in the medium of a classical prosodic formulation. Such a speech gains the power of formalization from an intense interplay of poetic rhythm, metrical structure and syllabic arrangement. The formalization of speech through the artful use of poetic devices will be explored shortly in the chapter on Somali pastoral prosodic systems. For the moment, we should turn to an examination of the
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manner and principles by which speech is formalized through the use of prose oration.

A prose oration acquires the solemn characteristics of a formal speech when, to use a pastoral metaphor, it is delivered as a ‘tree speech’ (‘hadal geed’), often to attend to a matter of collective interest such as politics or litigation. The significance of trees in Somali life and lore has found ample expression in the words of the oral poet who reminded his kin that “On the Ban-Awl plain there is a tree for poverty to shelter under.” The gatherings of Somali herdsmen are almost invariably held under the shade of a tree. So important is the refreshing shade of a tree in the barrenness of the land, that the term ‘tree (geed)’ has come to assume a synonymous meaning with ‘assembly’ (shir). Thus, Somalis speak of four trees to refer to four types of assembly which serve as the source and sustenance of oratorical formulation. Presented in order of decreasing importance, they are graphically shown in table 2.

Table 2: Somali assemblies

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<td>The Tree of Justice and Jurisprudence</td>
<td>This is the tree of the so-called ‘beertea’ or men of law, who arbitrate in matters of dispute.</td>
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<td>Geedka Haqqua iyo Hukunka</td>
<td>The Tree of Truth and Justice</td>
<td>This is the tree of the Sheikh, and it relates to situations in which religious sanctions are the basis of law and conflict resolution as distinct from secular sanctions (beer).</td>
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<td>The Tree of Bluster and Bravado</td>
<td>So named because it is the tree of young men where they brag about the superiority of their respective clans, their camels, houses, the beauty and merit of their girls, the valor of their men, etc.</td>
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<td>Geedka Quansada iyo Quraanta</td>
<td>The Tree of the Bow and Chisel</td>
<td>This is the tree of industry. All objects and crafts necessary for living in the country are manufactured under this tree. Things produced here include: military tools (bows, spears, daggers, darts), knives, horse and camel saddles, in short, all manner of household and personal implements.</td>
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There is no fixed time for the convening of a meeting nor any special person or group with ascribed authority to call one. Shirs are held on an ad hoc basis as the need for them arises. The Somali word for assembly oration is ‘hadalka shirka’, a compound noun from ‘shir’ (assembly or congregation) and ‘hadal’ (talk). An assembly meeting is distinguished from informal chitchat (sheeko). The difference is both one of size and of substance. Whereas the formal assembly is a solemn proceeding with substantial representation of the members of a lineage or lineages, the sheeko participants scarcely exceed the male members of several households and the meeting does not have in view a particular question to resolve or a particular goal to attain. No decisions are reached in a sheeko meeting and the banter and bluster which go on endlessly are inconsequential, except in cases where some inadvertent orator or poet slanders by a callous pronouncement the character of an individual or a group, and thus generates a case of godob (cumulative grievance). In the latter situation the meeting suddenly turns into a shir and sets about to amend the resultant wrongs, or failing that, breaks down in disarray, leaving the outstanding grievance to be settled by a subsequent shir or alternately by precipitating blood vendetta or destruction of property.

The typical shir convenes under the shade of a tree, usually one of a variety of the acacias which so uniquely thrive in Somali climate. There is, to my recollection, no particular arrangement as to seating, although choice positions are reserved for elders and clan notables. Privileged seating is determined in relation to coolness of shelter and nearness to speaker. In theory, all adult males are fully entitled to participate in the deliberations of the assembly, and to give their opinions on any matter of interest to the group, but in practice three types of men dominate the meeting: the orator (‘ulkar), the poet (‘gababaa) and the expert-in-tradition (‘beertea’). Two additional individuals hold ceremonial offices: the chairman (‘guu dhaaweyn) and the wordbearer (doxdood, literally ‘argumentbearer’), both appointed by popular consensus because of their skill and mastery in officiating at public functions.

The chairman opens up the discussion by saying, ‘The assembly is in order’ (‘Shir gudoomaysan’), upon which the speaker begins and the wordbearer responds to him antipodally. Thus, when the speaker says, ‘Hear me, kinsmen’ (‘Tolow haddii maqo’), the wordbearer responds, ‘So it is’ (‘Waa sida, waa kow’). The wordbearer repeats this phrase whenever the speaker completes a statement or makes a pause throughout the speech, so that a Somali oral delivery sounds much like dialogue, a question and answer. The wordbearer is a conduit between speaker and audience and his repetition of stock phrases is a confirmation that speaker and audience are communicating on the same wavelength. After the
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speaker completes his delivery, he usually gives the floor to a poet, who covers the same ground in poetic oration. Orator and poet between them present a case, facing a corresponding number of opponents. Sometimes, however, a speaker may be talented both as a poet and an orator, and thus combine the functions of both. Whatever the number of speakers on one side, they are leveled against an opposite set of speakers, equal both in number and talent.

The deliberations of a formal assembly are clearly dominated by two parties, namely, those who argue the case, the so-called ‘odkar-galabaya’ (orator, poet), and those who decide upon it on the basis of the argument presented to them, the so-called ‘beerebeegi’ (experts in tradition). The poet and orator act the role of the lawyer while the beerebeegi combines the functions of the jury and the judge in modern society. A case debated by a poet or an orator and deliberated on by a competent beerebeegi truly becomes a battle of wits and of words. Not only is knowledge of history, customs and traditions essential, but also the ability to articulate them into a coherent whole is equally, if not more, indispensable. For although they do not concede it in so many words, Somalis tend to emphasize style over substance in resolving litigation, so that the skill with which a case is presented seems to carry greater weight than its actual merits.

It would be in order at this point to look briefly into the attributes and the criteria by which the poet and orator on the one hand, and the beerebeegi on the other, are judged qualified to perform their roles. First, the oratorial class: the Somali term for orator, as we have seen, is ‘odkar’ from ‘od’ (voice) and ‘kar’ (able). Thus, a literal translation from the Somali would give us ‘voice able’ or ‘capable of speech’, as if to say those not endowed with oratorical talents are incapable of speech.

In respect to their mastery of speech and oratorical skill, Somalis differentiate ‘odkar into four ranks as illustrated in table 3. Their powers of oration, and hence their importance in society, come in this order, with the afebnaal leading the field, followed by afaftahan and afmisbaar. Whereas afebnaal and afaftahan use their assets to good effect, notably for reconciliation, afmisbaar is ‘the man of universal scandal and provocation, trafficking in malicious and insidious rumors and inciting clans to feud’.

But if he is hated and despised, afmisbaar is also feared, and individuals and groups seek his goodwill, but failing that, his neutrality. Some would even go to the length of bribing an afmisbaar either to flatter their lineage or to attack rival lineages and enemies. ‘An afmisbaar’, says one elder, ‘who is also a poet is the most vicious character in our society. He has powerful instruments for persuasion but always uses them to create mayhem’.

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<td>First</td>
<td>‘Afeb (mouth) and ‘maal (wealth)’ – he whose mouth is wealth. He is an individual of lowering prestige who has the reputation of never having lost a case in which he has argued. (This is in fact not wholly accurate for I have been in a纠纷 where an afmisbaar lost an argument to another afmisbaar.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afaftahan</td>
<td>Second</td>
<td>‘Afeb’ (mouth) and ‘tahan’ (generous) – he whose mouth is generous. Although his position is not as widely acclaimed as that of the afebnaal, he too occupies a commanding position in oratorical contests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afmisbaar</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>‘Afeb’ (mouth) and ‘misbaar’ (saw) – he whose mouth is a saw. Afmisbaar, as we shall see, is important in a negative sense. This class of orators seems to have emerged with the development of mass, nationalist politics and impersonal political organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afgaroo</td>
<td>Fourth and lowest</td>
<td>‘Afeb (mouth) and ‘garoo’ (deformed) – so named because he lacks oratorical prowess and public speaking skills and is therefore an object of scorn.</td>
</tr>
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The migration of a great mass of Somalis in the last forty years from pastoralism to city life and the weakening of ethnic and family ties attendant upon wholesale urbanization seem to have given afmisbaars great opportunities to create mayhem. Freed from collective kinship accountability and protected by powerful patrons, afmisbaars found the impersonal society of the city a fertile field in which to exercise their dark rhymes and to ruin reputations with impunity. Patronized by politicians and powerful men, they began to derive status, influence and economic privilege from their gift of the gab, and nowhere was this more obvious than in their intimate attachment to the powerful in the politics of pre- and post-independence Somalia. Their powers to assassinate character – thereby ruining careers – and their unprincipled readiness to sell their talents to the highest bidder made afmisbaars a despised but keenly sought-after class of hangers-on, enlisted by contending political parties which saw the great political mileage to be had from the services of afmisbaars as propagandists and public relations men.

Afgaroo, on the other hand, is the pathetic case, the man of universal contempt. Derisively he is often referred to as ‘he who cannot defend his camel!’ (‘Hashissaa ma da'sade’). The contemptuous aphorism makes
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...intelligence... the so-called educated people who acquire book knowledge collect all they learn in books according to written symbols. When such people are called upon to give a public speech, they resort to their written symbols. Without these they can hardly open their mouths. To register our contempt for such a person, we say: 'He who looks at a paper never becomes a memorizer' ('Haashi dowr haafaad ma noqdo').

If the pastoral Somalis prize the arts and skills of effective speaking, it is because effective speaking is necessary to persuade the men who play a crucial role in their judicial system, the so-called 'heerbeegti' or panel of judges. While a thorough exposition of the place of heerbeegti in Somali pastoral jurisprudence is outside this book’s concern, it is necessary to look briefly into this institution in order to appreciate the gripping power of oratorical argumentation among the pastoralists. 'Heerbeegti' (beer ‘customary law’, beegti ‘to know’) is a collective term referring to a body, of legal experts who mediate in individual, intra-clan and inter-clan disputes and have therefore risen to positions of prominence and prestige in the land. Their chief power and influence seem to derive from two sources: their knowledge of customary law and legal precedents on the one hand, and, on the other, their ability to persuade litigants as to the soundness of their decisions. Hence, the heerbeegti are both orators and learned men. Their task is arduous, requiring, as it does, both time and training. There is no formal training a man must undergo in order to become a qualified heerbeegti; one simply learns gradually the techniques of mediation and through time comes to impress on others one’s talents as an impartial arbitrator. The time it takes to develop these talents is long, and as a result most heerbeegti are elderly men well into the last third of their lives.

The typical heerbeegti is an amicable but grave elder. He sits in a meditative pose. His speech is slow and deliberate; his bearing is grave and attentive and the occasional stroking of the beard lends a measure of importance to his person. While the argument is in progress, he assumes the pose of a neutral character, showing no sign of sympathy or feeling toward any party. Ideally, he should neither take a bribe nor be partial, and in the words of one elder:

Two things are out of character with the heerbeegti: to take a bribe and to be partial. The heerbeegti suspected to have taken a bribe finds himself disgraced and falls into the status of 'he whose daughter would not be married because of his bad name' ('gabadaa guurwan').

Men of old used to tell me that the Somalis who have the gift of speech are the pastoralists. It is a well-known fact that pastoralists live on animal products. And animal products heighten the sensitivity of the brain and enhance reception of the mind. The animals, especially camels and goats, feed on plants of innumerable kinds. These plants contain breakin (natural salts). Our children grow on the milk and flesh of mineral-rich animals. The ones who do not excel in speech and intelligence are town children who eat food without milk or meat. Food that lacks milk and meat destroys the
The typical gathering of litigation begins with the guudhoormee (chairman) opening the discussion by the words: 'Assembly is in order.' Then a member of the heerbeegi takes the floor and directs a question to the parties in dispute. 'Who has an interest or claim?' ('Yaa da dan leh?') Then he who has a complaint responds 'I have an interest.' 'Against whom do you have an interest?' ('Yaad dan u leedaha?') 'I have an interest with X belonging to clan Y.' The heerbeegi then asks him, 'Do you speak for yourself or does another speak for you?' ('Maadka dooin, ma nin bad idanma?') It is unusual for an individual who has a complaint to speak for himself unless he also happens to be an orator. Usually he gives the name of his advocate (qareen) who stands up to identify himself to the audience.

The heerbeegi then proceeds with the second line of questioning which consists of the complainant being called upon to define the nature of his complaint. In doing this, the heerbeegi narrates a range of damages within which all complaints are expected to fall. Thus, he would ask, 'Is it wife or wives?' ('Ma hilaan?') 'Is it stock?' ('Ma hooaan?') 'Is it blood?' ('Ma hinjiirbaa?') 'Is it slander?' ('Ma qadaad baa?') 'Is it an abuse of the protected?' ('Ma magan baa?') 'Is it a matter of household damage?' ('Ma mooma?') Each of these has a fixed legal code defining it.

When the nature of the case has been decided upon, the complainant or his spokesman is given the opportunity to expand upon it. An argument usually consists of four parts. The first part is an introduction (qarar), a combination of boast and partial exposition of thesis. It contains poetic rhetorical expressions or a series of pithy remarks, wisecracks and bravado, all designed to grab the attention of the hearer and to set credentials of the speaker. The second part is aaf, a sort of advance refutation in which the speaker forestalls an anticipated attack on his argument, and builds up defences around the weaker areas of his argument by mentioning the weakness himself. The aim is to undermine an opponent even before he has an opportunity to present his argument. The third part is baaniso, the corpus of precedents, conventions, case histories supporting material, etc. It is here that the speaker runs riot, as it were, attempting to say everything that can conceivably be said. Volubility is a Somali commodity and a characteristic proverb in speechmaking says, 'If a man with more talk than you speaks before you, he leaves nothing behind for you to speak on. If he is to speak after you, he keeps you in dreadful trepidation.' The phrase 'more talk than you' is revealing for it points to the emphasis Somalis place on verbosity and to the ethos of speaking whereby a man aims to simply 'out-talk' his opponent.

Somalis admire men like the Ogaadeen chieftain, Googow Ade, who went to the tree of the rival Jidwaag Darood and offered to speak on ...
Elements of Somali pastoral oratory: prose

had to force for the rectification of grievances. But even here disputants return to the heerbeegti to compose differences after energies are exhausted in fighting.

ORATORY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: THE DAQAATO BEERATO FEUD OF 1962. 16

With the above remarks as a general introduction, it may be helpful at this point to describe briefly the juro-political proceedings of a specific affair, so as to bring out something of the dynamics and verbal lug-of-war attendant upon such affairs. To do this, we will take the Browsed-Maize case of 1962-3, so named because members of the Daqato clan, a pastoral people, and the agricultural Beerato clan fought over a grazed maize field. The Daqato inhabit the lower reaches of the Leopard River (Shabeell-e) northeast of the town of Qallaaf (see fig. 2, p. 11), while the Beerato cultivate the rich alluvial plains to the south of the town. Driven by famine and by a feud with another clan, the Daqato moved their herds of cattle and camels to the south into rangelands which they regarded as their traditional pasturage haunts but which at the time were being farmed by members of the Beerato. In an evening browse, the herds of the Daqato accidentally (the Beerato would say deliberately) wandered into a Beerato maize field and damaged the crop. A nocturnal skirmish ensued in which a Daqato man and two Beerato men were killed.

The disturbance spilled into the town, which was inhabited by both groups, and the succeeding three months saw the outbreak of inter-clan violence, not on the scale of a pitched battle as in olden days but sporadic clashes which nevertheless were disruptive enough to bring the normal life of the town almost to a standstill. Daqato and Beerato young toughs, armed with modern rifles, roamed the streets in broad daylight and engaged in periodic shoot-outs and assassination of each other's prominent clan leaders. In keeping with the style of Somali pastoral feuds, each clan sought to deprive the other of elders and able men.

The Ethiopians, who constituted the sole central authority in the region, did not bother to intervene. They had little reason to do so since their contact with the Somali population was limited mainly to two occasions, notably when it was time to exact gihar or tribute and when they needed to round up livestock to replenish their own provisions. Understandably, neither of these activities—which were grounds for much unrest among the Somali population—served to enhance Ethiopian popularity. Thus the Ethiopian army, garrisoned in a massive fortification on a hill overlooking the town, watched with studied indifference as members of the two clans kept up their internecine bouts. Regarded

by the Somalis as an occupying army and preoccupied with the defense of their fort against the periodic midnight raids of Somali nationalist guerrillas, the Ethiopians had little incentive to maintain law and order. On the contrary, they seem to have welcomed a development which might have favored their position by the likely mutual killing of rebellious subjects whom they regarded, and were regarded by, as common enemies.

The fighting continued for three months with neither side gaining a decisive edge over the other, a situation which encouraged the Beerato to hold a war dance called ‘jaarila’ one evening in which they celebrated with much oratorical banter their success in killing a prominent Daqato notable. Gloatting with uncommonly sarcastic language over the fall of their victim, they sang:

Yesterday at noon time We faced the Daqato in battle And slew the valiant among them, Spreading their flesh in broad daylight For the vultures to feast upon; And this has been heard all over the land.

The loss of their elder, immortalized in a taunt song, proved too much for the Daqato. Hitherto, only a minor Daqato lineage had been directly involved in the feud but, with the death of their elder and the singing of the taunt song, the event took a clan-wide significance. A week later the Daqato arrived with a force of 200 and encamped on the outskirts of the town, determined as they put it, to teach this ‘worthless scum of saucy slaves’ a lesson they would never forget. The derisive adjectives were meant for the peasant Beerato who in former times occupied a subservient position vis-a-vis the aristocratic Daqato, but who in recent years had succeeded in freeing themselves from pastoral domination. Indeed some thirty years before, a similar feud erupted between the two clans, in which the Daqato inflicted a resounding defeat on the Beerato, forcing them to sue for a humiliating peace. This truce was ignominiously remembered as the ‘Shoe-Eater Peace’ (Kaba-Un) because the Daqato compelled the Beerato peace delegation to hold shoes in their mouths as a symbol of their submission. In Somali pastoral ethics, to force a man to hold shoes in his mouth is the worst possible insult that can be inflicted.

It was against this background that the Daqato came out in force to ‘give the Beerato a lesson in good behavior’. And few doubted the Daqato meant to carry out their threat, least of all the outnumbered and outnumbered Beerato who stood no chance against the superior power of their foes. Faced with an unfavorable situation, the Beerato wisely refrained from coming out to meet their adversaries in battle and withdrew from the
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It was against this background that the Daqato came out in force to give the Beeraato a lesson in good behavior. And few doubted the Daqato meant to carry out their threat, least of all the outnumbered and outmatched Beeraato who stood no chance against the superior power of their foes.

Faced with an unfavorable situation, the Beeraato wisely refrained from coming out to meet their adversaries in battle and withdrew from the
town to form defensive positions along their village some three miles south of town.

Upon learning of the Beera village refusal to come out for a fight, the Daqato warriors, fully armed and thirsting for blood, began to move in on the Beera village and there was fear of a general slaughter. Then something unexpected happened: six Daqato elders rushed out of a hut on the outskirts of town and, running spiritedly, overtook their marauding kinsmen and wheeled around dramatically to face the main body of attackers. With outstretched arms, the elders made an impassioned plea to the young men to call off the action.

While they had no binding authority on the warriors, the six elders belonged to a circle of people who governed the clan and had a power approaching veto over such a weighty matter as the declaration and execution of war. Their advice therefore could not be lightly dismissed, nor their opposition easily overridden. To circumvent this problem, the warriors claimed to have the endorsement of other members of the clan leadership, especially the bush elders, who, maintained, not only authorized the campaign but actually helped to organize it. (This was the first reference to the ‘bush elders’ as a united faction within the clan’s leadership and their role in the feud will become obvious later on in the discussion.) To this, the six elders countered that the matter of war was too grave and too vitally concerned with the welfare of the clan to be decided by the bush elders alone—a group, they pointed out, which constituted less than half the entire leadership. Therefore, to the dismay of the young men who were greatly excited for action—the elders demanded that the matter be settled in a clan-wide palaver where the issues of war and peace would be debated before the whole clan. In the mean time, the six elders warned them sternly of the dire consequences of taking unauthorized action. The excited warriors might have defied the elders—they were certainly reluctant to disband—had not one of them, a dark middle-aged man with a bald head that glintened in the sun and a pair of squinting hawkish eyes, stepped forward and, waving a rifle aloft, advised his fellow warriors to comply with the order of the elders pending the proposed tribal palaver. To judge from the immediate withdrawal of the men, he seems to have been their amaan-dinde or war leader.

The next morning the Daqato began to congregate under the shade of a pair of enormous hadhum trees on the edge of the rocky road leading eastward to the town of Musthil. This road, built by the Italians during Mussolini’s occupation of the Horn of Africa had not seen much repair since the time of the Fascists, and therefore was not usable by motorized vehicles. As the Ethiopians ventured into the Somali countryside only in convoys of trucks and armed vehicles, the Daqato did not run undue risks in congregating so near the main Ethiopian garrison. Moreover, for reasons mentioned above, there was not much fear of Ethiopian intervention. Just the same, the Daqato took the precautionary measure of placing guards on a nearby hill to keep an eye on the Ethiopians.

The selection of the hadhum trees as the place of meeting seems to have stemmed from a pragmatic consideration: located on a hillside near a small valley criss-crossed by a system of irrigation canals and rows of harvest-ready maize fields, it was an ideal place to congregate. That they were not the rightful owners of the cornfields—which they appropriated for the moment as war booty—does not seem to have exercised the Daqato conscience.

Although most of the participants came from neighboring homesteads, it took the Daqato the whole morning to assemble: men, young and old and in parties of tens and twenties—kept arriving, until by noon the assembly had swollen into a colorful crowd of warriors, venerable elders, notables and representatives of different taxing units.

By noon the Daqato began to address themselves to serious business and in the first few hours the assembly was a scene of verbal anarchy: men huddled confusedly in groups or milled about carelessly in disorderly clusters, exchanging harangues and mutual insults. It appeared that each man of substance in a crowd of 200 or so wished to say his ‘piece’ at once and spontaneously without regard to other haranguers. This resulted in a bedlam of babbling voices.

The confused and confusing state of the shur was rooted in what appeared to be a serious division in the ranks of the clan’s leadership, the so-called ‘able men’ who were evidently deadlocked over the issue of war and peace. The dilemma became painfully acute when the thirty ‘able men’ present in the assembly returned from a morning private caucus in which they apparently failed completely to agree on a consensus course. It was the realization by the general assembly of this failure that triggered the commotion.

To judge by the charge of ‘influence-pending’ (mussag-maawm) leveled against them, the peace elders seem to have taken advantage of the chaotic situation by lobbying and successfully splitting the warrior ranks. The extent of their success became evident when fifteen of the most venerable elders refused to come out with the rest of the warriors. The elders, a towering man named Qamaan Deere (Qamaan the Tall), formerly a fierce warrior chief but now mollified with age and urbanization, stepped forward and, with uplifted hand, indicated his wish to speak. A hush descended on the crowd. "Hear me,
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kinsmen," he began, in a deliberately slow voice which seemed to emphasize the word "kinsmen." He was a man of strikingly winsome physique with large sloping shoulders and an enormous beard which seemed to vibrate animatedly whenever he delivered a serious oration or was crossed in the debates of the council-of-elders. He was therefore nicknamed 'Shivering Beard.' "Hear me, kinsmen," said he:

There is a time to make war, a time to make peace and a time to decide whether to make war or peace. Whether I am for war or peace, I am reluctant to say but I am not reluctant to say that I am for Daqato. Daqato are my flesh and blood and in them I have my being. A man without kin is like a camel without corral—lost and gone astray. She is bound to be devoured by the hyenas.

Having seen the contention which arose among us over a matter which agitates so many and so passionately, pitting us against each other, the young against the old, kinsman against kinsman and brother against brother— I believe we are unprepared for war or peace but perhaps we are prepared to decide. This perhaps is the time to decide whether it will be war or peace.39

Then, lowering the outstretched arm, he tilted his face to the left, then to the right, slowly and gravely scanning the 200 pairs of expectant eyes and the faces of the enormous crowd. "Do Daqato agree this is the time to decide?" Nods and whispers of approval flowed from the crowd and the gravity and silence which now characterized the shir made a striking contrast with the bubbling chaos of moments before. Savoring the effect of his oratory on the men, Shivering Beard continued effusively. "Alhamdulillah. Praise be to Allah. Then let us proceed in the way of our forefathers and in the custom of our people by appointing the wise and sagacious among us to counsel the Daqato in reaching a wise decision.

The elder's suggestion to "proceed in the way of our forefathers" was a direct appeal to traditional sanctions which, in a case like the present, called for the appointment of a body of ad lataif officers to govern the assembly to a solution. These included a chairman (guudoomiy), a wordbearer (doodkaad, literally "argument-bearer") and a council of elderly arbitrators (guudii odadayal). In addition, there was to be the inevitable body of lawyer orators (fodkaryayn) to be appointed by the disputing parties.

The selection of the largely ceremonial offices of chairman and wordbearer was a mere formality. Shivering Beard offered to nominate two individuals whom he commended for their 'reputed' skill in performing such tasks. The assembly seemed to have agreed with him, since the two men were merely asked to stand up—so they could be seen by everyone—

and accepted by popular consent. The selection of the vitally important committee of arbitrators was, however, another matter. For reasons which I shall refer to shortly, the clan's elders—of whom thirty 'able men' were in attendance—failed to form an arbitrating panel to mediate the dispute. As a result, soon after the chairman and wordbearer were appointed, the respective leaders of the peace and war factions commenced to appeal directly to the whole assembly. To boost its case, each side presented several men of 'weight' as speakers, and an investigation of each of their speeches would entail an unmanageable (and unnecessary) excursion into inconsequential details. I shall therefore limit my comments to the speeches of the two main orators.

As soon as the chairman perceived the contenders' wish to address the whole assembly directly, he called the meeting to order with the words, 'The assembly is in order' ('Shir gudooman'). The wordbearer moved close to the chairman and in a clear voice reiterated the chair's words, whereupon a rustic elder named Shire Gash (Shire the Short) stood up to enter the argument for the pro-war faction. He was a 'bushman' and his language sparkled with country idiom and vitriolic. He began with the inevitable 'Hear me, kinsmen' and with words which 'dripped with blood' he carried the assembly to the height of belligerent passion:

'If my worthy cousin [a reference to Shivering Beard] is proud to be Daqato, so am I. If Daqato are his flesh and blood, so are they mine. But I ask you: What is the source of our pride? Why are we all proud to be Daqato? [pause] I will tell you why I am. Because Daqato are Allah's great and beneficent gift to us. For Allah said in his holy word, "And we have made thee into distinct nations and clans so that you may know one from another." The profound wisdom of this verse reveals that Allah intended mankind to be organized into nations and clans and that the idea of the clan is built into the very essence of mankind, forordained by Divine Wisdom as part of the universal order. So if I am proud to be Daqato, it is because being Daqato is being part of a people mandated to chasms by divine order.

But can we really point to ourselves with pride after what has happened these past weeks, after slaves have slain the young and wise of Daqato in wanton jest? Think, my cousins, think of the Beerso slaves dancing over the dead of noble Daqato. Think of our noble blood shed by the bullets of slaves, and our flesh cut up by crude spears. Think of the Daqato dead picked on by vultures! Pride? Honor? What pride? What honor? Daqato have
been humbled by slaves. The slayers of Daqato remain unpunished and the dead of Daqato continue to lie in their lonely graves unavenged. Remember the poet's words: "If you die, there is a time when to die is better than to live."  

"Aye, to die is better," several in the audience cried.

"Alas," kinsmen!" Shire Gaab shook his head disconsolately.

"I am old and feeble but if I had any mettle left in me, if I had youth, I'd fly over these canals and maize fields into yonder village" (pointing at the Beerafo encampment) "to strike the blow that at once would avenge the dead. remove the stain of shame from my kin and teach impudent slaves to know their place. Even as I stand, feeble though my feet are, I'd fain hobble along, trusting to my walking cane to ferry me over to that odious encampment. Is there anyone who'd embark on an honorable course? Anyone accused into sleeplessness by the aggrieved shades of the unavenged dead?"

Upon these words a loud commotion broke out from the audience. Kinsmen! Kinsmen! To the odious encampment... to remove the stain of shame." Several dozen men, obviously in a state of frenzy, rushed about in dazed circles, fingering excitedly the triggers of their weapons.

Shire Gaab: Alas, kinsmen!
Wordbearer: Alas, alas!

Shire Gaab: Shame, kinsmen!
Wordbearer: Shame, shame!

Shire Gaab: Who will marry our daughters?
Wordbearer: Who will marry our daughters?

Audience: Nobody, till the shame is removed.
Shire Gaab: Then arms, kinsmen... Remove the shame... Let no Beerafo live.

Audience: Aye, let no Beerafo live.

Again a convulsive commotion erupted, with men running to and fro hystically. Some dashed off toward the 'odious encampment' of the Beerafo, determined to take matters into their own hands and had to be restrained physically. Others writhed about on the ground, overcome by affected or real delirium. At length, the frantic efforts of the chairman together with the helping hands of the elders, succeeded in quieting down the excited men, restoring a semblance of order.

Each part or phrase in Shire Gaab's oration was repeated antiphonally by the wordbearer, producing the sort of weird litany of war-talk which incited the orderly assembly into an unruly mob of screaming warriors. Satisfied with his performance, Shire Gaab ended self-efficaciously with the words, "I have nothing more to say, kinsmen." It was clearly a formidable job awaiting the pro-peace orator if he was ever to cool off this mass of inflamed passions.

The pro-peace orator was none other than Shivering Beard who apparently favored peace all along, though nothing in his opening statement revealed his true sentiments. He stood up, his ponderous beard quaking over the hushed audience, showing his exceeding agitation. "Hear me, kinsmen," he began, his voice barely audible, prompting the wordbearer to repeat after him.

"I too am proud to be Daqato, but for a different reason than my worthy opponent's. My esteemed cousin has wisely cited the words of Allah but I, fear, unwisely misapplied them. May he be forgiven the sin of misapplication. It is true that Allah has made mankind into nations and clans but not in order for them to make war on each other but to make peace, not in order for them to spill blood but to prevent the spilling of blood, not in order for them to hate and despise one another but to love one another. Did my worthy opponent mean to use the Holy Qur'an to incite Muslims to kill fellow Muslims? May Allah forgive him. Does anyone here really believe that it is the will of Allah for Muslims to kill Muslims?"

[pause]

He succeeded in extracting reluctant headshakes from the audience, even from members of the war faction who had to agree that it was contrary to the will of Allah for Muslims to kill Muslims. Sensing that his argument was producing some effect, Shivering Beard bellowed thunderously. "Do you agree that Beerafo are Muslims?" The wordbearer repeated this after him.

"Yes," someone said, "but they killed our men."

"We killed their men too," was his measured response.

Having seized the assembly's attention, Shivering Beard made a stirring counter-attack, slowly demolishing his worthy opponent's argument point by point and expounding on the virtues of peace and brotherhood. He then introduced an element of nationalism and national consciousness which he used to put the opposition on the defensive:

"Permit me to return to the text... And We have made thee into nations and clans. We see very clearly two principles enshrined here: the principle of the nation first and that of the clan second, and only second. I am not surprised that my worthy opponent stopped short of a balanced exposition of the text since such a just
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Effort would endanger his argument. But for myself ... I take pride in being Daqato but I take even greater pride in being Somali. As we, individually, are nothing without Daqato, Daqato are nothing without the larger brotherhood of all Somalis. And this includes the Beeraato. If in the past, we and Beeraato fought each other, we have done so out of ignorance. Today we are no longer ignorant. We know who our real enemy is.

He made this last remark, striving under the enormous beard, pointing a trembling hand in the direction of the Ethiopian garrison. He continued:

My esteemed cousin quotes the poet: 'There is a time when 'To die is better than to live.' He may be right. In the tricky circumstances of life, indeed there may be times when death is the honorable thing to embrace. But death by a brother? How base, kinsmen! How base, kinsmen! In a moment of strained passions, the Beeraato fell on us as we fell on them. And this was a fair fight. The Beeraato have not oppressed us; they've not RAIDED our herds nor burned our homesteads. You know who did all these things. I need not tell you.

He paused and the enormous beard shifted again towards the town. A wizened old man who earlier seemed sympathetic to the war faction, said suddenly. 'Wallaahi was runti — by God, the man speaks the truth. Who burned our homesteads? Why, the Habash.' A stir of voices followed noting that the Beeraato were not the enemy but still reluctant, unlike that lone reckless voice, to declare the Habash the real enemy. After all, many of the men lived in the town with families and business interests to worry about and were therefore reluctant to declare openly that the fortress authority on the hill was an enemy of the people.

Shivering Beard heaved up again, squirming cumulatively to the weight of his words and delivered himself of a last-ditch appeal:

Brothers and cousins! I stand here before you, grateful that Daqato have heeded my feeble words. I speak the truth and Daqato will not forsake the truth and brotherhood of all Somalis. Daqato are a wise and valiant people who love kindly thoughts and kindly deeds. O Kinsmen, let it not be said that the valiant Daqato — the young and old and wise — have this day congregated, deliberated the matter of fitna (mischief) and peace and chose fitna over peace, fitna against fellow Muslims.

Shivering Beard made a dramatic pause, his impressive bearing hovering royally over the mesmerized men. The shivering-up old man spoke again: 'The man has given wise counsel and we would be fools to ignore it.' A tremendous stir in the audience: 'Aye, aye. We would be fools to ignore him.' Many voices and gestures of support rang out from all directions — so many that one would think them contrived were they not so natural and spontaneous.

In that moment of terrific euphoria, Shivering Beard undertook a calculated gamble by making a bid for an assembly-wide consensus. 'Then,' said he, 'I trust Daqato are with me for peace.'

'We are for peace,' the capricious crowd boomed.

'Alhamdulillah!' said he, then called on a wadaad (man of God) to solemnize the 'decision' of the assembly with a prayer. But before the wadaad was able to invoke the blessing, Shivering Beard's opponent interjected angrily: 'Shame, kinsmen! A turn to answer.' This was followed by an exchange which proceeded thus:

**Audience:** By God, he speaks the truth. The valiant Shire Gaab must be heard.

**Shivering Beard:** Peace, kinsmen. Nothing to answer. Daqato are united for peace.

**Audience:** By God, he speaks the truth. The orator has hit the matter. Nothing to refute. Daqato are united for peace.

**Shire Gaab:** By the essence of man, kinsmen! It is our custom for a man to respond.

**Audience:** To think of it again ... the valiant Shire Gaab ... he must be heard.

**Shivering Beard:** Allah be praised. Daqato are united. Can anyone refute Daqato?

**Audience:** Nay, none can refuse Daqato.

**Shire Gaab:** By the essence of man, I seek to refute him, not Daqato.

**Shivering Beard:** Peace ... Dear bonds of kinship, Daqato have made up their minds for peace. Call a wadaad to bless.

**Audience:** Aye, aye! Call a wadaad. No shoulder-shoveling. Daqato are united for peace.

The thunderous shout of the latter phrase so drowned out the deacons who still stood by Shire Gaab that it now became obvious that the tables were turned. Shivering Beard now acquired complete control (at least momentarily) of the men. No one appreciated this fact more than Shire Gaab, who began to wag his head disconsolately, his face darkening with ominous signs of impending defeat and the certain loss of face attendant upon such defeat. In that awkward moment of unease and embarrassment, Shivering Beard took the stand effusively:

Hear me, kinsmen. My Esteemed Cousin Shire Gaab — he is my
superior. He possesses the gift of speech, so gifted that when he speaks the birds descend to hear, smitten by the power of his oration.

Shivering Beard wheeled, walking up to his vanquished opponent, and said with a measure of self-deprecating humility: ‘Cousin, I’d not have you as a foe. You and I — we are bonded together by unbreakable bonds of kinship.’ Shivering Beard extended a hand of friendship which Shire Gaab, not wishing to be discourteous, shook and replied somewhat jealously, ‘I am satisfied.’

Shivering Beard called on the wakhan to proceed with the formalization of the assembly’s ‘decision’ with a prayer. He then made a closing statement in which he thanked the elders and notables for the privilege of addressing them, commended the assembly for making a sound decision and advised that a peace delegation be appointed who would ‘reason together’ with the wise of the Beerato to calculate the losses suffered by each side during the feud. ‘If they owe us blood’, he was certain they would be ready to make the ‘necessary restitution. And if we owe them blood, we will do likewise.’

And so it was that a peace delegation was appointed to discuss terms of blood compensation and other outstanding matters with the Beerato. The manner and processes by which compensations for homicides and other juridical transactions of Somali pastoral life are conducted have received ample elucidation from the able work of J. M. Lewis. Therefore, a discussion of these here is neither necessary nor relevant. What needs to be pointed out is that the Daqato peace delegation found the elders of Beerato — who feared worse things — genially disposed to accommodate Daqato grievances and the two clans reached a bilateral settlement which resulted in the payment of 500 heads of Beerato cattle and a substantial quantity of grain to the Daqato. There were rumors that the Beerato made this settlement in order to buy peace.


7 ANALYSIS

To analyze the Daqato tribal proceedings, a convenient point of departure may be the obvious point, notably, that what began as a bloody inter-clan feud ended as intra-clan political squabbling — a squabbling in which one Daqato faction was pitted against another and in which the principals used words rather than arms in deciding the issue. After inconclusive skirmishes, the Daqato — whose pride was stung by their lack of success — came out in force to reassert their traditional supremacy over the Beerato. To achieve this objective, they were prepared to use arms — to teach ‘this worthless scum of saucy slaves’ a lesson. But when the moment of action came, the belligerent purposes of the clan were thwarted by a serious division in the ranks of their leadership, whose consensus was necessary to conduct the feud. Faced with a frustrating division, the clan resorted to a structural mechanism — namely, the shir institution — to compose their differences. In accordance with Somali pastoral norms, the Daqato sought to regulate their deliberations through ad hoc officers. As mentioned above, they succeeded in selecting the largely ceremonial officers of chairman and wordbearer, but failed to agree on the selection of the all-important panel of arbitrating elder/judges. To appreciate the implications of this failure, we need to examine briefly the functions of each of these officers.

As enforcers of orderly deliberations, the holders of the offices of chairman and wordbearer perform important functions but as far as authority is concerned, their role is strictly ceremonial, devoid of any effective weight (jural, moral or otherwise) to influence events. The function of the chairman is to call on speakers in the order of their desire to speak, often indicated by a raised arm or some other bodily gesture, to curb windy or inconsiderate talkers — of whom there are many in pastoral shirs — in short, to oversee an orderly execution of business.

The function of the wordbearer, on the other hand, is to repeat loudly and clearly key points of an argument after each orator so that everyone present has an opportunity to hear and understand what is being said. For this reason, the wordbearer is always a man with the gift of the presis-maker, able to distill the essential components of an argument and to present it in a clear, unsong voice which makes the presentation at once entertaining and appealingly persuasive. It is also his responsibility to summarize, if the judges so desire, the main point(s) of an argument.

Structural constraints — such as the Somali pastoral sense of fair play, the ignominy of being disqualified in the middle of a discussion — encourage the chairman and wordbearer to observe the strict neutrality of their offices. Additionally, a lawyer/orator enjoys the prerogative to declare either of these officers unacceptable on grounds of prejudice to the case. In such a situation, the assembly is obliged to defer to the objection of the lawyer/orator by removing the objectionable officer and appointing another in his place. Indeed this prerogative, designed to discourage the chairman and wordbearer from misusing the nominal authority of their offices, is susceptible to abuse by amoral lawyer/orators who endlessly hold off consideration of their weak cases by accusing the chairman and/or wordbearer of bias, thus forcing the assembly through a frustrating cycle of endless appointments. These obstructionist tactics, similar to the filibustering method in parliamentary debates of Western democracies, may hang the proceedings of an assembly for hours or even days. But a corrective to unscrupulous filibustering exists in pastoral
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shir, notably in the moral authority of elders to override excessive obstructionism by lawyer/orators.

The question of who appoints these officers and by what criteria may deserve a passing comment. While there are no structured criteria by which aspirants to these offices are judged, they are nevertheless expected to meet certain qualifications. The position of wordbearer, for example, requires the holder to possess an extraordinary memory to restate, without the help of writing, the principal features of a speech and to distinguish between subtle shades of meaning. Nearly always in the prime of life, he is witty, zestfully energetic and tends to possess an artistic style of delivery which enthralls the audience even while informing it. The wordbearer in the case at hand certainly demonstrated these qualities, and without his entertaining presence the Daqato proceeding would manifestly have remained a dreary affair.

The chairman, on the other hand, is a respected elder whose commanding presence adds a strong measure of seriousness and an aura of awesome formality to the shir. When the Daqato assembly was treated to the fiery orations of Shire Gaab and Shivering Beard, the chairman seems to have been the only person to retain his coolheaded composure and control in a mob of screaming hysterics.

There is no formal training which an individual undergoes to acquire these skills. Through the process of trial and error, individuals come to acquire a universal reputation as talented performers of their respective roles. In respect to the matter of appointment to serve in a given shir, here again one is struck by the absence of formal structure: officers are spontaneously selected with no guiding or structured procedure to follow.

In principle, any mature male adult enjoys the right to appoint someone, and the assembly would be obliged to abide by his choice, provided the appointee has proven abilities to do the job competently. In practice, however, such nominating is done by the elders who, by virtue of their age and experience, are deferred to by the younger men. We have seen how, in the present case, Shivering Beard made the appointments of chairman and wordbearer shortly after his opening speech. No one questioned his 'right' to appoint, nor the wisdom of his choice.

This brings us to a further consideration of the role of the heerbeegi council of judges which did not play much of a role in the Daqato proceedings for reasons which I will look into briefly now. As we have noted, the heerbeegi are an arbitrating panel of judges who mediate in inter-clan disputes and who enjoy a universal reputation as renderers of wise and impartial judgements. There was, however, no place for the services of a heerbeegi panel in the Daqato case since it involved a political rather than a legal issue. The decision to go to war or sue for peace was a political decision and it concerned the members of an immediate lineage who function as a corporate unit (e.g., in the payment and reception of blood-money). Instead of a heerbeegi council, the appropriate pastoral organ to dispose of political cases such as this one is a committee of elders (guudh odaysa) whose decisions are binding on the members of their immediate lineage. The difficulty here stemmed from the inability of the elders to arrive at a unified decision.

The reasons for this ‘scandalous’ (as one of them put it) failure emanated from a seemingly unbridgeable gap within the clan leadership. Of the thirty ninmarkarneed (able men) elders present in the shir, thirteen were for war and these tended to be ‘bush’ elders or traditionalists—men who led a predominantly nomadic style of life. Thoroughgoing pastoralists, the bush elders were shaped by a view of life dominated by the clan and shamshu values. As rural herdsmen, they lived in and for the clan, and to make it worth living for, they sought to preserve its integrity. This meant, among other things, taking arms against their traditional antagonists whom they regarded as a ‘worthless scum of saucy slaves’. According to the young warriors (when they were confronted by the bush elders) the bush elders sided and abetted the clan-wide action against the Beero, apparently without the knowledge of, or consultation with, the town elders. Shire Gaab expressed their sentiments when he spoke about the ‘wounded honor’ of the clan which required ‘urgent binding’. In their view, the way to bind the clan’s wounds was to restore, by means of a feud, its ancient supremacy over the despised Beero. To them honor meant tribal supremacy.

The seventeen elders who vigorously opposed the feud, on the other hand, had other ideas about honor and ways to make the clan honorable. Modestly urbanized townspeople, they belonged to that fluid class of Somalis whom I have referred to as the ‘transitional’ generation. While equally committed to the welfare of the clan and just as anxious to observe its self-preserving imperatives, they were also committed to supra-clan values and ideals inspired by the new conditions of their recently acquired sedentarized lifestyle. Unlike their pastoral cousins who ranged freely far and wide with their herds, the town elders lived in an urban setting with all its crosscurrents of supra-tribal ideas and influences. The town of Qallahafo was, in particular, uniquely situated to foster detribalizing influences. As the center of an important grain-producing region, it brought together merchants and grain dealers from all over the Somali peninsula, Ethiopia and even from Yaman across the Red Sea. Its estimated population of 40,000 originated from a mosaic of ethnic stocks including Arabs, Harris, Oromo, Amhara and of course, a multiplicity of Somali clans.
Furthermore, as traders and real estate owners, the town elders were subject to the pressures of a monetarized economy; politically, they felt more acutely the weight of the Ethiopian administration and the monthly requirement to appear physically before the Ethiopian district commissioner (in order to reaffirm political allegiance) was an irritating reminder of their subjection to an authority which they regarded as alien and oppressive. These factors, then, worked to foster in them a sense of pan-Somali consciousness and a corresponding anti-Ethiopian sentiment, inducing them to a commitment to Somali nationalism and national consciousness which overrode their commitment to traditional notions of clan honor and clan supremacy espoused by the bush elders. Indeed, rumors abounded that the hut—from which the town elders emerged on the morning of their face-off with the young warriors—was being used as a local command post by the Somali nationalist guerrillas who constituted a shadow government in the region, often exerting pressure from behind the scenes. If true, these rumors would explain the town elders' determined opposition to their youngsters' campaign against the Beraato.

Therefore, the division of the elders—and hence their inability to advise the clan on a consensus course of action—stemmed from deeper divisions of conflicting values: urban v. rural, tribalist v. nationalist and merchant v. herdsman. This resulted in a tribal crisis of inaction, generating ominous signs of the shir's imminent breakdown, whence the principal contenders, fearing a clan-wide fissac, commenced to take their cases directly to the people.

Though they made a striking contrast, the chosen spokesmen of the hostile factions bore some resemblance to each other. Each was a ninkarneed (able man) in the eyes of the clan, combining qualities of demonstrated leadership with the gift of the gab. While both were illiterate for all practical purposes, they shared the paradox of being minor theologians who could hold their ground in the treacherous waters of Qur'anic interpretation. But here the similarities end: Shivering Beard was also nicknamed 'the Tall' (Deere) and his opponent, 'the Short' (Gaab), and the epithets betokened their contrasting physique which tended to accentuate their antidotal contrast. Shire Gaab was a nomad—a bush-man in whose world tradition reigned supreme—and Shivering Beard, an urban emir in whose world tradition clashed with innovation.

To examine the content of their speeches is to re-emphasize their commitment to differing values. Shire Gaab's argument rested on two pillars of authority: the pillar of divine injunction and that of tribal precedence. The idea of the clan, he maintained, was 'built into the very essence of mankind by order of Divine Wisdom.' Thus Shire Gaab took a mystical view of the clan and do support this lofty claim, he appealed to the ultimate authority of the Qur' an, whence he cited verse 13 of Sura XLIX, that famous verse whose interpretation has occasioned abiding controversies as old as the Muslim community itself. '*' The verse speaks of God making mankind into 'nations' (shir`ah) and 'clans' or 'tribes' (gaba`al), seemingly not only taking for granted but affirming the sanctity of national and ethnic diversity. Shire Gaab ingeniously seized on the implicit foreclosure of separate nations and clans in the text as a manifest proof of God's intention for men to live in, and belong to, separate clans. From this he deduced the argument that his pride and commitment to his Daqato clan, as distinct from other clans, enjoyed a divine mandate.

Shire Gaab's second point proceeds from his first. Since the clan—mandated by Divine Wisdom—represented, as he put it, 'God's greatest gift to mankind,' it is the chief responsibility of each man to preserve the integrity of this precious gift. The Daqato, he argued, were in danger of losing their birthright—the mandate to clanship—because they proved poor stewards in the matter of preserving the clan's welfare. To strengthen his case, the orator appealed to the force of tribal precedence, exclaiming, 'Alas! There was a time when slaves knew their place.' The point is doubly important: on the one hand, it is designed to contrast unfavorably the Daqato's notable lack of success against the Beraato in the present conflict with the clan's former supremacy over these antagonists—a time when 'slaves knew their place.' On the other hand, it is calculated to stamp the stigma of slavery on the Beraato, thereby denying them the privilege of clanship and hence, of respect. This line of reasoning was important to his argument since it enabled him to pre-empt his opponent's anticipated rebuttal that the divine precept of 'clanship' equally extended to the Beraato because they, too, were a clan.

Thus Shire Gaab wove theology into tradition to present a powerfully reasoned argument for war. In the end though, he abandoned reason for emotion. 'Shame,' he cried with an affected air of wounded pride. 'Who will marry our daughters?' This befuddled rhapsozizing was designed to inflame the pastoralists' well-known weakness for vanity with an exaggerated sense of injured honor, a stratagem that succeeded in bringing the young unreflecting warriors to the height of martial delirium.

The pastoralists say: 'When someone who is a better speaker is to speak after you, keep your good reason to be in a state of nervous trepidation.' Shire Gaab had a painfully good reason to be in a state of nervous trepidation when Shivering Beard commenced to demolish his argument. Wisely avoiding the arcane theology of ethnic separateness, the latter appealed
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to a higher moral precept of Islam; the precept that all the families of mankind are to live in peace and brotherhood and the corresponding injunction against the shedding of Muslim blood. 'Did my worthy opponent,' he declaimed rhetorically, 'mean to use the Holy Qur'an to incite Muslims to kill Muslims?' He followed this with a rhetorical pause accompanied by the strategic flourish, 'May Allah forgive us.' The strategy which Shivering Beard succeeded in utilizing was to induce in the men the nervous feeling that they were being led, unwittingly, into committing one of Islam's worst sins: the sin of Qur'anic misapplication. The uneasy feeling that they might have committed such a grave error shocked the excited men into a sober, attentive mood and neutralized Shire Gaab's argument.

It was one thing to neutralize an opponent but quite another to win over the assembly to support his view. He needed a rallying cause around which to organize a consensus. Conveniently, he found that cause in the specter of a common enemy personified by the Ethiopian garrison. In so doing, with consummate skill he played upon the general grievances—real or perceived—harbored by Ogaadteen Somalis against the presence and activities of the Ethiopian military in that region.

The effect was electrifying: the fickle assembly which seemed wholly decided for his opponent half an hour ago, appeared now to be solidly on his side, crying with the shrivelled-up old man, 'By God, the man speaks the truth.' But the battle was not won yet. Shire Gaab was by customary law entitled to rebut the rebuttal and Shivering Beard had good reason to wonder whether the capricious support of the inconstant assembly which he now had would survive another flourish of purple patches by Shire Gaab. Such a consideration may have led him to make the next strategic but wholly unorthodox—and therefore, risky—move. Instead of giving the floor to his opponent as required by conventional practice, he submitted the matter, as it were, to a vote of confidence: 'I trust Daqaato are with me for peace,' he declared and perhaps was no less surprised than his opponent when the assembly thundered back, 'We are with you for peace.' Shivering Beard thus carried the day by the unethical tactic of denying his opponent equal time. When later asked about the unorthodox methods of his victory, he responded calmly that he could not allow the milk to spill, a pastoral equivalent of the American cliché, 'There is nothing that succeeds like success.'

Meanwhile the exasperated Shire Gaab insisted on his right for equal time, demanding 'a turn to answer, kinsmen, and was confronted with a fait accompli by his opponent's ingenious contention that the clan was 'united for peace,' and therefore there was 'nothing to answer.' By this line of defence, Shivering Beard contrived to identify his views and sentiments with those of the assembly, so that to challenge them was tantamount to challenging the combined wisdom of the clan. The measure of his success was demonstrated by the din of rude clamar which drowned out Shire Gaab's logical contention that he wished to refute Shivering Beard, not the clan. But by this time logic had given way to emotion and reasoned discourse to the ruckus of the 'rabble', tempting one to evoke the incongruous analogy from George Orwell's Animal Farm, where the outcome of the pigs' debate was determined by the bleating of the sheep.

Faced with a frustrating defeat, Shire Gaab could only plead, 'By the essence of man, kinsmen'—a rustic phrase which literally refers to human male genitalia but is metaphorically a term of oath to swear by, setting man, as possessor of this unique procreative organ, apart and above other beings. In the pastoral view, a man's procreative organ defines his ultimate essence and entitles him to the special rights such as the right to attack unhindered and the right to participate equally. It is this right which Shire Gaab invokes vainly in his moment of utter frustration and bewilderment, a rueful admission that he was outwitted, not outspoken.

For his part, Shivering Beard won by changing the rules in the middle of the game, thereby proving himself a flouter of tradition when it stood in his way, even as he appealed to the 'way of our forefathers' when it was in his interest to do so. That he managed to have it both ways demonstrated his personal resourcefulness and innovation as much as the remarkable flexibility and dynamism of pastoral shir or accommodate change and innovation without compromising their principal features as institutions. Though he carried the day, Shivering Beard was anxious to make up with his defeated adversary whom he graciously praised as 'my superior', a prudent gesture which betokened the pastoral principle of magnanimity in victory and, as such, put a touch of grace in an otherwise fraudulent, if effective, performance. Shire Gaab, too, knew when the essence of man (individual right) had to bow to the essence of the clan (collective right) by accepting the clan's decision for peace despite the dubious means by which it reached this decision.

The verbal duelling of the two orators and its impact on the Daqaato proceedings demonstrates both the egalitarian character of Somali pastoralism and the importance of the spoken word in mediating disputes. In the sense, a two phenomena are interconnected: where egalitarian institutions are the dominant norm, as among the pastoral Somalis, power and influence are exercised by persuasion rather than coercion. To a remarkable extent, the privilege of governing depends on the ability to persuade effectively. Given the absence of writing and other media of communication, the spoken word tends to become the sole instrument of persuasion. When the Daqaato leadership failed to arbitrate their
devastating conflict, its component factions turned to the spoken word as the arbiter of ultimate resort. Where leadership failed, words succeeded.

Not only did words play an important role in putting an end to the Daqato-Beeraato feud, they played an equally important part in provoking it. As stated above, the inter-clan squabbles remained a series of sporadic skirmishes until that fateful night of the Beeraato war dance when the clan incautiously boasted of "slaying the valiant of Daqato." Spreading their flesh for vultures to feast on." With the composition and publicizing of the taunt song, the Daqato felt insulted in some mystical way — in Shire Gaab's words, the clan's 'honor' was 'mortal wounded.' The context of its composition and the prevailing hostilities turned the taunt song into an injurious insult, deliberately premeditated by one clan against another. In accordance with pastoral sanctions, the Daqato felt that the only adequate response to a formal insult was a formal feud, an interesting example of how, in pastoral ethic, verbal assaults result in physical assaults. Fortunately for both clans, the cooler heads (or hotter words?) of the town elders prevailed.

2

Elements of Somali Pastoral Oratory:
Poetry

The country teems with 'poets.' Moreover, every man has his recognized position in literature as accurately defined as though he had been reviewed in a century of magazines — the fine ear of this people causing them to take the greatest pleasure in harmonious sounds and poetical expressions, whereas a false quantity or prosaic phrase excites their violent indignation... Every chief in the country must have a panegyric to be sung by his clan, and the great patronize light literature by keeping a poet.

So wrote Richard Burton in the 1850s from the Somali coast of Zeyla in an attempt to share with his countrymen what he thought to be a 'strange' phenomenon, namely, that an unwritten language should so abound in poetry and eloquence. Burton's expression of surprise at finding the unlettered Somalis in possession of developed literature reflects a widespread, if complacent, assumption, especially in the West, that equates literature and literary perfection with writing. Yet contemporary students of literature would tell us that the 'connection' between writing and literature is 'actually accidental,' and belongs 'only to a secondary phase in the history of literature.'

Burton, however, correctly noted the prominent place occupied by poetry among the pastoral Somalis and his observation has been steadily echoed by many students of Somali culture and language. The Somalis think of their verse as more than just an artistic enterprise whose sole aim is to enlarge the imagination and to inspire men towards the lyrical and the beautiful. When they talk of poetry, Somalis have in mind something which embodies the totality of their culture and to which they attach the highest measure of importance. In the words of one elder, 'Poetry is the central integrating principle without which harmonious relationships in society would be unthinkable.' Despite the ring of hyperbole in the elder's estimation, oral verse indeed seems to embrace a wide range of cultural and material activities in pastoral life.

To begin with, poetry is not the craft of an esoteric group of beauty-
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mined men whose role in society is at best marginal. On the contrary, his craft places the Somali poet in the mainstream of society and his energies and imagination are constantly drawn upon for social purposes; his kinsmen expect a Somali poet to defend their rights in clan disputes, to defend their honor and prestige against the attacks of rival poets, to immortalize their fame and to act on the whole as a spokesman for them.

His forum is the tribal assembly and it is here that he engages in poetic contest with rival poets representing opponent clans. Alternatively, the poet employs his artistic talents to present his own private individual feelings and emotions before his kinsmen with a view to winning sympathy for whatever cause he undertakes to advance. Thus, while the cultivation of beauty and high thought, the perfection of language and imagination and other virtues associated with art are the tasks of a Somali poet, his paramount responsibility is utilitarian: to inform, persuade or convince a body of kinsmen of the merits of whatever tasks he seeks to undertake.

Poetry has the force of ritual among the Somalis and it is resorted to in the formalization and execution of almost every public act of importance: a man explains his behavior towards others in poetic oration; marriages are contracted and terminated through the use of verse; verse is chanted to light wars and perpetuate feuds as well as to put an end to wars and feuds; and blame and praise are spread most rapidly through this medium. In short, poetry for the pastoral Somali is a principal vehicle of political power.

We have stated that not all words are equally effective in influencing public decisions and that rhetorical discourse gains in power in proportion to its formalization. Against this background, the hold of the poetic craft on the Somalis becomes obvious when it is understood that poetry represents for them the ultimate formalization. Somewhere in the interplay of lyrical beauty and fusion of thought with expression, poetic orATION turns into a force of the most potent sort which as one Somali put it, 'strikes with irresistible force.' In fact, in talking with Somali about the effect of verse on them, one does not get a logical explanation of what it is in poetry that appeals to them or moves them. The following rather sophomoric retort by Sheikh 'Aqib 'Abdullahi Jaama', himself a poet, is a standard response: 'The appeal of poetry,' he said, 'lies in the fact that it is poetry.'

MESSAGE

With negligible exceptions, Somali verse is an 'oral' art and is part of a significant body of unwritten literature which includes prose stories, proverbs and folk-tales which the Somalis cultivate with an undying interest. It is often performed or rather chanted by the poet himself or by a memorizer. The interest of the audience in the recitation is keen, as there are many self-styled critics and poet-aspirants who make it their job not only to judge the merits of a given work, but also to learn the techniques of the reciter. Such attention and vigilance is made necessary in the absence of written aids or references. Hence, those aspiring to become poets, which includes nearly everybody, must be alert to the only chance they have of hearing the poem. Ideally, the hearer aims to memorize the work but failing that, to get a sufficient grasp of its ideas, rhythm and sound patterns. In this way, the performing forum is a sort of training ground for budding poets.

The bulk of Somali poetry is committed in the sense that it is composed and chanted in relation to a specific occasion for the purpose of achieving a specific end. A Somali traditional poem has a story to tell, often as an argument to advance. As a rule, the occasion which prompts a poet to compose verse is socially significant: for example, reconciling two hostile clans which are on the brink of war through a poetic appeal. (We shall see later how this is done.) Although a poet may also compose to give expression to a private inspiration, emotion or passion, his ultimate concern as a poet is to influence the opinions of others towards a certain vital issue. In this connection, B.W. Andrzejewski and I.M. Lewis are not wide of the mark when they observed that were a work like Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' translated into Somali alliterative verse and chanted to a Somali audience, they would wait till the end and then would inevitably ask, "In what circumstances did the poet first recite the poem and what was his purpose?"

In the scheme of Somali versifying, therefore, it will be understood that the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' has no place. But to say that every poem contains a specific message which a hearer seeks to find is not to say that such a message can be abstracted with ease. While the central meaning is direct in some poems, in others it is hidden or, as the Somalis put it, closed (qal'lam) and requires considerable intelligence on the part of the hearer to decipher.

Whether a poet obscures the point of his poem or makes it plain depends on the circumstances and conditions obtaining at the time of composition. 'Ali Dhuub, the Dulbahante poet, for example, in his declarative petition, 'On Account of Fourteen Points', pleads plainly with the Ogaden to return his looted camels.

On account of fourteen points return the camels to me:
From the Gabaysane season (a plentiful year) when I was a mere lad
Until today when I am old, wearing silvery hair
Elements of Somali pastoral oratory: poetry

There never occurred between you and us a matter for vendetta;
Know this—so return the camels to me.
The man of many years brings forth wise advice;
Youths and fools understand not the so obvious point—pray, return the camels to me.

Listen, you did not find the camels astray,
A predator-thief brought them to you
And such rapine works all of us into death—pray, return the camels.8

He proceeds in plain language to state fourteen points showing why the usurped herds should be returned. Another poet, Husein Dqle, clothes his poem in mysterious language and sings of the rapacious caprice of 'Lion Justice' when in truth he was not thinking of lions at all but of his people’s plight under a tyrant chief.

The centrality of the message or the immediate point explains, at least partially, why Somali verse is thesis-oriented and the ease with which it becomes a debater’s tool, the element of the argumentative and rhetorical bulk large in Somali verse. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that a Somali poem is in bondage to its story, that its raison d’être is the message, and nothing else. Somalis see their verse in two senses: the immediate and the transcendental. While a poem commends itself for its sense of the immediate and the relevant, it derives its enduring validity from another quarter: from the fact of its permanency and its comforting qualities in an impermanent and uncomfortable environment.

A good poem, once its immediate point is appreciated, passes into a second phase whereby it acquires a new lease on life. It becomes a part of the people’s spiritual heritage. It is memorized and chanted for pleasure; raconteurs quote it to entertain and disputants apply it to new situations similar to the original ones, and in so doing, score not a few points. Thus, the Somali Government recently rehabilitated—after a long banishment allegedly for ‘clannish’ sentiment—Saalihi Arrabay’s lines:

If you die, there is a time when to die
Is better than to live,
A time when life and prosperity
Are forbidden to an honorable man.

The original context of the poem centered around an inter-clan squabble and the poet’s purpose was to instigate the humiliated party to seek blood vengeance against their affronters, to accept death rather than lead shameful lives. At the time of writing, the poem is being re-applied for nationalistic purposes. It is used to encourage men to die for the defense of the country. In this way, poems receive new meaning and vitality by being applied to new situations long after the original events which gave rise to them have faded into oblivion.

2 Alliteration

Next to didacticism, the most regular feature in Somali verse is alliteration (bikaad). With the exception of limited, quite recent innovations, all Somali oral verse uses the technique of alliteration. The type of alliteration utilized by Somali prose is that of initial sounds (the so-called initial or head rhyme). This feature of alliteration figures so prominently and with such regularity that it can be identified with relative ease even by a person who is unfamiliar with the language. The lines in the majority of Somali poems consist of two hemistichs, every one of which must include at least one selected consonant or vowel designed to produce a noticeable sound (artistic) effect. Thus, in the Sayid’s poem, ‘The Double-dealer’, (Musuqmaasq) alliterating in the letter ‘m’ we have:

Musuqmaasq Soomaali waa mehereedeeidiye
Hadba midab horlay kuula iman maalin iyo layle
Malahamalaha iyo baanahaa mowedku ka adeegay
Dissembling is the Somalis’ inveterate habit,
They come to you every day and night with a new color.
Oh! Death to duplicity and bluster.

All vowels are regarded as alliterative (bikaadad) with one another; to illustrate a point using an alliterative vowel structure, we may take an abstract from ‘Ismaa’il Mire, the Derwish poet-warrior, in his poem, ‘My Lad’, in which he sought to provoke a feud between two lineages of the Dulfahante clan:

Wixiyahow ilmaa igaga timid oragidaadiyi!
Qalbiga iyoogu adakmarkaad tiri adeeggow!
Abtsirinayo reer ‘Ali haddii Ebe kugu ra‘shay
Anguna odayoo xoo xoo annfaadii daayey,
Aashahaan soo yee haddaan rebo ral waaye.
AllaI ugu isaan aabbaanas ‘duu u aaraayey!
My Lad, the sight of you brings tears to my eyes!
It caused my aching heart to throb the moment you called me ‘Uncle’!
In kinship, if Allah affiliated you with the weakling ‘Ali people,
And I am old and too enfeebled to pursue the intrigue of revenge
and vendetta;
Reduced in my trial being to hold on to the Creed of Faith, Since I am unable to hurl the avenging spear. By Allah, no one will avenge your father cowardly murder.

(It may be of interest to add that the poet succeeded in instigating the two lineages into a feud which claimed over twenty lives but also succeeded in bringing about another consequence which he did not intend—imprisonment by the British Government who blamed him as an agent provocateur among the clans.)

In the case of poems with short lines undivided by a caesura, the beginning of every line includes a designated word which alliterates with a word in the next line. Thus, it may be said that the alliterative relationship between two consecutive lines of a poem with short lines is similar to that between two parts of a line in a poem of long lines with hemispherical divisions. To illustrate this, we take a geerar (war song), a genre characterized by short lines. Though the system of spelling adopted by the author for the rendition of the Somali is archaic and inadequate, the English version is lucid and lively.

Ma sidi geloga,
o guluf mel ku daremei
yah gam'i wai haben
Sidi arka iyo gosha
o gabnii nala laaye
furkan ma igu bote
Sidi godir irman,
o eelmi ka qahalen
garti mau ulule.

Like the bustard, Who has seen an enemy somewhere
I cannot sleep at night
Like the lion and hounds Whose young have been slain
I would make much clamor
Like a gooray, when with milk Whose young have been slaughtered
I would groan for justice.*

POETIC ELOQUENCE

The language of Somali verse shows a strong prejudice towards beauty. Vividness, clarity and precision of thought are prized but they are regulated by the rigid rules of alliteration. The choice of words depends as much on their sound as on their meaning. Currently, there is some debate in Somali poetry circles as to the restricting, and hence, debilitating effects which devotion to alliteration imposes on Somali verse. Something of the difficulty faced by the Somali poet, unaided by written tools, can be appreciated when it is realized that a poem of a hundred lines, a length by no means uncommon, demands two hundred words of similar sounds to begin its two hundred hemistichs. A poet, therefore, in his eternal

search for alliterative sounds is tempted to go on an endless journey of word-hunting. (This point was also brought out by Andrzejewski and Lewis.) In an attempt to restock his ever-dwindling vocabulary stock, he renames archaic words, rehabilitates outdated ones and may even invent new ones so that the resulting work from such a tedious enterprise is in danger of breaking down under the combined weight of archaisms and obscurities.

Word-borrowing is also resorted to and sometimes foreign words take up key alliterative positions in a poetic line with a curious, if entertaining, outcome. Thus we are amused, even as we sympathize with him, when Saalun 'Arrabay, aiming to alliterate in 'I, boasted:

La'da harafka laanikyo ba'da'an / looyar ku ahaaye
Lagar Ferenji niman ba'a akhriya / laawis iyo been e

In the alliterative sound of 'I I have been an expert,
But it is the habit of some men to indulge in lies and white man's

lecture.

Here 'looyar', 'lagar' and 'laawis' are Somali corruptions of the English 'lawyer', 'lecture' and 'lies' respectively. Alliteration, needless to say, constitutes the shibboleth of the weak poet, and a favorite subject of conversation among Somalis is the untalented poet who gets carried away by alliteration into an uncharted terrain of 'reverberating acoustics' which have no relation to the subject of his poem. Thus, Muhammad K. Salad, poet and literary critic, complained of a certain poet:

who trying to alliterate in 'I took off at Fakish [the Derwish capital in northern Somalia] and then went soaring towards Tanzania and from Tanzania to the Thames via Tanarive. Then sensing the wrath of his outraged audience catching up with him, he took a mighty desperate leap to Tokyo, but unable to find a respite from his angry pursuers, he soared again, this time in the direction of the Far East where he kept hopping about between Thailand, Taiwan and Tokyo. His hapless audience eventually traced him to Tokyo only to find that he had taken precipitous flight to 'Jimbuku via Tanger'**

Despite its pitfalls to the untalented and the unwise, alliteration poses no insurmountable dilemma to the capable poet. On the contrary, Somalis say it gives him an opportunity to rise above the rabble of upstarts. His language is rich in vocabulary and his mind is fecund, his memory is keen, his knowledge of environment is thorough and his expression is eloquent. While the incompetent poet gropes for words, the master has no difficulty in finding not only the right word for the right thought.
but also the right sound. The elders say when Mahmood 'A. Hasan, a man acclaimed by the pastoralists to be a master, spoke: 'Few men will venture to speak for fear that the Sayyid will disgrace them by the power of his eloquence. When the Sayyid spoke, even the birds were riveted to the ground.'11

The pastoralists also overcome alliterative ambiguities through the teaching of the elders. In almost every audience there are men whose knowledge of language and literature is above the average. These men serve as critics and interpreters and no stigma is attached to the practice of the young and the unimaginative turning to the help of 'connaisseurs' in understanding difficult passages. The services of the interpreter, moreover, are indispensable in the sense that a poetic recitation holds a collective interest for all. For the poet employs his talents in matters of public interest and his material and inspiration are often drawn from communal experience.

4 METER

All pastoral verse is intoned: this means that every Somali poem has a melody or tune to which it is chanted. The musicality of pastoral verse is obvious enough and derives from its consistent feature of regularity, the poetic rhythm. Although the syllables in a poetic line are so arranged as to produce similar rhythms, or in some cases an identical rhythm, to the preceding or succeeding line, it is by no means easy to identify what it is in syllabic arrangement that produces the rhythm. The significant differences of opinion among contemporary students of Somali poetic scansion rules as well as the modest progress made even after numerous years of earnest research, testify to the complexity of the subject.

In considering the feature of regularity which makes an expression poetic, Somalis emphasize, in addition to alliteration, the concept of mitaan. 'Miziaan' literally means 'balance', and a line is considered poetic when the units making it up are not only alliterative with each other but also balance one another. Thus in Sayyid Mahmood's triplet:

Eeb-bow gar-ka ha-daan qab-sa-day gaab-sha na-bi-di-yey
Eeb-bow gam-maan i-yo wa-ha-an gi-ni'as dii-baa-yey
Eeb-bow ga-row ka-ga ma he-lin gool-la-shaan wa-da-yey,
Lord, however much I'd plead with them, the infidels refuse to honor the peace,
Lord, they do not reward me with praises for my gift; the red stallions and precious mares which I lavished upon them,
Lord, the choice camels which I sent them do not earn me their esteem,

a Somali pastoralist would readily identify the words 'garka' and 'gaabsho' to be alliterative in the first line, 'gammam' and 'gimi' in the second, 'garow' and 'gooolshaan' in the third line, and note that the whole triplet alliterates in the letter 'g'. He would also recognize that the lines have rhythmic regularity and as such would be balanced. But he would not be able to state exactly what it is that produces this regularity, this balance. For the pastoralist is more of an aesthete than an analyst. In composing or evaluating a poem, he does not attempt to analyze it or break it into component parts or elements so as to examine their relation to each other and to the whole. Instead, he perceives in the fusion of thought and sound whether a given poem is meaningful and beautiful or whether it is distasteful and meaningless. Thus, while criticism is rough and remorseless in the rigorous standards of versification, the criticism we have in mind is not the type that discriminates or judges by taking apart but one which perceives through internalization. In this connection, John Johnson puts the point well when he writes:

One may consider scansion rules to be a set of linguistic constraints which are superimposed on top of the already existing linguistic constraints which make up the grammar of the language. Constraint further constrained . For years we have asked Somali poets and reciters to explain to us the rules of prosody. But that is like asking someone to describe the rules of grammar of [his/her] language.12

If, however, we return to examine the lines again, we would notice several particulars which do give us some leads as to the element of regularity in them. We would, for example, notice that not only are the lines divided into parts of unequal length by a caesura but that each second part or off-verse contains six syllables of which two have long vowels: gaaab and dii in line 1; dii and baa in line 2; and moo and shaan in line 3; while the on-verses each contain three long-voweled syllables: ee, bow, daan in line 1; ee, bow, maun in line 2; ee, bow, row in line 3.

Having noticed these features, we begin to suspect that there is in fact a relationship between mitaan (metrical rhythm) and the alternation of long and short syllables and their various arrangements. Our suspicion is borne out by the findings of 'Abdillahi D. Guuleed, an indigenous student of Somali oral poetry who maintains that Somali poetic scansion is governed by what he calls a law of "fixed (syllabic) proportionality."13

Guuleed is one of numerous scholars (prominent among whom are Mahmood H. Dama, John Johnson and Francesco Antinucci) who used the new opportunities provided by the adoption of an official national orthography for the Somali language in 1972 to collect and study
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extensive amounts of Somali oral poetry with a view to identifying and analyzing their scansion patterns. A discussion of their varied findings along with the consequent—and at times conflicting—theories concerning Somali scansion rules would be too involved to relate here.\(^{14}\) It should be noted, though, that while preliminary findings by these scholars have already yielded fruitful results which enable us to know a great deal that was hitherto unknown about the structure and internal mechanisms of Somali prosodic systems, a coherent explanation of how these systems scan remains to be formulated. However, the useful start already made in the field by Guuleed Johnson and others, encourages us to look forward to the promising discovery of an exciting system of scansion rules for Somali prosodic arts which may well have significant implications for the study of oral literature.

**Composition, Transmission and Dissemination**

The interest of the audience in a recited poem is related to questions of composition, transmission and dissemination. These are vitally important questions providing useful insights into the functions of the poetic craft in Somali society as well as bearing on the very nature of oral poetry in general. The manner and circumstances in which oral poetry is composed and transmitted have for long generated, as live subjects often, lively debates and controversies among folklorists, anthropologists, oral-literature experts and students of related disciplines. It may therefore seem inadequate to lump them together in a small section. The rationale for doing this stems from the fact that this is not a study of oral poetry—or even of Somali oral poetry _per se_—but an examination of certain uses of oral poetry which relate to questions of power and influence in Somali society. Nevertheless, it is hoped that a discussion of Somali oral composition and distribution, however brief, will shed some light on current debates in studies of oral poetry.

The first principle to underscore in Somali oral poetic composition is that the Somalis have a keenly developed sense of individual authorship and creativity so that a poem, once composed, becomes the property of its composer. It is regarded as a matter of great dishonor in Somali pastoral ethic—in effect, a theft liable to punitive sanctions—for anyone to claim falsely the authorship of a poem or to utilize it without giving credit to its creator. In matters of composition and publication,Somalis recognize what may be called, for want of a better term, an unwritten copyright law, no less strict than those observed in literate societies. Culturally, the principle of individual composition and ownership is enshrined in such proverbs as 'A message is a debt' ('Fariini waa qaan'),

\(^{14}\) Elements of Somali pastoral oratory: poetry

emphasizing the grave responsibility on the shoulders of those entrusted to transmit a poetic message, or 'he who claims what he hath not labored for is a fraud' ('Wuhusuan shaqaygan sheegte waa shaqab'). To illustrate this principle of unwritten copyright laws in matters of artistic production, it would be worth relating a rather memorable incident in 1963 which occurred in my home town of Qallafso in the Ogaden. In Qallafso, as in most Somali towns, a pervasive social pastime is the consumption of _qaat_ or _comah_ (Caafa xiddii), a mild narcotic in which many Somalis are fond of indulging. I have elsewhere\(^{15}\) discussed the culture of _qaat_ in Somali society, especially its significance for the preservation of the oral traditions in urban settings. Here it will suffice to say that when _qaat_-eaters gather to socialize (or have a 'chewing party', as Somalis put it), they sometimes retain a poet to entertain them.

One afternoon in Qallafso, a session of 'chewers' (including myself) invited a young poet—the mention of whose name charity forbids me to dazzle the 'high' nerrymakers with his gift of the gab. The poet came to live up to the group's high expectation, pouring out 'words of wisdom' in the classical _gabay_ genre. This together with the potent qualities of the _qaat_ of that day induced in the men and women a predilection— to borrow the local metaphor of the impious—to 'commune with Allah' or simply, in American idiom, to become 'spaced out'.

Somewhere in the middle of the poet's chanting and dramatic gestures, an elder who hitherto sat in a corner by himself and did not say much as he was peacefully and reverently working at his bundle of _qaat_, interjected suddenly and angrily, 'Liar—thou art a liar and a charlatan.' The outburst was so unexpected that the resulting unease and embarrassment took some time to sink in and dispel the jolly mood of the chewers. It was the more breathtaking because such outbursts were so out of character with this grave elder whose only shortcoming was a long-standing habit of _qaat_ consumption. He had popping eyes and sunken cheeks, the indelible mark of veteran chewers.

At long last the poet enquired, 'Who?'

'Thou, the elder responded.

'Why do you insult, uncle?'

'Because thou claimest what thou hast not labored for.'

'I only claimed what is mine.'

'Repeat those lines thou has just chant.'

The poet repeated and I reproduce some of the text in question along with an imperfect translation:

Allahayow min ii daran ma хаада даафта хоре сибишъа
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Nin i daaqaanaayana mahaan daalidoo karrey:
Jidka nin uuna doonayn mahaan hadalka deexiyay:
Ma degef ee hajjada mahaan ugu duuliyad ujeexay:
Wajji degeh san dayma an dareen gelin duubaalisaa:
Qosool dhabadda halnoon ka inaan dunida dalka:
Iisoog digin qabil mahaan kaga deeyan siiyey!
As the Lord lives, I've many a time lavished hospitality upon
mine oppressor:
And I prepared his dish who seeks my downfall:
And I sweet-talked to him who is odious to me:
As haste is not my wont, I treated him with forbearance:
With a soft face and an unassumming look, I'd seduce him into
complainant confidence:
With false laughter and sycophantic flattery, I'd disarm his defenses:
Then suddenly I'd strike the tellow blow while he is all unaware!

When the poet finished re-narrating the verse, the elder retorted,
'Young man, that verse is another's... I know not whose but it
certainly is not yours. I heard it before thou wert born. The poet insisted
the lines were his and affected an air of wounded honor, intimating that
such undeserved and outrageous calumny as was unjustly leveled against
him were sufficient cause to 'set up mats' (gospolad) - that is, sue for libel
before a panel of elder/arbiter. The elder dismissed the threat of legal
action with a curt, 'Do what thou wilt.' Both of them fell silent and the
silence helped the tension and unease to mount, a situation exacerbated
by the inability of the rest of us - unversed as we were in the arcane world
of the traditions - to intervene on either's behalf. The unbearable silence
mercifully came to an end when the injured poet shuffled about and,
declaring his intention to pursue the matter to a solution, stormed out of
the room, leaving his bundle of qaat behind.

The poet's sudden departure occasioned widespread consternation
and prompted muted curses from the frustrated qaat-eaters who felt
their 'momentary high and happiness' was ruined by this 'accursed
quarrel'. Their curses were directed not so much at the elder who pre-
cipitated the row as at Allah and the Prophet and a number of angels, as
such curses when uttered under the influence of qaat often are. In the
evening a few of us went to 'Abdullahi Geesey's teashop where the
elders and the grave of the town were wont to gather on the verandah
overlooking the Shabeel River, sipping tea in the cool breeze. That
evening the notable tea-drinkers included Dagane Malaal and Soofi
Deere (both belonging to the Qajaad, a clan well known for its purity
of language and excellence in verbal arts). As sulkily and politely as we
could muster, we approached them with the question of establishing for
us the authorship of the poem, in particular, whether they had ever
heard it before. "Why, yes," said one of them (which one, my memory
fails me) after a pause of some moments, that verse belongs to Ugaas
Nuur."

Further queries established that Ugaas Nuur, the apparent
composer, was a wily chieftain noted for his Machiavellian ways - his
poem hints as much - who ruled a confederacy of tribes around the
middle of the nineteenth century in the north-western region of Boodaada.

So the amiable qaat-chewer was vindicated; as for the poet, rumor
had it that, far from attempting to take legal action, he left town in a
hurry rather than linger around to face the laughter and ridicule which
were certain to greet him upon discovery of his unsuccessful antics.

The above incident - by no means uncommon in pastoral literary
performance and audience response - serves to demonstrate both the
pronounced ethic in Somali society of the concept of individual author-
ship and the occupational hazards of plagiarism. It also illustrates
Andrezewski and Lewis's observation in their brief but perceptive
anthology of numerous Somali poets that 'heated disputes sometimes
arise between a reciter and his audience concerning the purity of his
version.' It further signifies the vital importance of elders (the unlettered
literati, if the oxymoron may be excused) in establishing both the authen-
ticity of poems and their rightful composers. Throughout the Somali
peninsula there are individuals who enjoy established reputations as
literary experts, recognized for their talent to distinguish between the
good and the bad, the authentic and inauthentic in poetic arts. It may
not be an exaggeration to refer to these individuals as literary critics in
the true sense of the word.

The recognition of individual composition presupposes the existence
of individual composers. That Somali oral poets compose their poetry
before performing it or entrusting someone to perform it for them was
first noted - for the outside world, we may add - independently and almost
simultaneously by the Italian scholar, Enrico Cerulli, and Andrez-
jezowski and Lewis, and recently re-emphasized by Ruth Finneran, author of a notable example, in my view, of meticulous scholarship in
contemporary studies of oral poetry. To repeat the observations of
these scholars would be to belabor the point, what may be helpfull here is to
cite the testimonies of indigenous poets with respect to matters of com-
position. The poets whose evidence is cited below represent a cross-section
of composers of the maanso forms regarded by the Somalis as the quintes-
sence of their classical verse.
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Sayyid Muhammad:

The insufferable anguish of the night denies me the pleasure of nourishment,
I cannot swallow, the odious edge of anxiety blocks my throat,
Even the freshest of milk is bitterness to me,
And however much I try, I cannot sleep,
Instead I toss fitfully from side to side on account of this consuming wrath. 19

Raage Ugaas:

When sleepy men closed their doors before the awful darkness of the night,
I arose; there emerged from the depths of my tormented being, a deep groan

Like unto the rumbling thunder of a gloomy rain
Or the jarring sound of a thousand exploding guns
Or the obscene roar of a prowling, hungry lion
Only Allah knows the acute hurt of my scarred soul. 20

Salan ‘Arrabay:

Oh Faarah, I had no desire to take again the toils of poetry;
I had abandoned the travail of reciting impotent nonsense,
Although I am skilled in the art of alliteration, be it the letter 'f' or 'b'...

Last night I had no sleep for pain and moaning. 21

‘Ilmi Boodari:

Listen ye men, God’s judgement, I say to you
Is ageless, unbending. And I am forever a poet.
When I am weary, and want no friend but peace,
And say to you, ‘This night my songs are done’.
Your clamorous voices still would force from me
One ballad more to warm the dwindling fire. 22

The four poets cited above cover a time span of roughly seventy years, from the 1860s to the 1930s, and their artistic talents and poetic craftsmanship—two matters which the Somalis distinguish range from the somber philosophical observations of masters like Raage Ugaas, to Sayyid Muhammad’s bitter anti-colonial diatribes, to Salan ‘Arrabay’s wrenching lament over the futility which old age visited on his enfeebled body, to ‘Ilmi Boodari’s passionate love lyrics. What they have in common is a shared view of the task of poetic composition as a lonely and laborious process, at once humbling and ennobling. It is instructive to note how persistently the themes of gloom, darkness and sleeplessness—a midnight visitation—run through the anguished confessions of these deeply tormented men in their supreme moments of artistic inspiration. Raage, whose extent of ‘torment’ and ‘scarred soul only Allah knows’, arose to labor on his lonely job of composition ‘before the awful darkness of the night’; the Sayyid cried of the ‘insufferable anguish of the night’ of poetic composition which ‘denies me the pleasure of nourishment’, while Salan ‘Arrabay would rather ‘abandon the tools and trawl of poetic creation although he is as skilful in it as any man. Yet, afflicted with the passion to compose, he had no choice but to strive on with the reluctant rhymes with ‘pain and moaning’. For his part, the ‘year’ Boodari abjures solemnly any desire to versify, wishing ‘God’s judgement’ upon his unrelenting companions whose ‘clamorous voices still would force from me One more ballad to warm the dwindling fire’.

What emerges from the self-pitying confessions of these tortured men is a bitter-sweet testimony of the harsh demands which their coveted calling imposed on them. The pattern is familiar: a reluctant poet is overwhelmed with a consuming passion; he withdraws into himself, spends many sleepless nights, even months, attempting to craft the proper language with which to express his deep feelings. Having at long last attained a text which, if he is lucky and deserving, expresses his ‘passion’ adequately, he presents his case to the world, laying his heart bare before an assembly of kinsmen—and, if his kinsmen should fail to listen, before Allah, the ultimate arbiter in human affairs.

It may be of interest to note that the particular passions which drove Raage Ugaas, Salan ‘Arrabay and ‘Ilmi Boodari to ‘withdraw into themselves’ had to do with the pains of frustrated love. In Raage’s case, the woman whom he loved dearly, ‘Abban ‘Ilmi Hagoog, was stolen from him by one Ahmad U. Wilkaal; in Salan ‘Arrabay’s case, his refusal to meet the extortionate bride wealth demanded from him by the kinsmen of his new bride impeded his nuptial happiness. ‘Ilmi Boodari’s predicament stemmed from his inability to marry the girl whom he loved, Hodon ‘Abdilaah, on account of his poverty. She left him for a wealthy man named Mahammad Shabeel (Mahammad the Leopard). The Sayyid’s ‘consuming wrath’, on the other hand, was provoked by his unsuccessful struggle to prevent the colonial conquest of his country.

Having stressed the centrality of personal, individual composition prior to performance in Somali oral poetry, it may be helpful to comment on the question of its transmission and dissemination. On this matter too, we should turn to Sayyid Muhammad, who had much to say about how his poetry should be publicized. In his poem, ‘Abxakayd’, he addressed his lieutenant and chief poem-memorizer, Huseen Dogle, thus:

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O Huseen, by the will of the Lord, let not your mind vanish,
May the Lord accept my prayer for you,
Live for a while yet, for you're a man in whom I trust,
Yet if you die—I am certain that you'll join the ranks of the
Blessed,
You'll go up, up to be with the disciples of Fragrance,
Now hark, my son, your task is a little word I'd entrust to you;
Beloved, you'll not forget my words,
Listen, then, to the chant of my poetic supplications

In these most grave terms the Sayyid reminded his disciple of his
solemn undertaking to propagate without distortion 'this little word
which I'd entrust to you'. Beloved, you'll not forget my words'—a charge
as heavy as it is reminiscent of Christ's: 'My words abide in you'.
The disciple, Husein Dagle, was however not only too human, even with his prodigious memory and with the help of
other equally prodigious memorizers, not to have failed occasionally in
publicizing in verbatim fashion the more than 120 poems, some of them
several hundred lines long, entrusted to his charge. Perhaps it is the
Sayyid's realization of this circumstance that drove him to compose his
poetic lament, 'Lost Not My Utterance', excoriating the disciple's
'faulty memory' after he received word that certain of his poems failed to
reach their destination accurately.

The Sayyid's preoccupation with the fate of his verse illustrates the
principle that memorization is the prime mode of the transmission and
distribution of Somali oral poetry. A poet presents his composition
before an audience, chanting or reciting it slowly, repeating important
lines now and then, so that they can be absorbed by the audience.
His admirers, who are many if he is a good poet, learn his poems by
heart and not only preserve them but also recite them to other audiences
and memorizers who in turn learn them by heart and pass them on to
other memorizers. As nomadic society is in constant flux, with people
constantly dispersing and regrouping, dissemination occurs at a rapid
pace. In this way it is not unusual for a poem to be known in the whole
country within a few weeks or even days of its first recital.

But if poetic dissemination takes place rapidly, it may not do so
accurately. In the process of transmission, a poem runs the risk of being
falsehood, either through the faults and imperfections of memory or
through deliberate distortion. As we have said, Somali verse is issue-
oriented and it is likely that at any time a good Somali poem is publicized,
there is someone who has a vested interest in it, someone whose interest
it is to preserve, destroy or distort it.

Figure 3. The dissemination of a poem.
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But contemporary poems, that is, poems from the beginning of the twentieth century, are remembered remarkably well not only through the traditional methods of transmission but also because many of them have been committed to writing with the introduction of the national script.

The pastoralists have demonstrated remarkable powers of retention and, as we have seen, they are conscious of their superiority over the urbanized in this respect. As noted by Andrzejewski and Lewis, the gifted memorizer, unaided by writing, is capable of learning by heart a repertoire of poems which would not be ‘exhausted by several days of unbroken recitation’. The fact that in recitation poems are alliterative, chant-slowly and important lines repeated, of course helps in the process of memorization, but even so, the retentive powers of a memorizer are truly impressive. This is not to say that Somali poem-memorizers and reciters are immune to the vagaries and failures of memory; while their goal is verbatim transmission of the texts entrusted to their care, such texts do in fact suffer corruption on occasion, either through ‘faulty’ memory or through deliberate distortion. Though the process of textual change resulting from oral transmission is more evident in older poems passed by word of mouth through a vast chain of memorizers over great lengths of time and space, it can be observed even in recently composed poems. Thus, in Sayyd Mahamoud’s poem, ‘From Time Everlasting’ (‘Ka Sabaan ka Sabaan Baan’), composed in 1908 when the Derwishes were settled on the eastern Somali coast near Eyle, we have these minor variations:

‘And from time everlasting my men have been slaughtered’ (first version).
‘And from time everlasting my people have been slaughtered’ (second version).
‘And from time everlasting my community has been slaughtered’ (third version).

The Somali transmitter does not see a difference in meaning between saying, ‘my men’, ‘my people’, and ‘my community’. What matters to him is the substance of the poem, and as long as that is not significantly affected, he considers a poem to be transmitted accurately. Even so, oral transmission is surprisingly reliable and a comparison of several versions shows them to be nearly identical. If there is any difference between several versions of a given text, it is hardly ever a difference of meaning. Words might be transposed and new phrases substituted for original ones but the alliterative order and the meaning often remain unaffected.
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The preceding notes have made it evident that the concept of 'composition in performance' associated with the propounders of the 'Formulaic Theory' does not apply to Somali oral poetry, nor do Romance/folklorist notions of oral poetry as a communal product... an instinctive, artless outburst of feeling which 'naturally' springs to life without prior deliberation. As it practitioners would not only too pain-
fully remind us, Somali oral poetry is both individually created and
chiefly transmitted through verbatim memorization. Composition and
performance seldom, if ever, occur simultaneously and in fact composer
and performer are often separate individuals.

6 DIATURE, PROVOCATION AND CURSE IN SOMALI CLASSICAL VERSE

Somalis divide their poetry into two general categories: poetry (maanso)
and song (hees or heeeli). Hees are modern songs and have their origins
roughly in the fourth decade of the twentieth century, while maanso
is a more traditional form whose roots fade, as do other genres in the
literature, into the penumbra of unrecorded time. The numerous forms
and genres of Somali verse along with their social context and significance
have been treated elsewhere. Therefore wish to limit the remainder of the
discussion to three classical genres which are of vital concern to
this study: the diatiae, the provocation and the curse.

The diatiae is a class of verse which seeks to undo an enemy by dis-
gracing him (teere). To slander someone in verse among the Somalis
is not merely to heap insult, scorn and abuse over him - although that
is a considerable part - it is primarily to execute an act which if un-
defended would violate his personality and make him less than what he has been.
We have seen how in the institution of gudab (cumulative grievances),
verbal assault is regarded the same in its effects as a physical assault.
Poetic diatiae so reduces the status of the victim in the eyes of society
that he is compelled to respond in one of three ways: (a) to defend himself
in a formalized speech act so as to counteract (baabdi) the injurious
effects of the attack on him, (b) to accept defeat, or (c) to resort to physical
violence which, as we observed, is very often the outcome of poetic
attack.

In the exchange of poetic abuse, something more than a code of honor
is involved, for when abuse is uttered in verse it becomes institutionalized;
that is, it is invested with a new vitality and assumes a life of its own:
it is remembered and quoted in all kinds of circumstances and passed
from generation to generation to the everlasting humiliation of the victim
and his relatives. The story of Hala' Deere, the pastoral archetype for
greed, may be worth relating here. Hala' Deere was an Ogaden chieflain

who sojourned among the Majeerteen Daarood. While a guest at the
Majeerteen court of Ali Yuusuf, Hala' Deere was attacked in a poetic
tribute by a court poet and the event turned into a poetic feud between
the Ogaden and the Majeerteen. The story concerns the alleged viola-
tions of table manners committed by Hala' Deere. Apparently there was
even etiquette which regulated not only what a guest should eat but
how much and when he should eat. Hala' Deere allegedly violated both.
He ate too much too cruelly. This gave the court poet who was observing
him (poets usually watch when dignitaries are eating) an opportunity
to charge the unsuspecting guest with avarice and greed. He composed
a poem whose better-remembered lines include:

Greatness is a gift to us from Allah
And we've even managed to entertain the greedy Hala' Deere for years.

The poem was then publicized, and the Ogaden, according to Islaan
Abdille, felt 'deeply offended.' They responded with a counter-attack,
charging the Majeerteen with miserliness and meanness of spirit; the
Majeerteen were a beggarly lot, they taunted, who 'whined and whimpered
because you gave a piece of meat to a guest lad.' The lancorous exchange
continued for thirty years, according to Islaan 'Abdille, during which time
no Ogaden would be a guest of the Majeerteen nor a Majeerteen of an
Ogaden.

The poetic feud even spilled over to the Dubabante who, though a
separate clan, are genealogically a step nearer to the Majeerteen (see
fig. 7 p. 10). Thus, the Ogaden made several attempts to lure 'Ali
Dhuh, the Dubabante poet, into a lanuchon which they hoped to use
for an attack on the Harticlan-family, which includes both the Dubabante
and the Majeerteen. But 'Ali Dhuh refused to fall for the trap' and is
said to have responded thus to repeated Ogaden invitations:

I'd do Allah to come to your invitation sooner than death,
But I fear, I fear the women and children will say, 'There! The
worm has come!'

Over my shame, they'll join in triumphant song.
Yes, at night, in the Dzaarcole dance, they'll sing of me.
Then my name will become a byword, like Hala' Deere's.
Since I will not say 'yes' to your pleas
Why hold on to my garment's hem?
Behold, it is dark and I must depart.

The poetic exchange continued to gather steam and the relations of
the two lineages deteriorated so badly that there was fear that the protact-
Elements of Somali pastoral oratory: poetry

ed tension might erupt into 'open hostilities'. Then one Saahid Qamaan, an Ogaadeen, made a joint appeal to both groups to desist from composing and reciting further abusive verse. He admonished his kinsmen thus:

Brothers-in-law we are – and between us
There ought to be Salaams (peace)
And we've been close relations until lately
When malice has taken control,
What is better than goodness and mutual respect among kin?

Although Saahid's appeal was said to have had a 'cooling-off' effect, it is instructive to notice the incident is still well remembered and Hal'à Deere, the original protagonist, has come to represent the archetype for greed in Somali pastoral culture.

Poetic diatribe is also an instrument of war and it is hard to imagine a pastoralist feud in which poetry has not played a prominent role. Somalis in fact say three things are inseparable ('Waa ugu bahan') and thrive on one another: camels, poetry and feuds.

The influence of the poetic diatribe is perhaps illustrated by the time-honoured tradition among the pastoralists that an insult in prose can and should be easily forgiven by an offended person upon receiving an apology, while one uttered in verse is mortal and demands immediate response. A person attacked in poetry, if he is unable to compose verse himself, entreats a poet kinsman to redress his honor by composing a poetic answer, an attack in kind. However, if the insulted person fails to acquire the assistance of a poet in his clan, he will resort to violence. Such a situation in fact gives rise to the many feuds prevalent in pastoralist politics.

Provocative verse (diradade), on the other hand, has the express purpose of inciting trouble between two individuals or two parties. Where the diatribe seeks to discredit, to humiliate and destroy honor, the provocation incites a person or group to action by appealing to their honor. An excellent example of a provocative poem is 'Ali Duuh's 'Lament', analyzed by Andrejewski and Muuse Galal. 'Ali Duuh, whom we have mentioned several times before, belongs to the Dubulhante clan of the Darood clan-family (see fig. 1, p. 10). His real name was 'Ali Aadan Gorooy. He was a poet of singular stature but one whose talent was blighted by his flair for composing inflammatory verse. He is best known as the starter of a series of polemical poems called the 'Burner' (guba), so named because of the inflammatory character of the series.

The guba poems have a simple historical background: 'Ali Duuh seems to have composed the first acrimonious poem, 'The Ogaadeen Fools', in 1922, shortly after the defeat of the Dervish movement. In

the wake of the Dervish collapse, the British-protected Isaaq clans suddenly found themselves in an advantageous military position versus their erstwhile competitors, the Ogaadeen Darood. In recognition of their steady support of the Protectorate Government, the Isaaq were allowed to retain their firearms and they used their newly-acquired military advantage to raid the Ogaadeen Darood with impunity, seizing their herds 'by the thousands and reducing them to poverty'.

The Isaaq were also putting pressure on the Dubulhante Darood, penetrating deeply into their grazing areas and seizing some of their traditional wells. 'Ali Duuh, poet-spokesman of the Dubulhante, may have hoped to take Isaaq pressure off his own clan by bringing about through poetic provocation a renewed hostility between the Isaaq and the Ogaadeen. In composing his incisive poem, 'The Ogaadeen Fools', 'Ali Duuh intended to arouse the Ogaadeen to vengeance against the Isaaq who had seized their herds and humiliated them earlier in the year. In doing this, 'Ali Duuh took care to appear not as an instigator of trouble but rather as an outraged kinsman who was appealing to fellow kin to redress their honor. 'Ali Duuh lamented:

Doollo has been taken from the Ogaadeen, the fools;
If they want to encamp in Dannoode and 'Iid, they are forbidden.
Other men rule their country, and their two regions
In Daratoole and Faafan, both verdant and fertile,
And in the region where there is a watering pond, they do not graze
They do not feed milking camels on the madera bushes, where
The camels were wont to be reared ... The Ogaadeen cannot settle by the shallow wells to which they used to travel for water;
By God, from the red earth valley of Wardeed they do not get
second helpings of water.

From these lines,' said one elder, 'Ali Duuh 'screamed and kindled a great fire.' The Isaaq stomachs were stirred; they could not sleep or eat until a poet from among them rose and restored their honor by 'cooling off' 'Ali Duuh's hot tirade. The Ogaadeen poet in question was Qamaan Bulhan, and his long poetic retort is better remembered for these lines:

Oh 'Ali, the Everlasting One has driven on the words of your poem,
The rustling winds of summer and the warm breeze have carried them,
They have refreshed us, like the fresh grass and the abundant milk
of the herds,
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But they have entered our flesh and bone, and although words can
often bring relief,
Not everyone in this respect is the same, and they have made my
kinsmen live in bitterness.
The men whom you have branded with disgrace have been thrown
down.
You have touched and opened old sores on the back of a burden
camel.
Stop at this point: I shall contend with you and shall slate my case.
You always kindle fires by which you are not burnt yourself,
And setting ablaze a heavy log, you know how to incite people
against one another;
But maybe the encampment, all in smoke (and flames) will burn
the homestead in which you yourself dwell.33

The pastoralists say: 'Provocative poems follow one another.' Thus:
'A poem that kindles fire followed by one that puts out the fire, pours
water over the embers, and admonishes the people not to listen to the
insignator of trouble.'34

The provocation and diatribe classes of verse are the instrument of
the afmishaar poet ('he whose mouth is a saw') as distinct from the
tishaar poet ('the whose mouth is generous'). Whereas the afmishaar uses
his poetic skill to beneficent purposes, the afmishaar employs his to
intimidate, to blackmail in short, to accumulate ill-gotten power and
influence. A self-seeker, he would sing in his sinister rhymes that one
clan's men are prone to 'tremble fearfully' before their assailants as
their women are prone to 'scurry voluptuously' before their illicit
lovers, that another clan's herds are numberless as the sand while its
generosity to the weary traveler is merciless as the dew. In a recent satire,
an afmishaar poet entertained his avid fans with the bitter poetic anecdote
that Mahmed I. Jugaal, prime minister of the Somali Republic (1967-9),
was about to 'proscribe the drinking of milk' in the Republic and instead
to 'introduce the forcible drinking of spirits.'35 The remark was an
ugly allusion to the premier's alleged penchant for indulging in the
bottle. How far such poetic slander contributed to Jugaal's immediate downfall
is only a matter for speculation.

The curse (kuhaan) stands apart from the diatribe and the provocation,
which derive their significance from the concept of 'cumulative grievances',
that pastoral code of honor which does not allow a wrong to pass
unavenged. The curse rests on a belief in the possibility of bringing down calamity
upon a person or a thing by a mere pronouncement of evil against them.

Somali notions of curse seem to be close to those of the Hebrews of
the Old Testament. There certainly do exist some parallels: as for example,
the customary practice of the man of God being called upon to utter a
maledicton on behalf of the community against an enemy. Thus in
Numbers, chapters 22 and 23, we read the story of the prophet Baalam
who was called upon by the Amalekites to pronounce a curse on the
Jews on their way to Palestine. Like that of the Jewish tribes, the environ-
ment of the Somali pastoralists teems with modern Baalams, and the
services of the man of God are in constant demand 'to do curse' for
various causes and convictions. As among the Jews, moreover—and to some extent in Elizabethan England36—cursing is a powerful weapon at
the disposal of the wronged, the oppressed and the zealous for God.
And if the Jews believed the righteous curse of a person 'in authority'41
to be unfailing in its effect, the Somali believe the maleficent pronoun-
cement of a poet to be invariably effective. Whereas in other categories of
curse the pronouncement of evil must rest on a sense of guilt to be effective,
a poet's curse is not thought to be subject to such a constraint.
Whether or not it is deserved, a poetic curse is believed to be a powerful
force in and of itself. What, however, restrains the poet from a wanton
misuse of his malevolent power is the equally strong belief that an undeserved curse may return to the head of him who unleashed it. Thus,
when a poet puts his potent arts to use, it must be in the service of what
he deems to be a just cause; otherwise he stands in danger of afflicting
himself with his own sinister craft.

Somalis distinguish five types of curse which originate from different
sources and are applicable under divergent situations. Each of these
curses is distinct and has a specific name. The types of curse Somalis
recognize are (1) naalad, (2) inkaar, (3) habaar, (4) asmo and (5) yaaloo.
Naalad is the type of curse God alone is entitled to pronounce and is a
common occurrence in Qur'anic passages such as in Sura LXIII and
CLXV, in which God imprecates liars, oppressors, evil-doers, unbelievers,
and so on.

The second type of curse, inkaar, is at the disposal of all living beings,
including plants and animals, and is the weapon of the poor, the powerless
and afflicted. Thus Somalis are loath to destroy indiscriminately harmless
animals such as wild game and plants for fear of contracting a curse and
bringing upon themselves the dire consequences of their inkaar.

Needless to say, inkaar is the sort of curse resorted to by those who do
not possess material force to protect their person and property, and the
fear of contracting an evil curse restrains the powerful from a callous
misuse of their power against the weak. This is important for the survival
of the weak and the helpless in an environment where there is no central
authority to maintain law and order.
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Table 4. Types of Somali curse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Usable by</th>
<th>Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inkaar</td>
<td>All living beings, including plants and animals. This type of curse is a weapon for the weak against the predatory rapine of the powerful</td>
<td>The powerful, the oppressor and those who use their advantages over others to irresponsible ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na'aiad</td>
<td>God, Prophets, angels</td>
<td>Sinners, unbelievers, liars, trouble-makers in the community of faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habaar</td>
<td>Intelligent beings: men, angels, parents and elders</td>
<td>Insubordinate children, oppressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amnu</td>
<td>Wadadaa, Men of God</td>
<td>Rival clans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu'guuu, Kahaan (also known as Guuna or Haanfii)</td>
<td>Poets</td>
<td>Blasphemous offenders, rival clans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Habaar, the third type of curse, is a willed imprecation against persons or things and as such is only employable by an intelligent being who is capable of choice. Hence, the services of habaar are limited to human beings and angels. A parent pronounces habaar on a disobedient child, an old person on an unmanured youth and the elder on an ungenerous kinsman. Age seems to play a role in habaar curse; as a rule, the direction of habaar is from the aged to the young and hardly ever the other way around.

Amnu, the fourth type of curse, is the sort employed by a man of God (wadadaa). A wadadaa is capable of cursing not only with words but also with a concentrated evil-willing look at an object or a person. Some kinds of amnu involve elaborate ritual in their execution. Such is the case, for instance, when a clansman employs the services of a wadadaa for cursing a rival clan. Here the proclamation of amnu is accorded a fixed time and a fixed performance. The ceremony is held before the sunset or sunrise (duraadaa, literally, ‘red sky’) under a solemn environment. Qur’anic recitations, invocation of medicinal prayers, the making of charms and talismanic devices and synchronizing body movement with injurious incantations.

Where the effectiveness and fulfillment of the habaar curse depends on a just and deserved provocation, that of amnu depends on mere wish, without any regard to moral justification. Furthermore, amnu is a collective enterprise, utilized by a group or a clan against a rival clan; although some priestly clans, like the Shikhaasha Hawiye and the Dubabante Khayr, tend to predominate in the officiation of amnu rites, there does not seem to be any correlation between a genealogical unit and the employability of amnu. Theoretically, any male who has attained to the state of wadadaa, for example piety, religious knowledge and a rudimentary understanding of magic, is entitled to perform an amnu rite.

The last, though not least in terms of significance to our discussion, is the yusho curse. This is the poet’s curse and rests on the belief among Somalis that the poet has, as it were, a ‘hotline’ to the Deity and can therefore intervene, through his poetic oration, in natural events. The composer of poetic curse (kuwaan) is called ‘aklleebiis’ (‘the whomever is a dart’). An aklleebiis is at once weird, clairvoyant and prophetic: he is believed to foretell the future, to possess omniscient attributes and to perceive things which are beyond the natural range of mortal men. His malevolent orations are compared: to lethal arrows which fly across the Somali desert and come home to the hearts of those who incur his displeasure, causing joy among his friends and consternation among his enemies.42

The verse he composes is collectively called ‘kuwaan’, roughly translatable as ‘evil will’. The individual poem is called ‘gabay-awatii’ (‘stipper’), the notion being that gabay-awatii, once hurled at a person or a thing, has the effect of stabbing the object. It tears away the flesh of an enemy as a weapon does.

The distinguishing feature of the stipper-poem is its brevity: a poetic curse is hardly ever more than twenty lines; the typical poetic curse is often a brief, terse statement of half a dozen to a dozen lines. The lines are short and hurried, and have a sense of urgency which peculiarly lends itself to the geesboor form. The images are direct and obvious but vivid and hard-hitting. At their best they strike with an incantatory weirdness which lingers on in the memory long after the poem has been forgotten. Something of the expressive quality comes through in the following lines even after an inadequate free verse translation. The poet, a nomad, is cursing a townsman who deceived him of a goat:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stiper</th>
<th>Verse</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O my Lord, who has created me, Who humble servant I am, O thou great multitude of Allah’s messengers, O the querant angels,Detailed to good work among men, Who art writing my feeble words, O saint ‘Adrus, blessed be his name, O Mahamud, blessed Grandfather</td>
<td></td>
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81
A man has wronged me,
That he may be stricken with calamity,
That he may be cut off by evil,
That Allah may prevent him from uttering his prayer.
That he may be disfigured,
That all who see him turn away from him.
To this end, all of you say: Amen.

O Man! the death rite
And the confession of faith.\textsuperscript{45}
Would that you had missed both,
Vanish and be no more.
Let there remain no light in you.\textsuperscript{46}

Somalis apparently choose to remember events and circumstances in which a poetic curse has proved efficacious, while forgetting those situations in which poetic curse proved ineffective, for one searches in vain for an example of a poetic curse that has failed to achieve its objective.

It is true that only under very extreme conditions a poet compose k\textit{uhuut} for poetic curse, though a recognized power, is frowned upon in pastoral sanctions and its frequent user may therefore bring social ostracism upon himself. Moreover, once let loose, a poetic curse is uncontrollable, and may not only strike down the cursed object but return to the head of him who has uttered it. As one elder put it, 'composing k\textit{uhuut} is like allowing poison to seep into the air and is ultimately dangerous to both curser and cursed.'\textsuperscript{44}

Nevertheless, poetic cursing plays a significant part in pastoral poetry and evidence of cursing there is aplenty in the history of the pastoral Somalis. It would be in order to mention some well-remembered episodes of cursing: the Dervish poet-warrior, Isma'il Mire, is said to have cursed the British Native Officer, 'Arab Deere, who he thought was misusing his authority for channelling purposes in 1923. In a poem better remembered for its philosophical content, he concluded:

> I saw a man who will not live long to enjoy his wealth,
> He is full, satiated, and has grown fat buttocks like a big ram,
> His bags are full of loot taken from men of honor and valor.
> Watch silently, Muslims, and see how those who prosper lose their souls!\textsuperscript{48}

Soon after he was cursed, the official, many believe, 'died instantly'. Another poet attempted in a k\textit{uhuut} to 'move famine, drought and pestilence from the region of his clan' to that of a rival clan and is believed to have succeeded in so doing.\textsuperscript{49}

Among other historical events, many pastoralists attribute the death of the British Commander, Richard R. Corfield (slain by the Dervishes in 1913), the defeat of the Italians in World War II and the collapse of the Dervish movement itself to the pernicious effects of poetic curse. Colonel Corfield, according to the Somalis, was cursed a month before his death by one Ima Weesa-hume. The story goes that the commander, not understanding Somali inter-clan intrigue, listened to the protestation of the Habar Yoonis sublineage against the poet's people, who belonged to a rival lineage. Impatient and without adequate knowledge as to the guilty party in the dispute, Corfield seized the poet's herd and sold them at an auction. The poet pronounced a stabber-poem on him:

> When the Saiyyid strikes and you pursue him to rescue the herds,
> Would that you and your party had perished in the pursuit,
> Would that your maxim guns had stopped firing,
> Let the men of God hungry for infidel blood hack you to pieces.
> As you're partial in judging, let your mouth be cut off,
> You've reduced my kinsmen to poverty ...\textsuperscript{50}
> Would that you were cut off before the gu' rains.

'Then,' say the Somalis, 'Allah accepted his intercession and Corfield was ignominiously hacked to pieces.'\textsuperscript{51}

As for the Italians, they were cursed by one Muhammad Du'ale of the northern Somali Islaq. As members of the Axis alliance in World War II, the Italians attacked the British Somaliiland Protectorate in 1940, overrunning the tiny British garrisons in Bur'\textsuperscript{o}, Hargeisa and Berbera. Within six months their conquest of northern Somalia was complete. According to the Somalis, the Italians allowed their troops to plunder the pastoralists at will during the campaigns. It appears that the poet's people around Bur'\textsuperscript{o} suffered untold hardships. So, the pastoralists say, he pronounced a k\textit{uhuut} on them:

> We are the seed of the prophet and men ask us to intercede with Allah for them.
> Like burned wood, O Italians, may Allah bring fire upon you;
> May shells fired by Shelley\textsuperscript{51} rain upon you;
> May Allah return upon you the affliction you've brought upon us.\textsuperscript{52}

If one were to ask them whether it was these few lines or British imperial might that brought about the defeat of the Italians, Somalis would not be fazed by such a question; for they would not see an either-or dichotomy in the episode but a concatenation of material (British might) and spiritual (curse) force. The one is an immediate, apparent cause, the other not so apparent but regarded as the main contributory cause.
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We may note in passing that Sayyid Mahammad was a man who was said to command the powers of all the curses above, in addition to his other poetic talents. Not only did he excel in the art of the rancorous, provocative verse which so much inflames the Somalis, but he was also in a position, both as a poet and as a man of God, to pronounce the maledictory verse which so much overawes them.

7 TECHNIQUES OF PERSUASION IN SOMALI TRADITIONAL VERSE

Somali pastoral verse, especially the gabay form, employs the paraatonic technique whereby the poem is composed in distinct lines, each of which stands apart, both in meaning and words, from what precedes it or follows it. Theoretically, every line could end in a period. It is not only the physical structure of the line which is thus separated but also the sense of the line. Thus, in a sermonizing poem in which he brags of his poetry and Islamic orthodoxy, Sayyid Mahammad says:

1. Huseen, I have words for you, listen well.
2. Brother, the faith we received, I hold in high esteem.
3. The sayings of our Lord are the words which I love.
4. At the hours of prayer it is my duty to cleanse myself.
5. Each day of the Ramadan fast I must abstain from food.
6. To withhold even a single kid from the alms of obligation would be to transgress my duty.
7. I must forswear all neglect of my faith.
8. All the obligatory tasks I must fulfill.
9. I must eschew any neglect which has endangered my soul.
10. It is my duty to earn some merit for the day of judgement.
11. It is my duty to kill a ram for the Sheikh laden with his books.
12. And in a sheltered spot I should spread my straw mat for him.
13. And he should be regaled with the best meat of the rump and belly.
14. But I should beware the son of Walabe and his like.
15. And if he says 'Give me something', it is my duty to sink my spear in him.
16. Those who come to me with threats, it is my duty to challenge.
17. It is my duty to attack the Hagar lineage, with their cankered testicles.
18. It is my duty to destroy their dwindling herds.
19. And those of them who are impoverished and destitute should be driven to the river.
20. While those who are left behind should be eaten slowly by birds of prey.

In this whole poem there is hardly a single line which does not stand on its own, from the point of view both of syntax and of meaning. There are no connectives between lines, no modifiers, no suspended ideas which depend on a following or a preceding line for the completion of their sense. It is true that in some lines the ideas seem to be connected so that in reading them together we get a fuller meaning of what the poet is saying. Thus, in two groups of sentences (lines 17–20 and 21–26), in each of which the poet is charging a particular lineage with infidelity and perfidy, we would do well to read them as passages and not as individual lines – if we are to get the full point. But the interdependence of one line with another even here is one of context and not of syntactic necessity. Every line seems to stand as a unit idea and either adds to the meaning of what has preceded it or begins a related idea in a new but parallel direction. Somali gabay thus seems to utilize the technique of the 'adding' style said to be a characteristic of all oral poetry.

It is not only the lines which are thus disconnected but also the images. Often there occur in a verse of few lines several images which not only do not go well together but actually seem to contradict one another. In the poem we have just quoted, the Sayyid gives himself the image of a pious man of God and of peace (lines 1–10) who has, as it were, renounced the world in his single-minded pursuit of heavenly glory. Then we are given the image of generosity (lines 11–13). The Sayyid is generous and, in the spirit of nomadic hospitality, would slaughter his sheep for the roving Sheikh and the weary traveler. Thus, in the first part of the poem we are lulled into believing that generosity and piety are the qualities...
which the poet holds in high esteem. We come to line 14 and we suffer a rude awakening: the pious man of peace suddenly turns into a belligerent, abusive robber-warrior who almost seems to declare the ‘butchering of men’ as his goal in life (lines 17–20). Similarly, the man who at the beginning of the poem boasted of his unfailing generosity (‘he should be regaled with the best meat of the rump and belly’) now tells us that if a certain guest came to him and entreated, ‘Give me something’, it is my duty to sink my spear in him . . . it is my duty to attack the Hagar lineage . . . it is my duty to destroy their dwindling herds . . .

Piety, generosity and peace are claimed as exalted goals, as are bellicosity, warmongering and miserliness. The images do not agree but seem to be lumped together, screaming. But this is no problem for the Somali hearer (not reader) of poetry. What he looks for in a poem is not precise imagery nor a unilinear pattern of thought, but something with which he can personally identify; images which convey to him a reliving of his personal and communal experience.

The phrase ‘communal experience’ brings us to the heart of an important source of inspiration for Somali poets. While composition is intensely individualistic, pastoral verse finds its appeal by being firmly committed to the moral and spiritual experience of the community, by recapturing images and ideas which most people in a given community would know and appreciate. As one scholar put it, ‘Somali poetry establishes truth by arousing in the people a sensation of shared memory’. It prefers the obvious, the known and the communal to the ambiguous, the esoteric and the individualistic. Thus, the images on which a poet concentrates are familiar ones drawn from the experience of everyday life. This explains why the images of ‘heat, drought, famine, rain, milk, love, livestock, fatigue, travel, etc.’ abound in Somali poetry. So the Suyayd says in a farewell message to a friend:

Now you depart, and though your way may lead
Through airless forests thick with hagar trees,
Places steeped in heat, stifling and dry,
Where breath comes hard, and no fresh breeze can reach—
Yet may God place a shield of coolest air
Between your body and the assailing sun.

And in a random scourching flame of wind
That parches the painful throat, and sears the flesh,
May God, in His compassion, let you find
The great-boughed tree that will protect and shade.

In his rhetorical discourse, the Somali poet does not seek to present

a narrowly focussed syllogism so as to construct a unified, unilinear argument; instead, he appeals to some agreed-upon truth or experience through the repetition of evocative images. Thus, Saahan ‘Arrabay charges a kinsman with ingratitude:

There was a man who once knew great distress,
And lost his wealth, his power, his tribe’s respect.
But now, restored to eminence, he forgets
His former anguish, and my assistance then.
Ah, friend, your memory is short as any woman’s.

By referring to the former ‘anguish’ of the now powerful and eminent man, the poet is pinning his case on a historical fact which others hearing the poem are familiar with, and probably affirm. Similarly, when the poet attacks the man of ingratitude as having as short a ‘memory’ as ‘any woman’s’, he utilizes the image of what in the minds of his hearers is an established fact, namely, the inferiority of women to men. His strategy is to hang his case on the merits of established wisdom and thereby mock his opponent by comparing him to a female.

A poet sometimes wins lasting fame by a careful exploitation of the historico-cultural experience. Thus, Muheeya ‘Ali, the wife of a well-known Dubabhanite poet, won renown—some say notoriety—by the composition of a mere quatrain which she uttered at her husband’s expense. Somali elders say the lines are remembered and quoted because: they give voice to women’s congenital gripe against men, because she had the gall to challenge a poet of ‘Ali Dubh’s stature in verse and because ‘Ali Dubh felt chagrined enough by her attack to respond in poetic retort.

In a rough translation, Muheeya’s quatrain goes something like this:

Until I pour out his cup of tea in humour ‘Ali Aadan will not be; He’ll not converse with grace but will storm about with rage; And he’ll rush me like Koofi and Laaran.

Before he cuts off my head with his sword I’d better heat up the meal!

Although Somalis attribute the fascination which the lines hold for them to ‘sheer audacity and rascality on Muheeya’s part’, their interest seems to me to rest on her witty utilization of familiar experience, especially her portrayal of women as unhappy cooks for men and her use of the image of the stormy, ill-tempered husband. And certainly ‘Ali Dubh’s poetic retort falls short of her material both in the use of imagery
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of poet</th>
<th>Clan</th>
<th>Approximate period</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garraad Hirsi</td>
<td>Barire</td>
<td>1800–1850</td>
<td>This poet represents the earliest recorded poet-leader to have used his verse to achieve political ends. He is also one of the few leaders in pastoral Somali history to have ruled over a state whose peoples cut across tribal lines. With his base along the plains of Jigjiga in Eastern Ethiopia, he ruled over a tribal confederacy which encompassed much of the Jidwaq and Ogadeen Daarood. He is well-known for his poetic exchanges with his uncle, Iqaaal Ilay (Bad-eyed), in which the ruler attempted, with some success, to legitimize his rule through the use of poetic propaganda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aadan Guray</td>
<td>Mareehaan</td>
<td>1820–1870</td>
<td>Though not a chieftain himself, Aadan Guray defended his clan against Majeerreen and Hawiye incursions, engaging in bitter poetic dialogue with the poets of the latter clans. He is, however, better known for his self-pitying songs on ageing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Ali Jaama' Haabul</td>
<td>Isaak</td>
<td>18507–1919</td>
<td>The northern Somali, 'Ali J. Haabul, is best known for his poetic duelling with the Dervish leader, Mahammad 'A. Hasan, and the several of his works which survive, show the extent of bitterness some Isaak lineages felt toward the Dervishes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaan 'Arrabay</td>
<td>Isaak</td>
<td>1870–1940</td>
<td>Poet spokesman for the Isaak in the gaab exchange, discussed above, pp. 76–8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raage Ugaas</td>
<td>Ogadeen</td>
<td>1888–1910</td>
<td>One of the ablest of pastoral poets, Raage Ugaas represents the purely traditional in Somali verse. He is unique in his unwavering devotion to maintaining peace and goodwill among the clans. Although he died young, he is credited with having devised the formulaic phrase, 'Hoylayay, hoylayay' with which the singer of the gaab form sets the meter for his song. For an example of his verse, see his 'Lamen' on the death of his wife and his 'Respect Due to Power' in Andrzejewski and Lewis, <em>Somali Poetry</em>, p. 64.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faarab Nuur</td>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>1880–1930</td>
<td>Much of the verse of this poet is devoted to the emancipation of his Arab clan from their submission to the powerful Isdaaagalie Isaak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huseen Diqle</td>
<td>Ogadeen</td>
<td>18847–1923</td>
<td>Throughout his active life, he preached the message of revolt and resistance among his outnumbered clansmen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isma'ail Mire</td>
<td>Dulbahante</td>
<td>1884–1950</td>
<td>A leading Dervish general, Isma'ail Mire is regarded as a poet of great power, second in the Dervish community only to the Sayyid. He used his verse to further the cause of Dervishism and is best known for his battle song, 'The News to Rome,' composed after a Dervish force co-led by him annihilated a British expedition in 1913.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Ali Aadan Goroyo</td>
<td>Dulbahante</td>
<td>18907–1950</td>
<td>'Ali Duuh used his verse for various causes, including a long-standing opposition to the Dervish movement. He is a very capable poet but one whose talent is deeply flawed by his flair for the provocative. Among the pastoralists, he has the reputation of being something of an agent provocateur (dreader) and he is best remembered as the starter of a series of polemical poems called gaba, 'burner,' from its virulent character. The series turned into a sort of poetic vendetta involving the Dulbahante, Ogadeen and Isaak clans, and is alleged to have poisoned relations among these clans for some twenty years (1922–42).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qamaan Bulhan</td>
<td>Ogadeen</td>
<td>1890–1950</td>
<td>A contemporary of 'Ali Duuh, this poet was the chief spokesman for the Ogadeen in the gaba series.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Abdillahi Muses</td>
<td>Isaak</td>
<td>1900–</td>
<td>Although 'Abdillahi Muses achieved fame as a man of wisdom and piety, he is best known for his poetic lament over his unhappy marriage and the consequent attack on his beautiful but wayward wife is said to have nearly provoked a feud between her outraged kinsmen and the poet's people. Peace was eventually restored by the poet's agreeing to pay full blood compensation to her kin.</td>
</tr>
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Elements of Somali pastoral oratory: poetry

and of the flow of language:

Listen, Mahalee, I gave you milch camels which are pastured by the roadside:

You've heard Miira and Goglaan⁵⁴ are blossoming with wild fruits;
In truth the mortar sounds⁵⁵ from the people you share a name with:

A woman dismissed with the triple divorce oath⁵⁶ is disgraced;
That her mirror of honor is broken I have witnesses;
Be restrained from me, O Daughter of All, lest I cast you out.

His chief counterpart is twofold: (1) he has provided her with riches (line 1), while her people are destitute with poverty (line 2) though she mistakenly believes otherwise, and (2) making recourse to his ultimate weapon, he threatens her with divorce. 'Ali Dii's retort would not pass muster with a pastoral audience: convention would require him to pursue her line of argument and his refusal to address the points she has raised, namely, her reference to his stormy temperament, her description of men as tyrants exercising ill-gotten authority over women: before he cuts off my head . . . . .' is tantamount to capitulation.

The preceding discussion is intended to highlight the parameters of pastoral verse in a somewhat sketchy and arbitrary fashion. It is intended to be neither exhaustive in treatment nor systematic in the choice of topic. Even so, my hope is that it has alerted the reader critically for one of the principal tasks of the rest of this study: the attempt to show that the great Somali anti-colonial leader, Sayyid Muhammad 'Abdille Hasan, successfully harnessed the remarkable resources of pastoral verse in his struggle against colonialism at the turn of the century. Before doing this, however, it may be helpful to undertake a brief historical account of the Somali resistance movement which the Sayyid led and the conditions which gave this movement the vitality and dynamism it was to assume for two decades.

3

Occupation and Resistance: The Rise of the Somali Dervishes

The last three decades of the nineteenth century were years of fateful events and momentous developments for the Somalis. During this period the Somali peninsula was partitioned by treaty, and by conquest, among Britain, France, Italy and, most gravely in its consequences, Ethiopia.

Behind the imperial partition of Somalia lay varying motives. The principal concern of Britain was to preserve the northern Somali coast as a supplier of meat and other commodities for her Aden garrison which, given the rising importance of the Red Sea to British plans in the East, was considered vital to the defense of British India. The French, having fallen out with the British over Egypt in the 1880s, wanted a coaling station in the Red Sea to facilitate naval communication with their imperial interests in Indochina. They were, moreover, challenging British north-south expansion (the vaunted Cairo–Cape Town sphere of influence) by an east–west expansion. The French hoped to connect the Gulf of Aden with their possessions in equatorial Africa. The attempt to implement these conflicting imperial ambitions was to provoke a major crisis known as the 'Fashoda Incident' between France and Britain when Lord Kitchener's Anglo-Egyptian troops ran into Commandant Marchand's column from the West Coast at Fashoda, Sudan.

Recently united and a fledgling nation themselves, the Italians were new to the game of imperial aggrandizement and were interested in staking out a piece of land on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean coasts wherever they could find one, provided they could do so without incurring the displeasure of either the French or the British. What they, as other Europeans, did not realize then, was that the main threat to their imperial designs was not to be a European power, but a black power on the rise – Menelik II of Ethiopia.

Both the history of the partition of the Horn and the intricate motives behind it as well as the rivalries and dreams of the principal actors have been ably chronicled. It is therefore unnecessary to retell the tale here.
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It need only be observed that by 1898, the year of the inception of the Somali resistance struggle, the main spheres of the three European powers and Ethiopia were tentatively formulated, though their boundaries were ill-defined, especially those between Britain and Ethiopia on the one hand and Italy and Ethiopia on the other. The Somali peninsula, one of Africa’s few homogeneous regions, was divided into mini-lands – into a British Somaliland, a French Somaliland, an Italian Somaliland, and an Ethiopian Somaliland, and what came to be known as the Northern Frontier District (NFD) of Kenya. The unrealistic and opportunistic character of the partition of the Somalis was to predict, decades later, Lord Rennell of Rodd to observe ruefully:

If we had been interested enough ... (and if the world had been sensible enough), all the Somalis might have remained under our administration ... But the world was not sensible enough, and we were not interested enough, and so the only part of Africa which is radically homogeneous has... been split into such ... parts as made Caesar’s Gaul the problem and cockpit of Europe for the last two thousand years. And Somaliland will probably become a cockpit of East Africa.¹

Inland herdsmen, the great mass of Somalis – who, needless to say, were not consulted in the partition of their pasturelands into mini-imperial spheres – did not come into direct contact with the colonial administrations on the coast. They were therefore ill-disposed either to follow the arcane world of imperial treaties or to appreciate the consequences of such treaties for their country. If the northern Somali poet, Faarah Naur, was their spokesman, those who were immediately affected by the partition saw it in apocalyptic terms. He sang in bemused disbelief of what was happening to his country:

The British, the Ethiopians, and the Italians are squabbling.

The country is snatched and divided by whosoever is stronger.
The country is sold piece by piece without our knowledge.
And for me, all this is the Teeth of the Last Days."²

The initial impact of European colonialism on the Somalis was mild compared to that of Menelik’s Ethiopia, an inland power whose periodic raids of livestock frequently despoiled the Ogadenen Somalis. The Dervish resistance movement, it will be argued shortly, was largely a Somali response to these raids. It is indeed a remarkable irony that the fledgling British Somaliland administration blundered into a war with the Somali Dervishes who were primarily formed for self-defense against repeated Ethiopian raids. Before delving into the immediate conditions which provoked the Somali resistance struggle though, it would be helpful to look briefly into the general phenomenon of Northeast African Islamic revivalism of the nineteenth century – of which the Somali Dervishes were a part.

I. THE EMERGENCE OF MILITANT BROTHERHOODS

The Somali resistance movement which Sayyid Mahammad 'Abdill Hasan led at the turn of the century against Europeans and Ethiopians had a strong religious motivation. Religion served both as the ideological basis of the movement and the inspiring force in its day-to-day vicissitudes. The religious element is betrayed by the name of the movement, 'Dervish', from the Arabic 'Darwishi' (sing.), 'Darawish' (pl.), used to denote a Muslim believer who has taken vows of poverty and a life of austerity in the service of his God and community. It is reflected in the profound religiosity of the Sayyid himself and the reformist puritanism of the Salihiya Order which he represented in Somalia. Indeed any account of the Somali resistance that does not take stock of the religious element would be ill placed to explain the rising of the Dervishes and the success and surprising durability of the movement.

The Dervishes were also shaped by the pastoral environment from which they sprang. As we shall have occasion to point out, both Sayyid Mahammad's consummate use of poetic oratory as a political weapon and the militarist character of his followers had their roots in Somali pastoral tradition.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, eastern African Islam experienced a widespread religious re-awakening. During this period, Islam emerged with renewed vitality and fervor among its Somali devotees. Brotherhoods proliferated with religious centers (Jamā'ā) dotting the Somali hinterlands and the East African coast from Zeyala to Zanzibar. The annual flow of Somali pilgrims to and from Mecca tripled.³ The period also saw a renewed immigration into Somalia of Arab sheikhs and imāms who built mosques and opened up theological schools and centers of learning where the teaching of the Shari'a and of sacred law was re-emphasized. The outburst of zealous Islam in East Africa seems to have been part of a wider religious revival in the Muslim world. The recrudescence of militant Islam in Africa and Asia is said to have been the outcome of the increasing subjugation of Muslims and Muslim lands to Euro-Christian rule.⁴ In the eyes of the Muslim faithful, this had been a disquieting trend throughout the nineteenth century which finally acquired a painful climax in the last quarter of that century. In Egypt, ever since Napoleon routed the last of the Mamluks at the
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Battle of the Pyramids in the 1790s, European influence had continued to grow. It culminated in Britain's seizure of Egypt in 1834. The French had begun the conquest of North Africa with Algeria in the 1830s and had completed it with the annexation of Tunisia and Morocco in the succeeding years. In the 1870s, French colonial expansion was at work, taking out vast dominions in two decades (1880-1900). On the East African coast, the Omans of Zanzibar had been reduced to impotence by half a century of European hegemony. As early as 1834, the British consul's authority on the coast was so overwhelming that the frequent disputations of succession to the throne sought to enlist the aid of the 'power behind the throne'. In the following decades, the power and influence of Europe over Zanzibar affairs continued to increase. In 1886 the aga of Zanzibar was forced to sign a humiliating Anglo-German treaty of delimitation, which, in a higgledy-piggledy fashion, stripped the Sultan of sovereignty over his East African dominions, except for a few coastal towns and their immediate hinterlands.

The fortunes of Muslim Asia were hardly better off. Here, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, symbol of Muslim sovereignty and the embodiment of its spiritual integrity, had for long been ridiculed as the 'Sick man of Europe' while his petty empire continued to crumble under the corrosive activities of European diplomats, traders and concession-seekers. Pressed for political reform, forced to borrow loans at exorbitant rates, plagued by foreign-inspired sedition and discord from their Christian subjects and threatened with invasion from without, the Ottomans lived from crisis to crisis in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. The shock and humiliation of defeat could not but entail a traumatic impact on the Muslim community, a community which entertains a lofty image of itself as the noblest of mankind and the embodiment of divine expression. Muslim response to the imposition of Christian rule was, however, varied, ranging from a thorough breakdown of the traditional system and the concomitant rise of a secular state on the European model (as in the case of the Ottomans) to the militant retreatment of puritanical Islam, as illustrated by the Wahhabi state in Arabia.

With respect to African Islam, a widespread response seems to have involved the rise of the 'reformist movement'. The resurgence of reformist movements in Muslim Africa in reaction to Euro-Christian hegemony was first studied by John B. Martin and recently, quite ably, by B. G. Martin. At the heart of each of these reform movements lay a Sub-brotherhood figure, a sort of John the Baptist, who called men and women to repentance and sought to restructure society by reeducating it to the worship of its creator and to conformity with his sacred laws. Concomitant with the rise of the charismatic was the popularization of the messianic doctrine. The Sudanese Mahdi typified this spirit of messianism, but traits of it can be detected in the reformist movements of the Uwaysiyya of Sheikh Uways Muhammad al-Fahmi and the Dervishes of the Sanusiyya. The socio-political revolutions resulting from European intervention were, in the words of B. G. Martin, seen in religious colors, as part of an ongoing struggle between Christian intruders and the Islamic polity. Furthermore, these movements tended to justify the erosion of the Muslim position vis-à-vis the Christians on grounds of divine displeasure. Muslims were allowed to suffer under the Christian infidel because they were under divine favor brought on by their wickedly sinful ways in wandering away from the 'Straight Path'. The way to regain favor with God was, therefore, to govern society in strict accordance with his laws.

Beginning with the 1880s, the spirit of puritanical Islam made inroads into Somali life. The change from insouciance to militancy in Somali Islam was noted by European explorers and sportsmen in northeast Africa during this period. Their observations, ably summarized by Robert Hess, speak of a climate of spiritual ferment and anticipation among the Somalis. Captain H. Swaine, a British explorer who made several trips through northern Somalia between 1885 and 1893, described fellow travelers: 'The mululls are the traveler's best friends in the Ogaden; they are intelligent, have great social influence, and are particularly useful in giving introductions, passing the traveler from tribe to tribe.' Yet others found that the mululls, far from being the traveler's friend, could be his worst enemies, too. F. L. James, who traversed the Ogaden on a trip to the Shabelle River, had much occasion to dread the influence of the 'mighty priesthood.' At Faf, deep in the Ogaden, he found the Tannaq settlement 'a cloud which might precede a storm.' His Somali helpers were berated by other Somalis for accompanying 'kaffirs [infidels] through the land', and were declared 'no better than kaffirs themselves'. It may be wondered why Swaine and James, both of whom are fairly circumspect in their observations, acquired such contradictory impressions of the sheikhs' attitudes toward Christian intruders. Part of the answer may come from James's account elsewhere. Significantly, it was in 1885, at the height of the Sudanese Mahdist revolt in the Sudan, that he found this deep antipathy for Europeans among the Somalis. He attributed this to the influence of events in the Sudan: 'They had sent letters to the priests in the Ogaden, saying word had come from Mecca urging the people to stop us, as the English had lately killed a great many Muslims [Sudanees].' This observation seems to make plain the element of pan-Islamism in Somali opposition to Euro-
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Christians: the English had killed fellow Muslims in distant Sudan. Significantly, this news was said to have been transmitted through Mecca, that great center of pan-Islamic sentiment.

But the Somalis had a more cogent reason to be reluctant to welcome Christians in their midst, notably, the threat at home by Abyssinian Christians. The well-armed Ethiopians were at this time expanding from the highlands into the Somali Ogaadeen. Under pressure from famine and other natural disasters and motivated by a desire to share in the partition of the Horn, they descended on the lowlands seeking not only to recoup their losses from the ‘vast herds’ of the pastoralists but also to impose political hegemony on the Ogaadeen Somalis. There were about twenty Tariqa settlements of both Quadriya and Ahmadiya provenance in the Somali interior in the 1890s and many of these were feeling the pressure of Ethiopian expansion. The Italian explorer, Vittorio Bottego, spoke in 1893 of the plight of Somali religious communities whose influence had been lost to the Amhara. By the time of Bottego’s visit, the ancient Tariqa colony at Qunnel and the tomb of the founding saint of Quadriya’s northern branch, ‘Abd ar-Rahman az-Zeyliyyi, lay in ruins ‘sacked by the Ethiopians.’

Under these circumstances, it was understandable that the Somalis shared what a recent student described as ‘the fear of many Muslims that their society was threatened’ by Christian invaders.

Of the dozen or so orders which either sprang to life or experienced reviviscence in Somalia from the 1890s onwards, two were exceptionally important: the Quadriya and Ahmadiya brotherhoods. The Quadriya Tariqa, or order, was founded by the Baghdadi Saint, Sayyid ‘Abd al-Qadir Jilani (d. AD 1166); the Ahmadiya and its militant offshoot, the Saalihyya, trace their ancestry to the great Meccan teacher and mystic, Ahmad b. Idris al-Faasii (1760–1837). Being older and more established, the Quadriya Order commanded greater membership among the Somalis, but was (and is) less puritanical than Ahmadiya and Saalihyya. Locally, the Quadriya brotherhood is split into two powerful branches. In the north, the Zeyliyya, named after Sheikh ‘Abd ar-Rahman az-Zeyliyyi, who died in the Ogaadeen in 1883, is more influential; while in the south, the Uwaysyya, founded by Uways Muhammad, who was murdered in 1909 by members of the rival Saalihyya, tends to be dominant.

One of the crucial elements in the emergence of organized Sufism in Somalia was the rise of the wadud (man of religion). The institution of the wadud was, of course, an ancient one in Somali Islam. As spiritual leaders, waduds mediated between man and God. They offered sacrifices, solemnized marriages, taught the Qur’an and offered prayers on behalf of the clan. Waduds provided spiritual comfort where material comfort was not easily to had. At a more practical level, the settlement of waduds, often called ‘Jam’aa’ or ‘zawia’, was a welcome sanctuary to weary travelers, fugitives from tribal warfare and society’s outcasts. The bonds between waduds, moreover, transcended, and sometimes overrode, those between kinship ties. This meant that the community of waduds was potentially a tribeless community.

Yet for all its significance, the influence of the wadud in traditional society remained secondary to that of his opposite number: the warerre (spear-bearer) or secular man. Perhaps because of their environment, the pastoralists seek solutions to social problems in the secular domain, turning to spiritual remedies only where secular ones have failed. And they give expression to this principle in the proverb, ‘God and the warrior chieflain (tariqa) are fighting over us, and we are leaning towards tariqa!’ Thus it is the warriors, the arbitrator and orator who make important decisions as opposed to the wadud, the anzil and the sheikh. Traditionally, the latter’s influence rested solely on personal example rather than on any authority attached to their office. Thus Richard Burton might not have been wide of the mark when he observed:

Like the half-crazy fakhs of the northern Sahara, the Somal wadid [sic], or priest, is uniftled for the affairs of this world, and the hafiz or Koran-reciter, is almost idiotic.

But that was in 1854 and a radically different situation seems to have prevailed in 1890. During the latter period, not only were waduds fitted for the affairs of this world, they had become deeply involved in them. In fact, the years between 1880 and 1920 can be described as the era of the sheikhs in Somali history. The period produced such influential personalities as ‘Abd ar-Rahman az-Zeyliyyi, Muhammad Guelleh Rashid, Sheikh ‘Ali Nairobi, Uways Muhammad, Sheikh Muhammad ad-Dandarawi, Sheikh Madar of Hargeisa and Muhammad ‘Abdille Hassan. These were men of religion, whose fame and influence rested primarily on religious prestige. They acted as heads of religious brotherhoods and their involvement in secular affairs ranged from indirect influence over clan leaders like Dandarawi and Zeyliyy in the Ogaadeen to acquisition of actual political power like Muhammad ‘Abdille Hassan.

In a sense, the emergence of organized Sufism allowed these religious men to exercise autocratic powers unknown to secular men in the fragmented politics of clan organization. The organization of brotherhoods, unlike that of clans, is strictly hierarchal. The authority of the founding sheikh or his representative over the members of the brotherhood is absolute. The members, called ‘ikhwani’ (‘brothers’), are bound to their spiritual director by a mystical blessing (buraha) emanating from
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the prophet. The leading sheikh or sayyid is, moreover, in possession of the apostolic chain (tisliya) and the commission (hizbi) to propagate the tenets of the order. These two qualifications link him up with all the recognized saints of the order and ultimately to God through the prophet. The relationship between sheikh and disciple is one of complete dependence. In the eyes of his followers, a sheikh has the mandate to bind and free on earth.

Several rituals are used to reinforce the dependence of the members on the head. One is the ritual of džikr (also pronounced dzikr). This term as applied to congregational worship means the frequent mention of God and refers to a regular worship experience in which the participants chant hymns together, repeating stock phrases in a crescendo fashion to the accompaniment of rhythmic body movement. At the highest stage of džikr, a form of ecstatic delirium is produced in the worshippers.

B. G. Martin, citing the psychological study of W. Haas, observed:

Hyperventilation, or states of consciousness approaching the threshold of hyperventilation, could be induced by these collective rites. Under these circumstances, the carbon dioxide–oxygen balance in the brain is altered, creating a greater susceptibility to visions or hallucinations.23

In a regular Uwaysiya (East African Quadiriya) džikr a basic formula links up Uways with God in the following manner:

There is no God but God
Muhammad is his apostle
Sheikh 'Abd al-Qādir is our Successor
And Uways is the saint of God.24

The first and foremost period of indoctrination is the period of joining. Although membership in these associations is voluntary, admission into their fellowship requires rigorous preparation, a period ranging in time from one to ten years to master the esoteric content of their liturgy. During this period, the initiate goes through a series of graduated merit stages from a simple seeker (marātib) to a full successor (khāṭif) with authorization to preach and to make other khāṭifs. As with any other rite of passage, the initiate is subjected to psychic manipulation, as his sheikh gradually reveals to him the secret teachings of the order. There is ample opportunity for indoctrination in the process of khāṭifization.

Loyalty to the sheikh and commitment to his brothers are obvious criteria of an initiate's progress.

The arduous rite of initiation underpinned by the common experience of the džikr produces emotional interdependence between brothers and

spiritual head. Owing to the allegiance of his disciples, a sheikh enjoys far greater powers over his followers than a clan elder does over members of the lineage who have no binding allegiance to their nominal sultans. Moreover, membership in a brotherhood transcends, and ideally overrides, kinship ties, giving the Tariqa possibilities for effective centralized organization which do not exist in the segmental politics of the clan. This is not to imply that the birth of a brotherhood necessarily means the birth of a political movement. There is nothing inherently political about Sufi brotherhoods, oriented as they are to the pursuit of spiritual ends. Yet to the extent that a brotherhood possesses a centralizing tendency, cutting across several tribes and bringing various groups into the fellowship of one body, it represents a radical departure from the decentralizing tendencies of the clan. The large-scale organization which it makes possible can be used as a vehicle for a political movement. In converting the Sa‘ālihis a brotherhood into a resistance movement, Sayyid Muhammad skillfully seized upon this organization potential.

A džikr circle: members of the Quadiriya Order in southern Somalia.
age and the propensity to wage jihad.\textsuperscript{21} Naturally, this assessment, though more or less correct, reflects the benefit of hindsight. There was nothing about Sayyid Mahmud's parentage, childhood or early life that would be a guide to his career in later life. His nearest claim to distinction in his early life may have been his descent from a long line of roaming holy men. The first of these, on whom we have only fragmentary data, is his great-grandfather, Sheikh 'Ismayn of Bardeere, whom seems to have been the family tradition of peripatetic education. Leaving his homeland slightly north of Qalhofo along the Shabeelle River valley in what is now the Ogaadeen, he migrated southwards in the early 1800s and eventually settled with the religious community at Bardeere along the Juba River. Here he developed a reputation as a pious man of great blessing and his tomb in that community is an object of veneration to this day.

From the great-grandfather to Sayyid Mahmud, the family kept the tradition of wandering in search of religious education. In 1825 the Sayyid's grandfather left his home, relatives and possessions, heading north towards the pastoral Dulbahante in northeastern Somalia. Among the Dulbahante, Hasan Nuur set up religious centers and 'devoted himself to the worship of God, away from the affairs of this life.' Yet he was near enough to the 'affairs of this life' to father twelve sons and eleven daughters.\textsuperscript{22} The eldest of these was the Sayyid's father, 'Abdille, who was born at 'Uusura, a settlement of wadadaal, a dozen miles north of Laas 'Aanood in Dulbahante country in 1836. 'Abdille followed his father's footsteps and dedicated his life to a religious career, eventually earning the title of 'sheikh.' Yet he too married several Dulbahante women from whom he had nearly thirty children.

The eldest son of Sheikh 'Abdille, Sayyid Mahmud, was born in 1856 at the valley of Sa' Madeeq, seven miles north of Bushbottle water-holes in the northeastern section of what was to become the British Somaliland Protectorate.\textsuperscript{23} His mother, Timiro Seed, belonged to the 'Ali Geri sublineage of the Dulbahante clan.\textsuperscript{24} Maternally descended from the numerically superior Dulbahante and paternally from the warrior Ogaadeen, the Sayyid could boast of a well-placed ancestral background, for the combination of these two powerful Daaroed clans gave him superior kinship ties which, with some sleight of hand, he could employ to good advantage in his subsequent efforts to present a united Somali front against Euro-Abyssian invaders. How skillful he proved at this will be assessed in a later chapter. For the moment, it would be worthwhile to make a few observations about the Dulbahante, for it was this clan who formed the core of the Sayyid's following and whose strengths and weaknesses Dervishism as a movement could be said to have reflected.

The Dulbahante represent the best and worst in Somali pastoralism. With their great herds and haughty, aristocratic demeanor, the Dulbahante arouse the envy of their Somali neighbors. They are bound by the Majerteen in the east, the Issaq and Warsangali in the northeast and the Ogaadeen Daaroed and Habar Yoonis Issaq in the west (see map, p. 11). The surrounding clans with whom they engaged in regular bouts of warfare until well into the 1950s shield them off effectively from external influences. Of their neighbors, they interact most with the Habar Tol Ja'alo Issaq with whom they conduct feuds and exchange wives.

The country of the Dulbahante is the prize of pastoral habitat: well-watered and well-pastured, the Nugaal valley provides a welcome sanctuary from the perennial twin scourges of Somali pastoralism: thirst and starvation. In common with other pastoralists, the Dulbahante are good horsemen and warriors. Along with their flocks of sheep and goats, they raise camels and depend on these generous beasts almost entirely for their sustenance. But unlike other pastoralists, the Dulbahante are also excellent horsemen. The comparative plenteude of the Nugaal allows the horse to prosper along with the camel, and the Dulbahante possessed great herds of both in the nineteenth century. In the best of times, a well-to-do household might boast a hundred beasts of each. If the camel is a sustenance animal, the horse is a war animal, and the one is essential to raid, or defend the other against raiding. Thus camel husbandry and horsemanship form the ideal career of Dulbahante men. This was significant for the success of the Dervish movement, since the bulk of the Dervish cavalry was to come from the ranks of the Dulbahante.

Until well into the mid-1950s, the Dulbahante were untouched by Westernization and seemed to the British 'wild savages', who lived by the law of the jungle. Even by pastoral standards, the Dulbahante have a reputation for pride, independence and martial spirit. Freed from the threat of thirst and starvation by a relatively generous environment, and unrestricted by religious scruple, they devote their energies to giving free rein to their passions. One passion they indulged in regularly in the late nineteenth century was inter-clan feuding. According to local tradition, the warring factions, during the worst period of Dulbahante civil wars, were accustomed to constructing an impassable fence around the combatants. The idea was to reduce the chances of anyone escaping alive.

Sayyid Mahmud's early life and experience were shaped among these unique pastoralists. It was an environment in which men had enough
to eat and drink, saw themselves as sole masters of their destiny and took fierce pride in their way of life, largely because they had nothing to compare it with. But it was also an unstable, insecure environment in which a man’s life might be lost as easily to a wild beast as to a flying spear of chinnish vendetta. The idol and hero of Sayyid Muhammad’s adolescence was his maternal grandfather, Seed Migan, a fierce warrior chieftain who played a prominent role in the ‘Ali Geri strife of the 1880s, when the Suuban and Hirs branches of this lineage had one of their customary bouts.

Yet Sayyid Muhammad’s youthful impression did not consist solely of tribal violence and shapeless vendetta. Religion also had an impact on his early making. At eight years, he was committed to the care of an Ogaadeen sheikh who taught him the Qur’an and rudiments of the Shari’a. At eleven, he learned the Qur’an by heart (hafiz al-Qur’an) and was promoted into the monitorial position of his class. His classmates teased him as a “sharp mouth (‘idah) and the epithet may be token of the boy’s sharp wit and keen intelligence. According to one student of the Dervishes, the young Muhammad ‘showed in himself qualities of leadership . . . he was inclined to leading children in play. He would also aspire to horsemanship. His father noticed these precocious qualities and advised patience and modesty in him.33 The Sayyid would have done well to heed his father’s advice; impatience and the absence of modesty caused him to lose the day on more than one occasion.

In the following years Muhammad ‘Abdillah continued his religious education but, like most boys of his age, he also doubled as a camel-herder. In 1875 his grandfather died, and the event is said to have shaken the young man. After a two-year stint as a Qur’anic teacher of no noteworthy distinction, he returned to the ways of his forebears to peripatetic learning which took up the next ten years of his life. He traveled widely in search of religious knowledge, visiting such seats of Islamic learning as Mogadishu and Harar. The young seeker apparently suffered severe deprivations in Harar, for the name of that city would rattle with him as a ‘God-forsaken-place that would not extend succor to a needy Moslem’.34 According to local accounts, he also visited Kenya and Sudan.35 In Port Sudan, he purportedly met with ‘Uthman Dijna, the former Mahdist general whose remarkable operations in eastern Sudan during the Mahdist revolt won him the grudging respect of his British foes. If such a meeting did occur between the two men, the Sayyid might have been inspired by the Sudanese example into notions of his own jihad in Somalia.

Muhammad ‘Abdillah returned home in 1891 and married an Ogaadeen woman. By local standards at this time, he was well-traveled, well-educated and well-informed about events in the Muslim world. The method of studying he adopted is well illustrated by his Egyptian biographer, ‘Abd as-Sabur Marzouq:

The Sayyid spent nearly ten years of his life travelling in all regions of Somali country. He would not hear of a sheikh in the country who specialized in any field of knowledge, except he would go to study with him. He sat under him as a student and seeker until he absorbed all he had to offer, then he would go to another. In this way, he acquired all that the Somali and Arab sheikhs could give him and the number of these teachers reached seventy-two sheikhs.36

In 1894 Muhammad ‘Abdillah embarked on another journey, this time towards Mecca to discharge his Hajj obligations. With him went thirteen fellow pilgrims, most of whom came from his maternal kin, the Durbahant.37 Two, Adam and Muhammad Seed, were his uncles. During their one-and-a-half years in Mecca, the pilgrims fell under the influence of Muhammad Salih, the charismatic mystic and reformer whose new order, the Saalihiya, was at this time popular in Arabia and was spreading across the Red Sea into East Africa. The circumstances leading to Sayyid Muhammad’s ‘ordination’38 as Saalihiya khalif in Somalia are unclear. According to one version, the Meccan commissioned the Somali on the advice and urging of his Somali companions.39 Muhammad ‘Abdillah, now al-Hajj, must have seen his new position as Saalihiya’s sheikh in Somalia as a fulfillment and a vindication of his many years of spiritual seeking.

But if the appointment was a vindication of a life-long service, it was also a toilsome post, entailing physical and psychic hardship. Under Muhammad Salih, Sayyid Muhammad underwent a grueling period of initiatory training including an incarceration of sixty days in which he was kept virtually incommunicado. With his elder, he was obliged to spend the time praying, meditating and mastering the esoteric teachings of the order. One informant describes the character of this training in the following words:

The thirteen sheikhs suggested to Muhammad Salih the need to commission a Somali in place of the Arab who represented the Saalihiya in Somalia. They pleaded with him that in order to make a forcible propaganda for the Tarrika it was necessary to appoint as its head a Somali with the commission to preach. Muhammad Salih at first did not acquiesce to their entreaty but merely said, ‘In sha Allah, goodness shall befall us.’ Muhammad Salih then
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asked the Sayyid to remain with him until Allah had given him direction as to the course of action. Thus the two remained together for many days. Mahammad Sahib took away all the kutub (meditative books) from the Sayyid, removed him to a quiet mosque where the Sheikh and Sayyid performed a strict tassavur (mystic rite of various exercises, meditations and pious devotions designed to bring the faithful into perfection and communion with the Deity). The Sayyid was transformed during this period; he was transformed by the spirit of Allah, made to see visions of the prophet and angels. When it was all over, he was a changed man... the spirit which went into his head never really left him for the rest of his life. 38

The Sayyid came out of it 'shaken and overawed' and the experience perhaps accounts for the reputation of the 'mad holy man' he was to acquire for the rest of his life.

There is an account, in my view more apocryphal than true, that the Sayyid and his thirteen companions bound themselves by a secret vow at the foot of the Prophet's tomb to wage holy war on the four nations that had recently divided up their land. 39 Mecca was then as now the hub of the Muslim world. Bringing together literally hundreds of thousands of the Muslim faithful each year, it served as a great meeting house of pan-Islamic leaders and ideas. The Sayyid's new master, Mahammad Sahib, was a Sudanese from Dongola on the Nile, and as the Mahdist war had been concluded a few years earlier, the Sayyid could not have been ignorant of this episode in the Sudan. Be that as it may, there is no reliable evidence that the Sayyid had developed any ideas of jihad during his stay in Mecca.

In 1895 the Sayyid returned to Berbera in the 'power of the spirit'. On the way he stopped for some months in Aden, where he is alleged to have had a minor skirmish with an impudent British naval officer. 40 Once in Berbera, the Sayyid became embroiled in a disastrous theological controversy with the religious notables of the city, who belonged to the rival Qadirdiya brotherhood, and in doing so, threw the city into a considerable commotion. Naturally, this earned him the suspicion and hostility of an administration which had just then put plans under way to impose a tenuous pax Britannica on the coast.

For a better understanding of the Sayyid's lack of progress in Berbera, it would be worthwhile to take a brief look at the history of this ancient port since it came under the British in 1884. Berbera served as the principal outlet for trade from northern Somaliland and to a lesser extent from Harar. The decline of Zeyla both in trade and Islamic learning, owing to competition from Djibouti, the new French Somaliland port, placed

Berbera in a strategic position as the chief entrepôt of northern Somaliland. Yet the city did not gain any appreciable material advantage from its favorable position. This was due mainly to official British neglect of their Somaliland protectorate. To judge by their actions, colonial officials regarded Somaliland as an outpost of the Indian Empire, and had no ambition for Berbera other than for it to be 'Aden's butcher shop'. However, India's singularly lackadaisical attitude to her Somaliland possession was jolted into a rude awakening by the dramatic victory of the Abyssinians at Adowa. The triumph of Menelik II over Italy made Ethiopia the dominant power in the region, and Menelik let it be known to his fellow imperialists that he intended to have a piece of the Somaliland action. He underlined his intentions by allowing Ras Makonnen, the governor of his recent conquest in Hararge province, to send armed bands into the Ogaden. These bands, employing plunder and political occupation at the same time, began to cause havoc in an area supposedly well within the British sphere. Menelik's pressure tactics produced the desired effect for they forced Britain to surrender to Ethiopia 'the most fertile grain producing regions in the west of the British Protectorate and important spring and autumn pastures in the south'. 41

Yet the act of appeasement did not fully satisfy Menelik; the Ethiopian armed columns continued to forage into the truncated British possession and Ras Makonnen continued to talk tough. The dilemma for British officials was, therefore, what to do with what was left of their possession in Somaliland. So long as it was unoccupied, it remained vulnerable to the designs of the victorious Ethiopians. Was it worth spending money on or coming to a confrontation with Menelik? Yet if completely abandoned, would Aden survive the loss of its sole meat supply? 42

It was this climate of emergency that prompted the appointment of Colonel J. Hayes Sadler as British Consul-General in Somaliland. The aristocratic former consul at Muscat, who was later to be ridiculed as 'Flannel Hat' by the white settlers of Kenya, seemed 'too senior' for Somaliland, but the sensitive nature of events there demanded 'the appointment of a safe officer'. 43 Sadler was responsible to the Foreign Office which, in 1898, took over Somaliland administration from a grateful India Office. His principal tasks were (a) to make Somaliland pay for the cost of its occupation, (b) to effect a semblance of British presence in the principal regions of the protectorate and (c) in doing so, to avoid 'at all costs' coming to a clash with Makonnen.

The energetic Sadler proved more than equal to his arduous duties. As he was determined that his ward should come out of the Indian closet, he expanded and Somalized the administration. He relieved the costly Indian garrison and replaced it with newly recruited ilalo (constabu-
laries) and a small contingent of military police. At a cost less than that of the Indian garrison, he managed to police the caravan routes to a depth of a hundred miles as far as Hargeisa and Sheikh. So as to exercise some control over inland clans, he expanded the system of appointing 'aadil al- (paid elders) who were held responsible for the conduct of their kin inland. The consul also cultivated excellent rapport with the local 'ulema, such as Sheikh Madar of Hargeisa and Aw Gaas, the chief Islamic magistrate. To finance his reform projects, Sadler imposed a tax for the first time on 'the most valuable export' of the protectorate: livestock destined for Aden. Since Aden no longer bore financial responsibility for the Somali coast, there was no reason for her to receive her meat supply 'duty-free'.

Sadler's efforts produced a healthy economy and a well-run administration. With 1,000 cattle and 80,000 sheep and goats leaving for Aden annually, the volume of trade reached a record number in 1899–1900. After fifteen years of official neglect, it looked as if Somaliland was at long last entering a new era, an era of economic prosperity and orderly administration. Unhappily for the Somalis, the bold initiatives of the consul coincided with the appearance of Sayyid Mohammad 'Abdil Hasan.

The Berbera to which the Sayyid returned was not suitable ground for evangelization. The economy was booming and the religious arts flourishing under the Quadriyri banner and the majority of those who counted had too much invested in the status quo to be anxious for its disruption. Thus, the proselytizing efforts of the Sayyid either fell on deaf ears or generated a storm of religious controversy in Berbera. Never adept in the art of diplomacy, the Sayyid made loud and virulent attacks on ancient Quadriyri practices such as the cult of saints and charged Quadriyri notables with 'moral laxity'. The ascetic Sayyid also inveighed against the 'luxury of the age', singling out for special blame the chewing of quareh" and the gorging of the fat of sheep's tail. Both these delicacies were regularly indulged in by the Quadriyri inhabitants of Berbera. More outrageous in the eyes of the Quadriyri faithful, it would seem, was the Sayyid's claim that his master, Mohammad Salih, was the 'pre-eminent saint' (Qurb al-Zaman) of the age, with the implication that Quadriyri adherents should abandon their outmoded sect in favor of the new Saalihiya brotherhood.

Persons of Quadriyri persuasion had no desire to follow Sayyid Mohammad's puritanical order or to heed his uncompromising message. The 'ulema whom he confronted included the pious Sheikh Madar, the erudite Aw Gaas Mohammad and the Sayyid's former teacher, 'Abdillahi 'Arusi. They must have resented him as an upstart seeking to usurp their place of religious pre-eminence, and the Sayyid's attack on these prominent men could scarcely delight the town's inhabitants, who had high regard for them. In time, the Quadriyri elders struck back, commenting on Sayyid Mohammad's lack of success in his evangelizing efforts, 'Abdillahi 'Arusi recorded, with a measure of relief and perhaps some malice, his astonishment at the 'strength of the town's foundations which had prevented Berbera from being turned upside down'. Sheikh Madar warned the Sayyid that in his enthusiasm for Mohammad Salih, he might be in danger of transgressing the 'way of Islam'. But it was Aw Gaas Mohammad who may have done the Sayyid the worst damage by calling the dispute to the attention of the administration. He is alleged to have warned the vice-consul (Captain H. E. S. Cordeaux) bluntly: 'This Mullah is brewing up something. If you do not arrest him here and now, some day you will go far, very far, to get him.'

The vice-consul did not arrest the 'Mullah' there and then and, though on hindsight he might have regretted not heeding Aw Gaas's advice, he had no reason at the time to think of the Sayyid as an enemy of the administration. 'So far as the government was concerned,' wrote the administration's chief secretary, 'there was nothing in his teaching at Berbera to which exception could be taken.' The vice-consul thus, not unreasonably, viewed the matter as a religious squabble in which government had no business to meddle. Yet as the religious rift widened, the vice-consul was persuaded, either by his Quadriyri advisors or on his own appreciation of the situation, to 'close down' the Saalihiya's mosque in Berbera. This was the first official act by the government against the cause of the Sayyid and, even so, he might have seen in it the malignant hand of his old bête noire, the Quadriyri detractors.

Tired of preaching to 'bored and unsympathetic audiences' in Berbera, the Sayyid retired into the interior in 1897 to start afresh among his maternal Dubabhan't kinmen. On the way he passed by the French Catholic Mission at Daymoole, a few miles inland on the road to Sheikh. The Catholic Mission was established in the Protectorate in 1891 and, with a skeleton staff of three fathers and three sisters, catered to Somali orphans whom they hoped to Christianize. According to local tradition, the Sayyid came upon a party of these orphans who responded to the Sayyid's query of their clan affiliation — the typical Somali query to reveal someone's identity — that they 'belonged to the clan of the fathers'. This encounter is alleged to have enraged the Sayyid, confirming in his mind that Christian overlordship in his country was tantamount to destruction of his people's faith.

Back in the countryside, the Sayyid's fortunes changed for the better. He made his first headquarters at Qoryawayne, a watering place some
twenty-nine miles north of Aynaba wells. It was here that he adopted the name 'Dervish' for his followers and embarked on his periodic sallies among the pastoral Somalis, preaching religious reform under the Saalihiya banner. Unaffected by the new order in Berbera, the pastoral clans proved more attuned to the Sayyid's puritanical message. His influence grew rapidly and in less than two years he brought the Dukha-hante, the majority of the Habar Tol Joffalo and the eastern Habar Yoons under his sway. Initially, the British found him exercising 'his influence for good'. He settled tribal disputes, prevented the clans from raiding one another and was thought by British officials to be on the 'side of law and order'. The Sayyid was in 'constant communication' with the vice-consul's office and on occasion sent down to Berbera Somali prisoners 'guilty of criminal offences in the interior'.

The apparent amity and good will between the Sayyid and the British came to an abrupt end, ostensibly on account of a stolen gun. On 29 March 1899, the vice-consul sent a peremptory letter requesting the 'immediate return' of a rifle stolen by one Du'ale Hirsi, believed to be in the Sayyid's camp. The Sayyid responded just as peremptorily: 'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his apostle. Man, nothing have I stolen from you or from anyone else. Seek your wishes from him who has defrauded you and serve him whom thou wilt. This and salams.' The curt exchange was in fact a symptom of events which were beginning to set the Sayyid on a collision course with the administration. For the sake of clarity, a slight digression is in order to set these events in perspective. When Consul Sadler returned from Aden in April, he learned of 'conflicting reports current in Berbera concerning the capture of a Mullah . . . who . . . was collecting arms and men with a view to establishing his authority in the southeastern portion of the Protectorate'. The Mullah's 'ultimate aim,' concluded the consul, 'was to head a religious expedition against Abyssinia'.

Sadler's assessment contained an important element of truth, an aspect quite significant to a proper appreciation of the Sayyid's motives but one which has been hitherto overlooked by historians of the Somali Dervishes. This is that the Dervish movement appears to have been originally directed against the Ethiopians rather than the British. And it is one of the curiosities of the history of the British in northern Somalia that they had to bear the brunt of a war that was not meant for them in the first place.

In examining the Somali Dervish struggle, those familiar with European occupation and African reaction will find here none of the catalog of grievances often associated with African resistance and rebellion. The Somalis had nothing in their experience with the British to provoke them into a violent revolt. They do not seem to have suffered under British authorities any grueling physical or psychological trauma—nor at least any of the trauma associated with the rising of other eastern and southern African peoples like the Kikuyu, the Shona and the Ndebele, whose resistance to European intrusion was on a scale similar to that of the Somali Dervishes. The Somalis lost no lands to Europeans, were subjected to no forced labor and suffered no disruptive colonial presence in their midst. At the time of the Somali rising, British presence in Somalia was limited to three fortresses on the coast—Berbera, Bulahsaar and Zeyla—staffed by a handful of Europeans who had come to the coast at the invitation of the Somalis. They were called upon by Somali elders, religious notables and traders to arbitrate in clan disputes and to keep the peace. What influence these Europeans exerted hardly went beyond the coastal strip. In the interior, where the majority of the Somalis lived, life continued as it had before with its cycle of camel husbandry and hereditary feuds.

The case was of course different with respect to Ethiopian encroachment on western Somalia. Here, there appear to have been genuine Somali grievances. Not that the Ethiopians sought to create particular hardships for the Somalis; nor that Ethiopian colonization was less enlightened or benevolent than the Europeans', as the latter had sanctimoniously claimed. The key difference between European and Ethiopian methods of colonization seems to have hinged on the difference between their technical and economic resources. Unlike the Europeans, the Ethiopians possessed industrial home base nor a vast accumulation of international monopoly capital to finance their colonial enterprises.

While officials of the three European powers on the Somali coast were often bedeviled by lack of sufficient funds, they nevertheless managed, with the help of their international resources, to set up the rudimentary apparatus of administration. Once this was done, they could levy taxes to obtain the necessary funds to administer the colony or protectorate. Furthermore, the European efforts were facilitated by their possession of the ports—and by implication, their monopoly hold on trade—where the assembling of goods in a single spot made taxation a relatively simple task.

The Ethiopians, by contrast, did not have international capital to dip into in extending their influence to the Ogaden. Theirs was a subsistence economy and this meant the army of conquest had to live off the land. In the words of a noted Ethiopianist:

One reason for Menelik's southern conquests was his need to open up fresh lands on which to quarter his growing armies of hungry men
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who were pressing hardly upon the resources of Shoa. During some of these lean periods in the [eighteen-]nineties, Menelik found the cattle seized from the Galla and Somali herds a very valuable asset for his soldiers and people. It is interesting, too, to read that after the Emperor John had despoiled Gojama so that its Negro, Takla Haimanot, could no longer support his own army there, Menelik proposed to him that he should invade Kaffa in order to provide for his soldiers.

To chance upon the path of a traditional military expedition by the Ethiopians was apparently a rugged experience for the civilian population. Oromo and Somali informants recall with particular vividness the 'trail of devastation' which Menelik's robber bands left in their wake in 'Arussa and the Ogaaden.54 Margery Perham echoes indigenous assessment of the harshness involved in the establishment of Ethiopian rule. She observes:

By the sanction of custom, soldiers on the march ruthlessly took all that they could from the inhabitants in order to save their own supplies. Many European travellers, from the earliest to the latest days, have remarked upon the arrogant and extortionate behaviour of the soldiers. Cattle, mules and donkeys trampled down and ate the crops ... But woe betide those same soldiers if they returned defeated! For then the people whom they had despoiled would turn on them and take their revenge for the injuries they had suffered. It might almost be said that every large-scale campaign in Ethiopia had some of the features of a civil war.

Beyond the traditional sanctions of the army living off the land, Menelik's forces under Ras Makonnen seem to have had even more pressing reasons to turn their gaze on the 'vast herds' of the Ogaaden. As a result of the cataclysmic wars in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the Ethiopian highlands were scouraged by a devastating famine in the 1890s.56 Evidence from the works of Ethiopian specialists Richard Pankhurst and Harold Marcus as well as British diplomats of the day, would seem to emphasize the importance of this famine as a primary impetus to Menelik's move into the Ogaaden.57 At a guess based on indigenous evidence, Ras Makonnen exacted in tribute or seized in raids, between 1890 and 1897, 100,000 head of cattle, 200,000 head of camels and about 600,000 sheep and goats from the Ogaaden Somali.58 The Ethiopians appear to have had little use for the camels (whose meat and milk they did not consume) other than to employ them as a bargain with the Somalis who were required to redeem their camels with the payment of cattle and flocks. What the Somalis could not redeem, the

Amharas gave to their Muslim Oromo followers as a reward for their services. The sedentary clans of the Daarood Geri and Bajibre on the plains of Jigjiga and the so-called Reer Baare on the lower Shabelle basin suffered particular deprivations at the hands of the famine-driven Ethiopians. They were periodically infested, their villages burned and their crops pillaged. "The Ethiopians did not seem to come to the Ogaaden to govern,"59 says a western Somali elder from Jigjiga, 'they came to take away livestock.' But the Ethiopians did intend to govern the Ogaaden, as their unrelenting push eastwards from 1893 onwards was to prove.

Yet the story of Ethiopian–Somali contact in the 1890s was by no means one of steady Ethiopian gains and Somali losses. For one thing, the Bajibre and 'Iise Somalis played off the Ethiopians against the Europeans, often to good advantage. In 1891 the 'Iise Somalis allegedly told Capt. Swayne:

We ask you now to rid us of these Ethiopian intruders. They wish to treat us as they treated the Geri [another Somali clan], to seize our flocks, kill our people and burn our karus [villages]. They wish to settle in our country and ousted. We will not have it.60

Yet to judge from the intense interaction between the Ethiopians and 'Iises, the Somalis may not have been so hostile to the Ethiopians as Swayne was led to believe. The 'Iises regularly purchased grain at Jigjiga, Ras Makonnen's stronghold, and they may indeed have encouraged him to send his troops to the British zone of influence. The Ethiopian governor, in any event, despatched a small force to Byo Kaboba, a cluster of wells near the caravan route on the British side of the ill-defined border, and the move precipitated a near-collision between the Ethiopians and the fledgling British administration on the Somali coast.

If the establishment of Ethiopian rule was effected with relative ease in the well-watered northwestern end of the Ogaaden by the turn of the century, the south-central regions (roughly 80 percent of the Ogaaden land mass) were another story. Here, the pastoral clans, assisted by vast stretches of impenetrable scrubland, held their own against Ethiopian advances. Except for periodic raids - some of which indeed went in favor of the Somalis – the pastoral clans remained largely autonomous until well into the forties. Douglas Jardine, writing on the British operations against the Somali Dervish leader in 1920, described the Ogaaden as an "accursed ... no-man's-land populated by fanatical tribes ... the Abyssinians, fearing alike the fevers of the lowland climate and the martial qualities of the tribes, have always steadfastly declined to administer in this zone despite the most urgent representations of our Government."

To judge from the fierce resistance suffered there by imperial intruders,
the Ogaden was indeed 'somebody’s land’. 'The desert is our birthright,' says an Ogaden elder, 'and we have always made the empire-builders’ task a bit more difficult for them.'

Although the Ethiopians failed to maintain an adequate grip on the majority of the Ogaden Somali, they nevertheless made their presence felt, keeping up the pressure on the clans through periodic seizures of livestock and the harrying of villages. Thus where the Europeans did not impose much on Somali life except for a small coastal strip, the Ethiopian presence in the heart of Somali rangelands did constitute a disquieting intrusion. Robert Hess makes a judicious point when he observes that the Ethiopian presence in western Somalia led many Ogaden Somalis to join Sayyid Muhammad’s Sa’addiya order. His view is confirmed by indigenous sources. An 86-year-old Dervish elder related the Sayyid’s first message to his inland mandals in these terms:

In the name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful. My brothers, I come to you in the name of God who is strong, all-wise and everlasting. It is He who is with me and guides my steps. Infidel invaders have come to surround us. They have come to corrupt our ancient religion, to settle our land, to seize our herds, to burn our garyas [villages], and make our children their children. The End Times are at hand. For what could this general corruption of the earth signify other than to warn us of the approach of the Last Days? The signs are here for him who would be instructed: the Muslim chiefs under the tyranny of the unbeliever. Are there any among the Ogaden who have not felt the scourge of the Amhar [Somali, for Amhara]? Any who have not been despoiled by their odious raids? Not too long ago you heard how the Amhara fell on the Reer Amaadin [clan name] and carried off many of their camels in loot. If you follow me, with the help of God, I will deliver you from the Amhara. Insofar as the British came under the category of ‘infidels,’ the Sayyid’s remarks could be construed as anti-British. Clearly, though, the gist of his message has an unmistakable focus: 'I will deliver you from the Amhara.' It is interesting to note, too, that at this time the Sayyid addressed his audience as ‘brothers’, thereby presenting himself as one of them. This demonstrates his tact in soliciting the support of the egalitarian pastoralists who might not have responded to his message had they thought he was setting himself above them. When he grew strong in succeeding years, he was to change this strategy and require his followers to call him ’father’ (Aabbe).

The reference to the Ethiopian raid on the Reer Amaadin helps to establish a chronological point. From independent sources we know that no least of which would have beenZXZU

'the community of the Somali Dervishes'

establish a chronological point. From independent sources we know that

Ras Makonnen made two raids on the Reer Amaadin near Imay at the headwaters of the Shabeelle River. The one came in 1890 and ended in a complete success for the Ethiopians. The other took place in early 1899 and went well for the Ethiopians, who carried off a vast quantity of stock in hand. As the Sayyid (who left Berbera for the interior in 1897) began in earnest to collect men and arms in 1899, he must have made his speech in that crucial year when his brotherhood had its headquarters in the southeastern edge of the Hand in Dulkahante and Ogaden territory.

If the Dervish movement was primarily directed at the Ethiopians, as reported by the British consul and corroborated by indigenous testimony, why did Sadler get entangled in what was essentially an Ethiopian problem? This is the question to which we must now turn.

A set of fortuitous circumstances seems to have intervened, forcing the Sayyid and the British Consul to clash with each other. The first hinged on a misunderstanding as to the status of the territory of the Dulkahante, the Sayyid’s maternal kin. It was here that the Sayyid first gained the allegiance of the men and women who were to make him a ‘power in the land to be reckoned with’. But in establishing his power in Dulkahante, the Sayyid had no reason to believe he was infringing on British territory. British imperial title deeds to Somali-land rested on flimsy grounds. They had their origin in a handful of treaties with bought-off signatures, which had been obtained from isolated coastal clans. With the Dulkahante, there was not even such a treaty. In the dozen years since northern Somalia was officially declared a British possession, colonial contact with the Dulkahante consisted of two visits, one in 1895 by a Capt. Welby and another in 1896–7 by Capt. Merewether. On both occasions it was decided not to enter into engage-ments with the Dulkahante, and the consul was the first to acknowledge his ignorance of these inland people: ‘We have no information,’ he reported, ‘as to the country and character of its inhabitants.’

Under these circumstances, the Sayyid could hardly subscribe to Sadler’s claiming the Dulkahante as an integral part of our protectorate nor to his proclaiming the Sayyid a rebel when the letter established himself among his kin. Far from being a rebel, the Sayyid saw himself as the legitimate leader of a sovereign people, as he asserted in one of his letters to the vice-consul: ‘We are a government. We have a sultan, an Amir and chiefs and subjects.’

Left to themselves, Sadler and the Sayyid might have arrived at some sort of a modus vivendi. For a while the consul hoped the movement would ‘subside of itself’. This was not happening, yet the Sayyid was not
anxious to confront the British, whose power he had had ample opportunity to appreciate during his sojourn in Aden. Sadly for Somaliland, the two men fell victim to factious clan politics. As I have indicated elsewhere, clan-based feuding was particularly rife during this period in northern Somalia, with more than twenty lineages at one another's throats. It soon occurred to the antagonists that they could employ the powers of the Sayyid and the administration to good advantage against their enemies if only they could enlist these powers as allies. Sultan Nuur of the Habar Yoons was a case in point. This wily chieftain used the authority of the Sayyid to oust his rival, Hiri Madar, from the position of *qaqii* of the clan and to press a backlog of blood money claims against the Gogaadeen which he hoped 'to recover through the influence of the Mullah.

Even while ingratiating himself with the Sayyid, Sultan Nuur was conducting a clandestine raid against the Habar Tol Jaalo Gaashaanbur, who were allies of the Sayyid. Soon a situation developed in which the Sayyid and the administration became helpless pawns in the intrigues of warring factions and Sadler could only lament that the country was 'rife with old outstandings [and the claim] find this movement a convenient opportunity for ... releasing themselves from their obligations'. He wrote of the 'bad and suspicious characters who use the Sayyid's name for their own purposes'. The Sayyid, for his part, denounced bitterly the 'liars and slanderers' who sought to misrepresent him. And indeed he was misrepresented on occasion, as, for example, when four caravan escorts sold their rifles to him at hefty profits and reported them in Berbera as 'seized by the Mullah'.

In addition to pastoral guile, the Abyssinian question seems to have kindled the Sayyid's ire against the British. Upon learning of the intended Dervish expedition on the Ethiopians, the Protectorate administration instructed the British Resident in Addis Ababa to 'communicate to King Menelik the religious movement on the borders of his empire which the Mullah ... is conducting'. Menelik undertook to 'stifle the movement should the Mullah cross into Abyssinia'. On arrival in Harar, the British envoy reported satisfactorily that Dejazmatch Biratu, the acting governor, was detailed to deal with the movement. The governor had orders from Menelik 'to do nothing in the Gogaadeen' without the British agent's advice. According to local tradition, the Sayyid was informed of the projected Anglo-Ethiopian cooperation at his expense through his co-religionists in Harar. The Somalis, as we have seen, were at this time feeling the pressure of Ethiopian expansion and the prospect of a community of interests between 'our oppressors' and the British could scarcely endear the heart of the Sayyid to the administration. At least the Sayyid did not hide his resentment towards those who cooperated with

the Ethiopians against him. His chief complaint in one of his poems against his own Gogaadeen kin was that they collaborated with Menelik to the detriment of Somali interests:

They who've gone to the Amharas of Harar,
Whose father--judge and ruler is Menelik,
Who'd become servants and toadies of the Abyssinians.
Let no one else revenge upon them for me,
Like the prowling lion.
One day I will jump upon the fence.
I will descend upon them unawares.

In another poem, he showers praises on his lieutenant, Husein Dagle, because the latter stood fast for him, while Dagle's relations are denounced as 'ignorant fools' because they 'Red in headlong panic to seek servile protection under the Ethiopian King'.

But even more crucial to the events of 1899 was the paranoid attitude which seems to have permeated British officialdom about Muslim religious movements. They had just put down one such movement (the Mahdist revolt in the Sudan) at a horrendous cost in life and property. Sadler himself may indeed be regarded as the epitome of the prevailing British attitudes. A former career officer of the Indian navy, he brought to Somalia a colonial outlook that was shaped in India. According to Andrew Brockett, the Indian Government had to suppress in the 1890s a series of revolts among the Afriki clans of northwest India led by a body of 'fanatical mullahs' including Sadullah Khan (the Mad Mullah), Ada Mullah, and Sayyid Akbar. Sadler campaigned against these mullahs, who aroused their adherents into *jahad* against the British. Given this background, Sadler tended to view the term 'mullah' as a symbol of revolt and fanaticism. Yet the term in its original meaning was harmless enough. It was one of several terms imported from the Indian subcontinent which gained widespread currency in Somaliland in the 1890s. It denotes a Turko-Persian rendition of the Arabic 'mulla', meaning a Muslim scholar of theology and sacred law. The epithet 'mad' was first applied to the Sayyid by his Quadriya detractors and later given official status in colonial lexicography by Consul Sadler. In a character sketch of the Sayyid in chapter 5, I will take up the question of his alleged madness. I hope it will then become clear that what the Somalis meant in pinning the label on the Sayyid had no relation to what colonial officials assumed it meant. For the moment, I would only surmise that in view of his Indian experience Sadler found the temptation to see in Sayyid Muhammad another 'fanatical mullah' irresistible. In that fateful year, 1899, the Sayyid, prodded by the inexorable sweep
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of fortuitous circumstances, sent on 9 September his famous letter to the authorities in Berbera:

This is to inform you, you have done whatever you have desired, and you have oppressed our ancient religion without cause. Now choose for yourselves. If you want war, we accept it, but if you want peace, pay the fine. 

Bad translation in the concluding phrase gave the letter a provocative edge which it is doubtful the Sayyid intended to convey. What came out as 'pay the fine', should have been rendered as something like 'pay the protective tax', and referred to the compensatory tax (jizya) in Muslim jurisprudence which a non-believer pays in return for the protection of his person and property accorded him by the Muslim community. As it stood, however, the letter sounded as if the Sayyid regarded British officials as criminal transgressors who should be paying fines for their offenses. Nonetheless, even with the modified version, the Sayyid seemed to imply that he was the sovereign of the land, and the British, protected sojourners. Such a claim, needless to say, would be hotly disputed by his Quadiriya rivals.

Sudler responded by proclaiming the Sayyid a rebel and warned the 'Friends' against any dealings with him. The stage was set for a conflict of twenty years that was to plunge Somaliland into untold misery and was to cost, by a conservative estimate, the lives of one-third of the Protectorate's population.

The concern of the Sayyid with the religious health of his people seems to be central to his grievances against the British. The same concern dominated another letter which he wrote to the chief of the 'Idagale Isaaq. 'Do you not see,' he complained in July 1899, 'that the infidels have destroyed our religion and made our children their children?' 

Was the Sayyid goaded into rebellion by a genuine fear that Christian colonization was undermining the integrity of his nation's religion? Such is the impression one would gain from a speech attributed to him:

Unbelievers have invaded you in your country, to corrupt you and to corrupt your religion, and to force you to believe their own religion, supported by their governments, their arms and their numbers. But your faith in God and in your dignity is sufficient arms.

Do not, then, flee from their troops, nor from the greatness of their arms, God is stronger than they.

The Sayyid's encounter with the Catholic Mission outside of Berbera, coupled with his letters and alleged speech, seems to show his central preoccupation with the fate of his country's religion under infidel rule.

3 THE FLIGHT TO THE OGAADEN

The nominal sultan (Garraad) of the Dubabante, 'Ali Mahamud, had for some time watched with growing unease the expanding power of the Sayyid within the Dubabante. He had baulked at the leadership of the Sayyid, whom he regarded as having surrendered religious duties for political gains at the expense of the Garraad. Initially, the Sayyid sought to allay the Garraad's fears, and for a while the two men made a show of uneasy unity. But at the end of 1899, they clashed over Garraad 'Ali's refusal to go along with the Sayyid on an expedition into Isaaq country. While the Sayyid was away on his Isaaq campaigns, the Garraad allegedly
Occupation and resistance: the rise of the Somali Dervishes wrote to the British administration, reaffirming his allegiance to the government but complaining of the 'evil influence of this Mullah' which undermined his authority with the clan. The Garaad's overtures to the infidels enraged the Sayyid and he rashly ordered his assassination, which was at once carried out.

The Garaad's murder proved to be a disastrous miscalculation; for it nearly precipitated a civil war within the nascent community. Garaad 'Ali's immediate clan, the Bah-Ararasame, demanded the Sayyid's head in revenge for their fallen leader. The Mahamud Garaad, the most numerous of the three Dulbah antenna primary lineages, left the Dervishes in a body, as did other Daaaroog clans who had been scandalized by the Garaad's murder. Only his immediate maternal kin, the 'Ali Geri, stood fast with the Sayyid. Faced with widespread defection and the threat of Bah-Ararasame revenge, the Sayyid took a precipitous flight to the Ogaden, the home of his paternal kin.

The Ogaden was one of four political zones in the recently partitioned Somali peninsula: to the northwest lay the French Somali coast, to the north the British Protectorate, to the south Italian Somalia. Italian Somaliland itself consisted of three political regions: the Benadir coast, the Majercite Sultanate on the tip of the Horn and, sandwiched between them, the Hobyo (Obbi) Sultanate of Sultan Yusuf 'Ali. To the southeast, the Ogaden fell to Ethiopia but, then as now, the Ethiopians had difficulty in administering this region. Restrained alike by the fevers of the lowland climate and the martial spirit of the Ogaden people, the Ethiopians contented themselves with periodic seizures of the clans' livestock as a symbol of their sovereignty. But as the turbulence of the 1890s led to a devastating famine in the highlands, the Ethiopians turned to the great herds of the Ogaden to tide them over the hard times. Thus when the Sayyid showed up in the Ogaden, Ethiopian raids had been occurring there with virulent regularity. It was not therefore an unnatural response on the part of the clans to welcome him as a liberator. In 1900 the Sayyid found a convenient opportunity to impress on the Ogaden how useful an ally he could be in times of trouble with Ethiopia. An Ethiopian expedition sent to capture the Sayyid resorted to indiscriminate looting of Mahammad Subeer camels after failing to engage the Dervishes. The outraged Mahammad Subeer appealed to the Sayyid, who assembled a force of 6,000 men and on 5 March, stormed the Ethiopian garrison at Jiggiga and succeeded in recovering all the looted stock. Though it was a Pyrrhic victory for the Dervishes, who lost 170 men to Ethiopian rifle fire, the engagement enhanced the prestige of the Dervishes as defenders of the pastoral clans against Abyssinian plunder.

In June the Sayyid followed up his success against the Ethiopians

with a raid on the 'Iidagar Issaq, a British-protected northern Somali clan, and seized 2,000 head of camels in loot. The move on the 'Iidagar was to be remembered as the first raid on a Somali clan and a fellow Muslim people. In pastoral ethos, religious notables are expected, through their moral prestige and pious example, to be the instruments of reconciliation among the clans. This seizure and appropriation by the religious Dervishes of looted stock astonished some Somalis to such an extent that a neutral observer was moved to immortalize the event in verse. In wonder and irony, the poet sang:

When the Shariff leads the robber-band
And the learned Sheikh raids the people mercilessly.
And the herds are seized with the approval and the blessing of a
Sayyid. Would that I lived long enough
To witness the end of all these events.

Although at the time the Dervishes justified the raid on the 'Iidagar by citing the clan’s alleged support for the British, the Sayyid all but denounced this act later as misguided and ill-advised. With an apparent remorsefulness, he reminisced in a poem.

O Subi, pray, listen;
I have no heart for further raids.
As I still regret the day when intrigues
Caused me to seize the Dayah-weer camels.

The Sayyid gained great prestige in recovering the looted stock from the Ethiopians and be used it along with his charisma and powers of oratory to impose his undisputed authority on the Ogaden. To harness Ogaden enthusiasm into final commitment, he married the daughter of a prominent Ogaden chieftain and in return gave his own sister, Tooshaq Sheikh 'Abdillah, to 'Abdi Mahammad Waal, a notable Mahammad Subeer elder. It was here that he set out in earnest to create a political structure with governmental institutions, such as an established council of advisors (khussasi), a standing army and a civilian population whose taxes in livestock supported the ruling class.

It would be in order at this point to take a brief look at the structure of the Dervish nascent state. The Dervishes were organized into four main bodies: at the top a sort of ministerial council or khussasi presided over affairs of state. Members of the khussasi were either personally appointed by the Sayyid or by their respective liegees who as a whole had joined the Dervish movement. The khussasi were supposed to be men of impeccable character and selection into the council depended

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on a range of criteria, including religious (Sa'aihiiya) orthodoxy, prowess in warfare, generosity, allegiance to the Sayyid, eloquence and other qualities deemed important by the Somalis.

Next came the bodyguard (gear-haye) who were responsible for matters of security in the Sayyid’s household and generally for order in the capital. It was a mark of his political acumen that the Sayyid recruited the bodyguard from servile clans like the riverine Reer Barea and former slaves whom he adopted as sons, provided with wives and endowed lavishly with riches. They were to address him as father (Aabbe) and depended entirely on him for their position in life.

The regular army (muurra-weyn) comprised the third principal branch of the Dervishes. Tightly organized — in a manner reminiscent of the Ndebele state in Zimbabwe — into seven regiments, the army was usually settled some distance away from the capital as a precautionary measure against the possibility of its staging a coup d’etat. Each regiment was commanded by a sort of military governor (muqadam) who was appointed by the Sayyid in return for proven loyalty. The number of troops in a given regiment varied from 1,000 to 4,000 with 2,000 men as the average. Each regiment had separate quarters, horses, arms and other provisions.

The civilian population (rear-beed) formed the fourth body of the Dervish state. The rear-beed were the most unstable segment, consisting as they did of polyglot clans who followed the Dervishes more for political gains — especially the loot which they could exact in the name of Dervishism — than for any firm commitment to the movement. Accordingly, the ranks of the rear-beed swelled and shrank in keeping with the fortunes of the Dervishes.

The above remarks will serve to demonstrate something of the militaristic character of the Dervish movement. In function as in structure, the Dervish state was fashioned on the model of a Sa'aihiiya brotherhood. It was characterized by the strict hierarchy and rigid centralization of a religious order and in both respects it represented a radical departure from the ephemeral alliances of clan politics. The Sayyid proscribed the tribal identity of his followers in favor of a new identity based on religious ideology. For this reason, he adopted the term ‘Dervish’ for his followers and issued them with loose robes and a white turban (daab-’aad) to mark them apart from other Somalis. He required them to address him as ‘father’ (Aabbe) or ‘master’ (Sayyid). The army and the khusus were supported by tributary donations (siyaaro) significantly named after the voluntary charity which Somalis give to mendicant waduls. Trade became the monopoly of the state, with dealing in some items like gold and ostrich feathers designated as a special privilege of the Sayyid’s household. The Sayyid, moreover, ran the Dervishes with the autocratic

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powers of a sheikh, imposing rigid discipline on the day-to-day conduct of his followers. In short, while transforming the Sa’aihiiya brotherhood into a highly militaristic state, the Sayyid introduced a new order which was alien to the pastoral Somalis.

Initially, Abyssinian pressure, which the Sayyid appeared to counter, induced the egalitarian clans to submit to his autocratic reign. Predictably, however, it was not long after the imposition of that reign that anti-Dervish movement got under way among the Ogaden. It was led by a Mahammad Subeer chieftain, Haaseen Hiri Dabai Iljeed, and grew out of that ever-present pastoral problem: clanish vendetta. After the execution of one of their elders, the Mahammad Subeer came to the conclusion that under Dervishism they were being subjected to the hegemony of the Sayyid’s small Bah-Geri lineage, whom they traditionally despised. Consequently, Mahammad Subeer elders secretly plotted to assassinate the Sayyid and the entire khusus council. Word of the conspiracy, however, leaked out before the assassination was carried out and the Sayyid leapt on his swift pony and escaped, but his prime minister and long-time friend, Aw’Abbas, fell to the conspirators. In the ensuing mêlée, the Dervishes regrouped and succeeded in repulsing the attackers.

Some weeks later, the Mahammad Subeer proposed to settle up with the Dervishes and with this object in view, sent a delegation of thirty-two men representing the pick of their leadership. On arrival at the hurun or headquarters, the peace delegation was put in fetters and ankles by the Sayyid, who made their release conditional on the Mahammad Subeer agreeing to pay not only the blood money of his late friend but also a fine equivalent to the combined blood monies of the hostages. The Mahammad Subeer refused to meet these terms, which they considered too harsh and arbitrary, and the Sayyid put the prisoners to death. Among those executed was the husband of the Sayyid’s sister. In gallant but vain efforts, the young woman tried to persuade her brother to save the life of her husband and when she failed, she would not be dissuaded of her eulogy to him even on pain of death.

If thy [Sayyid’s] stiff dagger kills me,
If in the decimation of men, I too descend into the dust,
And if I die — what honor is greater than to follow my beloved
Abdi?!

In pastoral ethos, the killing of a peace delegation is regarded as a most heinous crime and the Dervishes suffered lasting damage to their reputation for the act. The act also adversely affected the position of the Dervishes, for it drove the alienated Mahammad Subeer into the arms
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of the Ethiopians and hence dealt a grievous blow to any hope of Somali unity against Euro-Abyssinian colonialism.

Faced with the combined hostility of Menelik and the powerful Muhammad Subeer Ogaden, the Dervishes could not remain in the Ogaden and they hastily withdrew to the Nugaal, where the Sayyid propitiated the Dubalbante for the moment by a massive payment of blood monies. Dervish re-entry into northern Somalia now caused panic among British-protected clans, who abandoned their pasturelands in the Haud and concentrated their vast herds in the largely barren coast, a situation which soon led to dangerous overcrowding. This impressed on British colonial officials the necessity of military action against the Dervishes and they recommended to their superiors in London the organization of an expedition to "put this mullah down" once and for all. But Salisbury, who was already waging two wars in Africa (against the Ashantis and the Boers), was not anxious for a third in Somaliland.

The idea of an expedition to deal with the 'Mullah', however, became feasible when Menelik proposed a joint action with the British at the end of the year. Accordingly, in the spring of 1901, Lt Colonel E. J. Swayne was appointed to head an expedition. Swayne assembled a force of 1,500 Somali troops, officered by twenty-one Europeans. On 22 May he started from Bur's, hoping to synchronize his efforts with an Ethiopian expedition 15,000 strong which made a simultaneous start from Harar. Both governments were confident that they would rid the country of the Sayyid, who was now dubbed the 'Mad Mullah'. The era of the expeditions had begun.

4 THE INCONCLUSIVE EXPEDITIONS (1901-4)

The history of the operations against the Dervishes has been covered well and it would be redundant to embark on a full-scale narration of them. A few relevant events may be recorded here. The British, with Ethiopian participation and, on occasion, Italian cooperation, sent four major expeditions against the Sayyid between 1901 and 1904 and these either attained inconclusive results or suffered disastrous reverses against the brilliant guerrilla tactics of the Dervishes. At the height of the campaigns, nearly 10,000 British troops, who had come from an assortment of nationalities including Sudanese, Central Africans (Yaois), Indians, Britons, Boers and, of course, Somalis, were deployed against the Dervishes. These comprised, in the words of one official, "the best seasoned British, Indian, and African troops at the Empire's disposal". They faced about 20,000 Dervishes, of whom roughly 8,000 were cavalry. So long as the Dervishes stuck to guerrilla tactics they proved invincible, despite their

enemy's superiority in fire power and organization. What Sir Charles Eliot said of another ill-fated expedition against Jubaland Somalia could apply equally well to the experience of the British forces:

It gained no success proportionate to its size or expense, for it was unable to capture or force a battle on the light-footed nomads, who vanished before it in a scruffy wilderness, well known to them though pathless to strangers, while it was on the other hand, exposed to sudden attacks from fanatical desperadoes.

Reference to a few episodes will provide a better perspective on these expeditions. The first expedition demonstrates the inadequacy of Dervish training in modern warfare as well as their quick ability to learn. The British, unable to force the elusive 'Mullah' to a decisive battle, seized a huge quantity of Dervish stock and placed them in a kraal, in hopes of employing them as bait to attract the Dervishes. The tactic seems to have worked, for on 2 June 1901, some 3,000 Dervishes attacked the kraal. Although the courageous Dervishes made one run after another at the British position, they failed to penetrate the kraal and recover the loot. At the same time, they sustained heavy losses from the well-coordinated enemy fire.

This engagement gave the Dervishes a painful but valuable experience. Henceforth, they assiduously refrained from attacking a fortified enemy position. Instead, they would draw out the British to the dense, waterless bushes of the Haud where the enemy could neither deploy their guns to advantage nor exercise familiar military maneuvers. On the other hand, the Dervishes, divided into small parties under the cover of ideal terrain, maintained light but deadly skirmishes with the British. They often struck at will and harassed British lines of communication with impunity.

This strategy seems to have worked so well for the Dervishes that they managed, in the third expedition, to cut up a strong British force at Gumburu Hill some seventy miles north-west of Gaalka'yo. In one engagement alone, only six survived of a 200-man British contingent. Sheikh Jaama 'Umar Iise described the savage intensity of this battle as well as the tactics employed by the Dervishes:

Of the great many ponies which the Dervishes brought to battle, they knew which horses were most suited for strenuous action during particular times of the day. They decided therefore to deploy the chestnut horse (hamar) in the cool hours of the morning because the chestnut would not stand much heat, and the beige (baroor) in the hotter hours of the day... When dawn smiled, the Dervishes said their morning prayer and attacked the British from four directions.
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After a while they stopped firing and with guns on their shoulders, delivered a hand to hand combat to the enemy whose fire was falling like raindrops. At eleven in the morning, the first Dervish force withdrew and the second force, fresh and full of dash, took up the field. But few survived out of either Dervish force. 56

The poet Qaajee Mahammad 'Iise Qaajee-Balas', a private in the British force, summarized the shock of defeat experienced by his men. In the first section of a short poem he dedicated to the occasion, he gratefully acknowledged God for allowing him to escape with his life. He sang:

With this arduous task to put down the Dervishes
I was never pleased.
But evil men aroused my greed
And Allah willed me into it [the campaign].
I desired to seize Dervish camels
But far from realizing my dreams.
I was only too glad
To stagger back alive to my people.
For this I return many thanks to Thee, O God. 57

Then the poet-soldier turned to ridicule the vaunted might of the British forces:

The English would claim:
Our Indians will shoot well,
And the Sudanese will deliver a fine charge
And the war-tried Yass 58 will hold fast.
We will all be ready,
The Dervish horses are feeble,
Their firearms are antiquated . . .
With ease we will put them to flight,
Let each one among us
Possess a whole Dervish clan
Such exalted claims
Dazzling like a mirage before their miasmic eyes,
Led the English to their downfall.

A supreme propagandist, the Sayyid did his best to play on the doubts and uncertainties of the enemy, as this letter 'to the English People' demonstrates:

I have no forts, no houses . . . I have no cultivated fields, no silver or gold for you to take. You gained no benefit by killing my men and my country is of no good to you . . . The country is jungle . . . If you

want wood and stone, you can get them in plenty. There are also many anti-heaps. The sun is very hot. All you can get from me is war. I have met your men in battle and have killed them. Our men who have fallen in battle have won paradise. We fight by God's order. We kill, you kill . . . If you wish peace, go away from my country to your own. 59

These words also reflect something of the Sayyid's profound belief in the rightness of his cause and his deep confidence in the inevitability of ultimate success.

It may be said that a similarly unwarranted confidence led the Dervishes to one of their worst reverses in the fourth expedition. In a subsequent chapter on Sayyid Mahammad's consummate use of poetic oratory as a political weapon, we will examine the particular features of this expedition and the consequences of the defeat which it inflicted on the Dervishes. For the moment, it need only be said that the Dervishes, buoyed up with the victory of the third expedition, abandoned their former, reliable strategy of guerrilla warfare and sought a head-on confrontation with a strong British force commanded by General (later, Sir) Charles Egerton. Without the benefit of cover, the mass of Dervishes attacked the British position on 9 January 1904 at the plain of Jidbaal. Before the day was out 7,000 Dervishes lay dead. The Dervish army was broken and the Sayyid, a disgraced fugitive, fled to eastern Majeerteen country.

The defeat of Jidbaal seems to have left a permanent scar, some would say a psychic dislocation, on the Sayyid. It is not hard to detect evidence of this scar in his later life and verse, as we shall demonstrate. The reduction of the Dervishes in morale and strength may also account for the Sayyid's willingness to enter into a peace agreement with the 'infiltrers'. This was the illig agreement of March, 1905, negotiated with the Dervishes on behalf of the Italian, British and Ethiopian governments by Consul G. Pestolozza, Italian envoy at Aden.

5 THE FREE-OF-BAD-COUNSEL REVOLT

Cautious in their colonial ventures ever since the debacle of Adowa and busy with a tenuous pacification of the Somali Benaadir, the Italians refrained from engaging in overt hostility against the Dervishes. This fact must have intrigued the Poor Man of God. At war with Ethiopia and Britain, the Dervishes needed the goodwill or at least the neutrality of the third colonial power in the region.

Accordingly, Haji 'Abdalla Shihir was sent on a mission to Aden to discuss with the Italian consul there the possibility of Italian protection
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for the Dervishes. The consul showed 'great interest' in the idea and, after further meetings and correspondence with the Sayyid, Pestalozza was persuaded to visit the barun to hold face-to-face talks with the Sayyid. He did twice in 1905. Pestalozza and his party, the first Europeans to set eyes on the Sayyid since his departure from Berbera, were sumptuously entertained at the barun, which was now at Illig on the southeast coast of the Italian sphere. The Italian consul succeeded in concluding a treaty of amity and friendship with the Sayyid. This treaty gave the Dervishes (a) a defined territory in Nugaal between the Hobyo and Majeereen Sultanates, (b) recognition by the powers to govern his followers, (c) religious liberty and (d) freedom of trade except in arms and slaves.

The clause on slave trade may have been added to the provisions of the agreement in order to pander to European liberal opinion at home, since the Sayyid is never known to have trafficked in that commodity. As for firearms, events were to show that he never intended to abide by that prohibition.

Using the peace and the ports which the agreement gave him, the Sayyid began to rebuild his forces and import arms on an unprecedented scale. Outwardly pacific, the Sayyid sent out a network of spies throughout the country who, alternately by threats and promises, sought to undermine Somali loyalty to colonial governments. On another level, the Illig period marks a new phase in the Dervish struggle against colonialism, in which the resistance changed from a war of arms to a war of words. Consequently, it was characterized by a great outpouring of vernacular verse and prose; if not all, of the Sayyid's best works were produced during this period. Sayyid Muhammad's ingenious double-dealing with the colonial regimes for a while managed to silence the conscience of some of the more sensitive theologians in the barun. These wondered whether it was not unethical for a Muslim to dishonor a solemn treaty, even if it had been entered into with infidels. The question had for some time a deleterious effect on the minds of some, but their scruples were overcome when the Sayyid defended his policy of sharp practice by citing the incoherence of, if convenient, example of the early Muslims whom God ordered to break 'covenant' with the treacherous Banu Quraiha of Medina.

Biding their time under the terms of the agreement, the Dervishes put into effect a well-coordinated strategy of sabotage against the colonial administrations, even while protesting friendship with them. Bands of armed looters who passed as 'terrorist thugs' (Bar 'Ad) banded out from the Dervish capital to loot and terrorize clans loyal to the British and Italians. The Dulbahante and Warsangali Dardood played an important role in this program of agitation and disruption. In an attempt to win over the Warsangali, the Dervish Bar 'Ad enabled them to carry out a series of devastating raids against the Mahamud Garaad Dulbahante, who had earlier defected from the Dervishes. In return, the Warsangali gave the Dulbahante free access to their ports at Laas Qoray and Meyni. Other Sections of the Dulbahante were encouraged to raid the Isaaq. Similar tactics were pursued with respect to the Italian-protected subjects of Boqor 'Ismaan and Yusuf Ali Keenanid.

Thus employing propaganda and acts of sabotage with equal effect, the Dervishes enjoyed a period of growth and prosperity until 1909. In that year, however, a serious disaffection within the ranks of the khussu leadership gripped the movement and brought about its near disintegration. Abdalla Shihiri, the astute envoy who had played a prominent part in the Illig agreement, fell out with the Sayyid, allegedly over a woman whom Shihiri loved but who was taken away from him by his master. Shihiri, hitherto an intimate friend of the Sayyid and a veteran Dervish who had taken an active part in all the early fighting, was deeply wounded by the loss of his lady. Disappointed in his master's behavior, he decided to leave the movement. The chance to do so came when he was appointed to head a Dervish trade mission to Aden. Once in Aden, Shihiri officially disassociated himself from Dervishism and rounded denounced the Sayyid.

Then Shihiri made common cause with two prominent sheikhs, Ali Nairobi, who was based in Lamu as the spiritual director of Sulhiya in southern Somalia, and Isma'il Ishaq of Berbera. The three, no doubt with Anglo-Italian encouragement, went on a deputation to Mecca, where they made strong representations to Mahamud Salih about the misdoings of his pupil in Somalia. A year later Shihiri returned with a letter from Mecca which amounted to a virtual excommunication of the Sayyid.

I have this news before my eyes — that you and your people have got into bad ways. . . . I have proofs that you have ceased to abide by the Shar'a in that you loot and enjoy other men's wives; you shed their blood and rob their property. You can be called neither a Muslim nor a Christian.

Mahamud Salih concluded that he wished to have 'nothing to do' with the Sayyid. Contemporary sympathizers of the Sayyid dispute the authenticity of this letter, which they regard as a blatant hoax. Whatever the authenticity of the letter, its circulation had a serious impact among the Dervishes. After a copy had been read in the barun, 600 conspirators held a secret palaver in the shade of a tree that was to be called the Tree-of-Bad-Counsel (so named because of the conspiracy that was hatched under its shade) with a view to overthrowing the Sayyid. They
considered three proposals: (a) to execute the Sayyid and appoint another in his place, (b) to force him to resign but allow him his life, or (c) to desert the movement en masse and hence bring about its inevitable collapse. They could not implement proposals one and two, chiefly because they failed to agree on a candidate to replace the Sayyid, so they settled on plan three, resolving to quit the harun with their clans en masse.

As the first clans began to leave, the Sayyid was alerted to the conspiracy by one Shire Ummad, who had initially taken part in it but subsequently lost heart. Fighting broke out between troops still loyal to the Sayyid and the rebels who had surrounded the Sayyid's clan, and the situation soon deteriorated into a major civil war. After a week of intense fighting, the Sayyid emerged victorious, but not before several Dervish clans, like the Reer Samatar Xuluf Majeerteen, were decimated.

Something of the seriousness of the uprising may be appreciated by consideration of three of its ringleaders. One, Haaji Haseen Awl, a military governor reputed to be the bravest man in the movement, was the instigator. The second, Sheikh Abdalla Qorayow, had been the Islamic magistrate of the harun and his involvement in the rebellion was a grievous blow to the spiritual prestige of the Sayyid. The third, Faarax Mahmad Suguule, was the Sayyid’s brother-in-law and one of the wealthiest of the Dervishes. As punishment for their role in the rising, the first received capital punishment, the second was ostracized from the harun and the third placed under house arrest.

The Tree-of-Bad-Counsel illuminates what appears to be a persistent pattern in Sayyid Muhammad’s tempestuous Dervish career. This concerns the fact that whenever there was a major crisis in his life, he tried to employ his poetic skills to weather the storm. It was, moreover, during these periods of crisis that he seems to have produced his most brilliant verse. To paraphrase a knowledgeable indigenous source, the Sayyid’s creative genius was brought out by his being exposed to heat.104

The Tree-of-Bad-Counsel was no exception. Realizing the gravity of the revolt, the Sayyid composed a series of poems and pithy remarks designed, as an elder puts it, “to silence critics and confound opposition.”105

One of the poetic proverbs he reportedly coined during the period says:

O you who grew up in the faith
And yet would sneak into a conspiratorial tree,
May Allah destine you to perdition.

Another, obviously intended to overawe his opponents, says:

O God, rescue us from danger,
For evil men have stirred a sleeping lion into action!

His best known poem on the revolt, though, is significantly called “The Tree-of-Bad-Counsel.”106 It is addressed to Haaji Suudii, one of his disciples who remained steadfastly loyal to the Sayyid throughout the crisis, and the grateful Sayyid possibly chose to alliterate the poem in the letter ‘s’ to honor the faithful disciple whose nickname ‘Suudii’ began with ‘S’. We will see in the next chapter that the Sayyid often addressed his verse to a disciple and that the master-disciple relationship was a cardinal element in his scheme of versification.

Like a poetic contestant before a tribal assembly, the Sayyid presented his case in the manner of an oratorical discourse. Essentially, the argument of ‘The Tree-of-Bad-Counsel’ is a charge of perfidy. In a deceptively self-pitying tone, the Sayyid complained of the ‘odious’ fraud which the men whom he trusted as his very soul had perpetrated on him. He promulgated these men, he claimed, to elevated positions, gave them wives and worldly possessions, taught them the faith—shortly, he took care of them as his beloved children. The charge against them is one of filial ingratitude, one of the worst sins in the pastoral ethos:

And I did not expect Qorayow107 to sharpen his spear against me,
And for all my charity, Ahmad Fiqi108 did not return a nod of gratitude,
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Slatin Pasha, and with the combined prestige of the two men who had an expert knowledge of the Sudanese Dervishes, the British government hoped the 'mullah' would somehow be induced to sign a peace treaty. But the Sayyid refused to treat and the men had to content themselves with the writing of a bulky report on Somaliland affairs.

With the failure of the Wingate mission, the British reluctantly decided to cut their losses in Somaliland by withdrawing from the interior and limiting their administration to a few coastal towns. This move, which abandoned the greater part of their sphere, was tacit acknowledgement by the government of defeat. It was simultaneously decided to arm the Frendlies against the expected Dervish onslaught. When these ill-advised measures were put to effect, they proved favorable to the Dervishes. First, the British used the arms left them by the withdrawing British on not the Dervishes but against one another. As usual, the clans had a backlog of 'old antagonisms' on one another and with a seasonable supply of modern weapons in their possession, they resorted to unprecedented raiding and bloodletting. In the ensuing chaos, entire lineages were stripped of their livestock and reduced to starving destitutes and the period is remembered with infamy as the 'Time of Eating Filth' ('Haaraamal'une').

In 1912, the administration recognized coastal concentration for the failure it was and abandoned it in favor of a new policy which called for a limited involvement in the interior. With this objective in view, a small force of mounted Camel Corps was raised with a view to policing the immediate interior. The force was put under the command of Col. Richard Corfield, a bold if somewhat reckless officer who soon gained the respect and admiration of his Somali subordinates. Highly agile and adopting tactics well suited to pastoral conditions, the Camel Corps scored impressive successes in restoring order in the nearby hinterland. The order was, however, at best tenuous so long as the Dervishes remained at large in the eastern half of the protectorate.

The withdrawal from the interior gave Sayyid Mahammad a golden opportunity to re-establish himself in the Nugaal and restore his prestige, badly battered by the Tree-of-Bad-Counsel incident. During the three years of anarchy, the Dervishes constituted the only disciplined force inland and the Sayyid put this advantage to ingenious, if rapacious use by seizing unprecedented quantities of livestock in loot. In the closing months of 1909 the capital was moved from Illig in the Italian sphere to Taleeb in the heart of the Nugaal. Here three garrison forts of massive stone masonry and a number of residential houses were constructed. The Sayyid, for the first time, built for his exclusive use a luxury-style palace. He strengthened his palace with new recruits from outcast clans and became increas-
The Dervish watchtower (Daaq ilaal) from a distance. Taleeb, northern Somalia.

Sitiola: the main Dervish fortress at Taleeb, northern Somalia.

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ingly less accessible to the public. This was understandable, though not propitious for the resistance cause. Ever since the Tree-of-Bad-Counsel fiasco, attempts on his life had occurred with some regularity. Just the same, the Sayyid continued to have a strong grip on his followers.

The influence of the Dervishes spread rapidly between 1910 and 1914. Following the settlement of Taleeb as a permanent capital, other forts were erected at Jiddali and Mirashi in Warseenje country, at Warder and Qorabah in the Ogaadheen and Belet-Wayn on the lower reaches of the Shabeel in southern Somalia. Thus by 1913, the Dervishes dominated the entire hinterlands of the Somali peninsula.

In August of that year a Dervish force led jointly by Aw Yusuf 'Abdulle, the Sayyid's brother, and Isma'il Mire raided the Habar Yoonis near Burt'o and carried off a vast herd of camels in loot. A contingent of the Camel Corps commanded personally by Corfield gave chase and engaged the retreating Dervishes at Dumladooba. A fierce battle ensued, which ended in a complete victory for the Dervishes. Corfield himself became one of the notable casualties. But it was a Pyrrhic victory. The Dervishes sustained three times as many casualties as their opponents (900 dead). In death, Corfield won the grudging respect and admiration of his foes for his courage and dignified bearing under overwhelming odds, and his fall became an occasion for two of the finest Dervish poems.

Encouraged by their success at Dumladooba, the Dervishes intensified the pressure on the British. In 1914, a party of forty Dervishes led by Isma'il Mire, delivered a daring command raid on Berbera and reduced the city to chaos and terror. The British, preoccupied with the larger matters of World War I, were unable or unwilling to undertake anything more than token efforts designed to contain the Dervishes for the moment.

Meanwhile the circumstances of the war enabled the Sayyid to score a number of diplomatic successes. One was to strike an alliance with the new Ethiopian emperor, Lij Yasu, who acceded to the throne in 1913. Increasingly, Lij Yasu came to manifest pro-Muslim and anti-British tendencies. The possibility of a northeast African empire encompassing Ethiopia and all the Somali regions may have intrigued Lij Yasu. In any event, he proposed to marry Sayyid Muhammad's daughter, perhaps as a prelude to realizing this dream. But Lij Yasu's hopes evaporated when his Christian subjects, alienated by his Muslim ways, rose in rebellion and deposed him. Before his deposition, the emperor managed to send a German technician, Emil Kirsh, to the Sayyid with the object of making ammunition and repairing guns for the Dervishes. For some unknown reason, Emil Kirsh was badly used by the Sayyid, who imposed
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on him conditions which induced the German to make a perilous bid for freedom; but, before reaching the coast, he expired from thirst.

The fall of Lij Yasu was apparently a bitter disappointment to the Sayyid. In the aftermath of the war, at a time when the Sayyid was a fugitive in the Ogaden, and his state in ruins, he continued to have great admiration for the fallen prince. Referring to the aerial bombardment, he was heard to comment that he did not mind the birds (airplanes) whose droppings fell on his white robe. Rather he was hurt by the damaging imputation to his ancestry which the leaflets dropped from the planes made: 'My origin has apparently been forgotten,' the Sayyid lamented. 'I am the son of Ras Makkari's brother and I am the cousin of Lij Yasu, the prince of Abyssinia,' a claim which the colonial historian of the period dismissed with the rider: 'It would puzzle even a Somali genealogist to discover the common origin of their respective families, unless, indeed, the devil was the ancestor whom both these rascals share.'

The Sayyid also looked for friends among the Ottomans. The Ottoman Sultan, as a universal caliph of the Muslim community, was regarded by the Sayyid as a defender and natural ally of the Dervishes. He had thus appealed to the Turkish commander at Lebiah for help against the Anglo-Italian alliance in Somalia. The commander, Ali Sa'id Pasha, agreed to provide the necessary help if in return the Sayyid would place his people under Ottoman protection. Agreement to this effect was signed by the Sayyid's envoy, Ahmad Shirwa Jaama. According to Caroselli, the document defining the terms of the agreement did not reach the Sayyid, as it was intercepted on the way by the Italian authorities. However, a Turkish envoy, Mehmet Arici, managed to reach Talech in 1916, where he continued to advise the Sayyid until he was killed by the British in 1920.

The Turkish alliance did not give the Sayyid much in material terms but it offered him considerable aid in the field of propaganda. Turkish agents slipped through Ethiopia into Somalia, where they tried to arouse the Somalis against their Christian overlords. A document purportedly issued with the blessing of the Grand Mufti of Istanbul freely circulated in the Somali interior. A proclamation of jihad against Britain, France and Russia, the document urged all Somalis to unite behind the Sayyid who, it claimed, was the appointed representative of the Ottoman Sultan.

Oh Somali brethren! Let it be known to you that our most honored and respected Khalifa, the Sultan... has notified to all the Mogadishans, wherever they may reside, the biggest jihad against England, France and Russia... Concentrate your forces under the command of Sayyid Mohammad Abdullah Iklan.

Some Somali sources suggest that Turkish propaganda was crucial in swinging the Ogaden behind the Sayyid. How much the Sayyid needed Ogaden support became evident when in the closing months of 1919 the British began their final and most effective campaign against the Dervishes.

The Sayyid's diplomatic enterprises and the circumstances of the war concealed a fundamental weakness in the Dervish policy, inaugurated in 1910. This was the policy of fixed residence. In building a fixed capital, with forts to defend and palaces to guard, and in concentrating his troops in stationary fortifications, the Sayyid may have committed the greatest strategic error of his twenty-year resistance struggle. He gave the British the strategic advantage they had long sought: a fixed target to attack. He could no longer boast to the enemy: 'I have no forts, no houses... I have no cultivated fields, no silver or gold for you to take.' He now had all of these, which the enemy could and did take. The settled life was, moreover, ill-suited to the pastoral Dervishes and they had become inactive and luxury-oriented. 'A sense of moral turpitude crept into Talech,' says one informant, 'and the Sayyid himself had grown corpulent, dictatorial and over-confident.' Thus, when in the early months of 1920 the British struck with a well-coordinated land, sea and aerial attack, the Dervishes were ill-prepared.

Even more significant for the success of the final expedition was the introduction of the airplane as a combat weapon in warfare. It proved to be a convenient weapon, as one of the pilots put it, 'to bomb the old villain out of his hiding place.' Dervish military leaders were either unpersuadable or ignorant of this newly-invented lethal weapon. Hence they seem to have made no contingency plans against an attack from the air. Consequently, when the British delivered the surprise bombing on Talech and the surrounding forts, the Dervishes not only sustained heavy casualties, but they became demoralized in the face of an attack against which they had no way of retaliating. They thus offered no appreciable resistance. The Sayyid and his reduced followers hastily abandoned Talech and other Nugaali forts and fled westward into the Ogaden. Pursued from the air by planes and on land by a swift mounted force, the fleeing Dervishes offered easy targets to their enemies, but the Sayyid's luck once again held and he managed to elude his pursuers, who failed to kill or capture him.

Once in the Ogaden, the Sayyid, unbroken by his staggering losses in Nugaal, employed his old talents of charisma, oratory and knowledge of his countrymen to rebuild his battered forces. In this he was helped by the Turkish propaganda which had done much reconciliatory work on his behalf among the Ogaden Somalis prior to his coming. Within six
months of his defeat, the Sayyid put together a coalition of Ogaaden clans, which made him a ‘power in the land’ once again. He proved this by rebuffing British overtures of peace, which offered him modestly generous terms, including a government subsidy and a land grant in the west of the protectorate where he could settle in liberty with his followers.120

The Sayyid humiliated the deputation of notables which brought him these terms and showed his scorn for British overtures of peace by raiding the Friends immediately after the deputation had left. Then the ultimate catastrophe struck the Dervishes. A combination of smallpox and rinderpest broke out in the Ogaaden and decimated man and beast in the Dervish community. At a guess based on an evaluation of indigenous sources, 50 to 60 percent of the Dervishes who had survived Tadeh perished during the epidemic.121 Among the prominent kinsmen claimed by the pestilence was Khaliif Sheikh ‘Abdille. Sayyid Mahammad’s brother and close advisor.

On the heels of the epidemic came a tribal raid, 3,000 strong, and organized by the British and led by a Habar Yoonis chieftain, Haaji Waraabe (the Holy Hyena), so named on account of his stormy character. Haaji Waraabe put the remnants of the Dervishes to the sword, carrying off nearly 60,000 head of livestock in booty,122 but he failed to lay hands on his elusive prize, who had staggered off with a few followers into the headwaters of the Shabeelle River at Limay. Here, still pursuing the ill-conceived policy of fixed residence, he constructed two forts. He also had recourse to his old technique of political marriage and arranged to contract marriages with the princely house of the ‘Aruusa Oromo, who had given the destitute refugees some timely protection. This was his last noteworthy act, for shortly after, in December 1920, Sayyid Mahammad, aged about 64, succumbed to an attack of influenza and died quietly. With his death the most important episode in the history of Somalia for twenty years came to a rather undramatic end. Yet if his life ended quietly, the drama of his influence continues to prosper. In word and deed, the Sayyid epitomized two qualities which are dear to the Somalis: a remarkable poetic talent, especially his zestful political verse, and an unyielding refusal to submit to foreign domination. Having discussed Sayyid Mahammad’s unrelenting efforts to resist colonial imposition, we now turn to a treatment of his other major contribution, notably, his exuberant political verse.

Poetic Oratory and the Dervish Movement

During the twenty-year period of Dervish fighting for independence, Mahammad ‘A. Hasan produced the works of poetry which have won for him the reputation of being the greatest Somali poet. By any standard the Sayyid could be judged an artist of great power and by Somali standards as something of a literary master. There is an element of paradox in this observation, as in many other features of Sayyid Mahammad’s complex, at times contradictory, life. Although he lived to be ‘one of the greatest Somalis of words’ (Somali speak of a man of words (nin hadal) as opposed to one of letters), thereby emphasizing the oral character of their verse, there is no record of his having ever composed a word of political poetry until he was a middle-aged man, well into his fortieth. Indigenous sources hold unanimously that the Sayyid’s first Somali poems date from 1904, nearly six years from the inception of the Dervish movement; that a great many of his serious poems were composed between 1905 and 1909, when the Dervishes had settled between Ilgii and Eyle on the eastern Somali coast between the Majeerteen and Hobyo (Oobia) sultanas.1 This is not to say that political poetry was not of importance to the Dervish cause before this time. As I hope to demonstrate shortly, high-powered propaganda warfare conducted through the medium of political poetry was a salient feature of the conflict from its early days, and it was utilized by both the Dervishes and their enemies in their fight for the allegiance of the Somali people.

In describing his oratorical verse, his followers speak of it as a ‘new and sudden outburst of artistic creativity, a supernatural gift which suddenly descended upon him (was lagu soo dagey): 2 The Sayyid was a master of political manipulation and the corpus of poetry, proverbs and wise sayings which he left behind are permeated with hints and suggestions which encourage his followers to believe and propagate the notion of
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his sudden inspiration, his possession of a 'divine endowment'. We shall examine this theme in the next chapter.

The first political poem on record involving the Dervish struggle seems, on the basis of internal evidence, to have been composed in 1900, shortly after the Dervish attack on the Ethiopian fortification at Jigjiga.1 It was not composed by the Dervishes but by their enemies. When the Isaq poet, Ali Jaama Hatabil (whom we shall come across quite frequently in these pages as the chief poetic antagonist of the Sayyid), learned of Dervish reverses at Jigjiga, he composed his poem 'Mahammad the Lunatic' ('Mahammad Waal'), thereby immortalizing in prosodic form the Sayyid's enduring epithet.4 With a measure of malice and cynicism, the poet gloated over Dervish losses and scoffed at the 'vaunted martial prowess' of the Dervishes, who bragged of their intent to carry out a successful campaign against the Abyssinians:

The uncontrollable man – he who'd seek Menelik in battle,
Who says: 'With my sword I'll smite the Abyssinians',
Who says: 'I'll give you the Habar Yoons herds',
Who'd weave lies around us,
Who'd take away our minds as if we were brainless camels.

The implication of these lines, obvious in the Somali version, is that the Sayyid promised more than he could deliver, imbued with a false sense of his military resources; he sought out Menelik in battle and lost miserably (historically this is not wholly accurate, of course); he promised his followers the possession in booty of the fabulous herds of Habar Yoons, a British-protected Isaak clan, and failed to do this equally miserably; that the Sayyid was a liar 'who'd take away our minds as if we were brainless camels'. Having thus scoffed at Dervish military capability, he turned to ridicule the notion of the Sayyid as a miraculous man of God:

He who says: 'I'll spear the heavens, and fill the earth with fine
pastures'.
Who says: 'Like a ship, my prayer-mat can take you across the sea',
Oh, how hollow our imagination when we deem the Lunatic
Mahammad our apostle.

Curiously, the poetic response defending the Dervishes did not come from among their camp but from an outsider, one al-Haaj Ahmad Samatar, a Majajteen poet who was a resident of Aden at this time. He despatched his poetic reply in the form of an oral epistle which he sent with a dhow returning from Aden, saying:  

Is Menelik of your kindred that you should sing praises to him? As for the cruising ships of the infidels, Know ye not they are but Allah's brief provisions to the misguided? If glorious were the infidels, they'd not be destined to perdition; The things they invent, and the wealth they amass are their damnation; And the ingenious artifacts their abominable forecaste of ultimate perdition;

This reveling in material things brought the mighty Pharaoh down. If the meaning of the prayer-mat moving you across the sea escapes your unbelieving mind, Consider your origin, the very first day when you were created, In the darkness of the womb the Lord protected you, How miraculous was your place of origin! You came into the world by the will of Allah, O mindless one, make a reflection on this.

Speak not of the Sayyid, O brainless one, lest this lead you to Hell, The ways of the saints, you fool, are dark to you,
And do not take him [the Sayyid] lightly, for unattainable is his likeness! 

By pastoral standards, al-Haaj Ahmad Samatar fails to make a successful defense. Although his poem, with its heavy metaphorical-ladenness, may appeal to the pious and the other-worldly, it falls far short of the original poet's attack, especially in its failure to address the issues raised by the attack-poem. Dervish reverses at Jigjiga, the Sayyid's promises which proved hollow in the eyes of the first poet and the charge of insanity in the Sayyid. Nevertheless, the Sayyid was so pleased with Ahmad Samatar's poetic defense on behalf of the Dervishes that he reportedly made a payment of 150 camels (quite a lavish gift even by today's standards) to his author and the author's brother. 3

Dervish sympathizers are quick to cite this incident of an outsider coming to their defense as an example of the appeal which their cause had for the Somalis. Opponents of the movement, however, counter that the poet was motivated not so much by an alleged attraction which the Dervishes had for the Somalis as by greed and sycophancy, hoping as he did, they maintain, to obtain material gain by toadyism to the Sayyid.4

In the following years (1901–1903), the Dervishes fought off three British expeditions, the latter two in collaboration with the Italians and Ethiopians. During this period, the Sayyid does not seem to have
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joined the war of words. Other men, like the khusaas al-mawashi, Qasim al-Miyanid, both of whom were poets of note, acted, so to speak, as ministers of propaganda.

In the second expedition (October 1902), for example, the Dervishes scored a notable victory over the British force commanded by Lt. Col. N. Swaine, which they ambushed at the valley of Eye-go in the Hadhramaut about seventy miles north of Gha'il. Thus the Sayyid hoped to use his new prestige as a result of his victory over the British to enter into a much-coveted alliance with Sultan Isma'il Mahamud of the Majerameen, through whose ports the Dervishes needed to import firearms. Consequently, the Sayyid made overtures of friendship to the sultan, including a proposal to marry the latter’s daughter, Qasim al-Miyanid. Although he received 227 camels in advance bride-wealth from the Sayyid, Sultan Isma’il Mahamud remained non-committal on the subject of the proposed marriage alliance. In return, however, he sent to the Dervishes a caravan of forty camels laden with guns and ammunition.

The Sayyid received the sultan’s envoys with great cordiality and bestowed lavish gifts upon them. When it was time for them to return, he detailed the poet-in-residence, Qasim al-Miyanid, to issue a valedictory message of solidarity to the Majerameen court. The resulting poetic epistle falls neatly into four parts. The first wishes the travelers a safe journey home:

O guests sojourning among us, on the morrow you’ll depart. Safarans be with you as you follow the fleeting dawn. Gifts of heart, endearments do follow you, Over endless plains and rocky hills, dawn marches and dark hikes. Dangerous the road is, May Allah see you through. But two eight-days and you’ll be at the coast, When they who’ve waited for you extend hearty greetings. If they press in on you for news while you are exhausted and unable to speak,

In your fatigue, pray, do not misrepresent us to the Sultan. Uncles, as we’ve requested, take kind words from us, Lest you forget: do greet the Sultan for us.

The second part narrates events about the battle in a manner favorable to the Dervishes:

Say: on the bed of river Eerago when tumultuous the skies were, Rifles and maxim guns, the day bullets were exchanged, The day that vultures perched lazily on the ribs of British infidels. The day the cowardly whites fell back and fled.

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Then follows the central piece of the poem, the crafty attempt to turn a modest battle success into an epic victory which could not be explained except in terms of the divine sanctions enjoyed by the Dervishes:

A message from Allah this contention was, Oh! how the English and the servile Khyber were humiliated, How their flesh and bones were fed to the beasts. Say: a line of troops was slaughtered as sacrificed lambs, Say: Bud-Eye was struck in the neck in broad daylight, Say: the unincircumcised sergeants inferno has claimed, And of bullets and guns, a fine haul we made. Oh! how the unbelievers fled in headlong panic! Brothers-in-law, go and proclaim all this from coast to coast. Shout for joy and drive the Italians from your side.

The final section is a piece of fervent sermonizing designed to evangelize for the Sayyid’s religious sect, the Sahliba:

Now, a word to the house of the Sultan: This Sahliba religion it will make us all equals, Love and friendship [through Sahliba] Allah will help us exchange, Let not Somali gossip-mongers [members of the rival Quadiria] drive us apart!

This poem and others which follow illustrate the Sayyid’s tendency throughout the early days of the struggle to employ other men to conduct the war of propaganda for him. An earlier example, by no means the only one of its kind, showed how the Sayyid attracted such men of words with impressive material rewards. And this demonstrates the importance he attached to the craft of political compositions. The intriguing question for us in a study of Dervishism is to examine the possible motives the Sayyid may have had in suddenly taking to the production of vast quantities of political verse from 1904 on, thereby becoming his own poet-in-residence, instead of delegating others to perform that task as he had before.

When confronted with such a question, indigenous sources would argue that he did not compose political poetry before this date because he did not know how to, with the implication that he received an abrupt inspiration to versify without premeditation or forethought. This view we may take note of, but would do well to treat with caution and skepticism. Given the strenuous demands which the poetic craft imposes on its practitioners among the pastoral Somalis, men simply do not become celebrated bards overnight.

In the first place, political poetry is a potent tool in socio-political
control among the pastoral Somalis and the possession and use of this asset makes for honor and influence in society. The Sayyid knew this and he was likely to capitalize on the prestige of his talent in this regard and to make sure that it was used to underpin his own authority within the Dervish leadership structure. As a result, the composition and use of political verse became, later on, a jealously guarded affair with access limited to a select few. In order to keep these privileged status, these few had to sing praise-songs to the 'father'. They had to display a good deal of self-effacement, dwelling 'ad nauseam on the inferiority of their verse to that of the all-wise Sayyid and their indebtedness to the master for inspiration.

A case in point was Isma'il Mire, a capable military leader and a talented poet. When he, together with the Sayyid's brother, Aw Yusuf Abdis, successfully led a Dervish force against Colonel Corfield's Somaliland Camel Corps, the general, in the great euphoria of the moment, inadvertently dashed off a narrative poem, 'Reposing at Tuleh', on the history of the expedition, apparently without prior clearance with the Sayyid. Although Isma'il Mire duly gave credit to the victory to his master, 'Cartridges of bullets he distributed among us', the Sayyid, bless him. He prayed to God for us', he was nevertheless asked upon return to Tuleh, to explain the circumstances of his poem. The remark was a veiled expression of the Sayyid's displeasure at the liberties which his lieutenant had taken. The Sayyid is said to have added further that Isma'il Mire's poem left something to be desired in that it failed to give a detailed description of Corfield's death. This gave Isma'il Mire a chance to get off the hook. 'Master,' he is reported to have said ingratiatingly, 'I reserved that opportunity for you to compose a poem that would make history for the Somali people.' For the occasion, the Sayyid did compose a poem - which we shall refer to later - and to judge from its enduring popularity, it indeed made something of a history for the Dervishes.

This incident and others of similar nature illustrate the degree of care and jealousy with which the Sayyid sought to control the composition and use of political verse in the movement. The important point to note here is that one way for him to ensure an effective control over this vital resource was to produce it himself, if he had the talent to do so. As an incentive for the Sayyid to enter the literary fray, in addition to his natural interest in controlling the production and flow of political verse, there were the trying events of 1904, the year of his alleged inspiration. In January of that year the Dervishes suffered, for the first time, an almost catastrophic defeat. Forced to a battle at the plain of Jibshaale in the Nogal valley by General Egerton, commander of the fourth British

expedition, the Sayyid chose to face a superior enemy rather than lose face, and the result was an unmitigated disaster for the Dervishes. They lost 7,000 men in dead and injured - half of the entire army which engaged the enemy. The Sayyid himself was given a hot chase under a grueling Jibaaal sun by a contingent of the imperial cavalry.

The physical and psychological trauma of defeat left the Dervish cause on the verge of collapse. In addition to the usual problems of morale attendant upon defeat, the Dervishes were subjected to a barrage of harassment and ridicule in the form of taunt songs by hostile clans. The Dervish plight, moreover, was not ameliorated by the spectacle of the Sayyid (the master) who, despite his vaunted claim to the divine connection of his mission, now a disgraced fugitive.

Fortunately for the Dervishes under these stressful circumstances, the prudent side of the Sayyid's multi-faceted personality took over. First, he reminded his shaken followers that his predecessor, the Arabian Apostle, too, had temporary reverses but ultimately triumphed; there was reason to believe his own mission would follow a similar course. Colonel Swaye, the British commander, complained. The Mullah himself made capital out of his reverses by reminding Somalis that Muhammad had begun in the same way. Secondly, the Sayyid appealed to a traditional code of ethics which he knew would strike a responsive chord in the hearts of the pastoralists: the notion of unbending defiance in the face of calamitous circumstances, a theme he often stressed in his poems, an example illustrates.

If I do not abandon the faith, the guiding truth,
No matter how infinitely terrible the fire which the Englishman
brings upon me,

By the Lord. I will not quit.

Yet these tactics, designed to hold the ranks of the faithful together, concealed the real shift in strategy which the Sayyid was initiating in the light of grim realities. Realizing that the British infidel could not be driven into the sea by force of arms, he wisely refrained from further suicidal confrontations. But if the enemy could not be defeated by force of arms, perhaps he could be by force of words - by undermining his authority with the clans through the medium of political oratory. And hence the great period of the Sayyid's career as a political orator began, a period in which, as one elder put it, the struggle changed from a `war of arms to a war of words'.

To give the new approach a chance to work, the Sayyid sought and obtained a 'peace treaty' with his foes, notably the Ilig agreement of March 1905, signed on behalf of the three colonial powers (Britain,
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Italy, and Ethiopia) by Cavaliere Pestalozza. We noted in the preceding chapter that the Sayyid had no intention of entering into permanent amicable relations with these powers, but merely wanted to use the 'provisions of peace' to regroup and reorganize his scattered forces and, above all, to initiate his new campaign of verbal barrage.

Once he decided to use poetry as a political weapon, the Sayyid brought to his new task a set of qualities which turned his literary barbs into weapons hardly less potent than bullets and which gave him a genuine advantage over his numerous poetic antagonists. In the first place, the Sayyid was a man of experience; what the Somali call a 'Servant of Time' (wayya-aarag) who had behind him twenty years of peripatetic wandering when he commenced to give leadership to the Dervish struggle. Thus he began his new career with that seasoned perspective which living in alien cultures brings to one's life, an opportunity his Somali foes did not have. Secondly, he was a learned man with remarkable erudition in a nation where illiteracy is the dominant norm. An accomplished religious scholar, he could debate on hair-splitting theological and doctrinal points as his Arabic polemic, the 'Letter to the Biyamal' ('Risala al-Biyamal') demonstrates. Although his firm grasp of classical Arabic did not directly bear on his Somali oral verse, it is obvious that he drew on his knowledge and experience of the former for the benefit of the latter. Thirdly, the Sayyid brought from Mecca a dazzling spiritual prestige, not so much because the Meccan sojourn gave him the distinction of being al-Hajj—there were quite a few al-Hajjis in Somalia at this time—but because he had studied under and received the 'commission to preach' from the great teacher and mystic, Muhammad Saheb. While the Qadiriya hierarchy in Berbera did not recognize the spiritual authority of the Sayyid's Meccan mentor, they had to admit grudgingly the persuasive character of Sayyid Mahammad's message to the Somalis.

These qualities, rare enough individually but unique in combination, received additional vitality from the charismatic personality of the Sayyid himself and from his gift of words. Furthermore, the Sayyid was fortunate to have in Somalia a language well noted for its richness of vocabulary, expressive style and adaptability to new ideas, and a cultural tradition highly appreciative of the politico-religious uses of the poetic craft. For his part, the Sayyid expanded the horizons of Somali verse by pushing its polemicism to the limits and, in some cases, revolutionizing it by inventing new methods and techniques of oration. He composed songs, for example, in all but two (the kh and y) of the twenty-one Somali alphabetical sounds, a feat that, on the basis of available evidence, no other Somali poet has accomplished before or since.

In a moment I will treat in some detail the strategy and politics of the Sayyid poetic warfare and the circumstances which prompted his

Somali enemies to consider his literary combat as potent as actual fighting. For a better understanding, however, of the Sayyid's success as a poet-combatant, it would be in order at this point to take a brief look at his poetry to see the principles and characteristics which held it together and made it 'a force in the land to be reckoned with'.

In the eyes of many Somalis, the Sayyid's verse has the 'power,' as one elder put it, 'to kill or give life.' A power which in part derives from the pre-eminence of role in Somali society and in part from the image of the holy mystic which he so consummately cultivated. As we have mentioned earlier, poetry in the Somali context is an invaluable asset deeply rooted in the vicissitudes of everyday life, treasured not so much for its artistic value as for its influential, sometimes sinister, role it plays in molding people's opinions and attitudes. The skilled poet therefore wields formidable power which he can use to ennable friends and slander enemies. The Sayyid possessed this talent and although he had qualities the Somalis admire in a leader—courage, persistence in the face of overwhelming odds, spiritual power, coupled with a certain degree of recklessness—it was his eloquent verse which articulated these qualities and enabled them to be seen at their best. His impromptu verses recited at his haraa (headquarters) are likened in Somali metaphor, to 'lethal arrows' which flew across the Somali desert, and came home to the hearts of those who heard them. Uttered by a wlad (man of God), they had the seriousness of a blessing or a curse and caused joy in his camp and consternation within the enemy camp.

Although Somali critics are always impressed by the sheer flow of the Sayyid's verse, its exquisite diction and its power which induced poetic emotions in men, they are quick to point out that he was a natural heir to the Somali gahar-making tradition. The Ogaden have a reputation for their purity of Somali and have produced more of the best known classic poets (Ragga Ugaas, Qamaan Bulhan, Fectin Mahamad). Since he was born of a Dibbahante mother and an Ogadeen father, it is little wonder that the Sayyid's poetic heritage was cultivated to the full.

2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAYYID'S ORAL VERSE

The principal feature of the Sayyid's verse, which was his own innovation in the gahar form, is the triplet stanza. Normally gahar lines are grouped in strophes with no set number of lines per strophe. In many of the Sayyid's gahar, however, each triplet stanza forms a self-contained unit in theme, while at the same time remaining an integral part of the whole poem. The first line in the triplet introduces the idea or theme, the second develops it and the third contains the conclusion. Thus in the following rough translation of the Sayyid's poem, 'If only' ('Ba'a E Yow

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Sheega’s alliterating in the letter ‘b’, the technique of the triplet stanza may be illustrated:

**Introduction:** In beauty, graceful bearing, the agile gait.

**Development:** In canter, the trot, the gallop - for convenience in raiding.

**Conclusion:** In these ways a horse is ever superior to a mule - if only he were told. 28

In the first line the poet alludes to something which possesses ‘graceful bearing’ and an ‘agile gait’, but we are not told what it is. In the second line, the theme is developed further with the words ‘canter’, ‘trot’ and ‘gallop’. We now know that the poem concerns a horse. This knowledge or at least that of a pastoral audience - is further strengthened by the phrase ‘for convenience in raiding’, since the horse is the principal pastoralist vehicle for inter-clan raiding. The horse and the camel are made for complementary roles, as they say, the former to raid or defend the latter. But, still, we are uninformed as to what it is the poet would have us know about a horse, until we get to the third line, the clincher, which establishes the superiority of a horse to a mule: ‘In these - a horse is ever superior to a mule.’ Further examples taken randomly from the poem would lend themselves readily to the scheme:

**Introduction:** If a young, healthy camel just calves,

**Development:** Rewards not her owner with plentiful milk

**Conclusion:** Then she’d soon be slaughtered - if only she were told.

**Introduction:** The stingy man is like an unclean carrion,

**Development:** He’d extend no hospitable hand to the weary guest,

**Conclusion:** The miser will be shamed - if only he were told.

**Introduction:** The slovenly woman, un instructed by Allah,

**Development:** However fine the apparel and brilliant dashes you may buy her.

**Conclusion:** That she’d still lack in grace - if only she were told.

**Introduction:** The apostate Sheikhs who, like the pagan Indians,

**Development:** In Allah’s Book it is revealed how degenerate they’ve become,

**Conclusion:** That they’ll be plunged into hellfire - if only they were told.

At times the number ‘three’ seems to have something of a mystical significance for the Sayyid’s literary productivity - the muse, as it were,
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and childlessness that knows the barrenness of one's procreative faculty.

There is evidence to indicate that the Sayyid was rather strict about the observance of the triad rule and that he regarded it as one of the distinguishing features of his poetry. In his poem, 'Loss not my Utterance', alliterating in the letter 'T', he spells out certain principles and peculiarities which he regards as distinguishing his verse. Thus he exhorts his chief poem-memorizer, Husein Dhele, to chant 'My Noble Utterance' not in ones, or twos but in threes.  

The Sayyid's adherence to the triad technique makes it one of several critical tools the researcher may apply in verifying the authenticity of the body of poems attributed to the Sayyid. If a work purported to be his departs from the triad design in significant ways, the reader has reason to be alert for omissions or falsifications.

The second principal characteristic of Sayyid Mahammad's verse is the circumlocutory feature. This technique utilizes what I propose to call, for want of a better term, an argument by the back door or evasive communication. All Somali verse is didactic in the sense that it is composed and chanted in relation to a specific occasion for the purpose of achieving a specific end. A Somali traditional poem has a story to tell, often an argument to advance or a point to make. Characteristically, the Sayyid withholds the point of his argument to build drama and suspense, circles around it, plays, as it were, cat-and-mouse with it and digresses into ostensibly irrelevant moralizing. The strategy is to disarm the opponent with a verbal barrage, to charm him with the range of his knowledge and the eloquence of his utterance. He then makes a precipitous descent from the lofty world of philosophizing into the practical one of bickering, stating his case in a line, more often in an ironic twist of phrase that is usually difficult to refute. To illustrate this point, we may take the Sayyid's poetic diatribe, 'The Parching Heat of the Wind', on 'Ali Jaama' Haasil, a prominent poet-speareman of the Habar Awal section of the Isag clan-family, whose people persistently opposed Dervishism. Until his premature death some years before the collapse of the Dervish movement, 'Ali Jaama' Haasil delighted in exchanging poetic dutes with the Sayyid as, for example, this passage illustrates:

Inasmuch as you attribute words of wisdom to me, it is for me to speak this Mullah:

For Allah hath removed wise counsel from the Reer-Hanar chief.  

Of free women, he cohabits with seven;  

And a thousand devout worshippers he butchered as one would a he-goat;  

And caravans are given the safety of Allah,  

But he wantonly cuts the tendons of weary travelers and engorges their dates.

He's battered on the weak and the orphan,  

Call you this Italian-infidel a Mahdi? How puzzling the thought.

We may note in passing that the Roman Catholic priest who first translated this passage into Italian in the 1910s, took exception to the use of the word 'Italian' in this unflattering context and bowdlerized the line to his satisfaction by replacing 'Italian' with 'Jew'. But the distortion could not successfully be concealed since Italian (Talyanm, in Somali) plays an important role in the alliterative scheme of the poem, a function which 'Jew' (Yahudi) could not perform.

The 'Parching Heat of the Wind', the Sayyid's reply, is a poem of seventy-two lines, only one line -- the last -- of which addresses the issue at hand. The rest is a jumble of philosophical observations on nature, culture, history and, of course, invective against enemy clans. A few examples:

The scorching flame of heat belongs to the parching wind.  

The thunder, lightning -- the blinding flash -- belongs to the torrential rain.

An overcast sky, a land filled with rainwater belongs to Haradiged pools.

The distant murmur belongs to a hungry lion, perhaps a raging sea,  

As the backward flight belongs to the craven coward.

False hope belongs to the Somalis who've gone astray,  

Words of wisdom belong to the saintly Dervishes  

The men who've become refuge to the faith -- dignity belongs to the Shihhoora.

In this manner he continues to range far afield, holding the hearer in suspenseful anticipation while probing him for sympathy through the eloquence of language. Then he suddenly leaps to the attack: 'And ifth belongs to the donkey and to foul-mouthed 'Ali Jaama'!

3 THE COMPOSER OF ORAL EPISTLES

It is necessary to devote a passing comment to the third major characteristic of the Sayyid's verse, namely the epistolary nature of his poetic
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compositions. The great mass of Somali oral poetry is message-oriented, composed to disseminate information and to facilitate the external relations of the clan. In one of its multi-dimensional functions, poetry is for the pastoral Somalis what the radio and press are for industrial societies: it plays the role of broadcasting. (This point was also brought out by Andrzejewski and Lewis.)

The Sayyid consummately cultivated and utilized with great effect the communicative or transmitting function of Somali verse. Aware of the importance of public opinion in an egalitarian society, he designed his verse in the manner of exhortative epistles to appeal or allure, to enhance or discredit. As a result, the majority of his poems are addressed to 'somebody': to colonial officials and their Somali collaborators whom he tried to discredit, to neutral clans whom he hoped to attract, or to his followers whom he tried to encourage. Epistolary poems are composed in a characteristic style which identifies (usually by name) (a) the messenger or transmitter to whom the publicizing of the poem is entrusted, (b) the party to whom the message is meant and (c) finally, the message itself. Thematically, verse epistles may be described as a private lament and public complaint, and their objective is often to appeal to three types of audience. On one level, the composer appears to pour out intimate feelings and emotions, laying his heart bare to a confidant, the one to whose care the poem is committed. The master-disciple relationship between composer and memorizer gives the verse epistle an air of familiarity, delicacy and a graceful simplicity.

O Huscen, by the will of the Lord, let not your mind vanish.
May the Lord accept my prayer for you,
Live for a while yet, for you're a man in whom I trust.
Yet if you die - I am certain that you'll join the ranks of the blessed.
You'll go up, up to be with the disciples of Fragrance,
And you'll enter the gates of heaven...
Now here, your task is a little word I'd entrust to you,
Beloved, you'll not forget my words.
Listen, then, to the chant of my prayer.²⁹

The Huscen to whom the poem is addressed is Huscen Dige, a renowned member who served his master with unswerving allegiance throughout the long struggle. He was the chief of a retinue of aides whose principal task was to commit the Sayyid's verse to memory and propagate it throughout the Somali peninsula and even beyond to Arabia and Egypt. The disciple is the first audience and the guarantor of the survival of his master's precious legacy. The rest of us who hear or read the poem are treated as bystanders, and while the composer appears oblivious of our presence in his intimate communication with his protégé, he is in fact very much concerned to draw our attention. We are his second audience and it is he who intends to move and win over to his cause. So we are allowed to listen in (to eavesdrop, perhaps) and to share the secrets of the master, with the tacit knowledge in pastoral ethos that the privilege of participation in his inner thoughts imposes on us a moral obligation to respond to the urgings of the poem. A moral web is thrown around us and neutral we cannot be.

The third audience of the verse epistle are the people concerned with the issues expounded or argued in the poem. The Sayyid began, as we noted above, with a few supplicant pleasantry, flattering to the addressee-confidant but morally obligating to us. The supple pleasantry, moreover, correspond to the salutation in a letter, and after he disposes of these in a few lines, he introduces the main subject of his composition, which in the case of the poem at hand is a wide-ranging complaint against British-protected clans whom he charged with moral abhorrence and religious apostasy. To their shame and damnation, these clans sided with the Euro-infidel against a fellow Muslim and a kinsman:

They who've refused the ordinance of their creator,
Who've heaped insults on the prophets and saints,
Who've become the prey of the Nazarenes, and fostered kinship ties with the whites.

Who've sought, on their own volition, to serve the Kaffir-whites,
Who were not under duress but fawned after the whites,
Who've chosen to become the offspring of the base Nazarenes.

They who've gone to the Amharas of Harar,
Whose father-judge and ruler is Menelik,
Who've become servants and toadies of the Abyssinians.

Who've turned the English against us,
Who've brought, at Afoksayle, the sinking infidel upon me,
They who visited afflictions upon me at Gogadogoye and Daratooloe woods.

They who out of jest decimated the brethren,
Who've plunged unkind spears in the Lord's anointed [the Dervishes] And who, with gusto, rained maxim guns on my men.

In my cry their name was on my lips when other men lay asleep,
They sold me out and ate the price of my life...
They've done all this to me, they cannot deny,
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Let no one else revenge upon them for me,
One day, like the prowling lion, I will jump upon the fence, I’ll descend upon them unawares.

4 THE SINGER OF POLEMICS: DIATREME, CURSE AND EXHORTATION

Consideration shows that the uses of the Sayyid’s verse were also traditional; to influence the opinions of a body of kinsmen. He employed his poetry to inform, to persuade, to attack, to exhort, to curse, to appeal and above all, to enhance his position. Of the 120 poems which have so far been collected and verified as his, almost two-thirds are poetic diatribes attacking colonial infidels and their Somali collaborators. Nearly all of his poetry was composed during the struggle (1900–1920) and almost every poem makes at least one direct reference to it. Even the seemingly apodictic praise-song which the Dervishes sang for their master, Mahammad Salih: ‘Oh miraculous man of God, Sheikh Mahammad Salih, the helper, Mahammad Salih,’ eventually assumed the role of a war-song, which the Dervishes chanted when charging into battle and was said to strike terror into the hearts of Somali British collaborators.

Although many themes underlie the poems of the Sayyid, it appears that his major topics relate to diatribe, exhortation and curse. Poetic diatribes are by far the most numerous and best remembered.

Produced during the war, these poems are belligerent in tone and incisive, reflecting the spirit of war.

Until I had driven long spears through the shameless Reer Hagar,
And until the shedding of their thick blood had been celebrated
With rejoicing,
And until they had been massacred and destroyed utterly,
And until my task had been fulfilled, I would not have given up
Haddaysane

There is also the vulgar element in the Sayyid’s poetic diatribes and this seems to be an accepted part of his style. He was wont, it is said, to boast: ‘Allah taught me the art of acrimony and abuse’, a reference to the Qur’anic precedent where God, of course in the mouth of the Prophet Mahammad, inveighed against a Meccan opponent of the Muslims in this exceptionally virulent language:

He who is given to much swearing, feet in faith, deceitful of mind, disgraced man of scandal ... gossip-monger in the face of corruption ... niggardly in giving and hinderer of people from coming...

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to the faith ... inveterate oppressor ... steeped in sin ... argumentative, having a protruding belly ... a bastard adopted to an alien race.

The Sayyid receives high marks for his malvolent pronouncements from B.W. Andrzejewski and L.M. Lewis who maintain that ‘by any literary standards he must be judged to be a master of invective, ridicule and scorn.’ Despite his skill as a master polemicist, the Sayyid’s passionate disliking of the British, coupled with the poet’s intoxication with language, at times entangled him in disastrous excesses which all but overwhelmed his argument, threatening to defeat the very cause he had sought to advance. A poem to the ‘English Woman’ represents the use of such fulsome language. An epigram which borders on the obscene, it is presumably meant for Col. Richard Corfield’s sister who, after the officer’s fall in an engagement with the Dervishes at Dulmadooba in August 1913, raised funds for a monument erected in his memory on the spot where he died. The Sayyid’s graphic description of the lady’s physique in rather unflattering terms is likely to be judged an unnecessary manifestation of rancorous zeal. But the ‘English Woman’ is an aberration.

Despite his penchant for cynicism and the heaping of invective, ridicule and scorn on his foes, he did this, for the most part, in a way that did not diminish the artistic value of his verse. Consider, for example, the Sayyid’s feat in sustaining the studied ridicule in these lines taken from an epistle to a British-protected clan:

Ye have mistaken the hell-ordained and Christians for the prophet.
Ye have shamelessly groveled after the accursed.
Were you noblemen (as you claim) ye would loathe the white infidels.

An exposition of the Sayyid’s acrimonious style may predispose us to judge his caustic verse as the idle fulmination of a sour-tempered old warrior, embittered by failure and frustration. Such a judgment, however, would rest on an erroneous interpretation of the Sayyid’s method and ideas. Polemicism, to re-emphasize the point, is central to Somali notions of verification and there is nothing wrong with abusive verse so long as it is, in the words of the Sayyid himself, ‘done with proper style’.

This means that in the arcane tastes of pastoral literature, there is a proper way to abuse, and to articulate literary propaganda so as to be effective, and judged by these criteria the Sayyid stands unassailable, a point which even his bitter foes would allow. The practice and craft of poetic curse, of lashing out against one’s foes and engaging in ruthless character assassination through poetry...
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is a frequent occurrence, a weapon commonly employed in the political
relations of the clans. Hence, when the Sayyid cursed, it was not out of
ill-will or purposeless rancor, although this may have played a part,
but out of a conscious determination to utilize a national resource in
which he happened to be well endowed by nature—the Sayyid cursed
for a cause.

By contrast, exhortation poems are intended to keep the flock together.
They sharply contrast the nobility of the Dervish cause with the baseness
of colonialism, the righteousness of Islam with the duplicity of the
Christian infidel. The most important function of exhortation poems,
however, seems to be to silence the critics of the Sayyid within the Dervish
leadership and to perpetuate his grip on the movement. The task of
staving off opposition within the movement had become increasingly
urgent and difficult to achieve, especially after the suppression with
great harshness of the so-called Tree-of-Bad-Counsel revolt. In putting
down the revolt, the Sayyid executed dozens of rivals, many of whom
had been prominent Haajis and holy men, and the massacre of these
men undercut the prestige of his mission and knocked the moral props
from under the movement. Consequently, the Sayyid showed after this
episode growing signs of insecurity. This had been justified by the ever-
dwindling number of trusted counsellors and the numerous attempts on
his life.

This sense of insecurity prompted the Sayyid to produce ‘Alas, My
Wives,’ a poem composed after he had escaped an assassination through
food poisoning by one of his wives. In it he attacks his wives as ‘the basest
of womankind’ and pleads with God to save him from their ‘bloody
stares.’

My wives all— they are the basest of womankind,
Everyone married to me is a glowing ember of hell,
Alas, decency dwells not among my hags!
Invertebrate spendthrifts, they save not for the future...
Let them not pour out for me cups full of fresh milk,
Let them not feed me dates and delicate dishes,
Let them not wave me up in the biting cold of the Dayr season.
Since they stay not away from swearing, anger, blasphemy,
In their wives, they seek to undo the innocent,
O how they’d savor my blood! Lord, deliver me from them.

The Sayyid then turns to the praise of his new spouse, his first cousin,
‘Aisha Yuwuuf, whom he ennobles in glowing terms:

Poetry as a Tool in the Long Struggle

I hope the preceding notes have served to show something of the depth
and range of the Sayyid as an artist and a polemicist, as well as the involve-
ment of his verse in the intimate interplay of people and events. I now
turn to a discussion of the ways in which the Sayyid used his verse to
achieve specific political ends. To do this I would refer to a series of
interrelated episodes to demonstrate the very real connection between
the Sayyid’s poetry and the vicissitudes of the resistance struggle. One
such episode is the battle of Jubaale which, though not the only one to do
so, shows admirably the relevance of poetry to battle.

Militarily, we noted above, Jubaale represented an undetected disaster for
the Dervish cause. Demoralized and disorganized, the Der-
veishes were forced to disperse all over the Nugaal and the Haal after
their resounding defeat by the British expeditionary force. Not only did
they sustain heavy casualties (7,000 to 8,000 in dead and injured) but also
the loss of 20,000 of their best war-horses.

The Sayyid and what was left of his battered troops were within easy
grasp of the advancing British cavalry when a gracious offer came from
Sultan ‘Ismaan Mahamuud inviting the Sayyid to retreat into the eastern
Mafeer teen country under nominal Italian protection. This offer was
accepted with relief by the hard-pressed Derveshes but the Sayyid viewed it
with cautious eye, for the goodwill of ‘Ismaan Mahamuud, a man noted
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for chicanery and Machiavellianism in his dealings with the Dervishes, could not be taken for granted. Might he not be luring them into his camp in their hour of weakness to prey on old scores? After much heart-searching and hesitation, and against the advice of important members of the khanums (inner circle of advisors), the Sayyid embarked on a long, weary trek to I’sma’il Mahamud’s territory.

Meanwhile Cavaliere Pestalozza, Italian Consul at Aden and Italy’s chief envoy to her Somaliand territories, learned of the latter’s friendly overtures to the Sayyid. According to local sources the Consul, fearing that an undesirable Dervish–Majeerteen alliance might result, threatened I’sma’il Mahamud with naval bombardment. The threat of Italian armed intervention cowed the Sultan, who immediately began a war with the disarrayed Dervishes. Terrible casualties were inflicted on both sides, including the massacre of women and children. As about the same time the British, in cooperation with the Italians, stormed the port of Illig, the last Dervish stronghold along the coast. As if this were not enough, 400 warriors of his own Ogaadeen clan deserted the Sayyid en masse. Faced with hostility on all sides, deprived of livestock, his few survivors diminishing by the day, the Sayyid became a fugitive, and it seemed that the Dervish cause was on the verge of collapse. At this dire point, the Sayyid turned to his last resource, the power of his mouth. He composed a number of poems designed to put his case before his countrymen. The best remembered of them is the “Jinn” or “Jinley.”

Filled with archaisms, discontinuous in thought progression and moribund in tone, the “Jinn” can only be fully grasped by the contemporaries of the Sayyid. Thematically, it embodies what I. M. Lewis calls a “duality in Somali notions of power.” On the one hand, force is commonly revered and is usually a decisive factor in inter-clan conflicts; and on the other, the weak and those who for other reasons cannot have direct recourse to war are protected by supernatural sanctions. Somalis seek strength in everything, and where it is not found in physical force it is sought in the supernatural sphere.

The spiritual power which the Sayyid invokes in the “Jinn” derives from two pillars: Islam and her (traditions). By Islamic teaching, all Muslims are brothers and are under obligation to assist one another and to follow the path of righteousness. In the words of B. W. Andrezejewski and Muiso Galal, who made a similar observation in a treatment of three Somali poets:

Any intrigue, instigation, double-dealing and hypocrisy are regarded as particularly heinous sins, which are often punished in this world. Injustice done to a brother Muslim is considered even greater if he

is bound to the evil-doer by bonds of kinship, and the closer the degree of kinship the graver the offence. Thus the transgressors not only has to bear the burden of guilt, but suffers from anxiety that at any moment retribution may come upon him in the form of one misfortune or another.

The “Jinn” can in fact be fittingly called the ‘Lament of a Kinsman’. Alliterating in “j”, the poem dwells on two themes: the deception of I’sma’il Mahamud and the desertion of the Ogaadeen warriors (the poet’s own kinsmen). The first part condemns the cowardly desertion of his relatives who to their eternal shame abandoned a kinsman at his most extreme hour and sought solace security under the Ethiopian king. Such men, the Sayyid charged, deserve disgrace on earth and damnation in the other world:

Oh! Huseen, it is unworthy of honorable men to speak words of worthless banter,

You are my comrade.

You have not joined the ignorant who fled in headlong panic,

You’ve not gone to the Amhar king when your relatives had departed.

Those who sought protection under the infidels are kinsmen of Hell;

By the Qur’an they are Hell-ordained.

The second section reveals the treacherous deception perpetrated on the trusting Dervishes by the Majeerteen Sultan. The Sayyid argues that he was comfortably settled with his Dervishes, enjoying peace and prosperity, teaching and practicing the true religion when the dissembling I’sma’il Mahamud invited the unsuspecting Dervishes and treacherously fell on them:

Attended by an assembly of friends and relatives in my home,

With no one daring to utter an evil word against me.

Lying comfortably on my mat, bent on the study of the Faith,

Meditating with the dignitaries in my haram,

Receiving at a sign from me whatever my heart desired,

Alas, the jinn has deceived me of my sceptre.

The poet then proceeds to present a graphic description of the long, weary trek. He vividly details the privations they suffered and the menaces they met on the way: thirst, starvation, injury to the body, beasts of prey, poisonous snakes, marauding midgets and outcasts — only to be pounced on, upon arrival, by the murderous Sultan. The havoc this long trek wrought on the Dervishes is borne out by Douglas Jardine.
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who wrote: 'The direct line of the Mullah's flight was marked by a trail of dead men, women, children, camels, cattle, goats and abandoned water-vessels and household utensils.'

The poet concludes his lament:

Ah, I would not have gone if a message had not come to me from a Sultan;

The flesh would not have moved had he urged me to stay.

It is out of love that I blundered into the seas of the Genes. 

Instantly I leapt upon hearing the din of the Majeeorte message.

It is the food who seldom realizes when he is being lured into a trap.

As for me, the man with the fawning countenance brought this evil upon me.

The poem was published and it spread rapidly across the desert, pricking the conscience of those who heard it. 'The enemy,' said Aw Daahir Afqarshe, 'defeated him in the battlefield but the Sayyid defeated them by his mouth.' The clans are said to have become 'disgusted' and 'horrified' at the dishonorable treatment the Sayyid, a fellow Muslim and kinsman, was accorded. And according to Aw Daahir Afqarshe, a cry of 'shame' was soon heard in the country. For although a great many Somalis had learned by bitter experience to hate and fear the Sayyid and in spite of the fact that many had been victims of Dervish depredations, they were moved by his verse. The Sayyid's charisma, his claim to supernatural powers, and the tacit conviction among most Somalis that he was in fact fighting the cause of Allah against an infidel power, instilled reverence in the minds of the people, friend and foe alike. But when these noble qualities and objectives were skillfully articulated in a medium which in itself affects the Somali in strong ways, the result was truly persuasive.

The moral outrage prompted by the publicizing of the 'Jim' at least in part translated itself into action. Many of the Qaaddeed who had earlier deserted returned to him, especially those of his immediate Bahri lineage. Those who feared to return sent presents of livestock and rifles. It is also said 'Abduh Allah Muhammad faced rebellion by his morally affronted subjects. Reportedly, he sought to propitiate the Sayyid by proposing to reopen his ports for Dervish importation of firearms. The proposal fell through, though, possibly because the wily Sultan never intended to carry it out.

From the conclusion of the Illig agreement in 1905 to its collapse in 1909, the Sayyid fought the propaganda war, and the prime weapon at his disposal during these years was his mouth. The policies which he pursued and which his poetry reflects are well summarized by Jardine:

Whilst refraining in his own interest from committing any overt act of hostility, he took advantage of the respite afforded by the Agreement to collect together again his scattered forces. Outwardly peace, he ... organized a widespread service of secret agents whose duty it was to undermine the loyalty of our tribes. (Emphasis added)

"To undermine the loyalty of our tribes" through political poetry was the centerpiece of the Sayyid's policy, and the political verse produced during this period includes such outstanding works as the 'Jim', 'This News from Beyond the Seas' ('Waraka Badah lagaa Keenayo'), the 'Blessings of the Lord' ('Bishaaraynka Eebabay'), 'Time everlasting' ('Ka Sabnaan Ka Sabnaan Baan') and the 'Sound of Flying Gravel' ('Hin Fimih'). The central message of these poems is twofold: (a) a concerted effort to persuade the clans to abandon their allegiance to their respective colonial governments in favor of the 'good cause' and (b) to foster an aura of personality cult around the Sayyid with a crafty view to discouraging any potential challenge to his leadership from the ranks of the Dervishes. There is a third class of verse which served as policy declarations or proclamations of edicts, a kind of state-of-the-union address. Both the 'Time everlasting' and the 'Scourge of Infidels' ('Qaada-Leged') would fit into the latter category.

Indigenous testimony would seem to recognize the period of poetry as a period of 'unprecedented prosperity'. Sheikh Jaama writes: 'In the years of coastal settlement, the Dervishes grew from strength to strength... Wealth and weapons poured into their hands, and God favored them with charisma, power and influence.'

The prominent clans won over to the Dervish cause during this period include the Warsangali Daaroood, with whose sultan, Ina 'Ali Shire, the Sayyid contracted a marriage alliance, sections of the Daabishane who defected from the Dervishes after the defeat of Jibbaale, and the princely house of the 'Umur Mahammud Majeeorte, the Reer Iisaal. In addition, Dervish influence spread to the lower reaches of the Shabelle River, where they threatened the Italian Benaadco coast. Here, the recently converted Ildar clan killed Sheikh Uways I, the spiritual leader of the rival Quadiya, in 1909.

In the Warsangali, the Sayyid secured a convenient access to arms through their port of Lasaqoray and in a spirited exchange of letters and verbal messages, the British consul Cordeaux urged him, in deference to the peace agreement, to cease his seditionous 'propaganda' among a government clan. To this Sayyid Mahammad replied by composing the 'Send me not to the Qaaddeed', an oratorical poem in which the poet
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"I freely counter[ed] each charge made against him and turned[ed] it into an attack upon his accusers." With respect to the Warsangali, the Sayyid declared rhetorically:

Concerning your demand 'turn aside from the Warsangali', I have a complaint:

If they prefer you, then they and I shall be at variance.
It is not in my nature to accept people who cringe to you.
But if they are Dervishes, how can I turn aside from them?
Do you also share their ancestry from Darood Isma'il? Are you trying to steal towards me through my ancestor's genealogy?

Although concealing his identity lest he provoke hostility with the British, the Sayyid made good use of the Bur-Ad (roving bands of robbers) to prod along those clans who proved unsuceptible to words alone. Thus he unleashed a combination of Warsangali and Bur-Ad raiders on the Jaama'a Siyaad Dullbahante and the raiders reduced the clan to destitution. Similarly, he made repeated forays into the Majeereneen sultanates of Ismaan Mahamoud and Ali Yuunuf where the Dervishes perpetrated genocidal attacks on the 'Ise Mahamoud sublineages. Conveninetly, he used the thousands of captured stock to reward his followers and to pay the lavish bride-prices for the multiple political marriages he sought to contract. The Sayyid was sufficiently pleased with the effects which the union of the sword and the poem were having on the country to sing:

Let my soul proclaim the good tidings from the Lord;
When the din of battle was heard a hundred times,
The princes of the unbeliever-
From them I captured the many guns in my possession.

Defeated, the English now bring us tributes:
From Bullahaar comes the rich token of their submission;
As for the Italians - behold, they come as Dervish allies?

The display of pomp and bravura in these lines betrays the Sayyid's ingenious use of ordinary events to enhance the prestige of the Dervishes. The Jilg agreement provided for a free flow of trade between the Dervishes and the British and Italian colonial authorities, and in fulfillment of this provision, the colonial authorities allowed the Dervishes to import commodities through their ports. Shrewdly, the Sayyid turned the colonial gesture into an acknowledgement by the Europeans of his suzerainty over them, the commodities being a 'rich token of their submission'. This line of argument was quite plausible to ordinary Somalis who had little or no knowledge of the inner mechanics of the agreement. He then went on to brag:

I decimated the low-caste Majeereneen,
Behold, the hyena feasts on the flesh of their fallen dead...
And the vulture on the valiant among them.
And their hapless remnant now pleads: 'Pray, let's eat some grain.'

Following the successful marriage alliance with the Warsangali, the Sayyid made a similar bid to Islaam Faararah, the chief of the powerful 'Umar Mahamoud lineage of the Majeereneen. Wary of any close dealings with the Dervishes ever since the poet, Shire Isaaq, stigmatized them as a 'black magic sweeping the earth' from whom 'not a path has escaped', the Majeereneen chieftain was rather reluctant about treating with the Sayyid. But to directly rebuff him would no doubt have brought the wrath of the Dervishes on his clan, a matter that would entail dreadful consequences. So Islaam Faararah sent an oblique response 'agreeing' in principle to the proposed marriage but requesting to have, among other valuables, 'Iin Finin, a swift pony, dear to the Sayyid's heart, in bridewealth. The Majeereneen hoped the Sayyid would refuse to part with his favorite pony, a circumstance that would allow him to bow out of the proposed marriage without offending the Dervishes.

With the arrival of the oral epistle, it was now the Sayyid's turn to become crestfallen. To surrender his 'beloved beast' would be a terrible loss but not to do so would be even worse, damming it as was likely to be to his vaunted reputation of generosity. After much hesitation and heartache, the Sayyid decided to surrender the beast, but not before composing the 'Iin Finin' ('The Sound of Flying Gravel'), a somber reply named after the horse. Andrzejewski and Lewis, who produced a fine translation of the 'Iin Finin', perceive it, correctly in my view, as the poet's 'lament' of his 'loss'.

Long life, Faarah! Men are entitled to straightforward and respectful words.
And I am a respectful man except when I am slighted,
And friendship and openheartedness was my wont until the hateful envy of the in-fidels was unleashed upon me,
And you have come to me bearing a message which a man of authority has written.

Had you yourself sought from me countless wealth and livestock,
I would not have hesitated in meeting your request,
And indeed I intended to present you with a gift of fine camels from

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And I meant to order thousands of those fine beasts to be driven into a corral for you,
But when you decided upon Hii Finin you made me heavy with pain.

The poet then proceeded to detail Hii Finin’s exceptional qualities:
And he is bay; for in colour horses are not equal.
The gallop, the trot, the Canter, the walk.
To whichever you turn him he is without equal.
Oh, you the straight-limbed one; this beast is without peer;
And whenever he comes into my thoughts my love for him is rekindled,
And nothing except the letter of my faith surpasses my love for him.

Then follows a description of the uses which he intended to make of Hii Finin:

It was upon him that I intended to make a feast of my enemies for the hornbill (the witness of death),
On him in the Hasse I meant to attack from Halin,
And between here and the coast to loot camels.
And on his back I meant to cut off the testicles of the menstruating infidels.

True to habit, the Sayyid turned to the subject he best knew how to handle, namely, validation of his enemies whom he attacked as ‘shameless’ and ‘evil-doers skulking about the world’ who would jump at any chance to slander his reputation.

But always in the world there are evil-doers skulking,
They spread slander like the [base] Isaaq.
And I fear that they will spoil my reputation;
And alas, to a man of honour slander is ever shameful,
And as a pilgrim I cannot in these times afford miseries.
Instead of being talked about behind my back, I am now free from blame...

At last the Sayyid is said to have turned over the reins of the horse to the Sultan’s representative and concluded dramatically:

It is Hii Finin that you hold on a rope,
And all the other beasts shy away from him with reverence.
Since the Sultan to whom I owe respect has insisted on having it,
Take its bridle; I would not have honoured another man with it!

In return for his poetic pains and the surrender of his property, the

Sayyid did win his bride but not the power of her clan, who a year or so later fell out with him and left the Dervishes on masse.

To put the Sayyid’s poetic combat in wider perspective, it may be helpful to discuss it in relation to that of the legion of poetic antagonists who did literary battle with him. The most notable among these are the two poets, ‘Ali Duul of the Dubahante clan and ‘Ali Jaama’ Haabibil of the Habsar Awal Isaaq. Throughout the long struggle, these two maintained virulent literary duels with Sayyid Mahamud, managing, on occasion, to more than hold their own. As a member of the ‘Ali Geri sub-lineage, ‘Ali Duul was a distant maternal uncle of the Sayyid. Like many of his kin, ‘Ali Duul was an ardent follower of the Sayyid in the early phases of the struggle but later deserted to the British sphere, whence he did much damage to the Dervish cause by concentrating his heavy literary guns on them.

The Isaaq poet, ‘Ali Jaama’ Haabibil, was, on the other hand, a resident of Berbera. Urged, pious and of an unusually handsome physique, ‘Ali Jaama’ Haabibil utterly lacked those traits that would be unberable to slander by the Sayyid. He was clean, according to many observers, in ‘both body and soul’. This lack of ‘slanderable’ quality in the Isaaq poet much vexed the Sayyid. Legend has it that he sent spies to Berbera with instructions to ‘dig out dirt’ on Ali Jaama’ Haabibil in hopes of employing whatever skeleton—to use a modern phrase—could be found in the Isaaq’s closet as material for his acrimonious epistles.

The crestfallen agents returned to their master with the report that indeed ‘Ali Jaama’ Haabibil was a ‘man of impeccable stature’, in respect both of living habits and of physical appearance. They noted, however, that the Isaaq had a minor blemish to his physique, notably a yellow discoloration on his front teeth. And this blemish, such as it was, was to serve as the take-off material for the Sayyid’s 72-line diatribe, ‘The Parching Heat of the Wind’, alliterating in the letter ‘H’. In ‘The Parching Heat’ Sayyid Mahamud, with an injurious tongue and an embittered spirit, presented a genealogical catalogue of opponent clans for abuse and ridicule.

Only one line of this malevolent invective is devoted to the Isaaq poet. ‘And fifth belongs to the donkey and to foul-mouthed ‘Ali Jaama’,’ an apparent reference to the plaque on the latter’s teeth. The brevity of the attack, however, gains effectiveness from its juxtaposition with the catalogue of tongue-lashing on other clans. The formalization in poetry of such abuse makes it belong to a class of defamatory verse, remembered and reapplied to new situations long after the original one had faded into oblivion.

In his response, ‘Ali Jaama’ concentrated his attacks on the two
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areas where the Sayyid was most vulnerable: (a) the Sayyid’s indiscriminate ‘raiding’ and ‘butchering’, as he put it, of defenceless Muslims and (b) the Sayyid’s well-known weakness for the fair sex. On the former, ‘Ali Jaama’ charged the Sayyid with one of the most heinous crimes in Islamic teaching, namely, the seizure and plunder of the property of orphans, as well as the callous slaughter of pious Muslims:

...And he butchered one would a he gout.
And caravans are given the safety of Allah,
But he wantonly cuts the tendons of weary travelers and engorges
their dates.
He’s battered on the weak and the orphan
Call you this Italian infidel a Mahdi? How puzzling the thought.!!!

The accusation is that anyone guilty of such atrocities as ‘Ali Jaama’ claims to be regularly committed in the name of Dervishism could not be a genuine wadad (man of God) but rather a vicious charlatan. By all accounts, the Sayyid had his share of the poet’s weakness for pleasures of the flesh, and the ‘beauty of women’, received persistent attention both in his poetry and life. He is said to have contracted at least a dozen marriages, some of them, no doubt, politically inspired, while others testified to his ‘keen eye for the fair maiden’ (‘ibrid bi’i Ich’). Since in Islam a man may marry no more than four wives at a time, the Sayyid was obliged, in an attempt to facilitate his multiple nuptial transactions, to marry and divorce frequently and this may have contributed to the instability, marital infidelity, internal strife and even death which from time to time afflicted his household. 78

Thus we should understand, even if we are a little dismayed, when the Sayyid advises us ‘not to trust him/her who grows up in your household’ or cries out in verse that ‘Every one married to me is a glowing ember of hell.’

It is this theme, the Sayyid’s weakness for light pleasure, which his poetic antagonists constantly hammer at. ‘Ali Jaama’ accuses the Sayyid of being a libertine and an adulterer—‘Of free women’ he cohabits with seven—while ‘Ali Duah went even further and charged the Sayyid with incest:

...And the women you consort with are fifteen...
Like a fattened ram among sheep in heat
He tires not of lust, the lecherous infidel;
In a crimson shawl and silken veil many an innocent lass night-visited him,

And lo, Reoba [the Sayyid’s sister] has come to the office, testifying to partnership of lust. 79

‘Ali Duah further accused the Sayyid of drunken habits, a flight of imagination which could only have been concocted by an intemperate push of resentment:

The Lunatic Muhammad did not make me drink wine with him as he had done to the Khyar people,
Nor have I partaken of vinegar, the bitter thing, with him,
He did not turn my head, as he had the learned elders addicted to
the crumbs of his table,
I’ve looked into his character and found him a worthless ruffian,
I left him, the adventurous gambler, let calamity come upon
him. 80

‘Ali Duah also did his measure of cursing:

Would that, O Muhammad, a hissing ember of hell descended upon
you,
Would that your chest and delicate organs were embraced by
infernals,
O thou hairy one, let Allah destine you to perdition.
As you’ve earned, let Allah burden heat upon you.
Of the Shona people [Ethiopian] and a whiskered Amhaar you are. 81

The charge against the Sayyid of womanizing is credible enough, that of wine-drinking less credible, unsupported as it is by any evidence, though curiously enough it has persisted through the years. A fake poem, for example, which came out in the 1960s purporting to be the Sayyid’s, glorizes in the consumption of liquor, as this excerpt seems to indicate:

Beloved, my son, give me of this thing,
The thing that transports me into the status of a prudent elder...
But a sip of it and lethargy flies from the eyes,
It turns not my head, nor makes me insane.
But only removes mercy from the heart. 82

The alleged author of this counterfeit poem, ‘Abdisaalam H. Aadan, is a contemporary Isaaq poet who has won fame, some say notoriety, for his craft, though hilarious, imitations of Dervish poets for the purpose of burlesquing and trivializing their poetry. 83 Here, ‘Abdisaalam arranges his parody on the Sayyid in triplet groupings to make it credible, thus cleverly meeting the physical, structural requirement of a triad. He even manages to construct into his poetic scheme one of the
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Sayyid's formulac devices of addressing his poem to a confidant, the 'Beloved, my son' who starts off the first line.

It is, however, on the semantic structure that he stumbles. It is clear, for example, that the 'thing' is the subject of 'Abdisalam's versicle.

Yet the 'thing' (whatever it is) is not developed as we would expect the Sayyid to develop it, but rather described with every line revealing something new, some unique property about it: (line 2) 'transports me into the status of... elder'; (line 3) causes 'lethargy' to fly from the eyes; (line 4) does not turn the poet's head or make him insane, etc.

Although such description as the poet provides us in a position to render an informed guess, it never enables us to know exactly the identity of the 'thing.' Such an exercise in obscurity would be likely to ruffle, perhaps provoke the suspicion of, those accustomed to the Sayyid's clear, declarative style which never leaves the hearer groping in the dark as to the identity of its subject. Thus in an outwardly familiar construction by the Sayyid, we have:

Beloved, my son, there is a type of desire that fosters mortal offenses in men.

But towards you I am gently disposed, because we are relatives.

However harsh my treatment of others, to you I'll always remain kind 64.

Here the subject of the triplet is the 'you', the addressee of the first line who receives a clear warning about the dire consequences of certain 'mortal desires. In the second, the 'you' is carried on to be informed of the poet's gentle disposition toward him because 'we are relatives.' In the third, the thought is brought to a conclusion by the declaration that however severe the poet's mislreatment of others, he will always remain kind to the 'beloved son'.

The Sayyid, at his best, thus utilizes the technique of sustained development, selecting a design and holding on to it: 'Abdisalam, the burlesque, by contrast, utilizes what may be termed the technique of sustained parallelism, with each subsequent line adding to what preceded it but never building on it. It is a subtle but important difference.

Another opponent poet, the Ilaq Jeeni Ade, made a damning comparison between the Dervish government and that of the English, maintaining that life under a Christian ruler was infinitely preferable to the bloody anarchy which, he charged, characterized the Dervishes:

Of water, the reliable trickle is better than the untempered gush of the fount;

An obedient wench is better than an intemperate woman of class.

And an unyielding camel which supports her sucking
Is better than a mean-tempered camel of much milk.

And an adversary is better than kinsmen who abandon fellow kin.

It is better to have none than to be afflicted with in-laws of bad manners.

Better than a murderous Muslim is a Christian who protects your woman and child 65.

The polemic was second nature to the Sayyid and he was more often than not able to 'outdo' his opponents but whenever a certain misstep proved particularly offensive to his honor, he would organize a punitive expedition against the clan of the offending poet. He would also direct a response to each individual attacker so that the resulting poetic exchange became what the Somalis call a 'chain' (suitable) a series of polemics. In addition, he would compose a blanket answer to the 'Somalis', a term of derision reserved for non-Dervishes. In the following passage of proverbs with its typical circumlocutions, he attacks colonial-protected clans as 'peons and houseboys' of white men:

A liar I despise,
A miser I despise,
And I despise him who eats polluted food.
A tobacco-chewer I despise,
I despise compulsion in men.
And fat without strength,
I despise an uncourageous man of small lineage,
I despise a tool that doesn't obey its user ...

A white man's peon I despise
And his houseboy I despise ...

An unjust king I despise,
A flag without an army I despise
And a city without rule I despise 66.

It is clear that the combined weight of his legion of attackers was having a corrosive effect on the Sayyid, and on occasion he betrayed the extent of his bitterness against his accusers. In 1908, he wrote to the Commissioner of Somailand that one of the prime causes of the disturbance of the peace was the insults, intrigue and envy directed at him by poets of government classes: 'Being cursed [the complained] is harder for us to bear than having our necks cut off ... I am considered (by opponents) and called a bad man, such as 'old singer,' 'looter,' 'disturber of peace' ... 67.
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If the British-protected 'Ali Jaarna' and 'Ali Duhu could attack the Sayyid from the relative security of Berbera, other poets were not so lucky. 'Olu-Loog Aadan Jigal, who belonged to the more inland Habar Yoonis Isaaq, despatched a vitriolic verse to the Sayyid, the key line of which read: 'Even the Sayyid is in mortal fear of stirring our camels, whichever we have come down to pasture on the Sesto plains.' Evidently, the Sayyid took a deep offense at the imputation of personal cowardice to him for he is said to have assembled his warriors and exclaimed: 'Is there not one among my cowardly followers who can defend me against this low-caste Habar Yoonis poet?'

Although the Sayyid's response, 'This News from Beyond the Seas', constitutes, literally, one of his outstanding poems, it reveals the depressed mood he was in at the time of composing:

This news from beyond the seas, imparted to me of late by the villagers,
This news from the low-born Habar Yoonis which reached me in the East saddens me.
He who believes the Dervishes to be any longer men of valor is mistaken.
The valiant among them are no more, only the rabble remains.
These lads—how swagger and sway—They lost the fighting mettle.
I fret in fury while my men languish in stupefying fear.
They cower and quiver in terror ever since the defeat of Buura hills.
The rout of Jibbia's turned them into a miserable lot of nursing moids.
Oh, how the heart, my heart aches as I've engorged the fat tail of sheep,
The throb of pain is upon it
And the body shrinks from sadness and weeping.

Afflicted and dust-ridden, I lie, humiliated by the uncircumcised unbeliever [the English],
The liver shivers, I quake for the men the infidel killed in wanton jest.
Behold, the hyena feasts on the flesh of my fallen comrades.

The post continued to pour out his lugubrious jeremiads, regretting the loss of his brave warriors who had been killed in the wars and dwelling on his dark contention that those who remained of the Dervishes were no longer men but 'nursing moids'.

His object in composing 'This News from Beyond the Seas' was to arouse his men into renewed martial spirit, and he was not disappointed.
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as the herd of Dervish stock seized by the Majeerteen came to be known, was proclaimed the biggest camel theft in the annals of stock-raiding among the pastoral Somalis. The significant thing, for the purpose of this discussion is that this, too, was allegedly provoked by poetry.

The two Majeerteen sultanes of Ismaan Mahamud and Yusuf 'Ali Keenadid had fought desultory wars ever since the 1880s when Yusuf 'Ali Keenadid, Sultan 'Ali's father, in a succession struggle, broke off from his cousin's territory and founded his mini-state of Hobyo, further south along the coast. Pestalozza concluded the IJlig agreement partly to place the Dervishes as a buffer state between Italy's two warring princelots on the Somali coast. On the rumor that Ismaan Mahamud was preparing an expedition against Hobyo, 'Ali Yusuf prompted his court poet to compose a dashing epistle on Sultan Ismaan which was issued and publicized, cunningly enough, as the work of the Dervishes. Keenadid's object in originating the incisive missive was to arouse hostility between the Sayyid and Sultan Ismaan, in hopes of deflecting the latter from the proposed expedition, and he was successful. Before the Dervishes had any knowledge of the existence of the poem or the opportunity to deny being its source, Sultan Ismaan, who was incensed at being attacked as 'not a prince but a mere fisher' (kalauu dhabuh) — the consumption of fish is despised by the pastoralists — fell on the unsuspecting Dervishes and made off with 50,000 head of Dervish stock.

The Dervishes under the military command of Aamir 'Agole, Sayyid Mahammad's uncle, made protracted attempts to recover Mimielle but never succeeded in doing so, although they had repeatedly harried the Majeerteen. Henceforth, the Dervishes remained mortal enemies of the Majeerteen sultanate and the Sayyid composed at least half a dozen poetic laments, regretting the loss of his precious herds and singling out his lieutenants' lack of vigilance as the blame for the misfortune.\(^4\)

We have said that the period of poetry was, on the whole, a period of Dervish prosperity and it is this prosperity which underlies the composition of the 'Time Everlasting', a song of military display or, in the words of a Dervish elder, a 'showing of the teeth' (dooja isuul).\(^5\) For five years following the IJlig agreement, the Sayyid fought a litigious war in which, to judge from the growth of Dervish strength and influence, the Dervishes recovered from the reverses of Jiboutale. "Viewing a military parade and seeing the coming of fighting age of the orphans whose fathers were killed in previous battles," the Sayyid ordered the military maneuver to impress on his foes that he had not only the strength but the determination to resume the armed phase of the struggle. A few sample illustrations from the 'Time Everlasting', though in an inadequate translation, reveal his mood of defiance:

Must I from time everlasting
Maintain servile politeness,
Abstain from evil words,
And observe the peace?

Must I from time everlasting
Coxs into false calmness
The husbandless wife and the fatherless child?

Must I from time everlasting
Fear to face [out of shame]
The weeping of the women
And the clamor they would make?

Must I from time everlasting
Implore every morning that comes round
For restitution for my men
Who've been wantonly slaughtered
And my property
Which has been confiscated?

Must I from time everlasting
Again and again cry out:
'Pray, Officer Swainey,' let's leave each other alone?
But leave me alone he would not.

The 'Time Everlasting' belongs to a category of verse in which the Sayyid attained fame for his description and praise of the horse: its uses in warfare, its nobility in the animal species and the 'sheer magnificence' of its physical beauty. A rendition in English of the Sayyid's verse on the horse would be likely to yield an interesting and rewarding result, though such an effort does not belong here, and it is hoped that others who possess literary ambition will undertake the task.

In 1909, as in other years, the Sayyid proposed and events disposed. Just as he was about to resume the armed assault to complement the literary assault on the 'unbeliever', there occurred a convulsive episode which shook up the Dervishes, nearly cost the Sayyid his leadership of the movement and occupied his poetic and political energies for the next four years. This was the Tree-of-Bad-Counsel revolt discussed in the preceding chapter. In this aborted coup, 600 conspirators tried unsuccessfully to oust the Sayyid from power following the outright repudiation of him by his Meccan master, Mahammad Salih.

The uprising, whose suppression precipitated the ruthless slaughter of scores of religious men and Dervish notables, destroyed the moral basis.
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of the movement, and it could be said with fairness that ever after this incident the Sayyid ruled more by coercion than by persuasion. Henceforth, he behaved like, and seems to have become, a mere warrior chiefain.

The series of apologetic poems in which he tried to absolve himself of responsibility for the disaster and to gloss over its evil effects are referred to as the 'Chain of the Tree-of-Bad-Counsel' (Silsilada 'Anjeel Tala was'). The chain includes the 'Alias, My Wives' discussed in an earlier section, the 'Bad Tree' ('Anjeel Tala was'), the 'Rising Fury' ('Saha Ka'ay'), the 'Voice of Verse' ('Od Gabay') and the 'Hyena among the Goats' ('Darwaq Ariga'). In them the Sayyid attempted to justify, with mixed success, his harsh conduct towards the conspirators: the summary executions of the ring leaders (many of whom were prominent mullahs and al-Hajjis) and the dispossession and banishment of the rest, as morally sound and politically imperative. Politically imperative, maybe, but hardly a moral victory. He tried to discredit the rebels as apostates, spies, malcontents and greedy men who sought to advance personal ends at the expense of the cause. How could anyone blame him for preventing these ravenous hyenas from devouring the flock? In the amusing song, the 'Hyena among the Goats', he prompted his aide, Husein Dique, to hold a mock but telling poetic contest with an imaginary hyena over the question of who has the right to consume the flocks—flocks understood in this context to stand metaphorically for the Dervish faithful. Husein Dique sang:

O Hyena, the flocks belong to God,
To God and to the Master,
The flocks belong to armed warriors,
It is the Dervish warriors...
Before a hidden club strikes you,
Flee, flee for your life.94

The hyena, in the mouth of the Sayyid, replied:

A word with you, O man of little knowledge,
Earlier you said, 'The flocks belong to God.'
Why do you say now 'The flocks are ours'?
Would you speak with two mouths?
Are you like God? Or would you claim to be stronger than he is?
Can you prevent, O, you lowly son of Adam, my livelihood?
Did not the Lord give the breath of life to both of us?
Or would you think the great Lord (respecber of no persons) to be partial to you?

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Why would you whine and whimper if I should find one day a morsel of bread
To break my fast?

This poem belongs to a poetic genre which the pastoralists call 'converted' or 'hidden' (qafil) verse. Impregnated with social ambiguities and contradictions, such material calls on the poet to treat it with a great deal of tact, in particular, to handle ambiguities in ambiguous language, so as to avoid the embarrassment and even the socio-political crisis which the elucidation of hitherto 'hidden' things may entail. On one level, for example, the hyena accuses his poetic opponent, Husein Dique (here representing the human selfishness and other evil emotions associated with the human species).

On another level, the hyena may be seen as representing the rebels and Husein Dique as an obvious spokesman for his master. It is the rebels' intention, then, to challenge the Sayyid's arrogation to himself, indeed his monopoly, of the leadership of the movement. Their protest is a protest against the tyranny of one-man rule, in particular, when that man has lost the moral credibility to lead— as had the Sayyid, in their view, the moment he disavowed by his teacher.

On yet a third level, and probably the one most tenable in a content analysis of the whole poem, it may be seen as a statement of clannish politics. Traditionally, the hyena is associated with the Dulbahante as a sort of metaphorical totem. In terms of agnicl kindship (the Somalis are patrilinear), the Dulbahante belong to the Harti cluster of clan families including the Majerteen and the Warsangali. The Harti, though too numerous and too unwieldy to act together politically, regard themselves as kinsmen in relation to the Ogaden, the Sayyid's paternal kin and the other main branch of the Daarood clans.

If it was the Dulbahante who constituted the central pillar of the Dervish force, it was also from them that the ringleaders (with the exception of Ahmad Eqi and Abdiile Qoryow) of the attempted coup sprang. In the poem, the hyena admonishes both the Sayyid and his aide to quit the territory of his cousins and to go to their Ogaden kinsmen.

The Sayyid was certainly alive to the paradox and the precariousness of his position from a tribal viewpoint—aware, too, of the circumstance that his power rested on the Dulbahante with whom, tough he was materially attached, he did not share paternal ties. This may in part account for his sustained requirement that upon entry into the Dervish ranks all his followers should renounce their former kinship obligations in favor of allegiance to him and to the new cause. 'Ali Dheeb, the Dulbahante poet and the Sayyid's perennial foe, on the other hand, sought to
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exploit the situation in the opposite direction by striving relentlessly to expose the Sayyid as an outsider and an impostor who had no right to exercise leadership among 'Ali Dhub's kin. So he maintained in this excerpt from a poem in which he attacked the Sayyid as a 'hairy sorcerer'.

I'll sing and sing till I've caused my kin to quit you en masse. 
You fool, they who've made you mighty were not of your flesh. 
As well aware you, the hairy sorcerer, must be that your elders belong to the Adan-Dagah dogs.

And your kin to the Reer-Humur dogs.

The last, though important, series selected for comment is called Corfield's Chain ('Silsila Koofit') and it began in the spring of 1913. As the title implies, the chain concerns Col. Richard Corfield of Somaliland, and his death constitutes the central event in the series, although the first poem was composed some months before the colonel's fall. Sent to Somaliland to organize a camel constabulary and establish order after two years of unprecedented anarchy in the interior, Corfield proved to be a man of courage and dash, gradually winning the respect of friendly clans whose confidence in the government had been badly shaken. He did much to 'restore order', to keep the trade-routes open in the vicinity of Berbera and to put an end to intermittent fighting between the Habar Yoons and Habar Awaal clans.

But Corfield had a streak of the madcap in him—rash, arrogant and taciturn, he treated the Somali with great hightenedness, subjecting them to summary confiscations, jailings and beatings. It was after such an incident that the first of the series, a curvilinear or 'stabber-poesy', was pronounced on him by an Isaaq poet, one Ima Woresa-hume, whose herds had been seized and sold at an auction by Corfield.

When the Sayyid strikes ... and you pursue him to rescue the herds.

Would that you and your party had perished in the pursuit.
Would that your maxim guns had stopped firing.
Let the men of God hungry for infidel blood hack you to pieces.
As you're partial in judging, let your mouth be cut off.
You've reduced my kinmen to poverty.
Would that you were cut off before the gu' rains.

We may note here that the Somalis attach significance to the coincidence of the curse on Corfield and his death a few months later. They do not in fact speak of it as a mere coincidence but as something of a cause and effect, believing, as they do, in the power of the poetic curse to influence events.

Corfield’s success with the friendly clans may have given him a false sense of invincibility, for he was drawn into an engagement with a large Dervish raiding party at Dulmadaba near Godwysen on 9 August 1913. Although the constabulary fought courageously, they were overwhelmed and savagely cut up, Corfield being killed in action. The Derwishes sustained considerable losses but proudly carried off the footted stock and Corfield’s severed arm as a war trophy.

On arrival at the war, Isma'il Mire, one of the commanders of the raid, composed a gubur, the second in the series, ‘Residing in Taleh’, celebrating the success which attended his operation. We observed earlier that this poem seems to have been composed without the Sayyid’s permission, for it evidently got its author into trouble with his master. The Sayyid is said to have censured his disciple by delivering a critique on the poem, praising it as a work of an accomplished gabbar (poet), but mildly protesting that the gubur did not include vivid details concerning the manner of Corfield’s death. Isma’il Mire observed with convenient humility that he was the work of amateur enthusiasm but that he hoped the master would compose a poem worthy of the occasion. More Derwishes joined Isma’il Mire imitating the Sayyid to recite a gubur, whereupon he reportedly burst into hysterical laughter, leapt his fuzzy beard with unawed animation and addressed a valedictory message to Corfield’s severed arm. The resulting poem named ‘Koofit’, a Somali corruption of ‘Corfield’, should therefore be viewed as an epistle sent to the souls in the Other World:

You have died, Corfield, and are no longer in this world.
A merciless journey was your portion.
When, Hell destined, you set out for the Other World Those who have gone to Heaven will question you, If God is willing;
When you see the companions of the faithful and the jewels of Heaven,
Answer them how God tried you.
Say to them: ‘From that day to this the Derwishes never ceased their assaults upon us.
The British were broken, the noise of battle engulfed us;
With fervour and faith the Derwishes attacked us.’
Say: ‘They attacked us at mid-morning.’
Say: ‘Yesterday in the holy war a bullet from one of their old rifles struck me.’
And the bullet struck me in the arm.’
Say: ‘In fury they fell upon us.’
Report how savagely their swords tore you.

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Show these past generations in how many places the daggers were plunged:
Say: 'Friend,' I called, 'have compassion and spare me!' Say: 'As I looked fearfully from side to side my heart was plucked from its sheath.'
Say: 'My eyes stiffened as I watched with horror; The mercy I implored was not granted.'
Say: 'Striking with spear-heads at my mouth they silenced my soft words; My ears, straining for deliverance, found nothing; The risk I took, the mistake I made, cost me my life.'
Say: 'Like the war leaders of old, I cherished great plans for victory.'
Say: 'The schemes the dinjwas planted in me brought my ruin.'
Say: 'When pain racked me everywhere Men lay sleepless at my shrieks.'
Say: 'Great shouts acclaimed the departing of my soul.'
Say: 'Beasts of prey have eaten my flesh and torn it apart for meat.'
Say: 'The sound of swallowing the flesh and the fat comes from the hyena.'
Say: 'The crows plucked out my veins and tendons.'
Say: 'If stubborn denials are to be abandoned, then my clansmen were defeated.'
In the last stand of resistance there is always great slaughter.
Say: 'The Dervishes are like the advancing thunderbolts of a storm, rumbling and roaring.'

The 'Epistle to the English Woman,' intended for Richard Corfield's sister, is another in the series and I have already cited this work as an example of polemical excesses which nearly overwhelmed the otherwise valid points in the poem.

Corfield's biographer, H. F. P. Batterby, seems unwittingly to have entered the poetic contest. Although there is no evidence that he was aware of the literary warfare at work on the Somali side, he opened his biography with a poem by a certain Sidney Low that admirably fits into the vitriolic properties of pastoral polemics. A blend of passionate eloquence and biting criticism, 'Beyond these Voices' is the author's attempt to defend his subject against defamation by officialdom - Corfield was attacked by the Colonial Office as rash and overbold - and to pay tribute to a 'gallant soldier' who admittedly fell as 'Englishmen should fall' in an 'obscure desert,' while serving the empire:

We strive to pierce the veil, and deem, Not wholly vain it is, the dream

To reassert here the seriousness with which Somalis view the poetic curse, and the mixture of awe and contempt in which they hold the composer and user of curse, would be to restate the obvious. What needs to be re-emphasized, perhaps, is the tacit ethical code that poetic invocation of evil should be used sparingly, if it must be used at all. There is about the curse an element that boomerangs, a sort of 'he who lives by the curse shall perish by the curse.' And so it was, in the view of some Dervish observers, with Muhammad 'Abdillah Hasan.

According to Isma'il Mire, the Sayyid's right-hand man who was lucky enough to survive the violent demise of Dervishism, the collapse of the holy war was directly attributable to the Sayyid's heavy-handed treatment of the Dhulmahshe Khayr people, a clan of mullahs whom Somalis believe to enjoy divine protection. From 1916 onwards, the Khayr people were repeatedly harried by the Dervishes, as were most clans in northeastern Somaliland, partly to give an edge to the Dervishes' new policy of what might be termed 'subjugation by force.' In his 'Road to Harar' ('Jidka Adari Loo Maro'), composed around 1914, a poem, as one observer put it, 'dripping with blood,' the Sayyid declared that henceforth he would make the Somalis 'pay him homage by the point
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of the spear' (waran 'aarad). And the violent chaos which followed showed that his was far from being an idle threat. In the relevant portion of his 'Reward of Success', Isma‘il Mire claimed:

Again and again the Sayyid made war and people helped him; Thousand upon thousand, all with white turbans, he brought to the battle of Beerdiga.

But what brought his downfall was the day he destroyed the Khayr people.

Oh men, pride brings disaster: let that be remembered. Few could have been more aware than Isma‘il Mire, the Dervish warrior who experienced at first hand the cataclysmic early months of 1920, that what brought Sayyid Mahammad’s 'downfall' was the combination of British might and a smallpox epidemic which ravaged the Dervishes by turns. Yet Isma‘il Mire, like many other observers of the movement including contemporary ones, would seem to place more weight on the transcendental cause of the collapse than on the immediate: the Sayyid, they would maintain, disobeyed the divine mandate by ordering the indiscriminate massacre of washqais and innocent folk. This charge against the Sayyid of estrangement from the 'proper' course and of incurring concomitant divine displeasure is reflected in the work of the Durbahaazi poet, Hasan Shill, whose stabber-poem is associated in the minds of some with the fall of the Sayyid. Stripped of stock by the Dervishes, the poet fled to Hobyo with a band of refugees where he is alleged to have despatched his epistolary malediction around 1918:

O Lord, we pray to thee
Bring death on the man [the Sayyid].
Or make him insane.
Or guide him to the true faith,
Or turn him over to
The infidels that seek his life.
Lord, do not choose this man
Above all thy people.

Indigenous sources who tend to place faith in the efficacy of the poetic curse are quick to make a mystical linkage between this and similar invocations of evil brought on by Dervish excesses and the demise of the movement the following year. While making a seasoned assessment of the real causes which terminated the struggle—war, internal strife, pestilence—they nevertheless point to the curse as a contributing cause. To them, the relationship between the actual cause and the transcendental does not involve an absolute dichotomy, but rather a situation in which the one serves as the agent of the other. Through their intemperate use of power, these sources would argue, the Dervishes incurred a curse—therefore, catastrophe came upon them.

It is the description of this catastrophe which constitutes the central message of 'The Will' ('Durdasaar'), Sayyid Mahammad’s last poem, composed in the closing months of 1920 shortly before his death. The 'Will', as the title implies, is a testimonial epistle, relating a frighteningly realistic account of the Dervish losses to the last British expedition and to the subsequent outbreak of the disastrous epidemic. It ends with a soberer, though strikingly prescient, prediction of colonial triumph over the Somalis. There is also an element of the 'Jim in 'The Will', the old warrior, at once combative and self-pitying, striving to alert his countrymen to the imminent catastrophe through the poetic word. After describing in vivid detail what he lost in men and property, the Sayyid posed a defiant challenge:

A beating we took, forced to flee, to swim in haste across the river.
Striped of stock, we reel, reduced to destitution. Rejoice, then, you lackeys who remained behind.
And an argument I will return to these people who revel in ceaseless banter, Oh men, folly leads to mental deterioration, Yet some love to indulge in profitless dispute.
I, on my own volition, chose to fight the infidels.
It was I who said to the filthy unbeliever: 'This land is not yours.' It was I who sought and found the prophet’s guidance.
It was I who rejected again and again the infidel’s offer to buy me out.
It was I who refused to sell my faith to gain the gates of hell.
And it was I who desired no status in the first of the two Worlds.

Then once again the old apostle of acrimony raised his head:
It was I who would not pack transport camels for the expeditions of the heathen.
It was I who would not carry their compass when they go to raid, And it was I who would not go before the white man as guide and scout.
It was I who would not assist the dirty unbeliever, I who would not succor the uniformed whites, I who would not be, like the greedy lidoor, the white man’s burden-bearing beast.
It was I who would not enter the house of pigs nor of dogs...
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Then the master-manipulator of clan politics sought to exploit the tribal differences of his opponents with a view to dividing the enemy alliance:

"O the pity the Daarood know not the trap being laid for them. The fools, they drummed and danced with joy when I was defeated. The fools, they sighed with relief. 'Lo, the Midwaal flees westward.'"

In this triplet the Sayyid was making a direct reference to a taunt song by his implacable enemy. 'Ali Duub, who, upon hearing of the defeat of the Dervishes, gloated over their fall with injurious malediction: 'How delightful it is to savour the defeat of your oppressor. Behold, the Mullah flees with the west wind.' In the response, the Sayyid was craftily trying to remind the Daarood 'Ali Duub that the defeat of the Sayyid who, as a fellow Daarood was after all a kinsman, might well usher in a domination of all the Daaroods, including 'Ali Duub's clan, by their ancient rivals, the Isaaq.

Finally, we hear the voice of the ardent nationalist who, contemptuous of clamorous politics and petty feuding, was aiming at higher things, notably, to awaken his sleeping countrymen to the loss of their land and liberty.

Oh, hear me, hear me, fellow Somalis Or refusing to hear, say comforting to yourselves: 'Let the madman rave.'

Here, my will to the prudent man, let the fool ignore it:

There never was a gain in treating with the whites;

You soften up the unbelieving white man and he is bound to deceive you.

One day you will come to regret the dirham [money] he is pouring over you.

First, he'll disarm you, he'll turn you into womenfolk;

Next, he'll commit you to his prison wards;

Then, he'll say to you under duress: 'Trade in the land for a little mammon.'

Last, he'll place a heavy load, like a pack donkey's, on your wretched backs;

Since in my flight I've gone beyond the plains of linsey and the hills of Harar,

What good will your gloating do you, your gloating over my predicament?

Behold, tomorrow he'll descend over you with his colonizing tools."

It is hoped that despite the loss in translation of the alliteration, rhythm and meter, something of the majesty, the truly moving power of the original comes through to the reader. The Sayyid did not live long enough to savor the effects, if any, that 'The Will' had on his countrymen. Whether it would have succeeded in deflecting the disaster, as did the Jibbaale series, or would merely have fallen on deaf ears, given the hardships which latter-day Dervishism caused in the land, is a matter for conjecture. 'With his death,' says an Ogadaan elder, 'we sustained the contradictory feelings of gloom and relief. Gloom that in his passing we lost an indefatigable fighter of imperialists; a great nationalist, a pillar of Islam and a brave kinsman. Relief that the terrible man, the haughty Mullah was no more.'

The significant thing is that Muhammad 'Abdille Hasan repeatedly sought to achieve in verse what he had failed to achieve in arms. The examples of Jibbaale, of the Tree-of-Bad-Counsel, of the Corfield series—in short, the constant poetic battles have, it is hoped, presented the reader with sufficient material to appreciate the importance of the poetic word to the success of Somali Dervishism. When defeated, the Sayyid dipped into his reservoir of rhymes at once to boost the morale of his broken army and to reduce his enemies to confusion. When victorious the poetic word was equally efficacious to celebrate the victory and more important, to solemnize it so that it became history. 'Victory without verse,' said Aw Duahir Afbarashi, 'was no victory but merely an ephemeral event.'

Both functions—inspiration of the faithful and denunciation of the foe—were necessary for the success, in fact the peculiar durability, of Somali Dervishism for the words of the poet were far from being idle utterances. They were no less important than the actual fighting, as the instances above have demonstrated. Even when his verse reflected the feeble and self-pitying cry of a discredited old warrior—which is in effect what the 'Jim' is—the Sayyid exercised profound influence over the hearts and minds of his countrymen through his rare powers of the tongue. Given the peculiar ways in which poetic diction influences the Somali environment, the Sayyid had the power, at least symbolically, to give life or withhold it, to save or damn, and to inspire men with that loyalty which enabled them to invoke his name not only in the heat of battle but at the cold hour of execution.
Myth and the Mullah

No character in recent Somali history has drawn so much attention from both foreign and indigenous writers as the Sayyid Muhammad 'Abdillah Hasaan, known in colonial literature as the 'Mad Mullah'. Yet, paradoxically, few have been misinterpreted and misunderstood more than this enigmatic sheikh who caused untold trouble for the British administration in northern Somalia, restricted the Italians to the south and harried Ethiopia's forces in the west for two decades (1900-20). The Sayyid and his movement have been so condemned on one hand and adulated on the other that it is hard for the student of Somali Derwishism to avoid either the unrestrained bias of anti-Dervish literature or the equally uncritical pro-Dervish publicity.

In the past, Western literature, British in particular, depicted Sayyid Muhammad 'Abdillah Hasaan as a 'maraudier a libertine, a profligate, and a cut-throat tyrant', whose 'oriental mind saw sensual pleasures as the natural rewards of earthly power' and whose fanatical movement 'spelt economic stagnation for Somaliland and ruin for its inhabitants'. Recently, however, another interpretation of the Somali Dervishes has gained momentum. The latter, chiefly propounded by Somali national leaders and popularized by historians, portrays Muhammad 'Abdillah Hasaan as 'a visionary, the father of the modern Somali nation', blocked at every turn by imperialist machinations in his attempts to unify the Somali nation. With the struggle against colonialism and the concomitant achievement of independence, it was only natural that Somali leaders should look back in their history to find a national hero whose legacy commands a continuing vitality for contemporary Somalis and for the task of nation-building. Muhammad 'Abdillah Hasaan is the only figure since the Genaaq Hirsi 'Will willa? ('Crazy Boy') of Jigjiga (ca 1800-50), and before him the sixteenth-century Muslim leader, Ahmad Garey (Mammad Gran), whose prestige cut across tribal lines. He has therefore been chosen to bridge the discontinuity between present nationalism and early twentieth-century resistance groups - hence the overrated tribute to the man and his movement.

The controversy in the historiography of Muhammad 'Abdillah Hasan begins with the traditional, Western, pejorative title, 'the Mad Mullah'. Although they did not invent the term, colonial writers certainly welcomed it as a fitting epithet portraying what they thought to be the man's manifest irrationality. In reviewing British literature of the period, one comes to realize how easy it was for the British imperial temper and taste to view Muhammad 'Abdillah Hasaan as a madman and, worse still, as an outlaw-chieftain of an isolated band of cut-throat robbers who supposedly had no appeal to the Somalis and no significance to the history of Somalia. Italian colonial opinion was a shade gentler to the Sayyid. In contrast to the British, the Italians did not characterize him as a monomaniac, but rather as a misguided savage prompted by an ideal to embark on an ill-advised course. Robert Hess quotes a revealing passage from Francesco S. Caroselli stating that the Italians found the Somali Dervish leader 'a little African Napoleon ... equal to the great Corsican perhaps only in his hatred of the English.' The colonial image of Muhammad 'Abdillah Hasaan changed abruptly in the wake of an independent Somalia and the consequent rise of Afro-centric historiography. Under the new interpretation, the term 'Mullah' has given way to 'Sayyid' (master). Likewise, the Dervish warriors are now called freedom fighters. The temptation is thus to err towards the other extreme, that of overstating the merits of the man and his movement. Demonstrative of the new trend is the banishing of the term 'Mad Mullah' from the vocabulary of contemporary historians and the introduction of terminology more appropriate to a nationalist hero, such as 'an African Napoleon'. Thus, after the efforts of I. M. Lewis, Robert Hess and, recently, B. G. Martin, the user of the word 'Mullah' in reference to the Sayyid runs the risk of being charged with historiographical infidelity.

The term 'Mad Mullah' had a rather innocuous beginning. Contrary to the common assumption held by many contemporary historians, its roots go back to Somali rivals of the Sayyid rather than to his colonial detractors. The label 'Mad Mullah' ('Wadaad Waal') was given to him by the inhabitants of Berbera who belonged to the Muslim religious order of Qadiriya. The Sayyid, as representative of the new and more puritanical Saalibiyah sect, was embroiled for two years (1895-7) in a disastrous theological dispute with Qadiriya notables, and it was they
who not only gave him the enduring epithet but drove him out of town in a less than honorable fashion.

The adjective 'Mad' was later given an official status in colonial writing by J. Hayes Sadler, the first British Consul General of the Somaliland Protectorate, who wrote in July 1899, that 'reports from the Dolfahantia, apparently on good authority, are to the effect that the Mullah has gone off his head.' Sadler added later on in a leisurely manner: 'The general opinion about the man is that he has gone religious mad.' The term 'Mullah' itself, as we have seen, was one of a group of words imported from the Indian sub-continent which gained widespread currency in Somaliland in the 1890s.

It appears that while Somalis had in mind in creating the phrase had no relation to what the British thought it meant. When Somalis speak of someone as being mad (waalint), they may be expressing a variety of concepts, beginning with the recklessness characteristic of the 'mad brave' (geela waalint). The renunciation of worldly concerns in favor of a transcendent mystery characteristic of the Sufi (suuf) is a Sufic concept, as is being slightly touched, a little queer but not really mad (sahaf). Finally, genuine insanity must be mentioned. Some of these traits are admired in a leader, especially those of the 'mad brave' and the mystic. The wide-spread zeal of the Somalis combined the inner serenity of the Sufi with the death-defying recklessness of the warrior.

At one end of the spectrum of the nationalist literature are the works of such Somali writers as Ahmad ‘Abdallah Riirash and Sheikh Jaama ‘Umar Tiye, whose accounts of the Sayyid and the Dervishes tend to border on panegyrics. To them, the Sayyid is a founding father. In assessing his career, these Somali writers are inclined to compare Sayyid Mahmud ‘Abdulle Hasan to Prophet Muhammad of Arabia. To fortify their argument of the heroic qualities of the Sayyid, they point to the 'three things' which the Sayyid shared with the Arabian Apostle: the name, the age (at which they began their respective ministries) and, the propensity to wage jihad. The dutiful Sheikh Jaama has even undertaken a spirited effort to bowdlerize the Sayyid’s poetry, pruning away obscenities from some poems while suppressing from publication others which could not be so redeemed.

At the other end of the spectrum of the literature sympathetic to the Dervishes, are the works of Professors Robert L. Hess and I. M. Lewis, two circumstantial authors whose accounts are quite clearly the outcome of careful research. Lewis’ work came out in 1965 and was part of his general effort to reconstruct Somali history from the late nineteenth century to independence – to my knowledge, the only such effort by a contemporary author. With a judicious combination of archival and field research, Lewis deployed here the same levelheaded critical judgment that made his Pastoral Democracy a landmark in the study of northern Somali pastoralism. Taken together the two books present the most useful account of Somali Dervishism. Hess’s came out in 1968 as one of the political biographies of six Eastern African leaders. The reader who wishes to have a brief but competent summary of Somali Dervishism would do well to start by consulting their timely essays. While we remain indebted to these notable achievements, it may be in order to point out that both authors give us, on occasion, sufficient grounds to quibble.

Lewis at times reveals his professional bias: as a social anthropologist, he has a measure of difficulty in resisting the temptation to explain the Dervish movement in terms of 'kinship' ties and 'political marriages' Professor Hess’s work, on the other hand, may be said to stem from the 'archival connection' and is characterized by a limiting dependence on documentary sources, and, in particular, on Italian archives. Hess was one of the first contemporary scholars of the Horn of Africa to gain access to the Italian archives and he used this opportunity along with his proficiency in Italian to increase our knowledge of Italian colonialism in Somalia in general and the Italian viewpoint on the Dervishes in particular.

H. J. Martin and ‘Abd as-Sabur Marzaq (the latter an Egyptian author) may be considered as belonging to a separate category in their interpretation of the Dervishes, in the sense that both emphasize the 'religious connection' in the rise of Mahamud ‘Abdulle Hasan. In their study of the movement, one detects echoes of J. Spencer Tringham’s interpretation of the role of Sufi brotherhoods as being instrumental in late-nineteenth-century Islamic revivalism in Africa. Behind the rise of the Somali Dervishes, they see a rise of militant Islam in Northeast Africa (a point also brought out by Hess) which they treat as part of a general religious reawakening, 'an anti-Western ferment running through African Islam,' generated in part by the imposition of Euro-Christian rule on Muslims and Muslim lands.

The comparison between Marzaq and Martin stops here. For the Egyptians, essentially a traditionalist, a chronicler more than an interpreter, seeming to give a disconcerting stress to the miraculous and the mystical in the Somali leader. Martin, by contrast, provides a perspicacious assessment as well as an erudite narrative of the Somali resistance struggle and he is cautious in both, examining the movement along with other African movements of its genre, such as the Uwaysiyya of Sheikh Uways Mahamad of East Africa, the Sanusi of Libya and the series of North African and West African reformist jihads.

Martin had access to some of Sayyid Mahamud’s Arabic works,
mainly his two polemical epistles, 'Risala Biyamal' ('Letter to the Biyamal') and the 'Qamri al-Mu'ânidin' ('The Suppression of the Rebelious'). His chief contribution, however, seems to be his grasp of the subtle shades of doctrinal differences and trends of thought in various schools of Islamic mysticism, such as the Wahhabis-influenced cluster of neo-Sufis (Ahmadiyas, Saviusiyas, Tijanis) as opposed to classical Sufism (Quadiriyas-related). His attempt, furthermore, to interpret the Sayyid's intellectual development in the light of neo-Sufist influence and his elucidation of the concept of intercessory powers of saints (tawwâb) as having been the basis of much of the doctrinal conflict between the Quadiriya and Sââhiyâ brotherhoods, yield, in my view, fruitful results.

Martin, however, fails to address the dimension of the Sââhiyâ brotherhood which seems to me to have been of more importance to the success of the Dervish movement. This is the organizational dimension. While correctly perceiving the radical innovation in the form of centralized, hierarchical organization which these mystical orders represented, he stops short of stating the important implication of such an innovation for the Somali movement: that in converting the Sââhiyâ brotherhood into a political movement, Sayyid Muhammad adopted its hierarchical model which enabled him to create a large-scale organization. This allowed him to surmount the great weakness in Somali clan politics arising from the traditional absence of any centralized political authority.

The socio-political structure of the Dervishes, as noted earlier, resembled to a marked degree that of a Muslim brotherhood.24 The Sayyid distinguished his followers, whom he called Dervish or 'âkhwân' (brethren) from the clans, whom he called 'Somalis'. For him the latter term evidently carried a derogatory connotation, reminding him of pastoral egalitarianism, clanlessness and decentralizing tendencies.

By now the reader may be inclined, with some justice, to regard my approach to the study of Muhammad 'Abdîle Hasan as the 'literary connection'. And such an inference, though not wholly accurate, would not be unjust in view of my sustained emphasis on the Sayyid's oratory powers as in large measure explaining both the surprising durability of the Somali Dervishes in the face of overwhelming odds and Sayyid Muhammad's continued grip on the reins of power despite numerous attempts within the Dervish leadership to unseat him. While recognizing the multiple factors which went into the making of the complex character and circumstances of the Sayyid, I have tended to stress his powers of persuasion along with his religious prominence as playing key roles in his success in forging, out of a multiplicity of clans hitherto at war with one another, a united, fighting front—a front which demonstrated a remarkable cohesion for twenty-two years, during which numerous military reverses were sustained.

The spiritual prestige and oratorical finesse with which the Sayyid seems to have been blessed are two assets essential to success in Somali pastoral society. The one, namely religion, gave him the legitimacy for leadership and the other, namely political oratory, gave him the practical tool to exercise leadership. To generalize, the pastoral Somalis are by temperament easily moved, and British colonialists had occasion to regret 'excitability',25 as one of the besetting sins' of the Somalis. A politician endowed with poetic oration and a proper set of spiritual credentials is thus in a strong position to excite their imagination, and to capture their hearts and minds.

2 The Master Polemicist

Sayyid Muhammad 'Abdîle Hasan was possessed of those qualities which make for powerful influence. His gift for public speaking, his ability to fuse thought and feeling into verbal expression are proverbial among the Somalis. As for poetry, a field in which he faced a legion of notable competitors from among his countrymen, some say he was 'peerless'26 and his 'noble lines' which are commonly quoted throughout the Somali peninsula provoked strong emotions in the past as they continue to be a source of inspiration for many today. In this connection, J. Spencer Tringham is correct for the most part, I believe, when he observes that Muhammad 'Abdîle Hasan 'was a master of eloquence and excelled in the art of composing impromptu poems which so readily inspire and inflame the Somalis'.27 To be sure, the Sayyid's verse did inspire and inflame the Somalis, but it was far from being an 'impromptu' art, representing as it did a consciousness production of a complex form of literature which sought to fuse ideas with verbal beauty in such a manner as to produce certain effects in the hearer. Behind the seeming spontaneity and vitality of the reciter of pastoral verse are the composer's long hours of patient labors. The Sayyid was fond of observing, it is said, that he composed his verse to 'show the truth of his position'28 and the 'falsehood' of that of his opponents.

I have said that Sayyid Muhammad's oral poetry was committed verse and that it was utilized in accordance with traditional poetic uses: either to enhance his position or to discredit that of his opponents. That he was able to do this reveals as much about the Sayyid's oratorical powers as about the influence of verbal communication among his people. Yet to assert here the power of the spoken word among the pastoral Somalis is hardly to make a unique claim for them. Words, in print or spoken,
have continued to prove powerful in all of mankind’s societies, from the ancient Greeks to the present. It is in recognition of this power that modern governments have come to rely so heavily on the artful use of words in their public relations activities, to sell their policies to their own peoples, to promote the interests and aspirations of their nations to other nations, and to fight off hostile propaganda. It is the power of words which gives so much influence to the ultimate persuaders of modern society, the press and related media of today’s mass-consumer cultures. In the words of a former director of the US Information Agency: ‘If this country believes that the end of the day will be carried not by force of arms but by force of persuasion, the job we do is key to our survival. I for one am persuaded that we have no alternative but to use our language as a weapon’.

The expanded democratization of the political process and the corresponding rise in the importance of public opinion for politicians may have given special significance to the role of words as persuaders in the West. Yet the American’s observation may well hold true for virtually all egalitarian societies, modern or primitive, industrialized or economically backward. Where the citizenry must be persuaded rather than coerced, the skillful use of words has proved essential to politicians.

What seems to give some uniqueness, or at least a sense of particularity, to the case of the Sayyid and the Somalis concerns the art medium which the Somali leader harnessed to exercise his verbal skills. The employment of poetry for the purpose of ‘public persuasion’, in effect for propaganda uses, may provoke a reflex suspicion in many, in view of the bad name which the Nazis have given the word ‘propaganda’. Yet one man’s propaganda may be another’s ‘truth’, and the Sayyid for one, was inclined, it is said, to observe, apparently with deep conviction, that in his poetry he labored for the ‘sincerest expression of truth’. The pursuit of this goal, the ‘sincerest expression’, on occasion runs not with the Sayyid, as we have seen, leaving an unpleasant stultifying effect on his lyrics, bringing to perilous heights the element of the preachy, the self-righteous, and the piously ignignant. Thus the imposition of the ‘truth’ on the poems, at times, denies them the opportunity to breathe freely, to speak for themselves. Slaughter, the Sayyid’s version of the truth, they are in danger of being anathomized by righteousness.

Despite his professedly steadfast dedication to an ‘honest’ exposition of the truth, the Sayyid’s acrimonious method of obtaining that objective is likely to ruffle the advocates of the doctrine of ‘art for art’s sake’ – the notion that the ‘creative process’ is something too personal and, by implication, too ‘noble’ to be subjected to collective or mass enterprises.

In the extreme manifestations of this doctrine, good poetry, or for that matter good art, is equated with individualistic art. Detached, stand-alone and often opaque, this kind of art is viewed as a highly ‘individual skill’ pre-ordained, as it were, to be the exclusive possession of a favored few, the cultured elect, and has therefore nothing to say to or about simple folk and their ways.

An argument about the origin, growth and ‘proper’ role of literature does not belong here; though it may be in order to note simply that a cross-cultural examination of the subject may well reveal that social or political commitment in the arts does not necessarily preclude quality, that poetry need not be detached from vital community concerns in order for it to be good and that one of the ancient, perhaps chief, functions of the creative skills has been to instruct, to guide men and women to the ‘truth’. In any event, even among modern thinkers of Europe and America who, by and large, the view of ‘art for art’s sake’ has come to hold sway, the Sayyid would find an occasional comrade. One such comrade was Lenin, the Russian thinker-revolutionary-statesman, whose advocacy of the concept of ‘Socialist Realism’ or ‘party-mindedness’ and whose call for the subordination of letters and images to the imperatives of the party betrays much kinship to the Sayyid’s relentless attempts to exploit ‘my mighty tongue for the holy war.

The question of ‘message’ in poetry does not appear to have exercised Sayyid Mahammad’s mind – he had inherited a poetic tradition, a way of life in which the ‘message’ is central to verbal creativity. His chief concern was to humiliate his opponents by ‘out-arguing them’ and the principal function of his poetry was to refine the quality of the contest by formalizing the language of argument. In the discussion of the institution of godis (blood and speech vendetta), I pointed out how the formalization of language through poetry represents power, mainly because poetry gives language a power that prose does not have, that among the pastoral Somalis an attack in verse is considered as injurious as a physical attack. Thus to vilify a man in verse is to violate his soul, to shatter, as the pastoralists put it, his ‘mirror of honour’.

Thus while the Sayyid may give the glory to God for the origins of his acrimonious style – ‘Allah taught me the art of abuse’ – he was in fact more indebted to the pastoral traditions of poetic combat which taught him the usefulness of ‘out-arguing’ an opponent. Pastoral poetry thrives on pastoral speech vendetta.

An examination of his verse reveals that he intended to convey three types of power as the cardinal virtues of his poetic art. The first was what
we may term the 'elemental power'—fire, water, wind, wild beasts and
so on. Based on a claim to sheer physical ferocity, this kind of theme is
often dealt with in the 'boast' sections of his poems.
Boasting is so regular a feature of Somali traditional verse that almost
every pastoral poem contains a boastful part, often the introductory
section or that next to it, in which the poet employs high-flown, grandio-
quent language to praise his poetic merits. The strategy is to intimate
one's opponent through grandiose self-praising.
Such a tradition seems to have suited the Sayyid's temperament and he
sought to overawe his enemies through the use of verbal extravagance,
which, of course, he could frequently back up with the sword. A passage
from The Scourge of Infidels illustrates the use of elemental power.
Say: these, my four lines betoken the potency of my poetic ways,
Say: as I let them roll down the hills,
They come to the ear as the boom of heavy guns and the thunder
of fired bullets,
Say: they engulf the opponent with darkness as of torrential
rains,
Say: they come with the rumble of thunder and the flash of lightning,
Say: they strike with the force of gale winds and the gathering
clouds of rain,
Say: they are the fury of the floods and the hurricane sweeping
by ever so closely.
Say: they are the quaking sea, the raging waves and the roaring
rapids of Eyle.
Water, wind, and fire—while these are terrible forces possessed with
power at once fierce, impersonal and unpredictable, they also represent a
benevolent power without which life could not exist. As they are the
agents of death and destruction, so are they the source of life and pros-
perity. The poet claims that his words possess similar properties: gentle
and life-giving to friends but death-dealing to enemies.
In another poem he likens his power to the ferocity of the lion and the
fury of fire burning out of control:
If the blaze of the fire I kindled does not consume them...
The English dogs do not flee in headlong panic...
If I do not send my harry46 and other traitors to the Other World...
If I do not cut off necks as the prowling lion,
If all these things do not come to pass,
Then, let it be said that I am not a true Muslim!47
Then there is the mystical power which Somalis associate with his person

and poetry. In chapter 2, I outlined five categories of curse which the pas-
toralists recognize as having potent effects: the curse of all living but
powerless beings against powerful and oppressive ones, the curse of God,
angels and prophets against sinners and troublemakers, the curse of
parents against unruly children, the curse of the man of God against
offending individuals and groups, and, finally, the curse at the command
of the poet. Both as a poet and a man of God, the Sayyid was said to
command all these categories of curse, and numerous stories are related
of how he disabled enemies by pronouncing a stouter poem on them or
by merely "concentrating an angry look on them."48 Typical of the
poetic curse is the following verse which he reportedly pronounced on
his brother-in-law, Faarah Mahamud Suguule, who defeated from the
Dervish cause after the disaster of the Tree of Bad-Counsel:

Oh, you Twisted Lip, the traitor,
Twisted Lip, the ruffian,
If you say, 'I would have worldly gains',
May Allah deny you even a donkey;
And if you say, 'I would have faith',
May the Lord blind you to it;
And if you say, 'I would run for war',
May the Lord hobble your legs.
The deserter had an insipidous chance encounter some years later
with a party of Dervish scouts, who recognized him and had him executed.
Although Faarah Mahamud Suguule fell to what we may call cold-
blooded assassination, indigenous sources would make much of the
Sayyid's curse which mystically 'hobbled his legs'49 and rendered him
unable to flee his foes.
Finally, there is the spiritual power which the Sayyid claimed, set
him and his poetry above all others. On numerous occasions, in his
 correspondence with the colonial powers and rival Somalis, he referred
to himself as the 'Poor Man of God',49 and the phrase does a great deal
to shed light on the Sayyid's thinking about the long struggle and the
part he played in it. He seems to have seen himself as a sort of 'lone
voice in the wilderness', a martyr-champion defending the cause of
God against an alliance of infidels and apostate Somalis. He was afflic-
ted and persecuted on all sides, he claimed, because of his steadfast dedication
to the truth. Yet, he argued, although he was outnumbered and outgunned
by the enemy, he was confident of ultimate victory because the source of
all power was on his side. Thus, in 'The Scourge of Infidels', he shifts
back and forth between the image of weakness in worldly terms and
that of strength through God.
O Lord, we are endangered on all sides, Threatened we are, for the nations have joined in alliance against us, Lo, even the Greeks would point their lethal arrows at us. And we did nothing to earn their hatred, only out of wickedness they oppress us. If they had any cause to attack us, we'd understand and be satisfied; Lord, they persecute us because we called on them to come to the faith. Yet it does not take the 'afflicted man of God' very long to be transformed into a holy fighter (ghazi) leading the divine host against unbelievers and backsliders:

And I'll react against the malice and oppression unleashed upon me, Yes, I am justified to smite, to sweep through the land with terror and fury, And I'll go out to make the country free of infidel influence. I am a man frenzied by indignation, who will not spare even a little maiden, And whatever destruction I wrought will be sheer pleasure to me, And he upon whom I fall will be the unfortunate of the land. Like a handful of grain I'll scoop up the cowardly Ogadaen, And if I do not halt the ceaseless jabs upon them, By the Lord's will, they'll be reduced to nothingness; they'll shrink as dried-up pools.

His contention that he was in league with God, and his opponents with the devil, was probably Sayyid Muhammad's most effective argument, the 'cutting edge' as an unsympathetic observer put it, 'of his malicious tongue.' This observer continued:

Concealing his true and life-long ambition of imposing his illegitimate authority under the banner of an alien sect in the country, he wore the cloak of religion and nationalism, two ideals which he worked with great propaganda effect.

To judge from his verbal techniques, the Sayyid knew how to 'wear his cloak' to advantage, marshaling in his poetic oratory those elements of the struggle on which there was almost unanimous agreement and which were bound to undermine the position of his opponents - thus, he would taunt them:

If the land is your land, why aren't you its government?
including longing for God (shawq), fellowship with Him (tanı) and satisfaction with all He desires (rada).**

The Sufism which Sayyid Muhammad inherited seems to have been partly influenced by these strains of early Islamic mysticism, but his was also a reformed mysticism, mainly the result of the nineteenth-century Muslim revival in the form of reformist brotherhoods which, according to R.G. Martin, received some influence from the puritanical doctrines of the Arabian Wahhabis. In contrast to the broad, on occasion allegorical, interpretations of the Qur'an and the Traditions favored by earlier Sufis, neo-Sufis tended to take a stricter, more literal approach in their interpretations of the faith. Neo-Sufism was, moreover, characterized by a militant puritanism, a concerted spiritual effort to return to the basics of the Shari'a. We had occasion to note how the Sayyid's attempts to 'purify' the faith from what he declared to be Qadiriya heresies entangled him in his unhappy quarrel with the inhabitants of Berbera.

The Sayyid's mystical imperatives clashed with his pastoral guile and pragmatism, to produce what one source called the 'tempestuous personality', which he came to manifest at times. Mysticism demanded a life of quiet and contemplation, the role in which circumstances cast him demanded constant action and involvement. The troops had to be fed, and that called for perennial raising of stock. Strategies had to be devised and battles fought, and that called for endless manoeuvres. Conspiracies needed to be guarded against, and this called for occasional execution of rivals. New recruits were to be enlisted, and that necessitated an unethical use of propaganda and publicity.

The Sayyid wanted wholeheartedly to satisfy both the pious tranquility of his faith and the stormy duties of his career as a warrior chiefman, and the dogged pursuit of these contradictory objectives led him, on occasion, into 'erotic behavior', which his enemies were quick to exploit as a sign of his manifest deception, or, worse still, as an incontrovertible 'proof' of his madness.** He maintained, evidently with conviction, that he was the 'Poor Man of God' who loved nothing more than to 'renounce this world** in his single-minded pursuit of 'higher things'. Yet he did not abstain from fulminating at 'this world', threatening to 'sink my spear** in the Somalis who had refused to join the cause. On one occasion he would be declaring that 'nothing pleased him more than to cause even a mild hardship to others, while on the next he would be on the move with the 'cavalry of terror', not sparing 'even a little maiden'.**

To his enemies, this - the inconsistency of word and deed - seemed all of a piece: he was the charlatan wazwand who wore the cloak of religion to achieve his goal of 'unabashed lust for power'.** The British sought to debunk his 'fraudulence' or 'insanity' by making much of the Sayyid's alleged claim that he could 'turn bullets to water'* and could hear with his 'own ears' what was being said about him in Berbera, a couple of hundred miles away. But for a Sufi to claim attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence was scarcely to betoken fraudulence or madness on his part, since he was operating, as Sufis often do, on a plane of reality where the real and the supernatural have a way of merging into each other without any apparent transition, in a world of 'miracles' and 'strange happenings' wholly perplexing to 'ordinary mortals'.** The Sayyid may have been convinced, even as he tried to convince others, of the sanctity of his person. He is said to have attributed his 'miraculous' ability to survive dangers to a life-saving gift he received in his seeker days, an enchanted book from a divine agent (who 'appeared' to him first in the form of a lizard and later as a lady) whom he had gallantly saved from death by thirst. The Sayyid may have believed in this tale, for indeed it is not out of character with other miracles he attributed to himself.

To the secular eye of the historian, this tale seems much in keeping with countless others of the Sayyid's deif tricks of psychic manipulation designed to foster in the Somalis, friends and foes alike, a belief in the invincibility of the 'divinely inspired' wazwand. He seems to have achieved some success in this, for there are some indigenous sources who, even today, cite this alleged 'protection of his person' by higher powers as the reason for his nimble talents in escaping the numerous attempts on his life.**

The Sayyid's allegiance to the mystical tradition had practical, on occasion, inauspicious, consequences for the movement. Against the advice of his generals, for example, he insisted on outfitting the troops with a white turban (dandhud), as was customary with Sufi traditional costume, and the implementation of the ill-conceived injunction marked his men out and made them an easy target for enemy fire. Although his military advisors are said to have repeatedly pleaded with him to discontinue the use of the 'suicidal uniform',** he would not yield to their remonstrances, on the grounds that to do so would be, in his mind, to violate the Sufi way.

At the battle of Jiebale, he had allegedly ordered the army to be arranged into two divisions of 6,200 men each, so that the number of each division would 'coincide with the number of verses in the Qur'an'.**

The mystical stunt might have proved harmless enough, had it not led to a heavy concentration of the men in one spot, and this together with the 'white heads' of the Dervishes is said to have helped the heavy guns of the enemy to strike with deadly accuracy.
Myth and the Mullah

The Sayyid was given, it is said, to dreams and midnight revelations which, though boosting his prestige as a divinely inspired sheikh, occasionally undermined a rational execution of the struggle. He demanded his followers to call him 'Sayyid' (master), or 'Aabbe' (father) which must have struck the egalitarian pastoralists as an odd requirement. They were to greet him and one another on formal occasions with a prayer (dhikr-as-salaam) to his spiritual Master, to maintain a strict observance of the five daily prayers, to recite regularly the esoteric creed of the sect, and to uphold the practice of other mystical deeds which were difficult or impractical to comply with. And he punished severely for lack of compliance.61

Poet, mystic, warrior — he strove earnestly to be true to all the ideological cross-currents of his life, and when the urgings of these impulses coincided, he appeared to be an extraordinarily gifted man, equally endowed with poetic creativity, political craftsmanship and spiritual integrity. But when the underlying compulsions clashed, their strains became easily visible, making him appear somewhat erratic and unstable, an eccentric but amiable master to his followers, a vicious fraud to his foes.

The Sayyid's inner tensions, which no doubt influenced his outward behavior, made him vulnerable to misunderstanding and misinterpretation and prompted his enemies to describe him in contradictory terms. They condemned him by turns as a 'corrosive ascetic' and a 'sensitive libertine', a 'glamorous romantic' but also a 'fearful', a 'megalomaniac' whose 'unbounded hunger for power' drove him to 'kill and maim innocent women and children' and an ardent resister of colonialism 'who will forever live in the hearts of his fellow countrymen as a national hero', a 'mudarab' but one who was nevertheless 'accursed with a madness that was akin to genius'.62

While notable for the tone of rancor with which they were written, the contradictory adjectives would seem to signify something of the complexity and multifariousness of the Sayyid's personality. He tried to please the several masters of his life. That he subjected himself to the exacting discipline — no less exacting than the one he subjected his followers to — which enabled him to impose order on his intermixtures of fierce emotions so that he managed to carry on with his arduous task for twenty-two years, should serve as a lasting monument to the strength of his character. His contradictions were the contradictions of a complicated personality. And while they do much to expose his frailties as a human being, they should do little to diminish his deserved reputation as one of the greatest Somalis of this century.

Myth and the Mullah

4 SAYYID MAHMAOUD'S LEGACY: AN APPRAISAL

Douglas Jardine's assessment sixty years ago of the Sayyid as 'forever living in the hearts of his fellow countrymen ... as a national hero' has proved highly prescient, in view of the exalted position which Sayyid Mahmood's legacy occupies in the Somalis' history of struggle for independence. That the Sayyid's image as father-founder of Somaliland nationalism overshadows his other, no less noteworthy, achievements has a certain measure of irony about it. For whatever courage, charisma and destiny made of his later career, he was first and foremost a man of religion.

From early in life when he began, like his forefathers, as a roving holy man, till his return to Berbera as the envoy of his Meccan mentor, to the waging of the holy war, the Sayyid's enduring passion had been to attain spiritual perfection. A corollary of his unrelenting quest for spiritual knowledge was his desire to regenerate his people's devotion to Islam. His perception that the 'spiritual laxity' of the rival Qaadiriya, protected by Christian overlords, stood in the way of spiritual reform fired his religious and patriotic sense of obligation and prompted him to conduct a jihad.

The national struggle which resulted from this momentous decision was thus primarily to achieve this end. Although he informed the British government of his intention to create his own sovereign state, he did not in fact establish a state structure which would survive his death. Although he harnessed to good advantage such favorable factors as the Somalis' antipathy to Euro-Abyssinian colonization and the hierarchical Saalihiya model, to forge out a national movement, yet topography, tradition and the pressure of hostile circumstances militated against the establishment of a durable state apparatus. And while he shared power with the ablest among his lieutenants, the government of the Dervishes remained fluid and personal in character.

From a practical standpoint, the Dervish movement was less than a dazzling success. Not only did the Sayyid fail in his stated objective of exacting discipline — no less exacting than the one he subjected his followers to — which enabled him to impose order on his intermixtures of fierce emotions so that he managed to carry on with his arduous task for twenty-two years, should serve as a lasting monument to the strength of his character. His contradictions were the contradictions of a complicated personality. And while they do much to expose his frailties as a human being, they should do little to diminish his deserved reputation as one of the greatest Somalis of this century.

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inspired, during the course of the struggle, to produce a magnificent body of oral poetry which has greatly enriched the Somali poetic tradition. It would doubtless have come as something of a revelation for British colonial officials to learn at the time that the man they dubbed the 'Mad Mullah' was doing for his language something comparable to what Shakespeare had done for theirs, and that the very poetic messages which, in their ignorance of the culture, they dismissed as incoherent, would become classics for the Somalis.

In the second place, the war, though destructive of life and property, broadened the Somalis' perspective, making them alive to the possibility of enterprises worthy of pursuit beyond the tribe. By bringing together the man of religion and the spear-bearer, the farmer and the pastoralist—men and women from diverse clans—into a common bond, the Derwish experience had a detribalizing effect. It forced its participants to see themselves as 'Derwishes' rather than as representatives of disparate clans. Hence, one of the long-lasting effects of the Derwish conflict was the development of pan-Somali ideas, from which the subsequent struggle for independence drew much inspiration. "The very idea of the nation," says a contemporary elder in a sentiment no doubt shared by many Somalis, "was inspired by the Derwish example."

Grudgingly, the British came to acknowledge his dynamism and tenacity of purpose. Wrote Jardine:

Faced by a European power, which was at once strong and anxious for peace, he was never tempted to abandon his ideals and come to terms. Even when he lost everything but his personal freedom, he scorned and scoffed at the extremely favourable peace terms that were offered to him . . . No misfortune broke his spirit . . . On due reflection, one must confess there is something to be said for the man who does not know when he is beaten.63

Long before the doctrine of 'black consciousness' was in vogue, Sayyid Mahmaad was an African leader who was a conscious black man, as his defiant verse clearly demonstrates:

It was I who would not assist the unbelieving whites,

I who would not be . . . the white man's burden-bearing beast;

It was I who would not enter the house of pig or of dogs . . .

The Derwishes may even have lent some inspiration to other resisters of colonialism in east and southern Africa. At least one militant group of Rhodesian blacks called attention to the Somali resistance in attempts to unify their own opposition to white settlers. 'If Lobengula had wanted to,' declared the speakers of the first black Rhodesian trade union in June 1929, 'he could have called on every nation to help him. He did not. That is why he was conquered. In Somaliland they are still fighting. That is because they are united. Let us be united.'

Manifestly, the Sayyid was aided in his task by his religious prestige and gift of political oratory. Yet it is doubtful that these factors would in themselves have been sufficient to overcome the political disunity and clanish discord inherent in the very fabric of Somali pastoralism. It took Sayyid Mahmaad's powers of charisma and personal resourcefulness to channel Somali discontent into a national front. During the movement was supra-tribal, nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the Sayyid exploited Somali clanishness when it seemed profitable to do so, taking good advantage of his paternal ties with the Ogaden and on one occasion, and his maternal ties with the Dulbahante on another. Sometimes he also played on the ancient rivalry between these Darood clans and the Isaaq, as evidenced by his poem, 'The Wolf':

O the pity! The Darood know not the trap being laid for them [by the Isaaq].

The fools, they drummed and danced with joy when I was defeated. The fools, they sighed with relief: 'Lo, the Wadadaab flees westward.'

His scathing poetic attacks on the Isaaq people—'the fate of the Isaaq is to remain forever as stupid as donkeys'—is not to be interpreted as a particular ill-will which the Sayyid had against this clan, but as mainly due to a fortuitous circumstance: as a coastal people, the Isaaq were more firmly under the colonial administration than were the inland Ogaden and Dulbahante peoples. Hence, they had little choice but to oppose him. The Sayyid's right-hand man, Haaji Sunjur, was an Isaaq, as were many in the khatama inner circle of advisors. His Ogadenin kin, too, came in for their share of poetic tirade when they offended the 'Poor Man of God'—'Like a handful of grain I'll scoop up the cowardly Ogaden'—as did the Dulbahante—'Until I had driven long spears through the shameless Reer Hagar (Dulbahante lineage).'

On the negative side, the war exacted a terrible toll from the Somalis, both in life and property. The twenty-one years of the Derwish eruption are generally remembered as a time of untold misery, a period, in the words of the poet, of 'universal perdition.'64 The Derwishes are likened to a 'black magic sweeping through the land' from which 'not a path hath escaped.' Raiding livestock with impunity on account of their superior force, the Derwishes helped to break down the moral sanctions regulating the external relations of the clans. Thus in the general demoralization of the land, the strong plundered the weak at will and the pastoral pastimes of feud and vendetta were unleashed with unprecedented ferocity, turning
northern Somalia into a land of 'prey and predator'. By a conservative estimate, the Dervish revolt and the colonial campaigns to put it down together caused the destruction of 200,000 lives, a casualty figure which must have had a terrible impact on a population that barely numbered a million.68

Of even more serious consequence for long-term Somali welfare, was the fact that the high cost of the war prejudiced the British Crown against the economic development of the Protectorate Somaliland, as I have stressed, came into British possession as a distant 'outpost of the Indian Empire'. The British reluctantly occupied the Somali coast mainly because they wanted to keep their traditional supply of meat for the Aden garrison from falling into French hands. Later the Protectorate came in handy when the British found they could use it as a bargaining chip with Ethiopia for higher imperial stakes. The high cost of suppressing the Dervishes encouraged even further the tradition of neglect and marginality with which Britain treated her Somali land possession. Lamented an administrator of the Protectorate soon after Dervishism came to an end.

All available government funds have been expended on the maintenance of military forces to meet a situation happily unparalleled elsewhere in British Africa. Nothing has been left for education, for the encouragement of agriculture, for development, or even a survey of the country's mineral resources. In the Sudan, the final destruction of the Dervish power left the country with 900 miles of railway, 900 miles of telegraph, and a flothia of Nile steamers wherefrom to promote economic development. But the greatest boon of all was the establishment of Gordon College... It is Somaliland's misfortune that her twenty-one-year war left her with nothing more than a few ramshackle Ford cars.69

The Dervish conflict also seems to have established the Somali in British eyes as the 'bad natives' of British East Africa. From the early nineteenth century onwards, British-Somali contacts were dominated by a series of misunderstandings, mutual suspicion and violent confrontations. Some of the spectacular events of the unhappy British-Somali relations include the pillaging by Somali tribesmen of several British vessels shipwrecked on the coast in the early nineteenth century, the devastating raid, again by Somali tribesmen, on Richard Burton and John Speke's ill-fated expedition to the Nile at Berbera in 1854, the attack on a British garrison in the 1890s by Tise Somali spearmen and the tactically violent which the British are trying to subdue the Juba lands of Somalia at the turn of the century.70 To each of these inci-

dents the British responded with massive reprisals. British colonial attitude toward the Somalis was partly shaped by these and similar incidents. The prolonged Dervish conflict, along with the general 'unreness' of the pastoralists who showed no perceptible reverence for British imperial might, helped to mark out the Somalis in colonial eyes as a 'bad breed of nati.' They were found to be 'treacherous, fainstical and vindictive.' The prevailing counsel for British officials whom misfortune destined to take charge of managing the Somalis was to minimize any involvement in the affairs of these 'wild' clans so as to 'avoid getting killed'.71 The result was a general colonial antipathy toward the Somalis.

It is certain [wrote Sir Charles Eliot with a touch of Victorian paternalism] that the average Englishman has little sympathy for the Somali. He tolerates a black man who admits bis inferiority, and even those who show a good fight and give in; but he cannot tolerate dark colour combined with an intelligence in any way equal to his own. This is the secret of the universal dislike of the... Somali among East African officials.73

The Somalis may have paid a high price for their recalcitrance, not only in the form of economic and educational stagnation, but, more seriously, in the establishment of what I. M. Lewis calls a 'tradition of Anglo-Ethiopian collaboration against Somali interests'.74 At any rate, there was no voice sympathetic to the Somalis in British officialdom, no Bishop Oldham, as in the case of Kenya, to raise a protest voice against the British Government's casual but systematic concessions of Somali pasturlands to Ethiopia.

Yet it would be unfair and empirically untenable— to judge Sayyid Muhammad and his movement by events which at best have tenuous links with his resistance struggle. To suggest that passive acceptance of British colonialism would have made English friends for the Somalis is to engage in flimsy theorizing, too speculative to be of consequence to this discussion. The Sayyid is today a towering figure in Somali eyes, the hero of Somali nationalism and one of their finest poets. If he failed in his objective of ridding his country of alien rule, his failures are regarded as 'failures of the tragic hero'—at once sad and inspiring.

The Sayyid was more than a nationalist. He was a poet of awesome artistic force, too, and his contribution to the heritage of Somali pastoral verse is judged by many Somalis to be infinitely superior to his nationalist contribution. He inherited a poetic tradition thriving with life and vitality, and he did much to advance the frontiers of that tradition by transmitting to it in image and metaphor the versatility and sophistication
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of his educational and travel experience. It should be noted here that the Sayyid's period, in the history of Somali oral literature, produced pastoral bards of extraordinary craftsmanship, probably the single most concentrated outburst of talent in one generation. And when we think of bards like Raage Ugaas, Qamaan Bulhan, 'Ali Duuh, Salaan Arrabay and 'Ali Jaama Haabiil, we are reminded of the stiff competition which the Sayyid faced in the field. Nevertheless, although many Somalis would admire the craftsmanship of these men and would recognize their talents – individually or collectively – few would quarrel with the assessment of an educated Somali who spoke of the Sayyid as the 'high priest of Somali oral verse in this century'.

Owing to the strong connection between politics and oral poetry in pastoral tradition, the Sayyid deployed his verbal arts to great political advantage, using it to humiliate his (Somali) enemies and to enhance his power and prestige in the land. A thoroughgoing traditionalist, he showed in his verse the two sides of the pastoral bard: the artist and the polemical striving with each other for mastery of the poet's soul. His deep antipathy towards his country's colonizers, together with his contempt for their Somali collaborators, at times overwhelmed the artist in him, giving the polemical a free rein. Manifestly, the Sayyid's deeply flawed, even obscene poems – as for example 'The English Woman' (also called 'Corfield's Sister'), 'Diima', a rude attack on the Sayyid's wayward wife of the same name, and the equally vitriolic diatribe, 'A Prince's Daughter' ('Iza Boqor') on Sultan 'Ismaan's daughter whom the Sayyid spitefully castigated after she rebuffed his amorous advances – represent clear instances of polemical rancor. Inevitably, the quality of his verse suffered during these periods of excess and bitterness. But fortunately for Dervishism (and for the Somali poetic heritage) the Sayyid for the most part kept on a firm leash the polemical animal stirring menacingly within him, and the great mass of his poetry will not disappoint the seasoned listener. Indeed, in some poems – 'The Scourge of Infidels' (Gaala-Leged), 'The Double-Dealer' (Musuqmaasuk), 'The Herald of Good Tidings' (Bishaaaroyinkii Eebahay), 'A Hymn of Thanksgiving' (Mahade Haw Sheego), and 'The Will' (Dardaaran) – are notable examples – the grand themes of death and freedom which underlie them inspired the Sayyid to a grandeur of language and evocative power which surely must rank as splendid achievements by any literary standard. When rhythmic vigor and sweeping cadences blend well with flashes of insight – as they do in these poems – the Sayyid achieves virtuoso effects, and even moments of sheer delight. On such occasions we cannot but forgive his touching vanity exhorting us to 'hold fast to my noble utterance/Lest thou perish'.

Notes

Introduction

3 The 'sense of mission' in the Sayyid's thinking is discussed in chapter 5.
4 From the Sayyid's poem, 'The Will' (Dardaaran).
6 Ibid., p. 125.
7 I take up again in the opening pages of this chapter the question of the description of the Somalis by outsiders as a 'nation of bards'. For the moment, the interested reader may refer to the brief but perceptive anthology of numerous Somali poets by B. W. Andrzejewski and M. M. Lewis, Somali Poetry: An Introduction (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964).
8 For an articulate expression of this view, see Margaret Laurence, A Tree for Poverty (Nairobi: Eagle Press, 1954), pp. 1–3.
Chapter 1

6 The ratio of nomadic to urban Somalis has not as yet been reduced to reliable statistics but the official 'guess' is two nomads per one urban person.
8 The Benadairis essentially constitute the four coastal, southern Somali towns of Mogadishu, Merka, Brava and Kismayo. Unlike other Somalis, the Benadairis have been an urban community for centuries and are distinguishable from the pastoral Somalis by linguistic and economic differences.
9 See, for example, William Morgan, Population of Kenya: Density and Distribution (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1966), passim.
12 Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, pp. 4–7.
13 The Somali version of this prayer goes as follows: ‘Ilaahow in bog ku socota iyo in baaba’o ku socota iyo in boodda naga naje. Ilaahow, habbadii kal iyo mooyey dehdooda ku barida naga yee.’
14 A town in the Ogadeen, a region in Eastern Ethiopia currently disputed by Ethiopia and Somalia.
15 Shabeel River, whose verdant basin is inhabited by Somalis who resent Ethiopian overlordship in their traditional pasturelands.
16 The central plains of the Ogaden.
17 This note and similar ones below are based on a 6-month period of field work (1977) in Somalia and Kenya which I conducted as part of the research for my 1979 history dissertation (Northwestern University): a project whose outcome forms the core of this book. The project was funded jointly by the Social Science Research Council and Northwestern’s Graduate School. The part of these notes (hereafter to be called Fieldnotes) utilized for this book is cited as follows: first, I cite the name of the informant, the word ‘Fieldnotes’, then the place and date of interview. Thus, in the present example: Sheikh 'Aaqib 'Abdullahi Jaama', Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 10 April 1977.
18 The Somali says: 'Nabigi baa isagoo 'arayso oo kaba la' maray duulkeena. Markaasuu haa baaray, markaasaa duulki noqday qodah, dagah, iyo qorrah: The prophet, angry and without shoes, passed through our land. He cursed it: hence, the scourges of drought, stones and thistles.'
22 During my childhood, we didn’t drink water and didn’t miss it for months, as camel milk is both nutritious and thirst-quenching. On occasion it is even used for bathing. It is also fed to less hardy animals like horses.
23 ‘Goodir’ is also the Somali name for Greater Kudu.
24 I am not sure how much a baby camel weighs. As a teenager, I used to carry them over a distance of about seven miles a day, a rather exhausting task, but I did not think much of it then.
25 Unlike sheep and goat or cow milk, camel milk produces hardly any butter when it is churned. That is highly nutritious is indicated by the fact that nomads who consume it as a staple food do not diminish in strength when they have a sufficient supply of it. They are usually taller and skinner than cultivators and townspeople, but they are no weaker and their powers of endurance border on the phenomenal. A pastoralist is capable of marching several days, covering great distances, with little or no food and drink. This firsthand observation is confirmed by the findings of scientific study. See, for example, Ivo Dronandi, Il Cammello: Storia Naturale (Florence: Istituto Agricolo Coloniale Italiano, 1936), passim.
26 For more about Somali camels, see Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, pp. 35–88.
27 ‘Ha targaada sida tooja geel tuurin baw Qoran c’ from ‘Ali J. Haabii’s poem, ‘Ma laynigaasaa mahdi ah’.
28 Cattle also play a major part in the Somali economy in the south.
29 It turns cold at night, especially in the early morning when the camp starts marching, and terribly hot in the day. In the night, we used to dig a hole in the sand and bury our bodies up to the head to keep ourselves warm.
30 Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, pp. 2–3.
32 ‘Geel hadba heru ku jiraa,’ ama ‘Geel ama hera Isaaq ama hera Ogadeen buu jiraa.’
33 Ahmad Guray (1800–1850), best known for his self-pitying verse on ageing.
34 Name for camel.
35 Water made holy by the blessing of a wadadul or a man of God, deemed to be efficacious in preventing diseases and other misfortunes.
36 An anonymous poet of the 1850s.
37 ‘Hagoonan’ means in Somali ‘to cover one’s face’, and Somalis say he who shared in the booty of Hagoonan camels covered his face with pride, while he who missed that great event covered his face with anger and remorsefulness.
38 ‘Sidii geel dukaan qaba miyaan ‘adadya ku daabnaadaay.’
39 ‘Sidii geel ubaaki laga hiray miyaan oo oolay oo reemaay.’
40 ‘Geelka haduul daranyahay laba nin dhoogtayey. Wah kaloo loo darandooyin dama ma yeeshaa.’
41 ‘Haddalkaagii waan u guubay.’
43 As an example, see Raage Ugaas’s geeraa, ‘Tribute to a Loved Beast’, Yusuf Meyeaq Samatar, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 26 March 1977. Cite. Sayyd Mahammod’s praise geeraa of horses in Sheikh Jaama’ (Aw Jaamac Cumar Cise), Diwaanka Gabayaddi Sayid Maxamad Cabdulle Xasan (Mogadishu:...
48 Laurence, A Tree for Poverty, p. 1.
50 Maino, La Lingua, passim.
51 Laurence, A Tree for Poverty, pp. 1–2.
52 The terms I have employed to designate these categories of offense are those in use in Ogaadeen. There may be variant words to denote the same concept in other regions.
54 Ali Hammam, an Isaq poet. In Somali, the line goes like this: ‘Goddiga Ban awl bu bu fahriigu, geed ku leeyahay e.’
55 Mahammad Haji Huseen, Sheeka-Hariir ('Man of Beautiful Story'), Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 6 February 1977.
56 Ibid.
57 A notable incident of political slander by amsiisaha occurred during the political elections of the soon-to-become-independent British Somaliland Protectorate. In a bitter political campaign in the closing months of 1959, the Somali National League (SNL) led by Mahammad Ibraahim Igal, accused Michael Mariano, leader of the opposition National United Front (NUF), of being an anti-Islamic imperialist stooge. This devastating propaganda is thought to have played a major part in SNL’s sweeping victory.
58 Sheeka-Hariir, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 6 February 1977.
59 Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry, p. 45.
60 I was often made aware of my inferiority in memory when I took notes in an interview. At one stage, I nearly lost my informants’ respect when they noticed that I could not load my camera without referring to the instructions.
61 Sheeka-Hariir, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 6 February 1977.
62 Ibid., 7 February 1977.
63 Ib., 10 February 1977.
64 ‘Daqato’ (Somali for ‘pastoralist’) and ‘Beero’ (‘farmer’) are generic terms referring to the cultural and economic modes of the feudal clans whose ethnic names are withheld for the following reason: as part of the Horn of Africa’s war-torn Ogaadeen, the clans and their homelands are, at the time of writing, caught up in a ruthless conflict between Somali guerrilla fighters and Ethiopian authorities. To reveal their identities would be to expose them to dangerous and needless reprisals by either — or both — of the conflicting parties.

For the same reason, the two principal speakers at the Daqato meeting are identified by their descriptive nicknames rather than their real names. However, the reader with academic interest in knowing their real identities (as those of the feuding clans) may consult my fieldnotes deposited (1979–80) at the Africana branch of Northwestern University Library (Evanston, Illinois) where special permission allows scholars to have access to them.

To explain the circumstances which led to my having a firsthand knowledge of the Daqato–Beero feud, I should say that I lived in the town of Qallaafo along with other members of my family at the time the feud occurred there and was thereby an eyewitness to the events described. A fortuitous but fortunate circumstance motivated me to follow these events with special interest: my father, Sheikh Samatar Mahamoud, who was the Islamic magistrate of the town, was invited by the elders of the Daqato to attend their meeting in the hope of utilizing his skill in arbitration, should the meeting reach an impasse. His religious prestige, mediating skills and neutral status (ethnically, he was an outsider) uniquely qualified him to serve as an arbitrator. My father ordered me to attend the meeting and to become thoroughly conversant with every facet of it, even requiring me to memorize the gist of the oratorical speeches. Assuming that I would some day forge out a career like his, my father was trying his best to prepare me. At the time, I resented what I regarded as his high-handed ways but, years later, came to appreciate, even be grateful for, his ‘highhandedness.’

As a Social Science Research Council Fellow, I returned to Somalia in 1976 to do six months of field work (January–June) for my doctoral research. As I ‘went native’ with my pastoral kin for three months, I frequently sneaked across the Somali border into the disputed Ogaadeen. During one of these excursions, I visited my father’s village of ‘Eel Berde and had the good fortune of meeting there the main speaker of the Daqato assembly, the man whom I identified by his nickname, Shivering Beard. With his and my father’s help, I was able to refresh my mind on the specifics of the Daqato assembly.

65 The Somali text of the taunt song:

    Daqato dagaaloo
    Anaa shalay harkii dilyay
    Koodii u dooraan
    Hilbiiska dhuurkiin
    Dugaagii u waray oon
    Dadka uunku wada maqaal.

66 Pastoral inter-clan raids are led by directors known as ‘war leaders’ (pl., amaandualjig). They are in recognition of their leadership abilities, receive an extra portion of whatever stock their raiding parties succeed in carrying off.

67 For a scholarly discussion of msig-paying units, see Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, passim.
68 Qamaan Deere (Shivering Beard), Fieldnotes, ‘Eel Berde. 25 May 1977.
70 From Salan Ararbay’s poem, ‘Hadaad dhaqyo geeridii’, alliterating in the letter ‘g’.
71 I render the Somali word ‘way’ as ‘alas’.
72 Pastoral Somalis believe that a man is haunted into manic sleeplessness by the spirits of his murdered kin if their deaths have not been avenged. This notion of the dead haunting the living serves to sustain the institution of reciprocal vendetta discussed above, pp. 23–7.
73 ‘Habash’: a pejorative Somali term for Amhara.
74 Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, chapter 5.
Chapter 2


Ibid., p. 81.

The observation comes from vol. 2, p. x of H. M. and N. K. Chadwick's monumental three-volume work, *The Growth of Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), which is considered a major contribution to the subject.


Ibid.


For the various theories proposed, see *Somalia and the World*, pp. 117–53.


Andrzejewski and Lewis, *Somali Poetry*, p. 46.


From the Sayid's poem, 'Huseenow Ninkii Laable', alliterating in the letter 'I'.


to have used his new powers for clannish vendetta and score-settling. Isma‘il Mire, poet-spokesman of the Durbahante, hence pronounced the curse on him.

50 A Somali version of this poem appears in Sheikh Jaama‘ Umar ‘Iise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Ciise), Diwaanka Gabayadii, p. 63.
51 Richard Shelley, British Somaliland administrative officer at Bur‘o.
53 The ninety-fifth Sura of the Qur’an, called ‘The Fig’.
54 Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry, pp. 84, 86.
57 Laurence, A Tree for Poverty, p. 36.
58 Ibid., p. 37.
60 Koofi and Laaran: Somali corruptions of Richard Gorfield and Mark (?), Lawrence, two British officers of the Somaliland Camel Corps, infamous for their rashness and ill temper.
61 Miira and Goglaa refer to the region of wife’s kin. The poet is saying that his wife has the mistaken notion to suppose that the land of her people is a land of plenty.
62 Mortar used for grinding maize evokes land-felling and other modes of peasant living which to the nomads signify a life of subservience and drudgery. Thus, the land of her kin, far from being a land of plenty, is in fact a contemptible place where men grind maize to eke out a livelihood.
63 The ‘triple divorce oath’ refers to a marital law in the Shari‘a in which a man solemnizes separation from his wife by uttering the third and final declaration of divorce in the presence of mature witnesses.

Chapter 3

4 The statement is based on Sheikh ‘Ali Sa‘id‘i’s estimate of the number of northern Somali Haj-makers in the 1890s as opposed to those in the 1910s. Sheikh ‘Ali is the head of the Saailihiya order in Bur‘o and he has a reputation for knowledge on the history of Muslim orders in Somalia. His estimate that 5 percent of the male population of Berbera made the Haj can be regarded as a well-informed guess. He attributes the high proportion of Haj-makers in the 1890s to an unusual prosperity of the clans during this time which enabled many to afford the cost of pilgrimage.
5 For African Islam, this theme receives a brief but provocative treatment in

9 The Qur’an, Sura III. 110.
11 Martin, Muslim Brotherhoods.
12 To be sure, belief in the millenarian, the notion of the coming Mahdi or prince—judge under whose government ‘holiness’, ‘righteousness’, and ‘justice’ will be triumphant as ‘sin’, ‘wickedness’ and ‘oppression’ are banished from the earth, is an underlying theme in Muslim eschatology, and the Mahdist figure frequently appears in the history of Muslim societies. See M. T. Houtsma and A. J. Wensink eds., The Encyclopaedia of Islam (4 vols. London: E. J. Brill, 1913–34), vol. 3, pp. 111–14.
13 Martin, Muslim Brotherhoods, pp. 5–6.
16 F. L. James, The Unknown Horn of Africa (London: George Philip & Son, 1888), pp. 142.
17 Ibid., p. 129.
19 Quoted in Hess, ‘Poor man of God’, p. 75.
20 Ibid., p. 75.
21 Martin, Muslim Brotherhoods, p. 2.
22 Aw: A Somali religious personage of slightly lesser stature than the wadad.
24 His real name was ‘Ali Muhammad al-‘Adali.
25 Martin, Muslim Brotherhoods, p. 2.
27 As an example of this, see Sheikh Jaama‘ Umar ‘Iise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Ciise), Taariikhdii Daraanwiishta iyo Sayid Maxamed Cabdule Xusan (Mogadishu: Wakaaladda Madhabaadda Qaranka, 1976), pp. 4–5.
29 Students of the Dervish Movement almost to a man place the birth date of the Sayid at 1864, a date which seems to have a single source: ‘Abdirahmaan
Sayyid, the notably erudite son whose records give this date. Surviving Der-
ishes, however, unanimously reject this date and insist on the 1856 one. See
Sheikh Jaama 'Umar 'Iise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Ciise), Taariikhda Daraawishta,
p. 4.
30 Better known by her nickname, 'Arro Seed.
33 Muuse I. Gaalaal and Aw Daahir Afsarshe, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 21 April
34 Marzuq, Tha'ir, p. 15.
35 Their names appear in Marzuq, Tha'ir, p. 16.
36 Although classical Islam has no clergy comparable to that of Christendom,
appointment into Sufi khulufs involves such regular rituals as to warrant the
use of the term 'ordination'.
37 Muuse Gaalaal, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 21 April 1977. According to Mr Gaalaal,
the thirteen sheikhs recognized in Sayyid Mahammad qualities of leadership,
and pleaded with Mahammad Salih to appoint him his spiritual envoy in
Somalia as there was at this time a great need to counter the missionizing
activities of the Roman Catholics in Berbera.
38 Muuse Gaalaal, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 21 April 1977.
39 Marzuq, Tha'ir, pp. 16-17. The same story is repeated by Muuse Gaalaal, a
Saailhiya elder whose observations on the Sayyid form the chief source of the
latter's stay in Mecca.
40 The incident allegedly took place at the Tuwahsi quarters of the port of Aden.
Sayyid Mahammad, wearing resplendent robes and holding an umbrella over
his head, attracted the attention of the officer who sought to accost him familiarly.
But the Sayyid rebutted him with a casual indifference, whereupon the
insulted officer rushed angrily after the Sayyid and pulled rudely on his umbrella.
A scuffle followed in which, as the tale goes, the officer got 'pushed off the wharf'
into the sea. The intervention of a Somali interpreter, named 'Ali Qaaje, saved the
Sayyid from imprisonment for his misconduct. It is said the interpreter,
wishing to explain to the port authority that the Sayyid was in spiritual ecstasy
and thus could not be held responsible for his behavior, but not knowing how
to describe such a concept in English, pleaded with the judge, 'Sir, pardon,
he Mad Mullah' - thus giving rise to the epithet. Muuse Gaalaal, Fieldnotes,
Mogadishu, April, 1977. Cf. Marzuq, Tha'ir, p. 17. Another version as to the
possible source of the phrase relates to a tax incident. Upon arrival in
Berbera, the Sayyid refused to pay the customs duties on his belongings
and got away with the civil disobedience because the interpreter convinced the
42 A. M. Brockett, 'The British Somaliland Protectorate to 1905', unpublished
dissertation, Lincoln College, Oxford University, 1969, p. 266.
43 Brockett, 'British Somaliland', p. 286.
44 For further on qaa', see Samatar, 'Somali mock heroic', pp. 458-61.
46 Sheikh Jaama 'Umar 'Iise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Ciise), Taariikhda Daraawishta,
p. 12.
47 Brockett, 'British Somaliland', p. 300.
74 Sadler to Salisbury, Correspondence, No. 5, 16 July 1899, Cmd 597, 1901.
75 Harrington to Cromer, Correspondence, No. 6, 17 July 1899, Cmd 597, 1901.
76 Sadler to Salisbury, Correspondence, No. 7, 12 August 1899, Cmd 597, 1901.
77 Sheekia-Hariir, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 4 May 1977.
78 From the Sayyid's poem, *Abbakayle*.
79 From the Sayyid's poem, 'Jim' or 'Jimley' alliterating in the letter 'j'.
80 This point was first brought out by Francesco S. Caroselli, *Ferro e Fuoco in Somalia* (Rome: Sindicato Italiano Atti Grafiche Editore, 1931), p. 8, and later developed by A. Brockett, 'British Somaliland', pp. 298-300.
81 Other important terms include Hafidjar, Jibcisar and Rasladar, referring to designations in the army, and Memsahib (madam), Sahib (sir), and Brasahib (governor).
82 Sayyid Mahmad to Sadler, Correspondence, No. 22, 9 September 1899, Cmd 597, 1901.
84 Marzq, *Tha'iir*, p. 36.
85 Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods*, p. 182.
86 Sadler to Salisbury, Correspondence, No. 9, 31 August 1899, Cmd 597, 1901.
87 Sharif (Arabic) refers to a normally pious clan believed by Somalis to have descended directly from the Prophet.
88 'Sayyid' here refers to Sayyid Mahmad. In one of its several meanings, the term 'Sayyid' connotes piety and holiness and this is one reason why both Mahmad 'Ab'di and his master, Mahmad Sa'id, assumed it as an honorific title.
89 A version of this poem appears in Sheikh Jaama 'Umar 'Iise (Aw Jaamac cumar Cise), *Taariikh dii Daraawiisha*, p. 28.
90 Reference to Haaji Suudi, a trusted lieutenant of the Sayyid.
91 'Idagale clan, from the Sayyid's poem, 'War Suudow Dagaalka Anigu Doonimaayo'.
92 Sheikh Jaama 'Umar 'Iise, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 4 February 1977.
97 From Qalaa-Balas's poem, 'Rahanaaakiyo Hawsa', Aw Daahir Afqarshe, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 6 March 1977.
98 'Yaos' refers to the Central African troops who, as members of the King's African Rifles, fought on the British side. Similarly, the Sudanese and Indians mentioned in the poem are imperial troops.
100 For vivid details of this visit, see Gustavo Chiesi, *La Colonizzazione Europea nell'Est Africa* (Torino: Unione Tipografico-editrice Torinese, 1909), p. 158.
104 Sheekia-Hariir, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 8 February 1977.
105 Ibid.
107 'Abdalla Qoriyow, the prestigious Islamic magistrate of the Dervish capital, who took part in the conspiracy.
108 Ahmed Fiqi, also a conspirator, was the Dervish expert on Qur'anic exegesis.
109 Reference to the Sayyid's brother-in-law. Faarah Mahamud Sughul, whose involvement in the conspiracy was particularly bad news for the Sayyid.
110 Copies of this report are extant: Colonial Office 537/4412 June 1909, and at the University of Durham Library: 'Special Mission to Somaliland', Box 125.
111 I will deal with these poems in a subsequent section on the impact of the Sayyid's poetry in the movement.
113 Ibid., p. 247.
115 Caroselli, *Ferro e Fuoco*, p. 224.
116 An English translation of it is enclosed in C. O. 535/42, Despatch No. 03286, 15 June 1916.
118 Aw Daahir Afqarshe, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 6 March 1977.

Chapter 4

1 See, for example, Sheikh Jaama 'Umar 'Iise (Aw Jaamac cumar Cise), *Dhawanka Gabayaddii Sayid Maxamed Cabduulke Xasan* (Mogadishu: Wakan-
3 For details of the Dervish attack on Jibiga, see chapter 3, p. 118.
4 Aw Daahir Afarshe, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 6 March 1977.
5 The connotation of this line and following ones rests on the theme in Islamic theology that God in his generosity allows unbelievers to enjoy a brief material prosperity in this life and is based on such Qur'anic verses as in Sura III: 196-7.
6 Aw Daahir Afarshe, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 6 March 1977.
7 Ibid.
8 Yuusuf Meygaag Samatar, current member of the Language Committee, the Somali Academy, whose people on the whole opposed Dervishism, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 17 April 1977.
10 An apparent reference to the proposed marriage alliance which the Dervishes hoped would establish ties of kinship between them and the Majerteen.
11 Aw Daahir Afarshe, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 6 March 1977.
12 Ildoo: a variant name for Isaaq, many subdivisions of whom were opponents of the Dervishes.
13 Bad-Eye: Lt. Colonel Swayne, commander of the British force, who was blind in one eye and received a minor wound in the battle.
14 An apparent reference to the proposed marriage alliance between the Dervishes and the Majerteen.
15 Sheikh 'Ali Sa'id, May 1977, see note 2 above.
16 The Sayyid required his followers to address him as 'Father' (Abbe), clearly emphasizing the hierarchical authority he sought to impose on the egalitarian Somalis who normally address one another as 'Cousin' (Ina-adeer). Note also the servile humility with which the Dervish poet, Hiri Duhul Halanje, talks about the poverty of his 'poetic style' as opposed to the great talent of the 'father', in Sheikh Jaama 'Umar 'Isa (Aw Jaama Cumar Ciise), Diiwaanka Gabaabadi, p. 175.
19 Ibid.
20 For more details of this battle, see Hubert Morse-Bartlett, The King's African Rifles (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1956).
21 Commissioner Swayne to Lansdowne. Correspondence, 6 October 1905, Cmd 2254, p. 477.
25 One version of the 'Letter to the Biyamaal' appears in Somali Government,

26 Aw Daahir Afarshe, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 1 March 1977.
28 Ibid.
29 My translation of the Sayyid's poem, 'Ba'a E Yow Sheega,' alliterating in the letter 'b'.
30 The City of Infidels: Berbera, in the Somali coast which was then the administrative center of the Somaliland Protectorate.
31 The Somali texts of these proverbs came to me from 'Ali Mahdi of Eeirigaab, an inspector in the Somali army, Fieldnotes, Eel Beere, 25 May 1977.
32 Muuse Galaal, Tape Recording, n.d. A second Somali version of this poem is reproduced in Sheikh Jaama 'Umar 'Isa (Aw Jaama Cumar Ciise), Diiwaanka Gabaabadi, pp. 264-6.
34 Reer Elmar: Paternal lineage of the Sayyid.
35 My translation of portions of 'Ali Jaama' Haabili's poem, 'Ma Taallyaniigaaqaa Mahdi Ah'.
36 Padre Giovanni Maria, Grammatica Della Lingua Somala (Asmara: Tipografia Francescana, 1914), p. 310. I am indebted to Dr B. W. Andrzejewski, who pointed this reference out to me.
37 A variant name of the Durbahante.
39 My translation of the Sayyid's poem, 'Huseenow Aqligu Kaamaa Babo idim Haahaye', also called 'Afbakaye.
40 Collected in Sheikh Jaama 'Umar 'Isa (Aw Jaama Cumar Ciise), Diiwaanka Gabaabadi.
41 Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry, p. 150.
42 Ibid., p. 68.
43 A Durbahante lineage which defected from the Dervish ranks.
44 A variant name for Jim Finfin, the Sayyid's favorite pony.
45 The Qur'an, Sura LXVIII, 10-16. The passage is based on an egesis of six verses and not on a literal interpretation.
46 Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry, p. 74.
47 Excerpt from the Sayyid's poem, 'Hirson Naaqsino waa Wabaad niig la xaddaha e'; alliterating in the letter 'n'.
48 As my informant, M. F. Mahamud put it, the Sayyid was wont to repeating the maxim, 'Gabayaga waa jib wabaah ku ah inuu si sharaf leh waa u 'aayo' ('It is incumbent upon the poet to abuse with grace').
49 Yuusuf Meygaag Samatar, an Isaaq elder and a poet himself whose people for the most part remained either indifferent or hostile to the Dervish cause, referred to the Sayyid as 'one of the best reciters of provocative verse'. Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 15 February 1977.
50 See preceding chapter, pp. 127-30.
raised in Taleeb, was married to Sayyid Mahammad's food-taster. She would not say which wife was involved in this incident for fear of present-day repercussions.

52 Ibid.


57 The Sayyid's advisor and poem-memorizer, Huseen Diqle.

58 My translation. A Somali version of this poem appears in Sheikh Jaama' 'Umar 'Ise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Cise), Diwaanka Gabayadii, pp. 57-9.

59 'Scepire' in the sense of authority.


61 Majerteen coastal seas traditionally believed to be inhabited by evil spirits.


63 Ibid.

64 Jardine, Mad Mullah, p. 159.

65 Also called 'gudban'.

66 Sheikh Jaama' 'Umar 'Ise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Cise), Diwaanka Gabayadii, p. 30.

67 Jardine, Mad Mullah, pp. 170-5.

68 Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry, pp. 74.

69 In this line and the one following it, the poet is making reference to the commonness of genealogy between himself and the Warsangali, both of them belonging to the Daarood clan-family.

70 Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry, pp. 79-80.

71 A Somaliland Protectorate coastal town.

72 A Somali version of the 'Bishaaroweyin kii Falsay' appears in Sheikh Jaama' 'Umar 'Ise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Cise), Diwaanka Gabayadii, pp. 31-3.

73 Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry, p. 66.

74 The Somalis fear the hornbill as a bird of death.

75 The cluster of British-protected clans, a great many of whom opposed the Dervishes.

76 Muuse Gaala, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 3 April 1977.

77 See note 35 for this poem.

78 Thus the Sayyid's wife, Dima, was tortured and executed for infidelity. After her death, the Sayyid composed the unkind taunt song gloating over her fate: 'Dima god loo qoday, amaan kaaba galaynayn'.'

79 Sheikh Jaama' 'Umar 'Ise, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 1 February 1977.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 The first three lines of the Somali version run:

Maandow i sii bahaashnaan ku ahay waayey e
Wab markaan ka siyayn in dha wabah ka duulaaye
Imana waa sa xooma sanabixna waa kaala warreeynoa.

83 See, for example, his mock heroic parodying Ismaa'il Mire's narrative poem, 'Annagoo Taleeb naal', reproduced in my 'Somali mock heroic', pp. 462-5.

84 An excerpt from the Sayyid's 'Hin Fiminh'.

85 Yuusuf Meygaag Samatar, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 4 March 1977.

86 Sheeka-Harir, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 5 March 1977. Only 43 lines of the Sayyid's 99 proverbs alliterating in the letter 'b' are extant.

87 Jardine, Mad Mullah, pp. 163-5.

88 Sheeka-Harir, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 5 March 1977.

89 Reference to the disastrous Jidbaale defeat.

90 A Somali version of the 'This News' is reproduced in Sheikh Jaama' 'Umar 'Ise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Cise), Diwaanka Gabayadii, p. 27.

91 Sheeka-Harir, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 5 March 1977.

92 Ibid.

93 My translation of the Sayyid's poem, 'Mahade Haw Sheego'.

94 One of these poems together with commentary appears in Sheikh Jaama' 'Umar 'Ise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Cise), Diwaanka Gabayadii, pp. 204-8.


96 Ibid.

97 Lt. Colonel E. Swayne, who carried the first two operations against the Sayyid and later on became Consul General of Somaliland.

98 My translation of the exchange between the Sayyid and Huseen Diqle, called 'Durwaar Ariga Eebaa leh'.

99 A portion of the Somali version of this poem appears in Sheikh Jaama' 'Umar 'Ise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Cise), Diwaanka Gabayadii, p. 21.

100 The Sayyid's immediate family.

101 The sublineage of the Sayyid's Bah-Geri (Ogaadeen) lineage.

102 The verse appears in Sheikh Jaama' 'Umar 'Ise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Cise), Diwaanka Gabayadii, p. 63.

103 Aw Daahir Afqarxe, Tape Recording, Mogadishu, n.d. but 1969.

104 Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry, pp. 70-4.


108 Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry, p. 110.


110 Sheikh Jaama' 'Umar 'Ise, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 7 February 1977.

111 Ibid.

112 The Shabeellin River across which remnants of the Dervishes were forced to flee, some drowning in the attempt.

113 A Somali version appears in Sheikh Jaama' 'Umar 'Ise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Cise), Diwaanka Gabayadii, pp. 124-8.

114 Iimo: a variant name for the cluster of Isaaq clan families, a great many of whom opposed Dervishism.

115 Iimo: a small town on the headwaters of the Shabeellin River where the Sayyid retreated in his final days.

116 Literally, with his telegrams.
poetic formula was the Isaak opponent of the Sayyid: ‘Ali Jaama’ Haabili. See p. 138.

11. Sadler to Salisbury, Correspondence, No. 8, Cnd 597, 1901.
15. ‘Sheikh Jaama’ deleted six offending lines from the Sayyid’s poetic diatribe, ‘Corfield’s Sister’ (‘Koofi Walaashii’), Diiwaanka Gabayadii, pp. 287–8; while excluding from publication the Sayyid’s malicious taunt song, ‘Diiwa’, on his wife of the same name who was executed for alleged sexual misconduct, as well as the obscene attack, ‘A Prince’s Daughter’, on Boqor ‘Ismaa’s daughter whom the Sayyid berated after she refused to marry him.

16. See notes 6 and 7 above.
17. Lewis, Modern History, pp. 70–1.
18. ‘Abd as-Sabir Marzib, Tha’ir Min as-Samal (Cairo: Dar el-Qowmiyya, 1964).
20. P. 129 above.
22. Muhammed Faarad Muohmmud ‘Jaawali’, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 5 May 1977. This elder, 76, took part in the last British operation against the Dervishes though the majority of his people were Dervish, from whom he was in a position to learn much about the life of the Sayyid and the day-to-day existence of the Dervishes.
23. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, p. 34.
24. The observation alouds from Toohay Muhammad. For a biographical note, see chapter 4, note 51.
26. Toohay Muhammad, see chapter 4, note 51.
30. See pp. 25–7 of chapter 1.
33. ‘Eyale: small village on the turbulent sea waters of eastern Somalia.
34. ‘Igaray: Resalad Major Haaji Muuse Faarad of the Habar Yoonis Isaq was an important British collaborator and an implacable enemy of the Dervishes.
38. Ibid.
39. See, for example, his letter of principles and policy declaration to the Biyaamu clan reproduced in Somaliya: Antologia Storico-Culturale (Mogadishu: Wakaaladda Madbacadda Qaranka, 1967).
40. There is no evidence that Greeks had done any harm to the Dervishes; possibly the Sayyid used the word ‘Greek’ because the alliteration of the poem in ‘g’ forced the distortion on him.
41. This excerpt and following ones are my translation of portions of the Sayyid’s poem, ‘The Scourge of Infidels’.
42. Yusufi Meygaq Samatar, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 26 March 1977.
43 From the Sayyid's poem alliterating in 'd', 'War Illeyn Doqone 'Alaf Ma Leh Dubbaah Mahaa Ka Baylahay'.
44 Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 27 March 1977.
45 Sheikh Jaama' Umar 'Ilise (Aw Jaamac Cumar Ciise), Dmaanka Gabayaddii, pp. vi, 263.
47 Ibid., p. 2.
48 Ibid., pp. 3–4.
49 Yaasin Ismaan Keenaadid, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 29 March 1977.
50 Jardine, Mad Mullah, passim.
52 Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry. p. 84, line 14.
53 Muhammad Faarah Mahamud 'Jaawali', Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 3 February 1977.
54 'The Scourge of Infidels', lines 73–6.
55 Jardine, Mad Mullah, passim.
56 Ibid., p. 52.
57 Indeed in numerous periods in the history of Islam, Sufis found themselves accused by their orthodox fellow Muslims of the sin of shirk (setting up rivalry to God's sovereignty over his creation, one of the three worst iniquities in Islamic theological classification of sin) by claiming supernatural attributes. In one famous case Husayn Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj reportedly declared: 'I am the Absolute Truth - ana al-Haqi'. Al-Hallaj was tortured and ultimately put to death for his teachings and style of life which orthodox Muslims condemned as heretical. See Annemarie Schimmel, The Mystical Dimensions of Islam (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University Press, 1975), pp. 62–77.
60 Aw Daahir Afqarshe, Tape Recording, Mogadishu, n.d. but 1969.
61 Muhammad H. Husein 'Sheeka-Hariir', Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 1 April 1977.
63 Sheeka-Hariir, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 11 April 1977.
64 Jardine, Mad Mullah, p. 315.
66 From Shire Idaad's poem, 'Sayyidkaad Maqalaysaan Aduun Sababiit Weeyaana' e'.
67 Sheeka-Hariir, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, 1 February 1977.
68 Jardine, Mad Mullah, p. 315.
69 Ibid., pp. 315–16.
71 For the British officials' dislike of the Somalis and the general colonial opinion of the Somali peninsula as a hardship post, see Gerald Hanley's barely fictionalized autobiography, Warriors and Strangers (London: Hamilton, 1971).
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