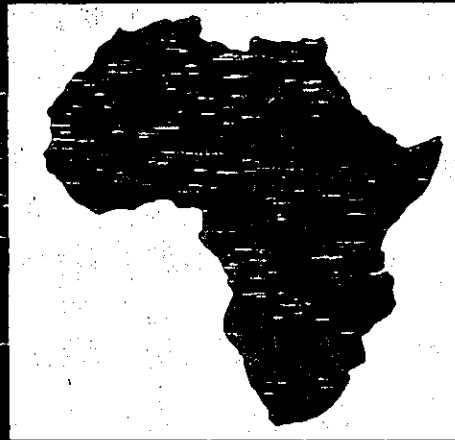


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The Plight of the Agro-pastoral Society of Somalia

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Despite advances in modern communication and the proliferation of information, there remain areas of the world about which little is known. One such place is Somalia. The informed public is aware of a political 'meltdown' and consequent chaos there, but few comprehend the causes of this tragic crisis. Unless and until there is greater understanding of the basic issues involved, Somalia will continue to suffer mayhem and chronic disorder. This article assesses some of the factors involved in the current civil war in Somalia, especially as they pertain to the inter-riverine region of the south. Particular emphasis is placed on the Dighil/Mirifle clan in that region.

In contrast to the single cause analysis that attributes all to Siad Barré's dictatorship, which is adopted by nearly every Somali scholar and politician, the article investigates the social causes of the worst civil war in the modern history of this country. The single cause analysis is inadequate because it is not so much scientific as ideological, and represents the desire of nomadic groups to impose cultural and political hegemony on the settled agro-pastoralist groups in and around the inter-riverine region in the south. The basic tenet of this hegemonic ambition is an invented homogeneity, which presents Somalia as one of the few culturally homogeneous countries in Africa, if not the world. The Somali people are said to have a single language and to share a mono-culture. In fact, Somalia has always been divided into southern agro-pastoral clans and northern nomadic clans which have distinctively different cultural, linguistic, and social structures. The mono-culture about which most students of Somalia speak is extrapolated mainly from the study of the northern part of the country, where most of the research into Somali culture was undertaken. The assumptions and extrapolations of these northern-based studies were later applied to other parts of the country without any scientific basis. The myth of Somali homogeneity played a major role in the rise of nomadic clans to political predominance, and the appropriation of resources from the less warlike and intensely religious agro-pastoral groups in and around the inter-riverine region. A major factor in the Somali conflict is the struggle among clans for control of limited and increasingly scarce resources, especially land and water. More specifically, it is a violent competition between the Darood and Hawiye clan families for political and economic dominance of the inter-riverine region.

The Land and the People

The contested region is the fertile valley that lies between the Shabelle river in the north, the Juba river in the south, the Ethiopian border in the west, and the Indian Ocean in the east. The area has over fourteen ecological regions providing four modes of livelihood; agriculture, pastoralism, agro-pastoralism and trade. The region is the bread-basket of the whole country, satisfying local food consumption as well as producing the main export goods; fruit, livestock, hides and skins. Before 1969 it comprised four regions: namely, Banadir, Upper Jubba, Lower Jubba, Hiran. After the 1969 *coup d'état*, these regions, with the exception of Hiran, were divided into many more. The Upper Jubba was divided into Bay, Bakool, and Gedo; the Lower Jubba into Lower Jubba and Middle Jubba; and Banadir into Mogadishu, Banadir, Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle regions. The reason for this regional division is not clear; nevertheless, one suspects the government's intention to create regions for favoured clans.

The inter-riverine region is mainly populated by the Dighil and Mirifle clans, the descendants of the two sons of Mad (Mahamad) Reewin; Dighil being the older and Mirifle the younger son. Today, the descendants of the Dighil inhabit the Banadir, Jubba and Shabelle regions, while the descendants of the Mirifle live in the central and western parts of the region. The Mirifle are divided into two main groups; the Sagaal ('nine') and the Siyeed ('eight'). The Sagaal, in turn, are subdivided into nine clans, such as the Hadame, Luway, and Gasaragude to mention a few. The Siyeed are divided into sixteen clans, including the Harin, Haraw, Eemid, Leysan and Elay. The Dighil are divided into seven clans known as the Toddobadi Aw Dighil, including Geledi, Tunni, Jiido, Garre, DaBarré. In addition, groups of Bantu origin live among the Dighil/Mirifle clans. These are the Banadiris, Jareer and Bajunis, who are mostly merchants, fishermen, hunters and cultivators, and inhabit the coastal strip bordering the Jubba and Shabelle valleys and the southern islands of the Indian Ocean. They speak languages of their own, but use Mai as the lingua franca. Historically they are associated with the Dighil and Mirifle clan structure. There is also a significant number of Hawiye groups, mainly in the Hiran region and in a few pockets in Banadir and Lower Shabelle.

These people of this region are socio-culturally and linguistically different from the nomadic groups who live in central and northern Somalia. They speak the Reewin language locally known as Mai, as opposed to Maha which is spoken north of the Shabelle river. Mai is to Maha as Spanish is to Portuguese; that is, they are not mutually intelligible. They are distinguished from the nomads by their agro-pastoral mode of production and their settled mode of life which produced a distinct culture and social organization. Unlike the nomads, the settled communities of the inter-riverine regions have well organized social and political structures based on hierarchical authority.

Colonial Experience

The Anglo-Italian agreements of 1891 gave Italy the triangle of land known as the Horn of Africa as her 'sphere of influence'. Afterwards, Italy proceeded to construct shaky colonial edifice of her own in this part of Africa. Until the outbreak of the First World War, Italy was unable to consolidate her control over these territories. All attempts, both military and political, were in vain due to active resistance from the inter-riverine people of southern Somalia. It is out of the scope of this article to discuss the details of this resistance; however, a brief sketch will be helpful. In the late 19th

century, the inter-riverine region was the centre of religious ferment and economic resistance against European colonization. The so-called Gosha Revolt (1890-1907), led by Nassib Buunto, emerged from the struggle against slavery. Nassib Buunto recruited the bulk of his fighters from the freed slaves who deserted their Italian landlords and Somali 'Abans' (overseers). He established a centre named after him in the Gosha region. The centre offered the escaped slaves not only refuge and freedom, but also a better way of life by developing communal ways of farming and cattle herding, training in new handicraft skills, new techniques for building houses and for manufacturing tools and weapons. It was the free men of this centre who fought against the Italians, delaying their penetration into the fertile hinterlands of the inter-riverine region for decades. Another focal point of resistance was the Banadir. The Banadirians of the interior were concerned that the occupation of the port by foreigners would mean the diversion of the external trade from their control. The Banadir ports played a significant role in the region's external and internal trade. They supplied the hinterland with imported commodities as well as providing markets for livestock and major local products. Moreover, it was in these coastal towns that cottage industries like weaving and knitting the Banadiri cloth, the manufacture of utensils and tools flourished, and trader communities were established. It was essential to defend such economic resources, and the Banadir revolt (1888-1910), though religious in origin, was motivated by economic factors. The Banadirians blockaded the Italians on the coast for more than two decades, from 1888-1910.

In October 1923, De Vecchi di Val Cismon became the first fascist Governor of Somalia marking a change in Italian strategy in the Horn of Africa. De Vecchi set out to exterminate all who opposed his government's desire for total control over what fascist propaganda called 'La Grande Somalia'. However, the Somalis were heavily armed and led by men who had been given advanced training during the preparation for the First World War. An estimated 16,000 rifles were in Somali hands. The Governor's first task, therefore, was to order the confiscation of arms and ammunition from the Somalis, particularly from the clans in the inter-riverine region. In March 1924, Sheikh Hassan Barsane, a leader of the Shabelle valley movement known as the Barsane Revolt, convoked a Shir (meeting of elders) where the participants, inflamed with millenarian zeal, denounced the Governor's order. On behalf of the Shir, Barsane wrote the following to the Governor:

In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful ... I have received your letter and understood its contents, but must advise that we cannot obey your orders and join with you in a covenant ... Your government has its laws, and we have ours. We accept no law other than ours. Our law is the law of Allah and his Prophet ... We are not like other people, none of us has ever enrolled in the Zaptie (colonial forces), never! ... and if you come to our land to fight against us, we will fight you with all possible means ... The world is very close to its end, only 58 years remain. We don't want to stay in this world. It is better to die while defending our laws.

After some initial success, the Somali resistance crumbled when Barsane was captured by the Italians on 4 April.

De Vecchi's problems were not over. Further resistance emerged from the Jama'oyin religious settlements which had sprung up in the 19th century in the same region. In 1923, Sufi Baraki united several Jama'a settlements: Buulo Mareerto, Golwiing, Muki Dumis and others scattered in the Lower Shabelle region, and set up his headquarters in Barawa, the birthplace of Sheikh Aways Qadir, the founder of the movement. The

major goal of this movement was to propagate the teaching of its founder. The tours of Sufi Baraki to the villages, where he often made provocative speeches, aroused Italian suspicion, and the fascist authorities warned him several times to give up what they called 'these unhealthy activities'. Sufi Baraki was forced to leave Barawa for the extreme north of the Upper Jubba region, where a strong religious movement had emerged led by Sharif Alyow al-Sarmani. Sufi Baraki learned many things there, which he later taught to the Lower Shabelle militants. These included plans to fight against tribalism; to bring harmony among the Ikhwan (Muslim) brotherhood; to fight salaried tribal chiefs who were considered agents of the colonial administration; to establish settlements for the protection of the Ikhwan from Italian raids, and to promote learning and training.

Sufi Baraki returned to the Lower Shabelle and established a village called 'Dai Dai', later known as 'Jama'a Dai Dai', located in the heart of the Jidu territory. Eventually, the movement gained the support of Sharif Alyow al-Sarmani, who established his own village at Qorile, later known as Buulo Ashraf, not far from Dai Dai. A partial merging of the two groups occurred, making the Lower Shabelle movement more powerful. Delegations were despatched across the inter-riverine region to obtain support. They contacted Sheikh Murjan, a prominent Qadiri holy man in the Lower Jubba. The Italian authorities felt endangered, and as a preemptive measure, the Governor ordered the Barawa District Commissioner to negotiate with the leaders of the movement in a peaceful way. This was not fruitful, and a Zaptie commando was sent against Sufi Baraki and his allies. On 20 October 1924, Zaptie forces besieged Dai Dai Camp; the Ikhwan defended their village and forced the Zaptie to retreat to Barawa leaving behind some of their dead and injured. Sufi Baraki considered the event a miracle, and proclaimed a *Jihad* against the fascist administration. Early in November 1924, the Italians sent well-armed detachments to attack the strongholds of the movement; many centres were attacked, and the Ikhwan fought bravely with arrows and swords.

Characteristics of the Inter-riverine Resistance

In dealing with Somali resistance to colonialism, much scholarly attention has been given to the northern Somalia, particularly the rebellion led by Ina 'Abdulle Hassan, known as 'the Dervish Movement'. Southern Somali resistance is not often discussed in Somali scholarship. There were a number of reasons for this. Perhaps the most important is the fact that Somalia's history has been seen mainly through the eyes of what some scholars call the 'orientalist scholarship' which classified southern Somalis as Bantu, culturally inferior to the northern Arab influenced nomads. In addition, Somalia's historiography became obsessed with a mythic monolithic culture, diverting scholars from examining other important themes of Somalia's past. Current scholarship is pointing out the significance of anti-colonial resistance in the inter-riverine region. The list of scholars includes Lee Cassanelli, Virginia Luling, Bernhard Helander, Herbert Lewis and those who contributed to Ali Jimale's recently edited volume, *The Invention of Somalia*.

Inter-riverine society was more diversified than its northern counterpart. At the advent of colonialism, it was divided not only along clan lines, but also on the basis of Sufi order affiliation. Moreover, the region had absorbed people from neighbouring regions; Arabs, Oromos and Bantu among them. One wonders how such a complex society could raise serious resistance against colonialism. Nevertheless, the region produced movements that transcended particular clan interests and fought for the

protection of broader regional political and economic interests. Because the regional economy was integrated, threats to any one sector affected the others. The early Italian blockade of the Banadir ports was a threat not only to particular clans or traders, but threatened to damage the sophisticated network linking the hinterland with the coast. The caravan routes started to fade, and the value of goods dropped sharply. The oral tradition of the time records the inflation caused by the blockade. Indeed, inflation triggered the resistance that involved numerous clans of the coast, such as the Biyamals, the Tunnis, the Gheledis, the Wa'dans, the Abgals, the Shikhals and others. A coalition of these clans prevented the Italian penetration to the hinterland of the inter-riverine region for over two decades (1886-1908).

From 1893 to 1905, when the Italian government assumed direct administration of the southern portion of the inter-riverine region, two companies – the Filonardi Company 1893-1896, and the Benadir Company 1896-1905 – introduced customs and tariff regulations which were anathema to the people of the region. Most early protests were provoked by these measures. Italian colonial records indicate a great deal of Somali discontent. With the introduction of forced labour in the interior, and the toleration of slavery in the newly-established plantations, popular resistance acquired a new dimension. The Nassib Buunto movement is a good example of resistance against slavery and forced labour. Bitter memories of the period are found in the oral tradition of the inter-riverine people. Terms like 'Cologno' (corvee labour) and 'Teen' (shift labour) are reminders of a tragic period in the history of the region, when its people were forced to work on plantations, roads, canals and other construction projects. Workers in the plantations were treated harshly, and many died of over-exertion and disease.

The faith of Islam includes a metaphysics, a cosmology, a moral and political theory. It is not surprising that colonial oppression and the moral disruption of inter-riverine society should lead to the emergence of movements to defend that faith. The Jama'a movement played a leading role in raising the political consciousness of its followers. The sheikhs who led them were the educated elite in a mass of illiterate people. Most of the Jama'a centres were located in the agricultural part of the region where the colonial plantations also developed, and they posed a threat to colonial activities. These centres became safe havens for runaway slaves and outcasts, giving them a fresh start and helping them to integrate into the religious and economic life of the region. The centres also enabled destitute people to acquire land and earn a living while also practicing their faith. Jama'a centres were actually a means by which the Somalis could evade the colonial forced-labour regime. In brief, these communities played a tremendous social and economic role and led most the southern resistance at the time.

As we have seen, the Jama'a were scattered throughout the inter-riverine region, and the colonial authority failed to suppress their activities decisively. Italian frustration is clearly manifested in the reports sent to Rome. Governor Riveri (1920-1923) noted in 1921 that the multiplication and extension of Jama'a communities might be a cause for concern since they were acquiring more land and more adherents along the Shabelle valley. 'By substituting the universal ties of religion for strictly ethnic ones', Riveri added, the Jama'a 'could constitute, sometime in the future, a real danger to the political tranquillity of the colony'. As the examples cited above of Sufi Baraki and Sharif Alyow reveal, Riveri's warning was prophetic. Although by 1926 the most powerful Jama'a resistance had been defeated and the leadership either killed or detained, the fascist administration still confronted sporadic disturbances and

sabotage from the Ikhwan followers of martyred Sheikhs. It is also evident that millenarianism strongly motivated these movements both in opposition to the colonialists and to rally their own followers. Barsane's letter to the fascist Governor cited above, and his foretelling the end of the world within 58 years, is a clear illustration. The statement that 'we are living in a time of unparalleled woes' is a familiar one in nineteenth and twentieth century African anti-colonial movements. The followers of Sheikh Aways al-Qadiri believe he would be murdered by the Dervishes of the north, and that would be the end of the world. Sheikh Abdulle Issaq from Bardhere, another millenarian, predicted that 'when we are close to the end of the world, Captains and Commissioners will conquer our country'. Similar movements inspired by messianic and millenarian doctrines appeared all over Africa during the colonial era; such as Kimbangu in the Congo, who believed the world would end on 21 October 1921 and Adamawa in Northern Cameroon, who believed the Mahdi (Messiah) era had already passed, and it was now the epoch of the Dajjal (anti-Christ). The believers, Muslim and Christian alike, had nothing to lose in this just struggle: if they die for the cause, they become martyrs; and if they win, they are heroes. Nassib Buunto, the leader of the Somali anti-slavery movement was hanged in 1907. Sheikh Aways al-Qadiri was murdered in 1909. Sheikh Hassan Barsane was sentenced to death in 1924, but had his sentence commuted to life imprisonment and died in prison in 1929. Sufi Baraki was killed in 1925.

The Struggle for Independence: 1920-1960

Modern political organization in the inter-riverine area has its origins in a philanthropic movement that appeared in the 1920s under the name of al-Jam'iyyah al-Khayriyyah al-Wataniyyah (The National Benevolent Organization). In 1947, the Jam'iyyah was transformed into a political party, Hizbia Dighil-Mirifle (HDM) (Dighil and Mirifle Party.) By 1957, it had changed its name to Hizbia Dastur Mustaqil al-Sumal (HDMS) (Somali Independent Constitutional Party). For more than 20 years (1947-1968), especially before independence in 1960, HDMS was the true opposition party in the country, given the fact that the dominant nationalist movement, the Somali Youth League, worked closely with the British Military Administration in the 1940s and later with the Italian Trusteeship authorities in the 1950s. During this period, it raised several important issues for Somali political development, including the necessity of undertaking a census of the Somali population as a basic step toward the political development of the country, insisted on 'al-Dastur' (constitution) as vital to democratic governance, and demanded the adoption of a federal system of government as the only way of creating a harmonious Somali state. The HDMS call for decentralization and a federal system of government was motivated by fear, later justified, that the powerful nomadic clans would dominate the Somali state. The Somali Youth League rejected a proposed census in 1956, because of fear it might show the Dighil and Mirifle population outnumbered the Darood who claim to be the largest clan in the country. Indeed, Somalia has never carried out a proper census of its population.

The HDMS was clearly disenchanted in 1956, when the victorious Somali Youth League formed the first Somali cabinet consisting of three Hawiye (including the prime minister), two Darood and one Dir. Though twenty of the sixty elected members of the legislative assembly were Reewin they received not one ministerial portfolio. The HDMS therefore had no choice but to call for decentralization. In fact, the party boycotted the general elections of 1959.

The Independent Era: 1960-69

The former Italian colony of Somalia became independent in 1960, and some months later united with the former British Somaliland Protectorate to form the Somali Republic. Before unification, seats in the southern assembly were proportionately divided among the three major clan families: 30 Reewin, 30 Hawiye, 30 Darood, irrespective of party affiliation. Unification with the north diminished the political importance of the Reewin because it reinforced both the Hawiye and the Darood who have kindred clans living in the north, Issaq and Dir, Dhulbahante and Warsangeli respectively. The Reewin and the HDMS party could not expect support from the North. Subsequently regional and clan cleavages became sharper. One issue was language. The Reewin speak a distinct language, Mai, which is different from the Maha spoken by most of the Hawiye, Darood and Issaq clans. Until 1960, both languages were used as means of communication in the south, and Radio Mogadishu used to broadcast in both. However, the first government after independence cancelled the Mai programmes for the sake of language uniformity.

Due to the new clan alignments in the aftermath of independence and unification, the SYL was dominated by the Darood. President Osman's nomination of two successive Darood prime ministers - Abdirashid A. Shermarke in 1960 and Abdirizak H. Hussein in 1964 - indicated this development. In the 1964 elections, the SYL won only 69 out of 123 seats in the national assembly, but managed to co-opt many members of other parties. Among those who crossed the aisle was Mohamed H. Ibrahim Egal, an Issaq former leader of the nationalist movement in the British colony, the Somali National League. This marked a shift in Somali clan alliances, from Hawiye-Issaq to Darood-Issaq, and brought about the victory of Shermarke, a Darood, in the 1967 presidential election. Egal was called to form a new government. For the first time a northerner, was premier and a Darood president of the republic. These developments greatly reduced the significance of other political parties. Between 1967 and 1969, Somali political life was in turmoil, caused partly by the disintegration of alliances and the fragmentation of clans, which passed the political initiative to smaller lineage groups. The Reewin in the HDMS were also divided. The 1969 elections confirmed this trend. More than 60 lineage parties, most of them contesting a single seat, competed for the 123 seats of the national assembly. Weaving a net of lineage groups and clans, the SYL commanded 73 seats, and when the remaining 50 opposition members (three from HDMS) crossed the floor to join it, Somalia had become in effect an one-party state.

During 1960-1969, when the Somali Youth League dominated the political life of independent Somalia, the Reewin found themselves increasingly marginalized and discriminated against in education and state employment, and the inter-riverine region suffered from the actions of the state. The Somali government collaborated with former Italian concessionaires to take over the majority of shares in the banana, sugar and livestock estates in the south. This was followed by a policy of forcing small farmers of the region to sell their land to state officials and army officers. What Ahmed Qassim calls 'the land rush' stripped thousands of small farmers of their lands and pushed them into the bush. Because of their nomadic background, the new landlords not only lacked knowledge of farming but, like their Italian predecessors, were also harsh and exploitative. Like the Italians as well, they spoke a language, Maha, that was alien to the region. Land hunting was not confined to the countryside. It went on in the towns of the region, where new landlords built houses and shops in the most preferred sections. The bulk of these 'land hunters' belonged the Hawiye, Darood and Issaq clans.

The Siad Barré Era: 1969-1990

It was evident from the start that the disfranchisement of the Reewin would continue under the Barré regime (1969-1990). For example, eleven of the twenty five members of the military junta, the Somali Revolutionary Council, were Darood, and the rest Hawiye, Issaq, and Dir. The same was true of the makeup of the first Central Committee of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party, formed in 1976. Clans like the Reewin were excluded from participation in the government of their own country. Furthermore, their land tenure systems were ignored and their property rights violated when many Darood groups were transplanted to the inter-riverine region. The resettlement scheme of 1973-74 is a good example: Over 100,000 drought-stricken pastoralists were resettled in the Lower Shabelle and Middle Juba valleys. The three sites chosen - Kurtunwarey, Sablale, Dujuma - are in the most fertile part of the inter-riverine region.

The Co-operative Law No. 70 of 1973 and the Land Law No. 73 of 1975 were further attempts to deprive the inter-riverine peoples of their land. These laws failed to limit the size of state farms, co-operatives and private owned companies, so that by the mid-1980s, there was not a single piece of arable land along the two rivers that remained unclaimed by state-sponsored projects. The laws failed to protect the small farmers from losing titles to their land. The late I. M. Abyan, in his study on the social impact of agricultural development in Somalia, showed how little benefit these projects brought compared to the harm they did. He reported that most of the small farmlands were taken without compensation. Farmers who resisted trying to protect their land were threatened or imprisoned. The Department of Land Use and Irrigation was very hostile to the inter-riverine farmers and, from the mid-1980s onwards, was the main instrument for the expropriation of their land.

The Civil War and the Baidoa Famine: 1991-92

The overthrow of Siad Barré was the prelude to total disintegration. The opposition groups were all clan-based organizations each fighting for a particular clan interest. This is made very clear from an examination of their areas of operation. Some of the groups focused their activities on areas historically controlled by their respective clans. The Somali National Movement (SNM) operated in the Issaq inhabited area of Northern Somalia; the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) in the Mudug region primarily inhabited by Majerteen; the United Somali Congress (USC) in the Hawiye territory of the central regions; and the Somali Democratic Movement (SDM) in the inter-riverine regions predominantly populated by Reewin. Other groups were fighting to defend the territorial gains they had made since independence in the inter-riverine and coastal regions of the south. The Somali Patriotic Movement, representing the Ogaden clan, operated in the Middle and Lower Juba valley; the Somali National Front, representing the Marehan, was based in the Gedo region; and the Somali National Alliance, a Habargedir faction, occupied the regions of Banadir, Lower Shabelle, Bakool and Bay. None of these three clans have roots in the regions they currently claim. These regions belong to the Reewin and some Hawiye clan sections, but not the Habargedir.

In January 1991, Mogadishu was captured by USC, and Barré's regime collapsed. However, this was not quite the end of this story. Barré's forces maintained strongholds in the inter-riverine regions of the country for almost a year, during which they pursued a scorched earth policy, destroying the infrastructure and bringing agricultural production to a standstill. Because the Reewin were excluded

from high ranks in the Somali army, the SDM, had no access to arms and lacked sufficient means to protect their people. The inter-riverine people were trapped between Aideed's forces in the north, Barré's in southwest, and Morgan's -- Barré's son-in-law -- in the south, in what became known as the 'triangle of death'. Baidoa, the capital of the region became also known as the 'city of the walking dead'. It is estimated that nearly 500,000 people died in the man-made famine that followed. After Barré's army was forced out of the country in mid-1992, Aideed militia looted Baidoa once again, taking everything the dictator's soldier's had left behind. One relief official in Baidoa in 1992 said of the starving Somalis: 'These people look like they are from Auschwitz'. The monthly death rate in August in Baidoa was 3,224; that is 104 a day. In September, the figure rose to 5,979 people a month, or nearly 200 a day. The looting and rampage increased when the US Marines landed in Mogadishu, and the fleeing bandits went on a last minute rampage in Baidoa.

Famine in Baidoa was neither the result of natural or environmental causes, nor the result of the civil war. Baidoa is the richest city in the country and the capital of the most productive agricultural region, and did not experience the level of conflict that was the fate of Mogadishu, Belet Weyn and Kismayu. How then could Reewin suffering be explained, when they had no part in the power struggle? Some have argued that Baidoa was hit by famine due to its inland location which made relief deliveries difficult. If that were the case, then Belet Weyn and Galkayo would have had the same experience as Baidoa, for they are located in the interior, too. One of the poets of Buur Hakaba, whom I interviewed, assessed the causes of the Reewin suffering as follows:

The main cause of the Somali conflict was not a direct conflict between Darood and Hawiye per se, but a competition among them to occupy the land of the Reewin. Their aim was to eliminate the Reewin and then occupy their land.

During my interviews in 1992-94, several elders in Baidoa have quoted Omar Jeas, the leader of the SPM, which represents the Ogaden clan of the Darood, addressing his followers, after a brief occupation of Baidoa by the SPM: '*Dhul baan idiin qabaney hadii aad dhacsan waydaan waa idinka iyo nacasnimadina*', he said, which means: 'We have conquered a fertile land for you; it is you and your folly that could not keep it'. Sheikh Eedin Alyow, an elder in Buur Hakaba, portrayed the situation dramatically and convincingly.

The Hawiye and Darood had a master plan of extinguishing our people. For example, they started to take all our stored grain first, then they took all the animals that we kept. After several weeks, the murderers came back to check whether the people of the villages were dead or still alive. When they realized that we were eating garas (an edible wild fruit) they started systematically to burn all the garas trees in the area. What could this mean?

This genocidal policy was exemplified by General Aideed and his militia when they blocked food shipments from inter-riverine area. Throughout 1992, and before the US Marines landed on the shores of Mogadishu, Aideed militia prevented food from reaching Baidoa and other parts of southern Somalia. They used various tactics, including forcing relief agencies to use the militia's trucks and drivers for transportation. Whenever vehicles of the United Nations headed for the inter-riverine region, Aideed militia methodically looted them en route. Finally, when the UN/US command in desperation decided to airlift supplies to Baidoa, Aideed militia captured Baidoa Airport, and imposed a fee of \$5,000 per flight, taking a percentage of the food load as well.

After UNOSOM

After the withdrawal of the United States followed by the United Nations, Somalia reverted to its pre-colonial past, consisting of a mosaic of independent clans with different laws and rulers, each with its own 'militia'. In the north, the Issaq clan proclaimed the independence of former British Somaliland; in the northeast and parts of Mudug inhabited by Majerteen there is talk of establishing a Majerteen state to be called Puntland, whereas in the central region, the Hawiye factions are engaged in mortal conflict for control of the Hawiye homeland. The inter-riverine region is the only one controlled by clans that are not indigenous to it. The Shabelle valley is occupied by the Habargedir, and the Juba valley by Marehan, Ogaden and Majerteen militias. This includes the ports of Marka, Barawa and Kismayu. In September 1995, five months after the withdrawal of UNOSOM, the hinterlands of the region – Bay and Bakool – with the country's most valuable livestock and agriculture resources, were invaded by General Aideed and remain under the control of the Habargedir clan until now.

During the period of UNOSOM, the people of the inter-riverine region established their own regional and district administration and a police force. Organized by the SDM, the Bonka Conference of 7 to 11 March 1993 defined an approach for reconciliation. One of the resolutions of the Conference stated:

In the light of the current political realities of Somalia, where parts of the country have declared secession, and others are talking about the possibility of federation or regional autonomy, the future reconciliation process should accommodate all these views and put them into perspective ... Somalia should focus on efforts to reconstitute itself by working on its grim reality, forgetting about the past myths which led to the current humiliating political conditions...The international community should support Somalis in putting their nation back together in whatever form of government they choose: a unified state, a confederation or federated states, or even several independent states.

In 1994, Baidoa was no longer 'the city of death'. The region's markets offered a range of food and clothing, even quality appliances and sophisticated electronic goods. Huddur, the capital city of Bakool region, became a centre of trade with Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti. Here the roads people and goods were safe, and there were even some landing strips serving international flights.

In February 1995, Baidoa hosted the pan-Digil and Mirifle Congress, which lasted until 19 March 1995. It was the first of its kind in the recent history of the region. Participants included traditional rulers (Sultans, Malaqs) of all Digil and Mirifle clans, religious leaders, business men and women, intellectuals, and representatives of various clan 'militias' of the region. The major purpose of the conference was to unite the inter-riverine communities and to voice their demand for regional autonomy. The conference recommended the formation of four federated states in Somalia: a Riverine State in the south for the Reewin people; a Somaliland State in the north for the Issaq; a Central State for the Hawiye; and a Cape State in the northeast for the Darood. Territorially, the Reewin State comprised the pre-independent regions of Upper Juba, Lower Juba and Banadir. The conference also elected two councils for the Riverine State. The Supreme Administrative Council of 175 members, with Dr. Hassan Sheikh Ibrahim 'Hassey' as chairman, and a Supreme Traditional Council of 51 members, with Haji Mukhtar Malaq Hassan as chairman. The resolutions of the conference were a direct challenge to the contending warlords of the region, particularly General Aideed in the Shabelle valley, and General Morgan in the Juba

valley. Six months later, Aideed forces invaded Baidoa, and the short lived experiment in self-rule was aborted.

The Emergence Of Reewin Resistance

Following the capture of Baidoa by Aideed's forces in September 1995, the newly-established regional political infrastructure was dismantled. Some of the senior members of the elected councils were killed, and many were taken to Mogadishu where they are still detained and reportedly maltreated. A few survivors fled to neighbouring countries. In the aftermath, a group of young officers and intellectuals formed the Reewin Resistance Army (RRA), and from October 1995 began attacking Aideed's forces. The RRA has not produced a political programme, but simply declared its intention to liberate the region from the invaders. It is led by a committee of four: Colonel Hassan Mohamed Nuur 'Shargaduud', Ali Mohamed Marguus, Mohamud Mohamed Ahmed 'Boonow' and Sayyid Ahmed.

Today, with the Habargedir occupying the farmlands of the Shabelle valley and the grazing areas of Bay and Bakool, while the Darood maintaining their occupation of Jubba, the region is experiencing infamous exploitation. The region's ports are controlled by Darood and Hawiye warlords who are waging what the media dubbed 'the banana war'. Before the state collapsed, Somalia was earning some \$20 million annually from banana exports. That represented around 25 per cent of the country's total export earnings. Most of it went to Siad Barré and his clique. Today, the banana earnings and other resources of the inter-riverine region go to whoever controls the region and its ports.

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