

British and Somali Views of Muhammad Abdullah Hassan's *Jihad*, 1899–1920

John P. Slight

An arid desert country...home of a 'Mad Mullah,' cause of one of the most prolonged and least successful of our 'little wars.'¹

I. Overview

Since the start of Hassan's *jihad* against unbelievers and insufficiently pious Muslims in 1899, the "Cinderella of the Empire" had suffered terribly.² Hassan's *jihad* caused "universal perdition," with an estimated 200,000 deaths over twenty years in a territory of three million people.³ An estimated 30,000 alone died in three years as the result of internecine warfare after the British decided the cost of keeping the "Mad Mullah" in check was too burdensome and withdrew to the coast in 1909. The withdrawal led Hassan to resume raiding Somali tribes in the protectorate. This, coupled with the British policy of arming these tribes to fend for themselves, contributed to the death toll.⁴ Hassan was condemned by the British, but a few of the same observers also grudgingly admired his determination and sustained resistance to imperial power.

This essay shows how the varied British interpretations of Hassan served to reduce his movement to a one-dimensional character. It also illustrates how Hassan, like other contemporary Muslim leaders in Northeast Africa, was believed to be part of a "Turco-German" plot against the British during the First World War. The article utilizes a rich existing corpus of source material to analyze Hassan's views regarding *jihad* and his motivation for beginning and continuing this struggle. It also demonstrates how some Somalis viewed his *jihad*. These Muslim views show how British perceptions of Hassan failed to discern the profound and complex religious factors that motivated his movement.

Somaliland, “a veritable furnace for eight or nine months” of the year, became a British protectorate in 1885.⁵ British motives for expansion were to obtain provisions for the nearby Aden garrison and to forestall further expansion by rival European powers on the Somali coast. The protectorate was seen as an insignificant corner of the Empire until the rise of Hassan. Born in 1856, Hassan studied under local religious scholars and then traveled for *rihlah* (travels in search of religious knowledge). He undertook the *hajj* and studied under Mohammed Salih in Mecca in the 1890s.⁶ He returned to Somaliland in 1895 as the local head of Salih’s own Sufi order, and preached unsuccessfully at Berbera, constrained by disputes with other orders. Hassan found more success when he traveled to the Somali hinterland. His *jihad* began in 1899 with a raid on a Qadiriyyeh Sufi *zawiya* at Sheikh. After that he made clear his hostility to Somaliland’s British and Ethiopian rulers, as well as all Somalis who were not sufficiently pious in his eyes. Britain’s four military expeditions against Hassan in 1901–1904 ended in failure due to his guerrilla warfare tactics. The Ilig Treaty of 1905 led Hassan to migrate to Italian Somaliland. A quiet period followed, but the British withdrawal to the Somali coast in 1909 caused widespread anarchy in the interior, and Hassan returned to continue his *jihad*. The establishment of the Somali Coastal Constabulary, which became the Camel Corps, harried Hassan from 1912 onward and engaged in “desultory fighting” throughout the First World War.⁷ Hassan’s switch from mobility to fixed defensive fortress positions gave the Camel Corps greater military success against him. In 1920, the Colonial and War Offices sanctioned a campaign using the RAF and the Camel Corps, which resulted in the destruction of his forts, the deaths of many followers, and his flight to Ethiopia. Before Hassan could regroup, he died from influenza in December 1920 and the remnants of his movement returned to their tribes.

Works dealing with Hassan fall into three categories: (1) those written when he was active or recently dead,⁸ (2) the 1960s and 1970s, after Somali independence,⁹ and (3) studies published since the 1970s.¹⁰ The roots of the historiography about Hassan lie in contemporaneous British insights in works that form a rich seam of enquiry into their interpretations of the man and his movement. Works written after Somali independence are coloured by nationalist feeling and are largely panegyrics to Hassan. He was seen as the Father of Somali Independence. These analyses provide little examination of his Islamic motivations. The last category of works strikes a more balanced tone. They view

Hassan's movement as informed by his Islamic beliefs,¹¹ or as motivated initially by religion, but they also stress his preoccupation with politics, the organization of his movement, and military measures.¹² These recent works are more nuanced than the contemporaneous British interpretations of Hassan outlined below.

Hassan was the most implacable Muslim enemy of the British during this period. While his movement was small in scale compared to other resistance movements in the Empire, such as the Boers, Hassan's successful military leadership and organization confounded British attempts to destroy his movement until his switch to fixed fortress positions rendered him more vulnerable to attack. The resilience of Hassan's movement led to several British responses. Whilst many British observers acknowledged the religious motivations for Hassan's *jihad*, most belittled the man. First was the interpretation that Hassan was a religious fanatic, who caused misery to the Somali population and set back the British "civilising mission" in Somaliland. This interpretation reduced the man to the stereotype of a fanatical Muslim rebel, a "Mad Mullah."

A second interpretation sought to strip away his Islamic motivation and contended that Hassan was using the religion to mask a cattle-thieving operation. This view stemmed from the desire of officials to downplay the continued effectiveness of his movement.

During the First World War, a third interpretation emerged: that Hassan was influenced by enemy propaganda. Either through unwillingness or inability, most British missed other factors that drove Hassan, such as his Sufi influences and profoundly religious motivation, anchored in a reformist and revivalist context. However, some observers picked up on this and so not all British analyses of Hassan viewed him through such simplistic negative tropes. The British were aware that he was not only opposed to them because Somalis bore the brunt of his violence. This rebounded on Hassan, with segments of Somali society opposed to him, such as religious leaders and certain tribal chiefs, and led to a lack of support for his *jihad*.

II. Hassan as a “Fanatical” Muslim Rebel

Much of the published British literature on Hassan repeats the works of others and reinforces several perceptions of him, the key one being that he was a fanatical rebel. These writers were mainly officials and soldiers who had served in Somaliland. While none had met Hassan, they either saw the effects of his *jihad* on the Somali population or encountered his followers in skirmishes. Their published accounts tally with the few official British papers related to the movement that remain in colonial archives.¹³ Contemporaneous accounts view Hassan’s movement in a variety of ways, yet all portray him as a militant tyrant.

British officials and commentators, however removed or close to Hassan’s movement, could not fail to be aware of the religious character of his struggle. Captain Summers, who served in Somaliland, said Hassan “established a great reputation as a religious leader,” which helped him gather a following from tribes in the Ogaden under Ethiopian rule and in British Somaliland.¹⁴ Angus Hamilton’s account added a further layer of British understanding. He emphasized the effect of the *hajj* on Hassan, who returned from Mecca “with the intention of reviving the religious spirit of his people” through his *jihadist* movement.¹⁵ This places Hassan in the conceptual framework of a “returning *hajji*” whose spiritual and intellectual experiences inspired his motivation for beginning a militant Islamic movement against the rule of non-believers over Muslims. This appreciation of the revivalist element of Hassan’s movement is corroborated by Henry F. Prevost-Battersby, who stated that Hassan “seemed inspired by a genuine passion for the faith,” which led him to “rebuke the easy going Islamism” of Somalis. While this was seen as a primary motivation for Hassan’s *jihad*, it was apparently inevitable that this preaching would clash with the British, because it was “difficult to preach the pure faith of the Prophet to a people under foreign rule without saying something detrimental to the foreigner.”¹⁶ But these interpretations of the religious character of his movement were overlaid with representations that reduced Hassan to a crude Muslim tyrant.

British representations of Hassan as a fanatic are most clearly seen in the epithet they gave him, “The Mad Mullah,” a title routinely used in literature and official correspondence.¹⁷ The first mention of this moniker was in an official report in 1899, in which Somaliland Consul-General J. Hayes-Sadler wrote, “the Mullah has gone religious mad.”¹⁸ This

characterization was frequently used by subsequent authors as it created a colourful picture of a stereotypical Muslim fanatic that the British public were familiar with from the days of the Mahdi. For example, an article in the *United Empire* journal said, "Religious fanatics, especially in the East, are frequently dubbed mad," Hassan's insanity being an "obsession that he was the only true follower of Mohammed, and that everyone else was an infidel."¹⁹ The British saw this resistance as irrational, a result of madness brought on by religious fanaticism and brain damage,²⁰ as opposed to what was closer to the truth, which was Hassan's deeply felt grievances at the state of Islam in his homeland and the fact that Somalis were ruled by non-Muslims. Observers such as Major H. G. C. Swayne, a soldier who served in Somaliland, had a more nuanced view of this "madness," contending that Hassan was part of "propaganda in which Sufi and other mullahs like him were engaged."²¹ Hassan's Sufism will be discussed below, but first it is necessary to examine some of the more lurid imagery of Hassan that the British seemed to revel in describing.

Added to Hassan's "religious madness" are British portrayals of him as a cruel despot who engaged in torture, mutilation, and widespread atrocities that destroyed the lives of ordinary Somalis and his followers alike. For example, Major H. A. Rayne, in his judicial capacity as District Commissioner at Zeila, encountered "wrecks of women and children," who asked for relief. Apparently their plight was due to Hassan: "their villages had been destroyed, their property looted, their men-folk killed, by the murdering gang of thieves who carried out incessantly the merciless policy of this awful man."²² Swayne described the "gruesome sight" at Medishe fort after the British captured it, "typical of the methods of the Mad Mullah." There, a soldier saw the remains of one of Hassan's followers, "at the end of a rope, suspended from the roof over a slow fire, hung by the waist" as punishment for some transgression.²³ Hamilton wrote that as a result of setbacks against the British in 1903, some Somalis attempted to desert. Consequently, "It was 'heads off' just then in the camp of the Mullah upon the smallest pretext, for the Holy Man had recourse to the sternest measures to enforce obedience." This apparently caused "dissensions in his council" and "little cohesion among his followers."²⁴ This points to a further complexity of Hassan's movement. It was not a monolithic entity united against the British.

These sensationalist tales were not only confined to writers appealing to the British market. They were reflected in official British intel-

ligence reports. One stated that, "atrocities...have recently been practised by the Mullah to an unprecedented extent. Wholesale executions are carried out on the slightest pretexts, and men, women and children go in fear of their lives." The report appears to be an attempt to show that Hassan relied upon tyranny and misinformation in order to keep his followers, who otherwise would "surely" desert but for "the belief that we torture and kill captives...fostered by the Mullah."²⁵ These accounts implied that the results of Hassan's *jihad* fell most heavily on Somalis as opposed to the British.

Douglas Jardine, another Somaliland official who wrote a book on Hassan, summed up these negative views of him but stressed he knew no other way of acting. Jardine described Hassan as: "Tyrant and cut-throat, slayer of innocent women and children, cattle-thief, profligate, and libertine." These "opprobrious epithets" show how British observers interpreted Hassan in caricatured terms.²⁶

This superficiality extended to Hassan being compared to that other Muslim "fanatic," the Mahdi, an easy analogy for the British to make. To observers such as Ismay, an intelligence officer in Somaliland, the connection was direct. The Mahdi's successes made such an impression that Hassan "tried a similar organization."²⁷ Ralph Drake-Brockman says that tales of the Mahdi, apparently heard by Hassan in Cairo and Alexandria,²⁸ "held him spellbound."²⁹ The Mahdi was portrayed as a freedom fighter, who "raised the flag of revolt against a people suffering from poverty and oppression," whereas Hassan was an evil figure who "brought destitution and even anarchy."³⁰ These interpretations show the inability of the British to view Hassan on his own terms, a man engaged in a *jihad* to make Somalis follow a purer form of Islam as well as overthrow their non-Muslim rulers.

Richard Corfield of the Somali Camel Constabulary believed Hassan was a mere cattle thief. Corfield wrote in letters written in June and July 1910 that after the Governor-General of Sudan, Sir Reginald Wingate, left Somaliland after his consultative trip to find a solution to the issue of Hassan, his "illusions" about Hassan were "completely broken." These illusions were that "he was a great religious fanatic, like the Mahdi, with the possibility of wielding enormous power in the Muhammedan world." Corfield thought that Wingate now realized that Hassan was "little better than a raiding cattle thief."³¹ Corfield hoped to present Hassan in a more prosaic light to his family in England. This irritation with what Corfield saw as the elevation of Hassan into a religious leader was reinforced in a later letter. He wrote, "it is

not a religious question in Somaliland now, but merely the suppression of a very troublesome border raider...who is a cattle thief first, a Somali second, and thirdly, and a long way last, a very indifferent Mohammedan."³²

However, despite the belief that Hassan was only a criminal, Corfield conceded that his movement had a religious origin. This interpretation is corroborated by Douglas Jardine, but his account of Hassan is contradictory in many places, which points to the complexity of Hassan's motives. Jardine claimed that any "religious or patriotic impulse that originally inspired the Mullah's movement was strangled...by the passion for power and the plunder which rewarded victory," and that most of Hassan's followers fought "solely for loot."³³ He sought to remove any Islamic motivations from Hassan, as well as other Muslim resisters to Christian rulers, and wrote that risings "attributed to a wave of fanaticism can generally be traced back to an unsatisfied thirst for power," and that the Muslim rebel "knows that he must disguise the fact that his ends are purely mundane and selfish; and he, therefore, proclaims to his friends and foes that he fights for the glory of God."³⁴

Historians such as B. G. Martin, S. S. Samatar, and Abdi Sheikh Abdi have argued that these interpretations are shallow and show a failure to discern the multifaceted factors behind Hassan's movement. But from Jardine's perspective, as an official who had worked in Somaliland for many years, this was a comforting line to take, without having to attempt to understand the complex nature of Hassan and the movement that the British failed to overcome for more than twenty years.

Before looking at Hassan's *jihad* as inspired by a religious desire to revive Islam in Somalia, and in the context of the wider reforming and revivalist elements that affected Islam in this period that the British did not recognize, it is first necessary to highlight a final strand of colonial interpretation. This view arose in the context of the First World War. It involved the belief that Hassan, like the Sanussiyya Sufi order and Sultan Ali Dinar of Darfur, had connections to the Central Powers of Germany and the Ottoman Empire.

III. "Turco-German" Influence during the First World War

British Somaliland was relatively unaffected by the First World War. However, the prioritization of troops for the Western Front meant that there was no opportunity for a large-scale expedition against Hassan,

although the historian of the Camel Corps stated, “the Dervishes had become extremely truculent” by 1914. This was attributed to encouragement from “Turkish and German propaganda.”³⁵ This response showed a willingness by the British to deny agency to local leaders of the Islamic resistance, as illustrated in studies of the Sanussiyya Sufi order and the Sultan of Darfur, Ali Dinar.³⁶ The British instead attributed these struggles to a wider conspiracy by Britain’s wartime enemies. The debatable presence of enemy propaganda was irrelevant to those who wrote after the War and Hassan’s demise. Apparently, despite “much propaganda emanating from German and Turkish sources in Abyssinia,” Somalis in the protectorate remained loyal to Britain throughout the war.³⁷ But the British emphasis on Ottoman and German influence over Hassan was far less than in the examples of the Sanussiyya and Ali Dinar. Because Hassan’s movement had been active long before the War, officials could not manipulate the idea of Ottoman and German involvement with Hassan as much as they did with his co-religionists in Libya and Darfur.

Nevertheless, British intelligence in Sudan reported that the “Mullah is being incited to action by Turkish emissaries from Abyssinia.” The report said there was a Turkish emissary in Hassan’s retinue and “that a Turkish flag had been presented to the Mullah who is stated to have said he would fly it over the fort at Hais as soon as Turkish troops arrived and the march on Berbera began.” This was wishful thinking, both on Hassan’s part and for colonial intelligence in Sudan, who connected every Islamic enemy in the Empire in this period to their wartime enemies. The report also mentioned Lij Yasu, the new Ethiopian emperor, who the British thought had converted to Islam and was “openly assisting the Mullah with ammunition.” Despite these “Islamic efforts” noted by the British, “friendly Somalis have proved loyal.”³⁸ This Islamic influence from Ethiopia was dismissed by British intelligence, which thought Somalis regarded Lij Yasu as a “giant impostor.”³⁹

According to Somali historian Aw Jaamac Cumar Ciise, Hassan appealed to the Ottoman commander at Lehaj in Yemen for help, and an agreement signed by Hassan’s envoy put his followers under Ottoman protection.⁴⁰ A document in the Colonial Office archives, apparently circulated in the Somali hinterland, supported the British view that Hassan was involved with the Ottomans. It summarized the 1914 Ottoman *jihad* proclamation and exhorted Somalis to join Hassan.⁴¹ However, the document’s authenticity is unclear, and it is unknown

whether it was circulated with Hassan's permission or if it garnered any response from Somali tribesmen. Hassan did entertain a certain veneration for the Ottoman Sultan, as seen in his panegyric poem:

And he [Hassan] turns to his dear friend
Taking refuge with that pillar of religion
Sultan of every victory
Who lashes unbelievers
Breaks their power.⁴²

This evidence suggests that while Hassan had some contact with the Ottomans and regarded their Sultan as a religious figurehead, this had little impact on his movement, compared to other Islamic resistance leaders in this period such as Ahmed al-Senussi of the Sanussiyya.

Hassan did have some dealings with Germany in this period, but in such an insignificant way that British officials realized it was inconsequential. At the end of 1916, a German armourer was sent to Hassan by Lij Yasu and the German Consul in Ethiopia to manufacture ammunition and repair rifles, but "received such abominable treatment that he escaped in June 1917, only to perish on the road."⁴³ This was nowhere near the scale of the British conviction that the Sanussiyya and Ali Dinar were enmeshed in Ottoman and German intrigue to challenge British rule. There were no British officials in Somaliland who thought Hassan was connected to Istanbul or Berlin in the same manner as those in Sudan who, in sharp contrast, produced reams of official correspondence that detailed how Ali Dinar was in league with Britain's wartime enemies.

Hassan had a slightly different interpretation of his relationship with the Ottomans, Germans, and Lij Yasu. In a letter to the British that responded to their accusations of his connections to all three, he wrote, "The suggestion is that I was weak and had to look outside for friends; and if, indeed, this were true and I had to look for assistance, it is only because of the British, and the trouble you have given me."⁴⁴ This appeared a half-denial. Hassan wanted to assert that he was a power in his own right. The British failed to discern the intricacies of Hassan's movement.

IV. Hassan's Islamic Beliefs and Somali Responses to his *Jihad*

Hassan carried out his *jihad* under the aegis of the Salihyya order, founded by Muhammad Saleh in Mecca in the late nineteenth century. This was part of a cluster of "neo-Sufi" orders, influenced by the Islamic revival and reform movement, which preached a return to a purer form of the faith. Abdi summarizes the aims of Hassan's mission as a struggle against the lax religious practices of Somalis and to revive their Islamic spirit.⁴⁵ It is in this context that his *jihad* must be seen. Hassan believed that part of this agenda necessitated the traditional religious strategy of the *Lesser Jihad* to respond to the iniquity of Christian rule over Muslims. This was a facet of Hassan that the British failed to appreciate. However, there were some British observers who noted the nature and impact of Sufism on Somali society. For example, Frances Swayne, a rare tourist to the protectorate, wrote that Somali Islam was a "very strict sect...Christians would do well...to take example by them in religious observances."⁴⁶ Another writer viewed the *Salihyya* as "very fanatical...their extremely uncompromising religious views...resemble the austere *Wahabbis*."⁴⁷ Sir Geoffrey Archer, Governor of Somaliland, called the *Salihyya* the "most fanatical" of all Muslims.⁴⁸ British observations of Somali Sufism reflected a suspicion of the orders due to their supposed extremism. A "Memorandum on Political Affairs in Somaliland," written after Hassan's demise in 1925, showed extensive knowledge of Sufism, but with a derogatory interpretation of the phenomenon. Somalis were presented as "fanatical and ignorant" and easily led by "Mullahs" who "infest the country." The "Mullahs," perhaps understandably after Britain's bruising experience with Hassan, were seen as a negative force, "preaching resistance to Government orders" and thus a "considerable power for harm" against the colonial administration.⁴⁹ However, like Willes-Jennings' contradictory attitude,⁵⁰ *zawiyas* were seen as harmless, which reflected the conflicting nature of British attitudes to Sufism.⁵¹

Hassan's career as a *jihadist* leader had a profoundly religious motivation but was coloured by military and political factors that arose from his leadership of a militant movement. Samatar and Martin have argued that Hassan used his leadership of the *Salihyya* order in Somaliland to adapt the sect's hierarchical model to create a large-scale organization that surmounted clan politics.⁵² Whilst Hassan's movement was political in nature, the religious sentiment that underpinned his movement is the area of focus here. Although Hassan was a reli-

gious personality in his own right, his connection to the Salihyya order was important. Jardine hinted at this when he wrote that Hassan's followers always went into battle "invoking the name of Mohammed Salih."⁵³ If Hassan used Islam as a front for thieving, it seems implausible that his followers chanted Salih's name before going into battle.

Another episode that shows the importance of the Salihyya connection is the denunciation of Hassan by his erstwhile mentor in 1909. Salih accused Hassan of "no longer minding the *shar'ia* law" because he killed and looted Somalis. Salih charged Hassan with not being a good Muslim and excommunicated him from the order for "not knowing your proper religion...Mohammedans are not those who take their neighbour's blood on their hands."⁵⁴ This caused a rupture between Hassan's followers but did not halt his *jihad*.⁵⁵ The connection to the Salihyya order was important, but the continuation of Hassan's struggle after the break with his mentor points out the strength of his own religious feelings and motivations for the struggle, consistent throughout his career, which are examined below.

Similar to the case of Darfur's Sultan Ali Dinar,⁵⁶ there is an unusual amount of material on Hassan in the colonial archives. Along with contemporaneous British accounts and research carried out by Somali and other historians in the last thirty years, there are many examples of Hassan's proclamations, letters, writings, and poetry.⁵⁷ Analyzing these against the grain of their location in British sources (that used them to highlight Hassan's fanaticism), it is possible to reconstruct how he saw his struggle as religiously motivated against British imperialism and insufficient piety in Somali Islam. Hassan's proclamation before he began his *jihad* stated, "Unbelieving men of religion have assaulted our country from their remote homelands. They wish to corrupt our religion...Our aim is to cleanse the land of unbelievers."⁵⁸ This declaration of struggle against the perceived oppression of Islam is supported by Hassan's first letter to the British as a *jihadist* leader in 1899: "you have oppressed our ancient religion without cause...If you want war, we accept it."⁵⁹ Subsequent letters to the British are consistent in the reasons for Hassan's *jihad*. One in 1903 stated his wish to "protect my own religion." This letter also showed Hassan's belief in the religious rightness of his cause: "We fight by God's order...We ask for God's blessing. God is with me when I write this."⁶⁰ A further letter to the British in 1913 humbly stated, "I am a pilgrim and a holy fighter, and have no wish to gain power and greatness in this world."⁶¹ Hassan's correspondence to the British had frequent references to himself as the

"Poor Man of God," and repeated his mission as the defense of Islam against non-Muslims.⁶² This evidence shows Hassan as a pious Muslim who saw *jihad* as the only way to achieve his aims of purifying the religion in Somaliland and eliminating non-Muslim influence.

Hassan's motivations for the *jihad* are also evident in his letters and poems to Somali tribes. A letter to the Warsangli tribe shown to British officials stated that, "fighting them [the British] is the duty of every Muslim." Hassan described himself as "a Dervish, hoping for God's mercy and consent and forgiveness and guidance" and not as a member of any Somali tribe. The letter highlighted his reformist and revivalist leanings. Proclaiming that, "this is a time of oppression...this is a time in which infidels defeat *Moslems*," his interpretation of the state of affairs in Somaliland reinforced the importance of his mission to revive Islam and struggle against its Christian rulers.⁶³

Hassan's poetry⁶⁴ castigated the Somalis' lack of Islamic fervour in struggling against their imperial overlords:

Somalis, rise from sleep!
Catastrophe has fallen on the land
The Unbelievers have deceived you
Since you failed to continue the *jihad*!⁶⁵

B. G. Martin has recovered one of Hassan's few written texts, the *Risala*, written in 1905. It answered Somali criticisms regarding his *jihad*. In the text, Hassan asserted his membership in the Salihyya brotherhood. Hassan saw the *jihad* as an inescapable duty incumbent on all Muslims because "unbelievers have invaded Muslim lands." He disagreed with those who argued that following Sufi rituals was sufficient to fulfill the obligation for *jihad*. The text attacked those Somalis who attributed the country's peace and prosperity to the British presence. Such thinking was full of "lies and falsehood" because of Christianity's "fundamental hostility to Muslims." Justice could not come from Christians, only from the Qur'an. Any Somali employed by Christians, or who "consorted" with them, or who lived in Christian countries faced "contamination and degeneration." They were "dubious Muslims" and "undesirables." Hassan quoted the Qur'an (IV, 140): "if you persist in keeping company with unbelievers, you will become like them." He justified attacks against his fellow Somali Muslims who associated with Christians because they were "unbelievers pure and

simple." This rationale extended to incorrect beliefs or actions, such as not appearing at Friday prayers.

The issue of *tawassul*, intercession with God by local saints and holy men, occupied equal space in the text. Hassan was against this concept, which explains his hostility to the Qadiriyyeh Sufi order, which believed it was acceptable. In expressing this opinion, Hassan appears to be part of the "neo-Sufi" reformation context as he reflected the views of al-Fasi, the intellectual ancestor of the Salihyya order. Hassan's views against *tawassuf* revealed his sharp differences with traditional Sufism, which was pantheistic in nature.⁶⁶

This text, and Hassan's poetry, went unnoticed by the British at the time. Even if they were aware of these writings, it is unlikely (given their dismissive responses to Hassan's letters) that their views of him as a fanatical Muslim rebel would have changed. Nevertheless, a selection of his poetry shows his piety and how he was driven to carry out the *Lesser Jihad* in defense of the faith. For example, one poem states:

If the blaze of the fire I kindled does not consume them
If the English dogs do not flee in headlong panic
Then, let it be said that I am not a true Muslim.⁶⁷

His last poem, *The Will*, in 1920, is perhaps the best summary of Hassan's reasons for *jihad*:

I, on my own volition, chose to fight the infidels
It was I who said to the filthy unbelievers—this land is not yours
It was I who sought and found the Prophet's guidance.⁶⁸

As intimated above, however, the British were not Hassan's sole concern. His *jihad* was as much directed against Somalis and the other Christian power ruling over his countrymen, Ethiopia. These two targets of his *jihad* are considered below.

It was Somalis, not the British, who bore the brunt of his raids and military actions. British sources described the fighting between Hassan and Somali tribes. One report mentioned Hassan being preoccupied with fighting the Majeerteen while he was in Italian Somaliland in 1905–08,⁶⁹ and hostility in 1913–15 between Hassan and his former ally, the Sultan of Las Khorai, who was motivated by the fear that his "own independence might be threatened."⁷⁰ The same report stated that in 1916–17, Ali Kendid, Sultan of Obbia, also fought Hassan.⁷¹ Other pub-

lished works also recorded Hassan's interactions with Somali tribes. Capt. A. H. E. Mosse stated that in 1913, Hassan had "quarrelled, apparently irrevocably" with the Dolbahanta tribe.⁷² Hassan's *jihad* was directed against the rival Sufi orders in the country that preached what he saw as an "impure" version of Islam, and against his fellow Somalis for being insufficiently pious Muslims who had allowed themselves to fall under British rule. For example, one of Hassan's poems to tribes under British protection says:

Ye have mistaken the hell-ordained and Christians for the Prophet
Ye have shamelessly grovelled after the accursed
Were you noblemen (as you claim) ye would loathe the white
infidels.⁷³

In a similar vein is another of his poems, this time to the Isaaq tribe:

You have allowed yourselves to be led astray by the
Agents of the accursed
Had you any self respect or pride
You would not have shown such fondness
For the priests of perdition.⁷⁴

Therefore, these tribes were in the firing line of Hassan's forces, and most of his activities were directed against them. Fighting versus the British largely took the form of Hassan reacting to their unsuccessful expeditions and patrols sent to destroy him.

Hassan's movement was divisive amongst Somalis. Their views of Hassan are largely glimpsed through British sources, and as such must be treated with a degree of caution because writers often sought to discredit the support he had from his fellow countrymen. However, their accounts were probably partly accurate. During the first expeditions against Hassan, Captain McNeill wrote that Somalis who made up the bulk of his soldiers "had had all their property carried off by the Mullah; in some cases their wives and children had been killed and mutilated."⁷⁵ One Somali who fought alongside the British wrote a poem that included, "Allah willed me" to fight, and that he was motivated by the desire "to seize Dervish camels."⁷⁶ Swayne thought that Somalis were "sick of the war" because regardless of which side won, "the tribes stand to lose heavily, from raids and the resultant loss of livestock."⁷⁷

The majority of Somalis appeared to be no enthusiasts for Hassan's movement because of its disastrous effects on them. However, this translated into apathy as opposed to ardent support for the British. This view is supported by a letter from the British Commissioner, who wrote that tribes were mostly "loyal." The apathy was due to reliance on British protection. The Commissioner discounted "any disloyalty to us or leaning towards the Mullah, whom they have now learned by experience to hate and fear."⁷⁸ The Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1916 asserted that desertions from Hassan showed a lack of support for his movement.⁷⁹ Some Somalis viewed Hassan as a blood-thirsty criminal. A Berbera poet from the Isaaq clan attacked Hassan in this manner:

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 travellers and engorges
their dates.⁸⁰

This poem and others show the complexity of responses to Hassan's movement.⁸¹ Somalis were far from receptive to his aims, although this did not translate into support for the British. Hassan's *jihad* was directed primarily against supposedly impious Somalis, then against the British and Ethiopians. He encountered opposition from some Somali men who joined British forces after they suffered a raid by Hassan, or those that saw him as a nuisance instead of a great Muslim and Somali leader. Ultimately, most Somalis appeared apathetic to his *jihad*. The majority was more concerned with surviving day-to-day life. Yet Hassan's followers were firm believers in his message, and his struggles against foreign rulers have had a long legacy in Somali society.

Some historians have argued that Hassan's movement was primarily caused by Ethiopian actions, and that Ethiopia was his main target instead of Britain.⁸² In fact, his *jihad* began in the Ogaden, which had suffered under Ethiopian imperialism, characterized by raids on villages and the seizure of livestock. Some British writers acknowledged Ethiopian imperialism as a factor that contributed to the causes of Hassan's *jihad*.⁸³ For example, Swayne wrote that the Ethiopian occupation of Harar in 1899, "roused the opposition of the Ogaden," which led to Hassan's *jihad* against Ethiopia and Britain.⁸⁴ Consequently, Britain was caught up in Hassan's movement against the Ethiopians.⁸⁵ An 86-year-

old “Dervish” interviewed by S. S. Samatar in 1977 recalled Hassan’s first proclamation to the Somalis: “Infidel invaders have come to surround us...They have come to corrupt our ancient religion...If you follow me, with the help of God, I will deliver you from the *Amhaar* [Ethiopians].”⁸⁶ It is clear from this and British writings that Hassan was not only concerned with *jihad* against the British. His sense of injustice at Christian Ethiopia’s rule over Somalis motivated him to proclaim his *jihad* just as much as his experiences with British imperialism.⁸⁷

V. Conclusion

In the British House of Commons in February 1920, Leo Amery, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, aptly summarized the situation in Somaliland: “In the course of less than three weeks the power of the Dervishes in British Somaliland has been entirely destroyed.”⁸⁸ During the war a campaign was “impracticable”⁸⁹ due to military requirements in Europe.⁹⁰ As soon as the armistice was signed in 1918, however, the government planned and executed a military operation that used the RAF to bomb Hassan’s forts, which ultimately broke his movement. Hassan fled from Somaliland into Ethiopia after his defeat and died there from influenza in December 1920. The movement, which was nothing minus its extraordinary leader, swiftly disintegrated. This points to a lack of wider support, as no Somalis were willing to carry on Hassan’s struggle. It shows the divisiveness of his movement among Somalis who had borne the brunt of his aggression, thus limiting his *jihad*’s effectiveness. “Dervishism” became “little more than a memory, but for the Somali a memory of how they successfully resisted for more than twenty years the power of a civilised nation. Can it or will it resuscitate at a later date?”⁹¹ So far, it has not, although Hassan left a powerful legacy that transcended the narrow nature of British views towards his *jihad*.

Notes

1. Maj. H. G. C. Swayne, “Introduction,” in *My Somali Book*, by Capt. A. H. E. Mosse (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, Ltd., 1913), p. 1.
2. Sir Geoffrey Archer, *Personal and Historical Memoirs of an East African Administrator* (London: Oliver & Boyd Ltd., 1963), p. 63.
3. Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 199–200.

4. Sir G. H. Summers, "Memorandum on Political Affairs in Somaliland," University of Oxford, Rhodes House Library, Mss Afr.s.905 (1925), p. 2.
5. Archer 1963, p. 54.
6. *Digest of History of the Somaliland Camel Corps*, King's African Rifles, London, National Archives, WO 106/272, p. 197.
7. Summers 1925, Chapter 4, "Religion," p. 2.
8. In chronological order: Capt. Malcolm McNeill, *In Pursuit of the Mad Mullah* (London: C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., 1902); Maj. H. G. C. Swayne, *Seventeen Trips through Somaliland and a Visit to Abyssinia* (London: Rowland Ward Ltd., 1903); Maj. James Willes-Jennings, *With the Abyssinians in Somaliland* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905); Frances Swayne, *A Woman's Pleasure Trip in Somaliland* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co. Ltd., 1907); Angus Hamilton, *Somaliland* (London: Hutchinson & Company, 1911); Ralph E. Drake-Brockmann, *British Somaliland* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1912); Capt. A. H. E. Mosse, *My Somali Book* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, Ltd., 1913); Henry Francis Prevost-Battersby, *Richard Corfield of Somaliland* (London: Edward Arnold, 1914); Maj. Henry A. Rayne, *Sun, Sand and Somalis: Leaves from the Notebook of a District Commissioner in British Somaliland* (London: H. F. G. Witherby, 1921); Douglas Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* (London: Jenkins, 1923); and Archer 1963.
9. Saadia Touvel, "A Question of Boundary Lines" in *Somali Nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1963); Muhammad Multasim, *Sayyid Mahdi al-Sumal* (Cairo: 1963); Jama' Umar Isa, *Ta'rikh al-Sumal fi'l-'usur al-wusta wa'l-hadith* (Cairo: 1965); and Sheikh Ahmed Abdullahi Riiraash, *Kashfal-Sudul'an Ta'rikh al-Sumal wa al-Mamalikihim al-Sab'ah* (Mogadishu, 1972).
10. Bradford G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Ioan M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia* (London: Longman Publishing Group, 1980); S. S. Samatar 1982; and Abdi Sheikh Abdi, *Divine Madness: Mohammed Abdullah Hassan (1856–1920)* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1993).
11. Martin 1976; and S. S. Samatar 1982.
12. Lewis 1980; and Abdi 1993.
13. There are very few official papers in the National Archives (London) due to the destruction wrought by the Italian invasion of British Somaliland in 1940. See C. R. Barnes, "The Ethiopian State and its Somali Periphery, 1888–1948" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 2001).
14. Summers 1925, Chapter 4, "Religion," p. 1; and *Digest of History of the Somaliland Camel Corps*, King's African Rifles, London, National Archives, WO 106/272, p. 197. Prevost-Battersby's published account concurred with this interpretation and added that there was "the prospect of loot as an attractive accessory" (Prevost-Battersby 1914, p. 33).
15. Hamilton 1911, pp. 49–50.
16. Prevost-Battersby 1914, p. 32.
17. The word "Mullah" came to Somaliland from colonial officials who served on the northwest frontier of India. It is a Turco-Persian rendition of the Arabic "*manla*," meaning a Muslim scholar of theology and law.
18. "Hayes-Sadler to Prime Minister Salisbury," Correspondence No. 8, *Cmd 597* (1901), quoted in S. S. Samatar 1982, p. 184.

19. "Nomad" and "Forgotten Pages—The Mad Mullah of Somaliland," *United Empire, Journal of the Royal Colonial Institute* 16, no. 2 (1925): 76–80 and 137–42.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 79. Virtually all contemporaneous British accounts contain the story of an operation Hassan had on his skull when young that contributed to his later "madness."
21. Swayne 1903, p. viii.
22. Rayne 1921, p. 200. Drake-Brockmann 1912, p. 181, corroborates this: accounts of frequent "atrocities" committed by Hassan were apparently true, due to the "living relics of humanity, maimed and mutilated" that were "a common enough site in the native bazaar in the up-country station of Bura'o."
23. Rayne 1921, p. 216.
24. Hamilton 1911, p. 124.
25. C. A. L. Howard, "Intelligence Report No. 191," University of Oxford, Rhodes House Library, Mss Afr.s.551 Somaliland/Abyssinia 1916–52 Military Affairs, p. 4.
26. Jardine 1923, p. 314.
27. Ismay, "Report on Somaliland," University of Oxford, Rhodes House Library, Mss Drysdale, p. 1.
28. There is no confirmation in available primary sources or secondary works that Hassan went to Cairo and Alexandria.
29. Drake-Brockman 1912, p. 176.
30. Ismay, "Appendix I—The Mad Mullah," p. 173.
31. Quoted in Prevost-Battersby 1914, p. 116.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
33. Jardine 1923, p. 55.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 309–10.
35. *Digest of History of the Somaliland Camel Corps*, King's African Rifles, London, National Archives, WO 106/272, p. 98.
36. J. P. Slight, "British and Muslim Perceptions and Responses to *Jihad* in the British Empire, 1914–1924" (Unpublished MPhil thesis, University of Cambridge, 2007).
37. Lieut.-Col. G. H. Summers, "Somaliland," in *The Empire at War*, Volume 4, Africa, edited by Sir Charles Lucas (Oxford, 1925), pp. 565–70.
38. "Sudan Intelligence Report, No. 260," March 1916, SAD MacMichael 110/5/21–22.
39. "Précis of Abyssinian Intelligence collected by District Commissioner," Hargeisa, 30/8–15/9/1916, University of Oxford, Rhodes House Library, Mss Afr.s.551 Somalia/Abyssinia 1916–52 Military Affairs, pp. 4–5.
40. Aw Jaamac Cumar Ciise, *Taariikhdiis Daraawiishta iyo Sayid Maxamad Cabdulle Xasan*. (Mogadishu: Wasaaradda Hiddaha iyo Tacliinta Sare, Akadeemiyaha Dhaqanka, 1976), pp. 241–45, quoted in S. S. Samatar 1982, p. 134.
41. "Despatch No. 03286," 15/6/16, London, National Archives (N.A.), CO 535/42, quoted in S. S. Samatar 1982, p. 134.
42. Quoted from *Somaliya* 3 (1967), pp. 28–29, in B. G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 192.
43. Ismay, "Appendix I—The Mad Mullah," p. 189.

44. Hassan to British Government, March 1917, reproduced in D. Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* (London, 1923), p. 249.
45. Abdi 1993, p. 58.
46. Swayne 1907, p. 66.
47. "Nomad" 1925, pp. 76–80 and p. 137–42.
48. Archer 1963, p. 57.
49. Summers 1925, Chapter 4, "Religion," p. 7.
50. *Zawiyas'* "religious character" meant they were free "from disturbance" but "Mullahs" connected to these orders preached *jihad*. Willes-Jennings 1905, p. 5.
51. Summers 1925, Chapter 4, "Religion," p. 7.
52. S. S. Samatar 1982, p. 186; and B. G. Martin 1976, p. 201.
53. Jardine 1923, p. 186.
54. Salih to Hassan, undated, reproduced in Jardine 1923, pp. 184–85.
55. The "Tree of Bad Counsel" Revolt (1909), details in S. S. Samatar 1982, pp. 125–30.
56. See Sudan Intelligence Reports in the National Archives, London, and the extensive material in the Sudan Archive at Durham University.
57. Unfortunately the author's Arabic is not sufficiently advanced to read sources in the original, and time has not permitted a trip to Somalia to conduct fieldwork.
58. "Umar Isa 1965," p. 59, quoted in B. G. Martin 1976, p. 182.
59. Hassan to Consul-General Hayes Sadler, 9/9/1899, "Correspondence No. 22," Cmd 597 (1901), quoted in Jardine 1923, p. 43.
60. Jardine 1923, p. 122.
61. Prevost-Battersby 1914, p. 227.
62. S. S. Samatar 1982, p. 191.
63. Jardine 1923, p. 211–12.
64. Hassan composed a large amount of poetry that touched on many subjects, which cannot be reproduced here due to limitations of space. See examples in B. G. Martin 1976; S. S. Samatar 1982; and Abdi 1993.
65. "Umar Isa 1965," p. 126, quoted in B. G. Martin 1976, p. 194.
66. B. G. Martin 1976, p. 196.
67. Muhammad Abdullah Hassan's poem, "Jidka Adari Loo Mara," quoted in S. S. Samatar 1982, p. 190.
68. Interview with Sheikh Jaama Umar Iise by S. S. Samatar, field notes, Mogadishu 7/2/1977, quoted in S. S. Samatar 1982, p. 179.
69. Ismay, "Appendix I—The Mad Mullah," p. 177.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
72. Mosse 1913, p. 252.
73. Excerpt from Muhammad Abdullah Hassan's poem "Hirsow naaqusnimo wa Wahaad niq la leedahaye," quoted in S. S. Samatar 1982, p. 153.
74. Abdi 1993, p. 73.
75. McNeill 1902, p. 103.

76. Excerpt from Qaaje Muhammad Iise Qaaje-Balas' poem "Rahanraabkiyo Hawsha, Aw Daahir Afqarshe," from field notes by S. S. Samatar, Mogadishu, 6/3/1977, quoted in S. S. Samatar 1982, p. 124.
77. "Swayne to Foreign Office," 21/4/1904, University of Oxford, Rhodes House Library, Mss Brit. Emp.s.279, Swayne, pp. 11–12.
78. Prevost-Battersby 1914, pp. 108–09.
79. "Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies to Mr. Steel-Maitland MP," 9/3/16, Column 1797, *Hansard* 80 (February–March 1916).
80. Excerpt from Ali Jaama Haabiil's poem, "Ma Talyaani gaasaa Mahdi Ah," translated by S. S. Samatar, quoted in S. S. Samatar 1982, p. 163.
81. Further examples in Abdi 1993, pp. 51–53. Ali Jaama Habil (1905): "A crazed priest has descended upon us/He has left us truly impoverished/Having seized all our stock/It is far preferable to associate/With an infidel who treats you right/Than to associate with a supposed Muslim/Who tramples you underfoot." See also Dolbahanta poet Hassan Shiil (1918): "Oh Lord, we pray to thee/Bring death on the man/Or make him insane/Or guide him to the true faith/Or turn him over to the infidels/Who seek his life."
82. S. S. Samatar 1982 and Barnes (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 2001) have argued that the Ethiopian side of events against Hassan is seen as subsidiary to the larger conflict between him and British imperialism.
83. Mosse 1913, p. 251.
84. H. A. Swayne, in Mosse 1913, "Introduction," p. xx.
85. Willes-Jennings' account supports the view that Hassan's *jihad* was "primarily directed against the Abyssinians," but that his actions against Somali tribes in the protectorate led to conflict with the British. See Willes-Jennings 1905, p. 5.
86. Interview with Mahammad Toogyar, field notes by S. S. Samatar, Mogadishu, 6/2/1977, quoted in S. S. Samatar 1982, p. 112.
87. However, the author does not possess the language skills to undertake archival research in Ethiopia.
88. "Statement by Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies," Lieut.-Col. Amery MP, 17/2/20, Column 721, *Hansard* 125 (10–27 February 1920).
89. *Ibid.*, Column 720.
90. "Nomad" 1925, pp. 76–80 and 137–142.
91. Ismay, "Appendix I—The Mad Mullah," p. 191.