The role of the individual administrator in famine relief: Three case studies

L. Brennan, R.L. Heathcote and **A.E. Lucas** *

The Flinders University of South Australia
Bedford Park
South Australia 5042

A series of hypotheses on the role of the individual administrator in famine relief are proposed and three are examined with respect to case studies of famines in India (1896 and 1906—1907), Uganda (1908) and Lombok (1940). While the evidence is not conclusive, the focus upon the role of the individual administrator offers additional insights into the compexities of official response to famines.

Keywords: Famine; Famine relief; Administrator's motivations; India; Uganda; Lombok.

INTRODUCTION

While many studies of famine have been concerned with their causes and results, few have attempted to assess in any systematic way the role of the individual administrators in the management of the crisis. The aim of this paper therefore is to suggest a framework within which the role of the individual administrator might be assessed and to provide some evidence on three components of that framework. We first outline the proposed framework and then examine three case studies which we believe illustrate separate propositions.

It is possible to hypothesize that the individual administrator's actions may influence the outcome of famine relief measures and that those actions may be the result of several possible biases in the administrator's attitudes towards the famine itself. While there can be little doubt about the validity of the first proposition, it may be useful to rehearse some of the possible biases implicit in the second. These biases can be set out as a series of hypotheses ranging from the null hypothesis that there are no observable biases, through to a series of hypotheses which suggest that there will be evidence in the actions of the administrator of definable biases which can be seen to have a measurable effect (either positive or negative) upon the management of famine relief. Our first approximation of these hypothetical biases is set out in Table 1 and our concern is to suggest possible ways in which the individual role of the administrator may influence the nature of the famine relief. From the null hypothesis (No. 1) there seems to be a range of possible biases, from an individual ideological stance, a national or cultural affiliation, personal career aspirations or experience as an administrator of famine relief, to personality bias or administrative training. As part of our more general research into management of famine relief we have uncovered some evidence which seems to support three of these hypotheses.

Table 1. Hypotheses on the role of the individual administrator in famine relief

1. The individual administrator plays no separate role in the food crisis management other than to carry out his duties as delimited by his official position in an administrative hierarchy. This assumes an efficient execution of all duties uninfluenced by personal preference, interest or favour, and not influenced by any interests other than those of a conscientious public servant.
2. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects a particular ideological stance which is separate and different from that implicit in the institution of which he is a part.
3. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects his national or cultural affiliation which is separate from that of the persons of the area administered.
4. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects his personal career status/aspirations and which makes interpretation of his actions understandable most clearly in terms of the implications for his career prospects and opportunities.
5. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects his or her personal experience as an administrator of famine relief. This bias may be the result of lack of experience or may be the result of prior experience and reflect a learning process.
6. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects his or her personality which may or may not be compatible with working associates.
7. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects his or her prior administrative training (separate from actual on-the-job experience, see 5).

*The authors are Senior Lecturer in History, Reader in Geography and Lecturer in Asian Studies respectively at the Flinders University of South Australia.

This evidence is presented below as three brief case studies, each concerned with a particular famine.

THE CAREERIST AT WORK? SIR HESKETH BELL AND THE BUSOGA FAMINE OF 1908

The famine of 1908 in the Busoga District of the British Protectorate of Uganda, officially attributed to drought, was one of the earliest food crises in the British East African dependencies, and was relatively well-documented largely through the efforts of the Governor Sir Hesketh Bell (1864—1952). The official account of the famine and its relief was published in November 1908 (Uganda, 1908) with a subsequent report on measures to combat Sleeping Sickness, published in 1909 (Uganda, 1909a). These reports provided evidence of the London Government at Whitehall's appreciation of the apparently successful efforts by the Governor in combating two major crises (Fig. 1). Preliminary assessment of the famine and the official actions in respect to it suggested to us that here was a possible case where an all-powerful Governor saw, in the challenge of the famine, an opportunity to further his career through a successful mitigation policy.

The course of the famine

Although some commentators claimed the onset was in October 1907 (Langlands, 1971), the existence of a famine in Busoga District was first reported by the Governor to Whitehall by a despatch of 4th April 1908, and further telegrams on 7th, 23rd and 28th May reported the extent of the famine and measures of relief (Uganda, 1908). By the end of July the famine was reported over, 10,000 people having died, and 50,000 having been fed from emergency supplies during May and June. The cost to the Imperial Government was £8,000, the bulk of which it was hoped to recoup by subsequent taxation, and significant assistance in famine relief had come from the Church Missionary Society and the Mill Hill Fathers (Cook, 1945; Langlands, 1971; Uganda, 1908). A subsistence native economy had apparently been saved from destruction by timely official and private famine relief.

The careerists' strategy

If our fourth hypothesis is correct we would expect that the administrator would ensure that the response to the challenge posed by the famine would further his or her career prospects in as many ways as possible. We might expect that the character of the famine might be exaggerated to make more impressive any solution; his own role might also be exaggerated; immediate palliative measures might be emphasized over longer term structural modification or policies; the causes of the distress would *not* be seen to be the result of any shortcomings in his prior official policies, but rather "natural causes" would be emphasized; and all famine relief efforts would be as widely and as publicly reported as possible to achieve maximum credit and "visibility" for the administrator. To what extent did Sir Hesketh Bell's actions support such a hypothesis?

There is no doubt that the Governor was well aware of the importance for his career of the successful completion of his tour of duty in Uganda. During his tour, from his appointment as Commissioner in December 1905 and as Governor from October 1907 to August 1909, he coped successfully with the famine, and with measures to eradicate Sleeping Sickness on the shores of Lake Victoria, carried out an extensive road works programme and encouraged the introduction of commercial cotton production. From

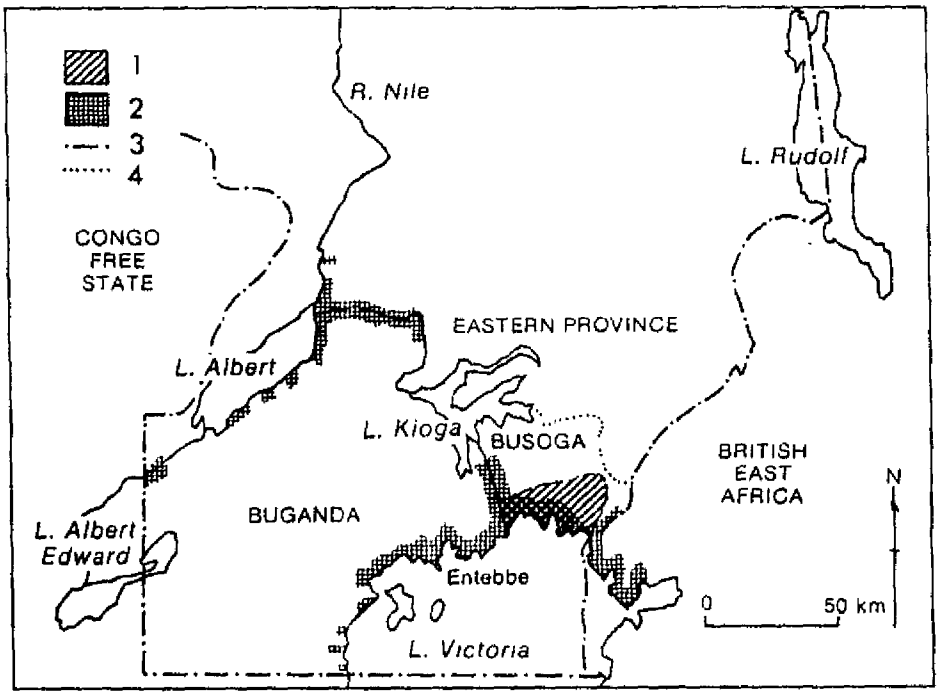

Fig. 1. The Busoga Famine (Uganda) 1908.

Key:

1 — Famine area 1908 (approximate).
2 — Areas cleared as part of Sleeping Sickness eradication program.
3 — International boundary.
4 — District boundary.

Source: Uganda (1909a).

Uganda he was to go on to be Governor of Northern Nigeria (1909—1912), of the Leeward Islands (1912—1916) and of Mauritius (1916—1924) (Bell, 1946). During his Uganda tour in fact in June 1908 almost immediately after his famine relief proposals had been supported by Whitehall, he had been awarded the K.C.M.G. which was a source of considerable satisfaction to him (Bell, 1946, p. 182). Significantly also, in November 1908 at the end of the famine, he applied (unsuccessfully) for the Governorship of Cyprus.

Sir Hesketh Bell's private letters reveal an active and conscientious bachelor enjoying the autocratic position of Governor in Uganda, and determined to make a good impression in Whitehall. His reports on his tours through the Protectorate were written

> in rather a lighter strain than is usual in official despatches as they are then sure to be read by the heads at the C.O. [Colonial Office] instead of being merely glanced through by some cheeky understrapper. As a matter of fact I believe they rather enjoy my reports at the C.O. (Bell, 1910, letter of 21st September 1908).

In fact his first major tour in 1908 through the Eastern Province was published as a Miscellaneous Colonial Report No. 57 (Cd. 4524 of 1909) as he had anticipated. In mid-1909 on a visit to England he met Lord Crewe, then Secretary of State, who "said he made a point of reading all my reports on account of their great interest" (Bell, 1924, entry on 22nd June 1909). In September 1908 he noted in his diary that Miss Violet Brooke Hunt, a "political lady" visitor to Entebbe, told him that he was "quite well known in London as 'the man who sat on Winston Churchill' " (Bell, 1924, entry on 28th September 1908). Bearing in mind such foresight and reputation, how in fact did the Governor cope with the 1908 famine, were his actions biased towards his career prospects?

The Governor's reporting of the onset and duration of the famine do not appear to show signs of exaggeration but rather the factual reporting of a developing situation which would need supplementary official funding. Unlike his letter to *The Times* of 2nd March 1907 to solicit funds for the victims of Sleeping Sickness, he does not appear to have made any approach to the British Press on the famine. He did claim, echoing his Deputy, that as a result of official actions "many thousands of lives" were saved but this does not seem inconsistent in the light of the daily feeding of 50,000 reported for June, and his Deputy's assessment of 50—75% of the 300,000 Basoga in "imminent danger of starvation" at the height of the crisis (Bell, 1908). Further, Hesketh Bell gave clear credit to his Deputy, George Wilson C.B., to whom the initial direct management of famine relief was given on 19th May, to Mr. G. Boyle who took over the subsequent routine administration, and to the subordinate staff and the two missionary groups who co-operated in the relief, namely the Church Missionary Society and the Mill Hill fathers. As a result the Secretary of State expressed his appreciation of their good work to both Wilson and Boyle and the latter was nominated for the C.M.G. on the basis of "the excellent work which he has done both in connection with the famine and in the development of the province" (Bell, 1908, opposite p. 117). When Col. J. Seely recommended to Lord Crewe the publication of the Governor's despatch, the reason appeared to be that it represented a successful *team* effort rather than solely to provide individual adulation:

> We generally only publish as a consequence of some row or difficulty. Here is an account of an emergency most successfully dealt with, and for the credit of the service it would be satisfactory to let the public know what has been so well done (Bell, 1908, opposite p. 117).

Indeed, some favourable publicity for the official efforts had already appeared in the Uganda Notes of the Church Missionary Society over the period May to July (C.M.S. 1908).

The main measures of famine relief adopted in 1908 were both gratuitous food distribution and food for work projects, the food being paid for from a specific grant of £8,000 requested by Hesketh Bell from Whitehall. The relief was seen as merely an interim measure to feed the population until the "short" rainy season could begin in September and on the advice of his Deputy Wilson, Hesketh Bell proposed to recoup the outlay by a doubled hut tax in Busoga for 1909—1910. No structural changes were proposed for the future but village granaries under the supervision of the chiefs were reintroduced, having apparently lapsed in the recent past. The measures appear to have been conscientiously enforced and were praised by at least one of the only other relief agencies involved, the Church Missionary group; the threat of famine in the future was played down since Busoga was considered a relatively rich area where the improved roads resulting from the relief and other public works, good transport and timely notice would reduce any future impact of drought (Bell, 1908, p. 136).

Finally, was there any indication in the official account of the causes of the famine that Hesketh Bell played down, or deliberately overlooked, facts which would reflect adversely upon his administrative policies? In the official reports the causes of famine were given as firstly drought, whereby the basic staple food crop, bananas, had been seriously reduced and secondly, the depredations in village food gardens of wild pigs forced out of their normal foraging grounds also by the drought. The Governor was to admit in 1909 that the role of the pigs was a source of embarrassment since they had been a protected animal prior to the famine (Bell, 1912). As a result of their contribution to the famine however, they had been taken off the officially protected list and hunts had been organized (Uganda, 1908). Whether the famine can be solely attributed to drought, however, can be debated. The meteorological records show that at Entebbe, rainfall in 1908 was only 89.5% of the average 1900—1909 and the "short rains" (September to November) for 1907 were only 75.6% of the average. However, the "long rains" (March to May) where above average for both 1907 and 1908 (116.8% and 107.5% respectively) and the 1908 figures in particular are curious since the period March to May was reportedly the height of the drought-induced famine. Locally in Busoga, of course, the situation may be been

different, but the evidence initially raises some doubts about the severity of the rain failure (Uganda, 1909b).

As research into natural hazards has shown however, a society may be made more vulnerable to "natural events" by human activity (Burton *et al.*, 1978). This appears to have been the case in Uganda and the relevant human activity seems to have resulted from three official policies in particular. The first was the recruitment of labour for official public works schemes — mainly road building; the second the official encouragement of cotton as a cash crop at the expense of the area under food production, and the third the land clearance policy associated with the official measures to counter Sleeping Sickness.

The first two actions were noted by the Bishop of Uganda in 1909 as leading to the reduction of local food production, leading in turn to a famine situation (Bell, 1912). The first claim was further supported by Roscoe (1921) who suggested that after the recruitment of the men the Busogan women refused to take over the preliminary tillage normally done by the men and as a result the gardens were neglected and food production reduced. He contrasted the thriving adjacent gardens of settlers from Buganda to both support his claim and to play down the drought impact explanation. Confronted by the Bishop's claims in 1909 the Governor denied that the labour recruitment had caused hardship (but did note that the system had been adandoned during the famine) and suggested that the size of the areas under cotton was insignificant compared to the area under crop (Bell, 1912).

While the impact of labour recruitment and commercial cotton growing therefore may be debateable, the Busoga society had already suffered severe stresses prior to and during the early stages of the drought, which would certainly have exacerbated any developing famine situation. These stresses resulted from the Governor's decision to clear all human population from within two miles of the shores of Lake Victoria and the banks of the River Nile as part of measures to prevent the spread of Sleeping Sickness. The measures were a desperate step, but based on humanitarian motivation, to remove potential victims from the environments in which the carrier — tsetse fly (*Glossina palpalis*) — thrived. Already by 1906 over 200,000 deaths had been reported since 1898 and some areas in Busoga had already been depopulated (Uganda, 1909a). The forced evacuation of 100,000 inhabitants from the lake shore and islands, and the destruction of likely breeding sites for the fly, began in November 1906 and clearance of the Busoga shores was completed during 1908. The inhabitants were financially compensated and relocated on fly-free land of supposedly equal productivity but, as the Governor admitted in his reminiscences, considerable trauma and hardship were involved:

> it must be a terrible thing for the unfortunate peasants to see their old houses and luxuriant banana groves all burnt and destroyed (Bell, 1946, p. 165).

While there is no doubt that deaths from Sleeping Sickness decreased as a result of these measures, there is also no doubt that this disruption of a subsistence society, already under stress from the impact of the disease, must have seriously increased its vulnerability to any drought-induced food shortage occurring at the same time. Yet in the report of the famine there is no mention of this additional and officially sanctioned stress on the Basoga.

A clue that all was not well in Busoga society was present in the official famine report, however. Wilson noted that the ravages of Sleeping Sickness had been accompanied by "a peculiar breaking up of a certain indefinable cohesion in family life" and the spread of a belief that the land was under a curse. The resultant apathy had led to a low official opinion of the society by comparison, for example, with the Baganda (Bell, 1908) and according to the missionary Roscoe (1921) had suggested Indian hemp smoking was widespread. Yet despite the apparent relevance of these factors, they do not seem to have been seen as contributing to the famine, which officially at least was seen as the result of natural causes beyond the influence of man.

On reflection, while there is no doubt that Sir Hesketh Bell was determined to be seen in Whitehall to be doing a good job as Governor of Uganda, the case that he used the relief of the famine to further his career must rest, such as it is upon the emphasis on the natural causes of the famine rather than on the apparently more complex, and possibly officially exacerbated, causes. At the end of his tour of duty the Governor considered that he deserved a further term.

> In two years more here I would have completely stamped out Sleeping Sickness, made motor roads to all the principal centres of the Protectorate, and thoroughly established the cotton industry (Bell, 1910, letter 7th December 1908).

Significantly, there was no mention of the successful relief of the famine. Perhaps it was an embarrassing subject.

HARD WON EXPERIENCE: WILLIAM EGERTON ICS 1896—1907

For William Egerton ICS, September to December 1896 was a trying period in his career. During this time he was officiating as Collector of Shahabad in the Bihar region of the Bengal Presidency (Fig. 2). He was a relatively inexperienced officer, having arrived in India in December 1890, working first as an assistant magistrate and collector and then as an under-secretary in the Bengal secretariat (*India List*, 1897). It was, perhaps, his misfortune to be tested so early in his career by the infliction on Shahabad of the drought which triggered the first major famine in India since 1879. During the early months of the famine he was to make a number of "mistakes," one of which was to merit the censure of the Divisional Commissioner, J.A. Bourdillon (Bourdillon, 8th October 1896), and the notice of the Lt. Governor of the province Sir Alexander Mackenzie (Finucane, 15th October 1896) — each of which was in turn brought to public notice in the documents printed for Parliament in London. More important, the famine

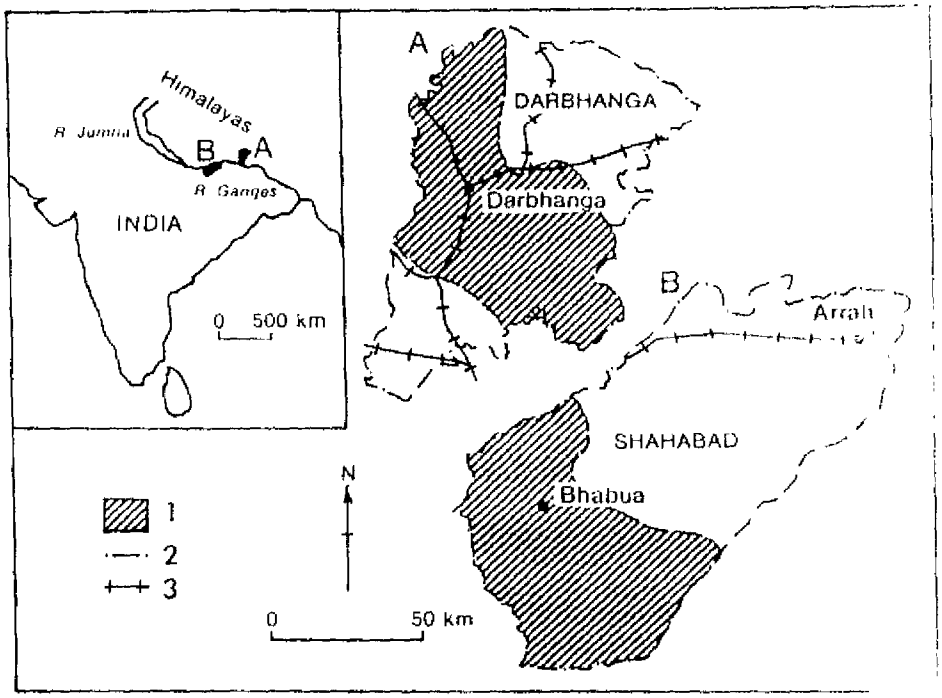

Fig. 2. Famine in Shahabad 1896 and Darbhanga 1906—1907 (India).

Key:

1 — Famine areas (approximate).
2 — District boundary.
3 — Railway.
A — Darbhanga 1906—1907.
B — Shahabad 1896.

Source: Adapted from Egerton (1908) and Hubback (1925).

operations in Shahabad between September and December were not conducted with a high degree of administrative control, and served mainly to push those affected by the famine away from the government relief works. But if Egerton had problems in 1896, he took the opportunity to wipe the slate clean ten years later when as Collector of Darbhanga he had the responsibility of containing the impact of a famine in that district. How far can we say that Egerton learnt from his previous experience?

Inadequate rainfall in Shahabad prior to August 1896 was followed by the absence of the *hathya* rains during late September and early October — the crucial period when moisture is required both for the maturing autumn crop and for the planting of the spring crop. This signalled the likely onset of a famine. By the end of September, there was no further rain and similar conditions elsewhere in northern and central India encouraged grain merchants to speculate in the Shahabad market, with the result that food prices began to rise. On 1st October, when grain dealers in Arrah, the district headquarters, suspended retail trade, there were signs that a grain riot was imminent. The following day, Egerton tried to strike at the root cause of the local fears by forbidding the export of grain, then reporting his actions to Bourdillon. The latter promptly commanded him to cancel the order, to protect the grain dealers, and to use only influence and advice to persuade the merchants to sell at a fair price (Bourdillon, 8th October 1896). This was the first sign that Egerton had not followed the underlying doctrine of the famine policy of British India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. For one of the major tenets of this doctrine was that there should be no interference with the grain trade.

He also came in for criticism after he had set up his first relief works in the south of the district, an area which was not connected to the canal system which continued to irrigate the northern two-thirds of the district. He reported that it was costing Rs2.25 per 1,000 cubic feet of earthwork on the roads: some half a rupee higher than the usual district board rate, and three quarters of a rupee more than that offered by the contractors building the East Indian Railway line in the district. Given the increase in the price of grain, the payment was probably quite reasonable — but again Egerton received a rap over the knuckles from Bourdillon. He had offended against two of the other tenets of famine relief doctrine: the payment was *prima facie* extravagant, and he had paid to workers on the relief works more than they would receive on nearby private work. He was ordered by Bourdillon to reduce the rate immediately. This had the required result because within a short time there was an exodus of relief workers to the railway. This was gratifying to Bourdillon, who held out great hopes for the railway construction as a "natural" famine relief mechanism (Bourdillon, 11th November 1896).

The pressure on Egerton to economize continued into December when, while he was touring the southern region with Bourdillon, he responded to the momentary decline in grain prices following the harvest by closing two of the projects and sending their workers to the railway or other relief work, and reducing payments elsewhere. One aspect of the difficulty faced by Egerton at this time was that the prosperity of the irrigated northern section of Shahabad and the railway construction had led the higher echelons of the administration to believe that there was nothing to worry about in the district.

This difficulty was compounded by Egerton's apparent reluctance to tour in the vulnerable area at this time. There

is evidence of his setting up the original relief projects in the third week of October and visiting the area only in the first week of December. His absence from the critical area and the pressure to economize seem also to have led his subordinates to make unwise decisions: for example, a circle officer increased without authorization the work required on a project by 50%. But most unfortunately, because Egerton did not travel through the villages of southern Shahabad, he was unable to detect for himself the large numbers of destitute people who during January 1897 demonstrated their need to his successor, Charles Marindin (Finucane, 16th February 1897). Perhaps because of Egerton's inexperience, he was unable to detect the signals of the impending famine, and because of his earlier "mistake" in relation to the pay rates of the relief workers he may have been reluctant to claim that there were problems in the district. This reflected a lack of acquaintance with the famine history of the district. He does not appear to have studied the two most recent famines there in 1866 and 1874, on each of which there were official reports. Although the circumstances were different in 1896, there were some interesting parallels, and at least one lesson from 1866 was relevant to famine relief in general: as W.W. Hunter pointed out, ". . . no relief measures were commenced till long after the pauper population had been reduced to the extremity of striving to support life on roots, leaves and grass" (Hunter, 1877). It was to just such a situation that Charles Marindin, the Collector of Shahabad, returned late in December, leading him to embark in January on an extensive programme of gratuitous relief, a programme which was to draw the attention of the Government of India (Holderness, 28th June 1897). In the meantime Egerton returned to his subordinate duties in the north of the district.

Egerton's next brush with famine occurred ten years later when he was the Collector of Darbhanga. If our hypothesis (No. 5) is correct, he should have learnt from the 1896 experience and the difficulties which had ensued, and put into operation these lessons. That is, he would in this case tour comprehensively, study the reports of his predecessors, keep a strict watch on his subordinates, be less concerned with short-term economies, and be more anxious to develop smoothly a work-relief programme which would be designed to cope with the shifts and changes in conditions.

There was a marked difference between Egerton's actions during the 1906—1907 famine in Darbhanga and his previous work in Shahabad. To a certain extent it was an easier situation to handle, because it did not occur during a general famine, and there were sufficient subordinate officers of good quality available to be drafted into the district to oversee the relief works and to distribute gratuitous relief. On the other hand, it was a more complex famine: it started with a flood in July, followed by another and more serious flood in August, and the final blow was a drought when the *hathya* rains failed. There was a shortfall by some two thirds in the crops in Darbhanga, affecting a core area of 1,690 square miles, with a population of nearly one and a half million. At the peak of the famine during January and February 1907, the average number of people on relief was just over 52,000 (Egerton, 1908).

After an initial period, during the floods in the last two weeks of August, when he was unable to make much impression on the problem of distressed villagers who had lost their crops, homes and food reserves, Egerton began to move with energy to provide cooked food through relief kitchens and to give agricultural loans to the small cultivators. He was substantially assisted by the managers of the indigo factories, employing them as voluntary relief officers and their compounds as distribution centres (Egerton, 1908). After the floods subsided it was hoped that winter crops would still be successful, but the failure of the rains prevented this. Egerton did not take any risks about the possibility of famine in the district and from September began to set up an organization which could be used for the administration of gratuitous relief. When famine was declared in December, the gratuitous relief and work relief systems were in place and operating. Egerton was in much better control of the situation than he had been some ten years previously. This control continued through to the end of the relief process after the monsoon rains in August 1907.

A number of factors help explain his success in 1906—1907. The first was that he toured extensively: we have the evidence of his tour diaries for December to July 1907 (Egerton, 1908), which demonstrate that even in the summer months he was constantly moving around the district — assisted by the provision of a motor car. During the tours he interviewed the officers employed on famine works and in charge of gratuitous relief, noted where relief works could be established, checked the condition of the people in different localities, and as well, attended to the official tasks not directly connected with the famine. It is clear that he expended a great deal of energy in coming to grips with the problems of the district. He was assisted in this, as he declares, by his close study of the reports of his predecessors in the district, and especially Carlyle's report on the 1897 famine.

The constant touring brought him into close touch with his subordinates, and it is clear that he was as anxious to avoid the corruption which had occurred in Darbhanga in 1896—1897, as he was to ensure the smooth operation of the relief works. Where there was evidence that the overseers in charge of the payment of relief gangs were keeping some of the funds for themselves he had them prosecuted as a deterrent to others. He also removed any officer whom he felt was not able to cope with the rigours of famine management (Egerton, 1908).

The pressure for economy was still evident in his operations. One example of this was that the scale of diet given in the relief kitchens was less than that prescribed by the Famine Code — by an average of twenty-five per cent (Egerton, 1908). He also seems to have decided that to make the work relief less attractive he would close the works on Sunday and not provide a Sunday wage— on the grounds that the workers were in good health and their dependants were being looked after at the kitchens. Moreover, the basis of payment of the workers was often to their disadvantage

since he initially chose a price for grain lower than that actually operating in the market: that is, the workers could buy less than that provided for in the Famine Code. Even then "... the market prices and the condition of the workers was carefully watched with a view to reduce wages as soon as possible" (Egerton, 1908).

Overall then, Egerton's performance in 1906—1907 was a great improvement on his initial experience in 1896. In the context of the ruling doctrines of economy, it was perhaps necessary that he should try to pare costs to a minimum. Yet it may be that it was only possible to do this without seriously affecting the welfare of the people because of the specific circumstances of this famine — a localized crisis, with adequate supplies of grain being brought in from an adjoining province, and with a numerous and well-trained group of subordinate officers. These factors, combined with his own contributions of intensive touring and careful analysis of the lessons of the past, may have compensated for the dangers of an overemphasis on economies.

Although he reaped some small reward for his work in the many commendations from the Lt. Governor and other superior officers, and the receipt of the Kaiser-i-Hind medal, Egerton did not receive the promotions his predecessors had received for their work in the 1896—1897 famine in Darbhanga. Indeed he had reached the pinnacle of his career, and died in 1918 with the same rank of Collector.

The case of William Egerton demonstrates that experience of famine relief and its problems can make a substantial difference to subsequent effectiveness, even in the worst possible case where the initial involvement had been largely unsuccessful. Egerton improved some of the crucial aspects of his administrative role: knowledge of past famines, touring, control of subordinates, and the careful development of a viable and useful work relief programme. He still seemed, however, to be obsessed by the need to justify his work on the basis of its economy. This too may have been a fruit of his early experience of famine relief in Shahabad.

HENRI JOSEPH ELIZA MOLL AND THE LOMBOK FAMINE OF 1940: INCOMPATABILITY WITH SUBORDINATES OR INERTIA AT THE CENTRE?

The famine which broke out in the southern part of the island of Lombok east of Bali in 1940 was the second major food crisis experienced by the Dutch East Indies in the twentieth century (Fig. 3). The Dutch (unlike the British in India) had little experience in dealing with disasters such as major food crises. Furthermore in the central government in Batavia (Djakarta) there was a general belief among those who administered food aid, that Lombok island, a rice exporting region, had no food problems (Creutzberg, 1983). In fact, the situation on Lombok was critical. Food production on the island had been declining since 1900, and rice exports had increased in the 1930s to a yearly average of 20% of total rice production (Van der Kraan, 1980). Population was rising much faster than food production on the island and malnutrition and disease were evidence of widespread poverty. Socio-economic conditions reinforced the physical factors behind the repeated harvest failures of the rain-fed rice crop in southern Lombok: local droughts (in 1897, 1903—1904, 1926, 1930 and 1938) which were caused by continuous variability in the onset and duration of the short wet season, heavy clay soils difficult to cultivate, and crop damage due to plagues of plant pests and viruses.

The course of the famine

The first real warning that the situation in the late 1930s was serious was a report written by the Resident of Bali and Lombok, H.J.E. Moll, on 11th June 1938 from the administrative capital of the Residency in Singaraja in north Bali. The 1937—1938 rainy season had been most unsatisfactory, and a drought from March till June 1938, had caused a harvest failure of 30—40% in some districts. Furthermore, the Resident warned, "due to long standing and long running export contracts this food shortage cannot be avoided." Measures to improve the situation included importing cheaper rice varieties for food (Lombok was renowned for the quality of its table rice, which was also exported to France to make face powder), and the planting of secondary food crops (Verballen, 1938). Four days after this report was written, Resident Moll went on leave to Holland for six months.

Two months later the Governor General in Batavia was advised of proposed measures to relieve stress. First came relief from the land tax. A 20% average exemption was awarded in the badly hit regions, whilst ten villages in central Lombok were granted 40% relief and for one district in east Lombok 72% land tax relief was granted. Secondly, credit was to be provided for seed paddy, while "in exceptional circumstances payment for the seed paddy by the population may be delayed until the next successful harvest." Thirdly, work relief schemes (to prevent the population from eating the seed paddy) were to be implemented to build irrigation works in west and mid-west Lombok, and to construct new works in southern Lombok. A request for 10,000 guilders (equivalent to 20,000 tonnes of rice) to implement these measures was agreed to by the Director of Economic Affairs (Verballen, 1938) who later reported that the emergency measures of September 1938 "appear to have worked well" and a good harvest was expected for April 1939 (Mailrapporten, 1940). However these expectations were not realized, for the 1939 harvest was badly affected by further drought and plant diseases.

Then in July a severe flood struck southern Lombok. On 10th July, Resident Moll, now back from leave, telegrammed the Governor General estimating the extensive damage to the irrigation works at 30,000 guilders, crop losses of over 300—400 ha, and damage to bridges, houses and communications links. On 26th July Moll informed the Governor General he had made 10,000 guilders available for cleaning sand and silt out of the irrigation works. While there was some discussion as to which government department was responsible for the relief, apparently it was

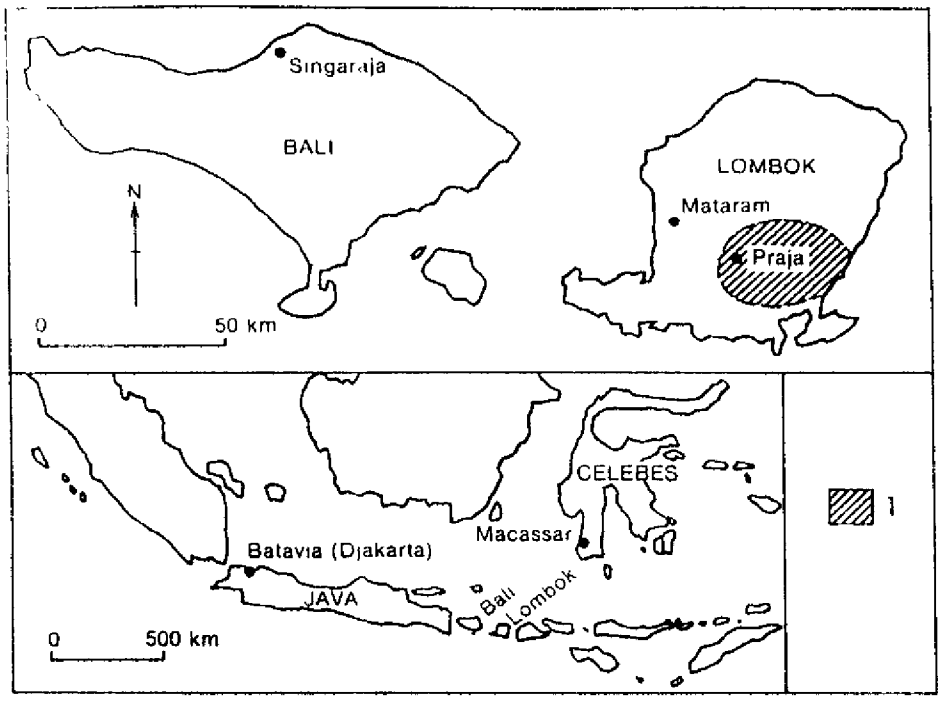

Fig. 3. The famine in Lombok 1940.

Key:

1 Famine area (approximate)

Source: Verballen 1940a and 1940b.

paid (Verballen, 1940a). Seven months elapsed, however, before the floods came to the attention of the Minister of the Colonies in The Hague, and by then the Netherlands Indies government had a full scale famine on its hands.

The trigger for the famine was the late and irregular rainfall during the first two months of 1940 (the middle months of the monsoon). In a telegram from the Governor of the "Greater East" in Macassar (Resident Moll's immediate superior) the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies was informed that the food situation was "extremely precarious," that 60,000 people were in dire need, and aid was needed immediately for gratuitous relief and seed paddy. On 8th April 1940 10,000 guilders in relief aid was granted by the central government (Verballen, 1940b). A doctor "experienced in leprosy" and two nurses were summoned from Bali, and makeshift accommodation was built to house the seriously ill. While no official estimate was made of deaths in the 1940 famine, a Dutch official sent to administer relief aid in 1940 recalled in 1983 that "hundreds" died (Kiers, 1983). Relief measures continued to be administered until February 1941 (Kiers, 1941).

The role of Resident Moll

If our sixth hypothesis is correct (see Table 1) we might expect that the relationship between the individual administrator and his subordinates would be crucial in the management of a food crisis, and that as a result of incompatability or because of a personality bias the administration of the famine would be affected. The individual administrator might have a particular interest in, or preference for, a particular region under his control, spending more time in that region than in other areas, or he may be an "office" administrator, with a preference for desk work rather than touring, and so on.

Henri Joseph Eliza Moll was 43 when he became Resident of Bali and Lombok on 8th May 1937. Born on the East Coast of Sumatra, in 1894, he was trained at the Technical University in Delph, a training regarded as "very superficial" by Moll's younger subordinates, who were graduates of the five year degree course in "Indology" at Leiden University. Moll had worked for most of his career in Sumatra but also in Borneo and the Moluccas, with a stint in the Governor General's bureau, the *Algemene Secretarie* (General Secretariat) in Bogor near Batavia (Stamboeken).

Moll's bureaucratic style manifested itself in various ways. Described by one junior associate as "a good clerk"; another subordinate who served under Moll as a controleur in the Residency capital Singaraja recalls:

> I was reprimanded for writing my reports to the Governor [in Macassar] too concisely. My successor was also reprimanded for the same reason. When Moll wrote a letter one need only read the last paragraph, the length of of his letters was a great joke in the departments (Lapre, 1983).

Described also as "a bad administrator who always followed regulations," his deafness further slowed down his reactions. His main interest was in financial matters, and he was "fond of long conferences" rather than touring the Residency (Prins, 1983). Added to this bureaucratic style, was Resident Moll's lack of interest in the administration of Lombok. Moll had two Assistant Residents under him to administer the two islands which made up the Residency, and below them were the controleurs or district officers. Dr.

•Prins, secretary of the Residency administration in Singaraja (Bali) during Moll's administration recalls:

> I did my utmost to work for the interests of Lombok because I always had the impression that my chief [Resident Moll] was not interested in it. My impression was Lombok was not important compared with Bali (Prins, 1983).

This may have been a reflection of Batavia's attitude, because local administrators believed that the Indies government was more interested in Bali than Lombok. Another reason why Moll seldom visited Lombok was that his relations with his Assistant Resident H.K. Jacobs were strained (although apparently Moll had seldom met Jacobs' predecessor either). The geography of the residency must have also played its part, since the journey from Singaraja to Mataram, the administrative centre in Lombok, involved a boat trip across the straits of Lombok where the seas were often rough and the current dangerous.

Resident Moll's incompatability with his Assistant Resident Jacobs and his bias towards Bali affected requests for aid from Jacobs, according to later accounts. Moll apparently made it clear that he regarded Lombok's food problems as the Assistant Resident's responsibility and it was not until personal representations from Lombok and a visit from his immediate superior (the Governor of the Greater East) from Macassar made Moll act in April 1940. Moll's subordinates today consider this to be the reason why Moll was quietly replaced in May 1941, three months after the famine relief had ended.

CONCLUSION

The three studies, while not offering conclusive proof of the validity of the three hypotheses examined, do nonetheless help us understand the role of the administrator in famine relief. The complexities of individual famines do not lend themselves to explanation in terms of simplistic hypotheses of human motivations, but the focus of analysis made possible by the formulation of the hypotheses encourages the search for understanding of the official responses to famine situations. In some ways it is an attempt to put into human perspective what would otherwise all too easily be dismissed as merely a bureaucratic response to a stressfull situation.

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