

FROM IRREDENTISM TO STATE DISINTEGRATION: GREATER SOMALIA DURING SIAD BARRE REGIME (1969-1991)

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Abstract: 'Greater Somalia' refers to the union of the five regions inhabited by Somali people under the same state. For decades, and especially since colonization, this idea has tried to unify the different Somali peoples in the Horn of Africa: Italian Somalia, British Somalia, the small enclave of Djibouti, the Ogaden and Haud (under Ethiopian rule) and the Northeast border of Kenya. The pansomalist objective has never been fulfilled despite Mogadishu's repeated attempts to integrate all these territories. The last attempt was the so-called war of the Ogaden (1977-1978) driven by the dictator Mohammed Siad Barre, who was defeated. Despite the disaster, the dream of Greater Somalia has remained active for several years. However, the fall of Siad Barre in 1991 and the disintegration of the state of Somalia erased at one stroke the pansomalist aspirations. Finally, the purpose of this article is to analyze the unifying aspirations of Somalia from the Ogaden War to its total disintegration and the strategies promoted by this government until its fall in 1991. The Research methods includes the analysis of historic resources, such as the Constitutions of Somalia and different previous articles and books related to this topic.

Key words: Ethiopia; Somalia; Irredentism; Ogaden; Siad Barre

1. Introduction

When we get into the history of Somalia we must be cautious when defining concepts and reflect on the reality that the country and the Somali people have gone through. What is sought in this paper is how the policies related to Greater Somalia evolved from independence until 1991. This article focuses on the measures that the government of Mohamed Siad Barre carried out since his arrival to power, through the Ogaden War (1977-1978), until the total collapse of the state structures of Somalia at the end of the Cold War.

However, it is fundamental to analyze the background and try to shed light on where the idea of 'Greater Somalia' comes from. Although there is no intention here to dwell on the history of Somalia before the coup d'état of 1969, it is necessary to understand that nationalist movements and ideas are not born in one day, but are built over the years. In this case, pansomalist ideas are based

on the theory that all territories which are inhabited by a majority of Somalis should be integrated under the same rule. 'Greater Somalia' would include the former Italian colony of Somalia, the British Somaliland, part of the current Djibouti and the North Frontier District (NFD) of Kenya and the Ethiopian Ogaden.

Many authors have studied, with opposing positions, the Somali peoples and have tried to determine to what extent they form a national entity. Thus, authors like Ahmed Ali M. Khayre defended that 'Somali people share a strong sense of national identity underpinned by their shared territory, common language (albeit with minor dialectical difference), culture, religion and a deeply held belief that nearly all Somalis descend from the same ancestry' (2016a, p.13). Others like Abdi Mohamed Kusou considered that the Somali nation is a product of an artificial construction of the past: 'in spite of the well-elaborated mythology about the culture, the singularity and the origin of the people, before the second half of the 20th century there were no Somalis' (1994, p.32). Along the same lines, Daniel D. Kendie insisted on the idea that 'the Somali nation is not a historical or centralized social unit, but a group of segmented identity and kinship [...] The very idea of a state is totally alien to Somali culture, and they were not known before the colonial period.' (2003a, p.70). It is true that the history of Somalia and its people can be traced back to the fourteenth century, but we must bear in mind that a state structure as such, that encompasses most Somalis, has not existed until the independence and unification of Somalia in 1960.

However, this does not mean that there was no national feeling before independence. In fact, some studies retrace the origin of pansomalism at the end of the 19th century, coinciding with the distribution of the Horn of Africa after the Berlin Conference. Specially considering that the occupation of a territory by powers generates a nationalist response and independence movement. In the case of Somalia, the first germ of what was a resistance movement was headed by Mohammed Abdullah Hassan¹ who is currently considered a 'proud symbol of freedom from outside influences, commands to new respect among Somalia people.' (Hess, 1964: 415)

As it is already known during the Scramble for Africa the Horn was divided: Italy occupied Mogadishu and dominated the coastal region of Somalia, the British occupied the northern area and created Somaliland, France invaded the current Djibouti and Ethiopia conquered the Ogaden plateau, after the Emperor Menelik II extended the borders of his empire at the end of the 19th century. (Meredith, 2011a: 559-560) Although due to the colonial occupation pansomalism

¹ Mullah Muhammad Abdullah Hassan was a leader who led the resistance against the colonial powers of Great Britain, Italy and Ethiopia. He founded the Dervish State that occupied a part of the Horn of Africa between 1898 and 1920

movements were somehow deactivated, the certain thing is that from that moment the followers of the 'Greater Somalia' followed a double objective: to obtain the independence and to unify all the 'lost territories'. These purposes, however, were complicated to accomplish due to different agreements that emerged between the powers after the Second World War.

Thus, 'Ogaden became part of Italian East Africa and in 1941, after the defeat of Italian troops, Great Britain annexed Italian Somaliland, including Ogaden and Haud, under the British military administration. When the UN Trusteeship Council decided to give administration of Somalia to Italy, Haud and Ogaden remained annexed to British Somaliland. At the very beginning of British administration in Somalia, Lancaster House showed a positive attitude towards the creation of a Greater Somalia including Ogaden and the Northern Frontier District (NFD).' (Tripodi, 1999: 372) However, subsequent events changed the position of Great Britain with Ethiopia and Kenya: in 1948 they agreed with Emperor Haile Selassie to return Ogaden to Ethiopia and in 1962 ignored the outcome of the referendum in which the Somali population of the NFD supported mostly join Somalia. Thereby, the territory was permanently linked to Kenya. (Khayre, 2016b: 11)

In this context, the constitution of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) in 1963 did not benefit the newly born Republic of Somalia either. To avoid major interstate conflicts, the OAU defended the inviolability of the borders that emerged after independence. (Anonymous, 2002: 250) In this way, Somalia became, along with Morocco, one of the few countries that did not recognize the borders inherited from European colonialism. (Bahdon, 2012: 14-15)

2. Pansomalism and the Ogaden War (1969-1978)

In this situation Somalia and British Somaliland became independent in 1960. Although the rest of the considered 'lost territories' were part of other neighboring states, the union of the former colonies in a single state gave wings to pansomalism. These aspirations drove expansionary policies in the first decade of independence. Thus, the different governments of Somalia bet on the irredentism and they demanded the incorporation of Djibouti, the northeastern border of Kenya and the Ethiopian Ogaden in a reiterative way. The 6th article of the 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Somalia even specifies the country's inescapable commitment to unify all these territories. 'The Somali Republic shall promote, by legal and peaceful means, the union of Somali territories and encourage solidarity among the peoples of the world, and in particular among African and Islamic peoples.' (Somali Constitution, 1960)

In this way, irredentism became the main policy of the government. Foreign relations and 'lost territories' claiming were prioritized over urgent social concerns and economic development. In addition, the high popular support

made these policies a tool to legitimize the power of the country's elites and allowed national unity against common enemies.

So much so that throughout the 1960s Somalia tried to recover some of these regions through different strategies. This policy served as a prelude to the subsequent confrontation in the Ogaden War. First of all, Somalia maintained a low intensity war with Ethiopia almost since independence due to the fact that the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, had denied the demands of self government and the right of self-determination repeatedly. This decision led Somalia to declare war in January 1964. This conflict ended in April of the same year, when the ceasefire was signed. (Robinson, 2016a : 239) Although this dispute did not reach the level of the subsequent war of 1977-1978, it highlighted a problem that was difficult to solve. In the end, Ethiopia emerged victorious and, in the peace agreement, imposed on Somalia the demilitarization of the border area in a width of ten kilometers.

In the case of Kenya, in 1963, just after independence, there was a rebel uprising known as the Shifta War². This revolt demanded the unification of the North Frontier District with independent Somalia. Somalia supported this movement and intervened in the dispute. However the situation of conflict throughout the Horn of Africa led both countries to sign the truce in 1967. Nonetheless, this agreement did not finished issues related to somali people in Kenya. 'Although the conflict ended in a cease-fire, Somalis in the region still identify and maintain close ties with their kin in Somalia.' (Hussein, 2017: 17)

The defeat and withdrawal of the army in Ogaden and the inability to incorporate the Somalis of Kenya affected the public opinion of Somalia, the high command of the army and some political representatives. These two factors changed definitely the sign of events in Somalia. So much so that the new government that came out of the 1969 elections took a radical turn to its policy, abandoning the irredentism and carry out a moderate policy and relaxation that attracted many criticisms and dissatisfaction. (López, 2007: 422)

As a result of this change, the military discontent caused the assassination of President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke and the confusion was used by different army commanders who consecrated a coup d'état in 1969. The power was then in the hands of Mohammed Siad Barre who established a Supreme Revolutionary Council, inspired by scientific socialism with numerous nationalizations in the economic sectors. (Carrera, 1993:102) Barre declared his intention to keep the traditional foreign policy based on expansionist policy and irredentism. After the

² Shifta is a somali word meaning 'rebel'. It was used by the Kenyan government in a pejorative way to refer to the movement that was defending the idea of joining Somalia.

defeat suffered in Ogaden, the dictator chose to deepen his relations with the USSR in order to consolidate them and try to rebuild a larger army. By 1977 Somalia had received a total of 154 million dollars and a military support valued at 181 million dollars, which managed to transform the army becoming one of the most powerful of all Sub-Saharan Africa. (Thiam & Mulira, 1993: 816)

But which is the main reason to re-adopt an irredentist and expansionist policy? First of all, it must be borne in mind that at the international level, it was very difficult to win the game to Ethiopia, which had many supports. In addition, in the main international forums, such as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) or the United Nations (UN), no state was inclined to recognize the right of Somalia to recover those territories. This denial was based on the idea that this recognition could create a dangerous precedent among other countries that would break the tense calm that Sub-Saharan Africa was living in after decolonization. The only international organization from which Somalia received some form of support was the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation, founded in 1969. (Muhumed, 2017: 67) In this way, the multilateral path to recover lost territories was left out of the new government strategies.

In addition, since independence some politicians supported irredentism to create a Greater Somalia only with the aim of diverting attention from the internal problems of the country, which were numerous. (Kendie, 2003b: 70) Some did it in order to win popular support and legitimize their governments, although others did it because they really believed that once the dream of reunification was achieved, Somalia would become a regional power. Be that as it may, the fact is that the reiterative use of expansionist propaganda was a very useful tool to control people masses and keep the Somali people together defending the idea that they had a common enemy. Siad Barre exploited these strategies in order to unite a community that shared cultural, religious and linguistic features but who were living in the same country only over a decade ago.

The ideology of the Somali regime of Siad Barre was framed in nationalism with the intention of creating a Somali national identity that would end with the clan ties that turned Somalia into a divided and fragmented society. (Cobo, 2015: 6) The best example may be anti-tribal campaigns such as *Ololeh* - which literally means burning in Somali - in which attempts were made to abolish traditional structures, including the regulation of compensation. (Grote & Röder, 2012: 557) The ultimate goal of these policies was to claim the creation of a united and integrated Greater Somalia. It was useless to achieve the pan-Somali dream if afterwards a cohesive nation was not going to be maintained due to the internal divisions of its clans.

Irredentism functioned not only as a policy of internal control, but it also posed a threat to its neighbours. Siad Barre and his government were fully aware that their expansionist policies 'posed a threat to the stability of Haile-Selassie's ethnically and religiously fragmented empire, which was dominated by a Christian-Amhara minority'. In addition, Somalia's intentions of annexing the small enclave of Djibouti threatened to close Ethiopian 'railway access to the Red Sea' which was the fastest commercial route. (Lefebvre, 1998: 614)

Nonetheless, the expansionist desire of Siad Barre did not go towards Djibouti, which had reached independence in June 1977, nor the NFD of Kenya, but went, again, to the Ogaden. This was due to several reasons: first of all the government of Ethiopia was recovering from a traumatic revolution initiated in 1974 in which the Emperor was expelled and the country became controlled by a military junta, known as Derg. Moreover, Ethiopia went through low hours due to independence aspirations of the province of Eritrea. Second, as we have pointed before, Siad Barre had the largest army in Black Africa and hoped that his armed forces could easily occupy the territory. Finally, the Somali government was convinced that the existence of internal organizations that pursued its union with Somalia would promote the final victory. The paradigmatic case is that of the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) that played a highlighted role during the war, especially due to his knowledge on the ground.

With an army of 37,000 men, with heavy artillery and a modern air force it seemed that the war would not last long. Siad Barre sent regular troops in support of the Somali insurgents of Ogaden and in two months most of the territory was occupied. Just at that time the war seemed to mobilize public opinion that saw for the first time the possibility of recovering the 'lost lands'. However, the adventure of the Ogaden changed its sign for external reasons. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) decided to support Ethiopia and the Marxist regime of Mengistu to the detriment of the Somali government. In March 1978 an attack of the Cuban army inflicted a hard defeat to the Somalis, who announced their definitive retirement. (Meredith, 2011b: 562)

3. Last assault on pansomalist dream: from defeat to disintegration (1978-1991)

Ogaden disastrous campaign and the outcome of the war had a huge impact on Somalia. With a second defeat against the Ethiopian enemy in less than twenty years, the ideal of 'Greater Somalia' began to crumble. Although Siad Barre government continued defending irredentism, it was done at a much lower level. The internal problems of the country forced the dictator to change his own strategies, promoting different internal policies. Nevertheless, foreign policy and irredentism was not completely marginalized.

As soon as Siad Barre proclaimed the defeat of Somalia, the government had to face an attempted coup d'état. In a few weeks, officers of the Majerteyn clan of the Darod, unhappy with the course of events, tried to overthrow the leader. Although the revolt was crushed, the consequences of this coup attempt reverberated in president's reaction. From that precise moment, Siad Barre was convinced of the need to start a policy of nepotism with the aim of staying in power at any price. He surrounded himself with high positions of his own sub-clan, the marehan of the darod, and some other ally, marginalizing from power the different political forces and representatives of other clans. (Robinson, 2016b: 241) This created a precedent in the political life of Somalia based on political grouping around the clan origin and the concentration of power, marginalizing the rest simply because they have a different origin.

This event prompted the different clans to form their own organizations and parties. The best example is the Somali National Movement (SNM). This organization emerged in 1981 and was formed by a base of the Isaaq clan, which was concentrated in the former British colony of Somaliland. (Höhne, 2006: 401) From its foundation this party tried to shake off the yoke of Siad Barre. They looked for an own formula of organization, whose foundations were in the old British colony. The SNM fought for years against the government of Mogadishu and came to control a large proportion of the northern region of the country with the support of Ethiopia.

Faced with this situation, Siad Barre tried to put an end to the internal division of the country looking once again for a common enemy that had united all Somalis in the past. Pansomalism continued to be the rule par excellence of the government, although it no longer had any effect either among the Somalis of the country nor in the international arena. A sign that irredentism continued to exist during the 1980s is the promulgation of a new constitution in 1979. This constitution was supposedly supported massively by somali people with 99.69% of the affirmative votes. (Ododa, 1985a: 288) In article 16 of the constitution it was proclaimed: 'the Somali Democratic Republic adopting peaceful and legal means shall be the support of the liberation of the Somali territories under colonial occupation and shall encourage the unity of the Somali people through peaceful means and their free will.' (Constitution of Somalia, 1979: 7) Therefore, Mogadishu still did not lose its pansomalist aspirations not even after the overwhelming defeat of 1978.

However, the decline of the regime, the defeat of 1978, the inactivity of the armed separatist groups of the Ogaden, the pressure of the guerrillas who opposed the Somali regime, the great economic problems and other factors deafened pansomalist activism from the second half of the decade. (Caranci, 1988: 211) There was no longer such a large enemy capable of covering up the mistakes made by the dictator in recent years. Some of the Siad Barre measures

were 'mismanaging the Ogaden war; sending members of tribes other than his own to die in the Ogaden war; nepotism; tribalism; fascist rule; tyrannical rule; advocating Marxism; oppression; abuse of human rights; running 'an absolute and despotic dictatorship'; the 'undermining of the faith and Islamic way of life of the Somali people'; sending assassination squads abroad to infiltrate opposition movements and liquidate their leaders; and pursuing an 'incoherent, ill-conceived, unpredictable and self-defeating foreign policy which has resulted in the isolation of the Somali Republic and international indifference to Somali causes'. (Ododa, 1985b: 286-287)

Due to the unsustainable situation that was taking place inside Somalia, Siad Barre had to change its position significantly regarding its neighbours. Firstly, in 1981 Somalia signed an agreement with the small Djibouti for economic cooperation and recognizing its sovereignty. Djibouti showed a wide lack of enthusiasm to abandon its sovereignty in order to join Greater Somalia project. (Ododa, 1985c: 291) Furthermore, half of the population of the country is not Somali, but belongs to the Afar, much closer to the Ethiopian peoples. Secondly, by 1988 the situation of the Ethiopian regime was not much better than Somali state. The last years of the Cold War were sweeping away different regimes in Africa, and Ethiopia was no exception. Both enemies signed an agreement whereby each nation committed itself to stop supporting opponent groups. This groups were the National Liberation Front of Ogaden (FLNO) that had replaced the former WSLF and supported by Somalia; and the SNM strongly supported by Ethiopia. With this pact, irredentism officially ceased to be a foreign policy promoted by the government. Many Somalis considered this pact to be a huge betrayal. (Meredith, 2011c: 463-464)

Thus, in the last years of the decade nothing remained of the dream of Greater Somalia. The unsustainable internal situation forced Mogadishu to close the fronts it had open with its neighbors. The internal division of Somalia was beginning to be so wide that no one was already looking for the union of all the Somali peoples. First, the military leaders of the government that Siad Barre had surrounded had begun to undermine formal state institutions such as the police and the army by creating their own informal networks to oppress the masses and exploit resources for their own benefit. (Khayre, 2016c: 11) Thereby, the structures of the State began to disintegrate and weaken.

In addition, the struggle for power had led the different Somali clans to a civil war. Many of the clans began to ally themselves with different warlords in order to protect their political and economic interests, promoting rapid state fragmentation as well as territorial division. Finally, the conflict between the SNM and Siad Barre turned into a total war. The rebels controlled all the old British Somaliland and the response of the government in 1988 was to devastate Hargeisa, the capital. Paradoxically, 'by the end of the 1980s Somalia had not only

failed in its irredentist enterprise in the Ogaden, but was also close to splitting into two states'. (Zoppi, 2015: 52) This breakdown was fulfilled in 1991 when Somaliland proclaimed his unilateral declaration of independence.

This disintegration was due mainly to the cessation of Western support. Without western aid Siad Barre no longer had the ability to control its territory and it was fragmented into a mosaic of private fiefdoms. The rapid atomization was unstoppable for Siad Barre who barely deployed his control beyond Mogadishu and whom his opponents mockingly referred to as the 'mayor of Mogadishu'. (Meredith, 2011d: 564-565)

The fall of Siad Barre and the definitive disintegration of Somalia in 1991 meant the end of the central government. Somalia had to face an unstoppable fragmentation into small territories controlled by the leaders of the clans, guerrilla groups and warlords. The demise of a strong central government denoted the end of a pansomalist ideology that only ten years earlier had numerous supporters inside and outside Somalia. The last blow to 'Greater Somalia' was the new Ethiopia emerging after the fall of the old Marxist regime, which tried to convince the Ogaden somalis to put aside their irredentist aspirations and join the new project of a plural Ethiopia. Certainly, 'the Somali apparently accepted the offer of self-government within a decentralized Ethiopian state and plunged enthusiastically into political competition for its regional government control' (Markakis, 1996: 567) This agreement was undoubtedly due to the fear generated by the situation that Somalia was suffering. Insecurity, war and lack of control were rampant throughout the country.

By contrast, Ethiopia came up with the key to keep the country united despite its ethnic diversity. In 1995 the country became known as the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and 'the constitution promulgated in 1994 recognized the rights of ethnic self-determination up to secession. Moreover, it created a federal government with nine regional states.' (Kefale, 2009: 2-3) The integration of the Somali people living in Ogaden within the new Ethiopian project had many meanings, but the most important was that they gave up 'Greater Somalia' project.

4. Conclusion

'Greater Somalia' project was in 1991 an agonizing idea. In spite of the strength that pansomalism had since the independence of Somalia in 1960, its fall was constant throughout the decade of 1980. But which is the reason that caused this collapse?

Firstly, it must be born in mind that the pansomalist enterprise had specific objectives but they were extremely difficult to achieve. With almost all international actors against Somalia and its objective to control all inhabited

territories with a Somali majority, the peaceful and multilateral option was left aside. The last option, based on invasion, war and the support of internal revolts (used by the governments of Somalia) was not very fruitful and was also condemned by the international society. However, the failure to meet its objective does not explain this ideological decline on its own.

Secondly, the repeated calls to the union and the pansomalist propaganda of the Siad Barre government were not combined with a total internal unification. Measures taken to displace the classical differences were not enough. Moreover, when the strategy of the common enemy failed, everything began to fall apart. Ogaden defeat in 1978 had undermined the authority of Siad Barre and the Somali-Ethiopian pact of 1988 caused the loss of all Barre credibility and, even worse, the legitimacy to its people. It was no longer credible to revive the great common enemy with the aim of unite the Somalis and diverting attention from internal instability.

Finally, it can be said that the central government appropriated irredentism since independence and made it the central policy of Somalia over three decades. When the Mogadishu government disappeared in 1991, pan-Somalism was totally orphaned. The fragmentation of Somalia, the disappearance of the State and the processes of independence and self-government ended up burying 'Greater Somalia'. Since 1991 nobody has tried to revive an ideology without support, since the priorities have changed. It is no longer about creating a 'Greater Somalia' , it is about strengthening the state of Somalia and achieving the well-being of a population tired of war, confrontation and insecurity.

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