Djibouti

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Compiler

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Introduction

About the bibliography

The Republic of Djibouti, formerly known as the Côte Française des Somalies (French Somali Coast) and the Territoire Français des Afars et des Issas (French Territory of the Afars and Issas), became one of Africa’s newest states on 27 June 1977, when it achieved independence from France. Unlike the majority of African countries, Djibouti constitutes a ‘mini-state’ that, over the years, has been described as a ‘cross-roads’ at the intersection of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, the ‘hell of Africa’ due to its often inhospitable climate, and the ‘eye of the cyclone’ — a reference to the country’s special role as an island of stability in the troubled region of the Horn of Africa. In many respects, these references point out the unique nature of a country that, at the time of writing, has enjoyed less than a decade-and-a-half of independence.

The limited duration of Djibouti’s period of independence, however, does not mean that the country has been ignored within the scholarly literature devoted to the Horn of Africa. Among the twenty-two categories into which the following 409 annotated works are divided, several have historically generated a great deal of interest among scholars. For example, Djibouti’s role as the coastal end-point of the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway has fostered a tremendous number of travellers’ accounts, as well as works on the evolution of transport within the country. Similarly, the internal politics, foreign relations, and general history of the country — so crucial to a complete understanding of regional conflict and co-operation in the Horn of Africa — have also been areas of traditional interest among scholars. More surprising, perhaps, is the vast number of works within the fields of geography and earth sciences. These works were spawned by Djibouti’s geographical location at the triple juncture of the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and East African rift systems, a position which has made the country a veritable treasure trove of volcanic and geothermal activity. Other topics of growing
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interest to scholars, particularly in the aftermath of Djibouti’s independence, continue to include the periodic refugee burden imposed on this small country as a result of regional conflict and drought (see ‘Migration and Refugees’); the harmful physiological and social side-effects of substantial local usage of a narcotic known as ‘khat’ (catha edulis; see ‘Social Conditions, Health and Welfare’); the Djiboutian government’s attempts to replace an almost total dependence on imported energy and foodstuffs by developing local energy and agricultural potential (see ‘Energy’ and ‘Agricultural Development’); and the importance of regional and international development co-operation, most noted by the establishment in Djibouti City of the headquarters for the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD; see ‘International Development Co-operation’).

The primary purpose of this annotated bibliography, therefore, is to introduce the interested reader to the limited, albeit growing, field of Djiboutian studies. As is the case in all such endeavours, the bibliography inevitably builds upon the preliminary archival explorations of numerous scholars and research institutes. Among these are W. Sheldon Clarke, the first US chargé d’affaires accredited to Djibouti who also compiled the first general English-language bibliography dealing with Djibouti (see The Republic of Djibouti – an introduction to Africa’s newest state and a review of related literature and sources, q.v.); the Documentation Center of Djibouti’s French Cultural Center which compiled the first general French-language bibliography dealing with the country (see Bibliographie de la République de Djibouti, q.v.); and Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, two Africanists who wrote the first general English-language book devoted to exploring Djiboutian society, politics and international relations (see Djibouti and the Horn of Africa, q.v.). These and other excellent works will be complemented by the scheduled publication in 1991 of two book-length studies on Djibouti: a massive bibliography compiled by W. Sheldon Clarke of French- and English-language works on Djibouti, inclusive of newspaper articles, locally-produced Djiboutian political pamphlets, and numerous unpublished papers and reports; and a general introduction to Djiboutian society and politics written by Adrian Fozard as part of the well-received Westview Profiles/Nations of Contemporary Africa series.

Due to Djibouti’s common cultural, ethnic, religious, political and language ties with its two larger neighbours, Ethiopia and Somalia, an equally important starting point for a full understanding of the nascent field of Djiboutian studies is the vast body of scholarly works subsumed under the broad titles of Ethiopian and Somali studies. For example, both Harold Marcus (q.v.), a noted US historian of...
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Ethiopian studies, and Mohamed Khalief Salad (q.v.), a respected scholar within the field of Somali studies, have compiled bibliographies dealing with Ethiopia and Somalia, respectively, which are useful starting points for studies specifically focusing on Djibouti. Similarly, the volumes devoted to Ethiopia and Somalia as part of the Scarecrow Press's African Historical Dictionaries series are also of great benefit (see *Historical dictionary of Somalia* and *Historical dictionary of Ethiopia*, q.v.). Indeed, several of the works cited throughout the pages that follow constitute general works which, although primarily focused on either Ethiopia or Somalia, contain information or passages of direct relevance to Djibouti.

Individuals intent upon utilizing this volume as an introduction to either brief, or more extensive, forays into the field of Djiboutian studies should be aware of two caveats. First, although the majority of works cited are in the English language, summaries of approximately eighty French works have been included throughout the text, particularly for categories lacking sufficient English-language materials (such as ‘Ethnicity and Population’ and ‘Constitution and Legal System’). Those seeking a more comprehensive introduction to French-language works should first consult the above-noted bibliography published by the Documentation Center of Djibouti’s French Cultural Center, as well as the forthcoming volume by W. Sheldon Clarke. Second, despite this bibliography’s primary focus on relatively ‘easy-to-find’ books and journal articles, several citations constitute ‘hard-to-find’ publications more dependent on inter-library loan services. Among these are publications of various agencies of the Djiboutian government; donor organizations, such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID); private institutes, such as the Arlington, Virginia-based Volunteers in Technical Assistance (VITA); and regional organizations, such as IGADD.

Acknowledgements

Before proceeding with this general introduction to Djibouti, it is important to acknowledge those individuals and organizations which, although not responsible for any remaining deficiencies or omissions, greatly facilitated various stages of the research process. First, special thanks are due to the Africa Bureau of the US State Department which provided the author with an internship at the US Embassy in Djibouti in 1987. It was while serving in this capacity that I began compiling and annotating the initial citations of this volume. While working in Djibouti City, both the French Cultural Center and the US Embassy facilitated my initial archival forays. Among those who
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Geography

Located in the Horn of Africa, Djibouti comprises a land area of 23,200 square kilometres (approximately the size of Massachusetts or Wales). Despite its small size, historically the country has generated a large degree of international interest due to borders with its larger neighbours of Ethiopia (420 kilometres) and Somalia (80 kilometres), as well as its strategic location straddling the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. With a coastline of approximately 370 kilometres ranging from Ras Doumeira in the northeast to Loyada in the southeast, Djibouti commands the southern entrance of the Red Sea and access to...
to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. This coastline is broken by the extremely large and picturesque Gulf of Tadjoura. In addition to Djibouti City, which constitutes both the capital and major port, the major urban areas include Ali Sabieh, Dikhil, Obock and Tadjoura.

The topography of Djibouti is most noted for a largely barren, flat landscape composed of black volcanic rock. The harsh beauty of these plains is broken by the basaltic range north of the Gulf of Tadjoura where mountains range from 800 to 1,750 metres in height. The highest geographical point of the territory is the Moussa Ali mountain range (2,063 metres above sea-level), whereas the lowest point is Lake Assal at 155 metres below sea-level. The other major inland body of water is Lake Abbé, located on Djibouti’s southwestern border with Ethiopia. Although there are a number of subterranean rivers, the country is completely devoid of any permanent, above-ground rivers.

Despite the relatively harsh landscape, there is an abundance of flora and fauna. In the northern portion of the country, one finds the ancient Day Forest and a variety of tree species, such as jujube and euphoria, fig-trees and wild olives, holly, juniper and mimosa. To the south and southwest of the Gulf of Tadjoura, the vegetation is similar to that found in other arid regions of Africa, and includes acacia and doum palm trees. Among the types of fauna are a wide variety of birds (the migration routes of many species traverse Djibouti and the Red Sea), numerous types of antelopes and gazelles, more limited numbers of carnivores (such as cheetahs) and scavengers (such as hyenas), as well as monkeys, squirrels and warthogs. Perhaps most spectacular is the extremely rich diversity of marine life found along Djibouti’s coastline and coral reefs, a factor which has made the country a special point of interest to international scuba-diving associations.

The average annual rainfall is 128 millimetres and is usually spread over no more than twenty days. Different regions of the country, however, receive varying amounts of rain. For example, the coastal regions receive between 60 to 70 millimetres of rainfall per annum, while the northern portions of the country receive between 120 and 140 millimetres. The rainy season lasts between January and March, with the majority of precipitation falling in quick, short bursts which result in periodic flash floods, devastating those areas located at sea level, as exemplified by the flood of April 1989 that killed eight and destroyed the dwellings of approximately 150,000 people in Djibouti City.

The often torrid climate, which has earned the country the nickname of the ‘hell of Africa’, varies between two major seasons.
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The cool season lasts from October to April and typifies a ‘Mediterranean’ climate in which temperatures range from twenty-three and thirty degrees celsius with low humidity. The hot season lasts from May to September. In addition to the dry, sand-filled khamsin winds which push temperatures from a low of thirty degrees celsius to a stifling high of forty-five degrees celsius, this time of year is also noted by days in which humidity approaches 100 per cent. Among the coolest areas of the territory is the high-altitude Day Forest in which temperatures as low as twelve degrees celsius have been recorded.

One of the most spectacular aspects of the country is its international reputation as a geological treasure trove. Located at a triple juncture of the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and East African rift systems, the country hosts significant seismic and geothermal activity. In November 1978, for example, a volcanic eruption near Lake Assal created the Ardukoba volcano – complete with spectacular lava flows – that attracted the attention of volcanologists worldwide. Of particular interest was the tremendous seismic activity which accompanied the eruption and, subsequently, led to the widening by more than a metre of the plates between Africa and the Arabian peninsula.

People

Djibouti is an ethnically diverse country where population statistics are subject to controversy and range from conservative estimates of roughly 300,000 to official Djiboutian government estimates of 500,000.2 Despite a rather high population growth rate of three per cent per annum, the average population density for the entire country is only estimated at roughly thirteen inhabitants per square kilometre. This latter statistic masks the crucial distinction that, unlike most African countries, the majority of the population (some say as much as eighty per cent) lives in the urban centres, with the capital of Djibouti City serving as the largest urban agglomeration (roughly sixty-five to seventy-five per cent). The process of urbanization, specifically tied to the growth of the port city of Djibouti City and the construction of the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway, constitutes an important transformation of a society that historically was largely pastoral in nature.

As indicated by the pre-independence name of the French Territory of the Afars and Issas, these peoples comprise the two dominant ethnic groups which historically inhabited the territory. The Issas constitute the largest ethnic group (roughly thirty-three per cent
of the population) and inhabit the southern one-third of the country below the Gulf of Tadjoura and east of the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway. Divided by the arbitrary imposition of colonial borders, the Issa people spill over into both Somalia and Ethiopia where they number 50,000 and 230,000, respectively. The Issas constitute but one subgrouping of the Somali peoples who inhabit Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia and, of course, Somalia.

The Afars, also known as the Danakil, constitute the second largest ethnic group (roughly twenty per cent of the population) and inhabit the northern two-thirds of the country above the Gulf of Tadjoura and west of the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway. Also divided by ill-conceived colonial boundaries, the Afars spill over into the southern portion of Ethiopia’s province of Eritrea and extend southward as far as the Ethiopian town of Nazareth in numbers that surpass 600,000. The combined Ethiopian and Djiboutian territory inhabited by the Afar peoples, due to its elongated, triangular shape, is often referred to as the ‘Afar triangle’.

The remainder of Djibouti’s population is divided among five major groups, largely living in Djibouti City, which were not historically indigenous to the area. The Gadaboursis (fifteen per cent) and Isaaks (13.3 per cent), who are also subgroupings of the Somali peoples that inhabit the Horn of Africa, migrated from northern Somalia during the twentieth century. They were attracted by work associated with the construction of the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway and the expansion of the port at Djibouti City. Arabs and, particularly, Yemenis constitute a third major group. Largely working in the commercial sector of Djibouti City, they constitute approximately six per cent of the overall population. A fourth group, comprising approximately four per cent of the population, includes a large number (roughly 10,000) of French and other European nationals who work at nearly all administrative levels of the Djiboutian government. Of particular significance are the nearly 3,500 French troops and family members (a total of 6,000 persons) maintained by the French government on Djiboutian territory since independence in 1977. Finally, fluctuating numbers of refugees and illegal economic migrants from both Ethiopia and Somalia have periodically comprised upwards of ten to fifteen per cent of the country’s population at any given time. This final grouping has strained the limited capacities of the Djiboutian government and, therefore, has contributed to often acrimonious political debates and international controversy.

In addition to sharing a common nomadic tradition that places a high value on livestock and virtues of bravery and individualism, a strong adherence to the Islamic faith, and an oral tradition that places
singers and poets in high esteem, the two dominant ethnic groups – the Afars and the Issas – have maintained strong social networks that form the basis of everyday life, especially within the rural areas. The Issas maintain an especially egalitarian form of social organization based on clan membership in which all ‘men’ are considered equal and each has the right to voice his opinion concerning the affairs of his clan. As such, decisions are arrived at through consensus. The Issas are divided into two major clan families, each of which is further subdivided into several sub-clans. The Abgal clan family, which accounts for three-quarters of all Issas in the Horn of Africa and two-thirds of those living in Djibouti, includes the following four sub-clans: Yonis-Moussa, Saad-Moussa, Mamassan and Ouirweine. The Dalol clan family, which accounts for only one-fourth of all Issas and roughly one-third of those living in Djibouti, is similarly divided among four sub-clans: the Fourlaba, Horoneh, Walaldon and Wardick. The spiritual head of all the Issa clans resides in Ethiopia and is known as the Ogaz.

Despite a similar emphasis on clan membership as the basis for everyday life, the Afars maintain a hierarchical form of social organization that derives from traditional chiefdoms and sultanates, such as the still extant Tadjoura, Raheita and Aussa sultanates. Decisions and debate among the Afars, unlike among the more egalitarian Issas, are more the reserve of recognized leaders and the heads of clans. For example, historically the sultans of Afar sultanates made decisions based on the advice of vizirs and councils composed of the heads of sub-clans and notables. In this regard, there is an important distinction between the so-called ‘noble’ Asaihimera (‘red’) clans and the less prestigious Adohimera (‘white’) clans. Among the five major sub-clans represented in Djibouti are the Aadarassoul and the Debné, both of which are prevalent in the Dikhil region; the Adial and Badoita-Mela, which are located in the region of Obock; and the Hassoba, which is representative of the Tadjoura region.

Despite the strong adherence of the vast majority of both the Afars and the Issas, as well as the Isaaks, Gadaboursis and Arabs to the Islamic faith, several Christian denominations are also represented in Djibouti. The Roman Catholic Church, with an estimated 9,000 members, is, perhaps, the most active, successfully winning over several hundred converts from the local population. Among the other churches represented in Djibouti are the Anglican Communion, the Protestant Church and the Greek Orthodox Church.

Finally, although Somali and Afar are the predominant maternal languages of the majority of Djiboutians, the official national languages are French and Arabic. Indeed, fluency in French is
essential for those with political aspirations in this former French colony. French is also the means of instruction in primary and secondary schools (there are no colleges or universities within the country), although Arabic is taught as the first language at both of these levels. The Djiboutian government obviously believes that education in either Afar or Somali, unlike French and, to a lesser degree, Arabic, will work against the goal of creating a uniquely ‘Djiboutian’ personality and citizenry. Language is clearly viewed as an important means for promoting national integration among the various ethnic groups. Moreover, instruction in Afar, even if desired, is hampered by the fact that the language still lacks an accepted written orthography (whereas an official written orthography for Somali was chosen by the government of Somalia in 1972). As of the 1987-88 academic year, approximately 26,200 students were enrolled in primary schools, while a little over 6,300 students were attending secondary schools.

History

Historical records clearly demonstrate that the Horn of Africa was known to ancient seafarers and geographers. As demonstrated by the *The periplus of the Erythraean sea* (q.v.), accounts were being made of the trade and peoples inhabiting the coasts of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean as early as the first century AD. For the region currently known as Djibouti, one finds references to the port of Tadjoura as early as the seventh century in the *Géographie d’Idrisi*. One century later, one finds references to the Afar peoples of the region in the writings of Ibn Said, an Arab geographer. Similarly during the ninth century, Ibn Battuta, another Arab voyager, described the existence of Somali peoples inhabiting the coastal regions ranging from Zeila to Mogadishu.4

The Arabs largely dominated the trading of the Horn of Africa prior to the nineteenth century except for a period of competition with the Portuguese that reached its height during the sixteenth century. A highly sophisticated caravan trade system linked coastal trading centres, such as the Djiboutian port of Tadjoura and Somalia’s coastal city of Zeila, with the inland plateau region of what currently constitutes Ethiopia. The caravan traders were forced to pay transit fees to the Afar sultanates and Issa leaders who controlled the region. Whereas on the inland journey such goods as imported cloth, salt slabs from Lake Assal and, more significantly, firearms were carried, such goods as coffee, wax, hides, perfumes and, most importantly, slaves were carried on the coastal journey.5 For
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eexample, it has been documented that, as early as 1839, the Ethiopian empire was even importing several ‘small cannon’ in return for one female slave for each camel required for transportation.6

It was specifically at the beginning of the nineteenth century that imperial competition among European powers and growing French interests in the Horn of Africa gradually contributed to the establishment of a French colony at Obock. In 1862, a treaty was signed in Paris between the French government and Afar chiefs that ceded the port of Obock and adjoining territories to France. This treaty was favoured by French commercial interests hoping to unlock the possibilities of Franco–Ethiopian trade. After a short period of official neglect, the French government commissioned the Mesnier Company in 1883 to create a coaling station at Obock capable of supporting French colonial expansion and wars, particularly in Indochina and Madagascar. The growing importance of Obock in French imperial thinking was marked by the appointment in 1884 of Léonce Lagarde as commander and, three years later, as the first of twenty-two French governors to administer this small colony. Governor Lagarde ensured the consolidation of the French presence in the Horn of Africa by signing a variety of treaties and protectorate agreements with Afar leaders. These treaties acquired rights of passage and protection for French caravan trade, as well as adding additional territories to the growing French colony.

The new colony of Obock turned out to be less than ideally situated for an expansion of trade with Ethiopia, particularly in the context of the construction of a railway from the coast into the hinterland. In addition to Obock’s inability to handle heavy tonnage shipping, the mountainous region north of the Gulf of Tadjoura made the construction of a railway impracticable. As a result, French eyes turned to the less mountainous, Issa-inhabited territory south of the Gulf of Tadjoura. In a move that would forever transform the politics and economics of the region, in 1885 the French government signed a treaty with Issa leaders that traded French protection of the region from other foreigners for favoured access to Issa territory. Stimulated by the movement of French commercial interests from Obock to the southern side of the Gulf of Tadjoura, in 1888 Governor Lagarde transferred the French colonial administration to what would become known as Djibouti City – an act which became official in 1892. In 1896, the new title of the French colony – the French Somali Coast – reflected the importance that France attached to its new relationship with the Issas at the expense of traditional French ties with the Afar peoples to the north.

Originally a barren area devoid of any permanent dwellers, Djibouti City grew by leaps and bounds as a result of the construction
of the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway and the subsequent expansion of the port. The concept of the railway reached fruition in 1894 when Emperor Menelik of Ethiopia authorized the establishment of the Imperial Company of Ethiopian Railroads. Two years later, the French government approved the building of a railway from Djibouti City that would cross the approximately 100 kilometres of French territory that lay within Issa-inhabited territory. Among the milestone dates in the project were the commencement of construction in 1897, achievement of the Djiboutian–Ethiopian frontier in 1900, and the completion and opening of the Djibouti City–Addis Ababa link in 1917. As the railway line continued to prosper, the traditional caravan trade routes declined, both Tadjoura and Zeila were replaced as important coastal trading centres, and Djibouti City became a magnet for individuals seeking their fortunes.

French administration of Djibouti underwent several consecutive changes in the aftermath of the Second World War that slowly, but surely, led to pressures for self-governance and, ultimately, independence in 1977. In 1946, a Representative Council was created that was partly elected and, for the first time, included personnel from the local, indigenous population. Among the various functions of the Council were voting on the territorial budget and passing legislation dealing with some local matters. In addition, elections were held for a deputy and a senator that were allowed to take part in the French parliament. In 1956, the French loi-cadre (enabling act) transformed the Representative Council into a Territorial Assembly and created a Government Council that included a president who served as governor, a vice-president from the local, indigenous population, and ministers.7

The first test of Djiboutian desires for independence came in 1958 when, along with French citizens and other overseas territories, Djibouti voted on the constitution of the Fifth Republic. In a referendum in which voters had the option of choosing independence or a new form of autonomy within a restructured French community, nearly seventy-six per cent of all votes cast (11,733 out of a total of 15,914 registered voters) favoured continued association with France. An important factor guiding the ‘yes’ vote was Afar fears that independence meant ultimate annexion and, therefore, domination by the soon-to-be independent Republic of Somalia. By 1958 it was already clear that the British and Italian Somaliland territories would achieve independence and unify as part of a ‘Greater Somaliland’ movement. Moreover, Somali politicians were pressing for the inclusion of the three other ‘lost’ portions of the Somali nation that had wrongly been divided by colonial conquest. Among these were the Northern Frontier District in British-controlled Kenya, Ethiopia’s
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Ogaden region and, most importantly, French-controlled Djibouti (or at least that southern portion inhabited by Somali Issas). As a result of this referendum and growing Somali pressures for French abandonment of Djibouti, France initiated a conscious policy that began to favour their traditional Afar allies politically at the expense of previously growing French-Issa ties.

Growing pressures for Djiboutian independence during the 1960s led to a second referendum in 1967 concerning Djibouti’s status within the French community. The idea for a referendum emerged in 1966 when, during a visit to Djibouti by French President, Charles de Gaulle, independence demonstrations turned into riots that officially left four dead and seventy wounded. Similar to the 1957 referendum, nearly sixty-one per cent of the electorate (22,523 out of a total of 37,257 votes cast) voted ‘yes’ for continued association with France. Votes were cast largely along ethnic lines, with the vast majority of Afars voting ‘yes’ and the vast majority of Issas voting ‘no’. Most importantly, however, France was accused by both Somalia and disgruntled Djiboutians of Somali heritage for manipulating ethnic cleavages – most notably by expelling thousands of Somalis prior to the referendum – to ensure continued Afar dominance of the Djiboutian political scene and, thus, continued association with France. Indeed, in a move that subtly underscored the growing French tilt toward the Afars, the name of the territory was changed in 1967 from the French Somali Coast to the French Territory of the Afars and Issas. The significance of this carefully crafted French policy was emphasized when Ali Aref and his Afar-based Regroupement Démocratique Afar (RDR; Afar Democratic Reassembly) won twenty-six out of thirty-two seats in the 1968 elections for the Chamber of Deputies.

Events during the 1970s, however, forced France to reassess its tilt toward the Afars and, ultimately, cede independence to its last colony in Africa. First, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and other non-governmental bodies, such as the France-based Collective of Christians for Self-Determination of Overseas Departments–Overseas Territories (DOM-TOM), were pressing for independence. Second, the dramatic rise of Somali immigration, inclusive of those individuals who had earlier been expelled from the territory, was leading to greater Afar–Issa ethnic conflict. Third, the Afar-based government of Ali Aref was losing domestic support in favour of the Somali-dominated official opposition party, the Ligue Populaire Africaine pour l’Indépendance (LPAI; African Popular League for Independence). Fourth, the territory was increasingly being subjected to attacks by Somali government-supported guerrilla groups. Finally, the unfolding revolution in Ethiopia led by Mengistu Haile Mariam, a
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self-proclaimed African-Marxist, raised fears of Djibouti’s absorption by the new leadership in Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{8}

The net result of these combined pressures was a referendum held on 19 March 1977 in which the vast majority (94.5 per cent) of those who took part (79,789) overwhelmingly voted for independence. Three months later on 27 June 1977, the French Territory of the Afars and Issas achieved independence as the Republic of Djibouti.

In a significant change in the pro-Afar policies that dominated French political thinking in the post-1958 period, the first independent government reflected an important shift in internal Djiboutian politics: Hassan Gouled Aptidon, an Issa Somali and leader of the LPAI, became the first president of the republic, and Ahmed Dini, an Afar and secretary-general of the LPAI, assumed the position of prime minister.

Political and administrative structures

Djibouti is a republic that, fourteen years after independence, still lacks a formal constitution. As a result, the office of the president – which is responsible for choosing the prime minister – enjoys wide powers. Yet, according to an electoral law passed by the National Assembly in February 1981, the president is elected by universal suffrage for a period of six years and may serve no more than two terms. Another electoral law passed in October 1984 specifies that, in the event that the office of the president falls vacant, the head of the Supreme Court shall assume the presidency for no less than twenty and no more than thirty-five days, during which period a new president is to be elected. Neither of these two laws as of 1991 have been put to the test.

The National Assembly is the legislative arm of the Djiboutian government and is comprised of sixty-five members who are presided over by a prime minister. They are elected for a period of five years by universal suffrage. According to the National Mobilization Law passed by the National Assembly in October 1981, Djibouti is a single-party political system in which the only legal party is the state-endorsed Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progrès (RPP; Popular Assembly for Progress). As such, only those members approved by the RPP are allowed to present themselves as part of a single-party slate during election periods.

The judicial arm of the Djiboutian government is divided into three separate court systems: customary courts, sharia courts and a judicial system patterned after that of France. The customary court system maintains a trial level in Djibouti City and the four major towns of Ali Sabieh, Dikhil, Tadjoura and Obock, as well as an
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appellate level in Djibouti City. These courts are responsible only for civil matters. The sharia court system deals with family matters that fall under the jurisdiction of the Islamic faith. Although presided over by a cadi, this system is similar to the customary court system in that it includes both trial and appellate levels.9

The third realm of legal activity in Djibouti is the heavily French-influenced judicial system. The Supreme Court, created in 1979 and composed of a five-judge panel, constitutes the top court of appeals for this system. Its jurisdiction includes appeals from both the customary and sharia court systems. Among the other courts in this system are: the Judiciary Court, composed of various tribunals, such as the Criminal Court and its responsibility for all violations of the penal code; the Council of Administrative Litigation, which deals with all law matters and litigation dealing with the Djiboutian government; the Safety Tribunal of the Republic, responsible for handling all crimes related to the security of the state, such as espionage and treason; and the Superior Court of Justice, which tries public employees for illegal acts committed while carrying out their official duties, such as corruption and embezzlement.10

Djibouti’s army and security forces fall under the direct control of the president as commander-in-chief. The Djiboutian National Army numbers approximately 2,600 soldiers, including a 900-strong infantry commando regiment; a 200-strong armoured company; an 800-strong frontier commando unit; and a 300-strong gendarmerie force. In addition, security forces, which fall under the realm of the Minister of the Interior, number approximately 1,400, inclusive of 1,200 members of the National Security Force. These Djiboutian forces are buttressed by nearly 3,500 French soldiers stationed throughout the country who fall under the command of the Commanding Officer of French Forces in Djibouti. Although the majority (2,757) of these soldiers are associated with the French Army, including the 13th Demi-Brigade of the French Foreign Legion, the French Air Force (840 personnel) and Navy (134 personnel) also are represented. Djibouti constitutes one of the last, remaining French bases on African soil.11

Finally, the country is divided into five major administrative cercles (districts). In addition to the municipality of Djibouti City, the four major districts include Ali Sabieh, Dikhil, Tadjoura and Obock.

Domestic politics

The Djiboutian political scene has been dominated since independence by President Hassan Gouled Aptidon, a veteran Issa politician.
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(Mamassan clan) who is reported to be eighty years old. President Gouled led Djibouti to independence under the auspices of the Somali-dominated LPAI, the ethnic nature of which he attempted to overcome by the creation of a national party (the RPP) capable of attracting both Issas and Afars alike. Although receiving an overwhelming number of votes cast in presidential elections held in 1981 (84.66 per cent) and 1987 (87.42), in both contests he was the only choice offered to the electorate. As noted above, an electoral law passed in 1981 limiting presidents to two, six-year terms means that President Gouled is scheduled to give up the reins of power in 1993.

Similar to many African leaders, President Gouled has overseen the strengthening of a single-party system increasingly subject to his personal control and restrictive of popular debate. As a result, numerous opposition parties and political movements have been banned over the years. Among these are the Front de Libération de la Côte des Somalis (FLCS; Liberation Front of the Somali Coast), an Issa-supported movement created in 1963 and based in Mogadishu, Somalia; the Mouvement pour la Libération de Djibouti (MLD; Movement for the Liberation of Djibouti), an Afar-based movement established in 1964 and based in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; the Parti Populaire Djiboutian (PPD; Djiboutian Popular Party), a predominantly Afar-based political movement created in 1981; the Mouvement Populaire de Libération (MPL; Popular Movement of Liberation), an Afar-supported movement based in Ethiopia that reportedly resumed activities in 1988; and the Front Démocratique pour la Libération de Djibouti (FDLD; Democratic Front for the Liberation of Djibouti), an Afar-supported movement created in 1979 through a merger of the MPL and the Union Nationale pour l’Indépendance (UNI; National Union for Independence).

The so-called ‘winds of change’ sweeping Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during the late 1980s and the early 1990s have led to increased demands for multiparty politics throughout Africa, inclusive of Djibouti. For example, Mohamed Moussa Kahin, former director of planning and economic adviser to President Gouled, clandestinely formed the Mouvement pour l’Unité et la Démocratie (MUD; Movement for Unity and Democracy), an organization committed to the introduction of a multiparty system in Djibouti. Kahin’s actions were especially significant as he represents the first member of President Gouled’s clan to openly break with the government.12 Similarly, Aden Robleh Awaleh, an Issa of the Yonis-Moussa clan, who fled Djibouti in order to avoid life imprisonment amidst charges of political destabilization, formed the Mouvement Nationale Djiboutien pour l’Instauration de la Démocratie (MNDID; Djiboutian
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National Movement for the Installation of Democracy). Most importantly, in a move designed to unify the opposition in its quest for a multiparty political system, both the MNDID and the FDLD formed a joint organization known as the Union des Mouvements Démocratiques (UMD; Union of Democratic Movements) in January 1990. The UMD claims that it is seeking to ‘unite all ethnic groups and different political persuasions within the country’ so as ‘to put an end to the chaotic situation which the people of Djibouti are in due to their tribal and obscurantist regime’.13

As demonstrated by the membership of the above-described political parties, ethnicity has played an important role in Djibouti’s post-independence politics. In an unwritten power-sharing agreement worked out prior to independence and maintained ever since, the office of the president is occupied by an Issa and the office of prime minister is occupied by an Afar. Among the Afar politicians who have occupied the office of prime minister include Ahmed Dini (1977-78), Abdallah M. Kamil (1978), and Barkat Gourad Hamadou (1978-present). Indeed, despite the restriction on multiparty debate within Djibouti, President Gouled has carefully sought to maintain an ethnic balance within the country that caters for all major ethnic groups. For example, President Gouled’s Cabinet has always included one representative each from the Isaak, Gadabouts and Arab groupings within the country, as well as a mixture of the remaining positions that ensured one more Afar than Issa. Toward this end, the first independence cabinet included seven Afars and six Issas, whereas the 1982 cabinet included six Afars and five Issas. Care is also taken to ensure proportional representation of the various clans within each ethnic group, such as the equal sharing of positions between the Abgal and Dalol clan families of the Issa ethnic group.

Ethnic politics also play a role in elections governing membership in the National Assembly. Under a power-sharing agreement worked out prior to independence and maintained by President Gouled, the sixty-five-seat National Assembly is divided along ethnic lines. Whereas Issas and others of Somali origin (Gadabouts and Isaaks) are guaranteed a plurality of thirty-three seats, the Afars are apportioned the slightly smaller number of thirty seats. Finally, the Arab portion of the population is guaranteed two seats. A major complaint of Afar opposition candidates concerning this arrangement is that the single slate of candidates presented to the public is chosen and approved by the Issa-dominated RPP and, therefore, ensures Afar candidates who potentially are more beholden to President Gouled than to their own people. In any case, the slate of candidates presented to the voting public in the 1982 and 1987 legislative elections was overwhelmingly approved by margins of ninety and
eighty-seven per cent, respectively.

Despite the conscious efforts of President Gouled to maintain some degree of ethnic balance within the government, the Afars have increasingly felt slighted by the Issa-dominated régime. As noted earlier, the Afars largely dominated the pre-independence political scene in Djibouti, a fact that was changed by independence and the accession to power of President Gouled. Indeed, since 1977, real power has resided in the hands of the Issas who have increasingly dominated the civil service, the armed forces and the RPP. Issa domination is favoured by the simple facts that they constitute the largest ethnic group and that their power base, Djibouti City, is the political and economic centre of the country. As a result, many Afars feel that those among them, such as Prime Minister Hamadou, who have accepted positions with the Gouled government, are corrupt and inept officials who merely serve as ‘window dressing’ for an Issa-dominated government rather than serving the legitimate needs of their own people. One of the key Afar opponents of the current régime is Ali Aref, a member of the Hasabo clan from Tadjoura who was one of the French-favoured leaders of the territory prior to 1977.

An important aspect of Djibouti’s delicately balanced political system is the often disruptive impact of external and, particularly, regional events on inter-ethnic relations. This problem obviously stems from the simple fact that, while many Djiboutian Afars feel a special affinity for their counterparts in Ethiopia, as well as often strong feelings for and against the central governments that have held power in Addis Ababa, many Djiboutian nationals with ethnic ties to Somalia have been captivated by the thought of Djibouti becoming part of a ‘Greater Somalia’ in which all Somalis in the Horn of Africa would become part of a Somali state. During the 1977-78 Ogaden War between Ethiopia and Somalia, for example, these affinities were manifested by Djiboutian nationals taking arms against each other through clandestine movements supported by both Ethiopia and Somalia. In the latest manifestation of this phenomenon, the ongoing Somali civil war between the government of Maxammad Siyaad Barre and a host of guerrilla movements committed to his overthrow spilled over during 1989 and 1990 into the Djiboutian capital. Specifically, violent ethnic fighting broke out in Balbala, a large shanty town on the outskirts of Djibouti City, between the Gadaboursi and Issa communities. This conflict arose because Gadaboursis living in Somalia, who tend to side with the Siyaad government and are found in the Somali military, had taken part in repression targeted against Issas in northern Somalia who, in turn, tend to support the Somali National Movement (SNM), a guerrilla movement seeking to overthrow the Somali government.
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cases, President Gouled has not hesitated to exert pressure on targeted ethnic groups considered to be a threat to the security of the state. Yet, such actions have not approached the severity of reprisals that have generally been the norm in either Somalia or Ethiopia.

Perhaps the most debated political topic, however, is the question of who will succeed President Gouled if he steps down as required in 1993 or, for some unforeseen reason, is incapacitated earlier and unable to carry out his regular duties. As of 1991, there is no clear successor and President Gouled himself has avoided grooming a replacement. In a best-case scenario marked by President Gouled’s voluntary step-down from office upon completing his second term in 1993, the personal blessing of the president as head of the RPP and founding ‘father’ of the country would be crucial to the success of any potential successor. In a worst-case scenario marked by the death of President Gouled while still in office, the rise of violent inter-ethnic conflict, especially between the dominant Afar and Issa ethnic groups, as well as military intervention in the political process, would become distinct possibilities. If handled in a reasonably orderly process, however, it would appear that two overriding factors would set the parameters of choosing a political successor. First, any potential candidate would undoubtedly have to be an Issa, a reflection of the dominant and growing role of the Issa ethnic group within the post-independence political system. Second, the candidate would then have to be able to muster support among all the ethnic groups within the country. This qualification is due to the lack of any ethnic group having a clear majority within the Political Bureau of the RPP, or that body which would bear the responsibility for choosing a presidential successor (assuming, of course, that the single-party system remains in force at the time of presidential transition). In any case, President Gouled, who has obviously fared far better than either of his two immediate neighbours, will be a tough act to follow.

Foreign relations

President Gouled has carefully crafted Djibouti’s foreign policy according to four major goals: (1) continued close relations with France and the West in general; (2) strengthening of the Arab link; (3) neutrality in the Ethiopian–Somali conflict; and (4) promotion of regional cooperation and development. It is precisely because of the success of these policies that Djibouti has been referred to as the ‘eye
of the cyclone’, or a centre of calm in the troubled region of the Horn of Africa.

Despite President Gouled’s desire to maintain cordial relations with the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the so-called ‘radical’ Arab states and organizations, such as Iraq, Libya and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Djibouti’s first and foremost foreign policy objective remains continued close relations with France and the West in general. For anyone who visits Djibouti, the continued influence and importance of the French link is unmistakable. In addition to over 3,500 French soldiers and associated family members whose incomes provide a large infusion of foreign currency into the local economy, over 400 French ‘coopérants’ are active at nearly all levels of government administration and the educational system. Indeed, it has been estimated that the combination of direct and indirect French expenditure accounts for nearly fifty per cent of Djibouti’s gross domestic product (GDP).\textsuperscript{15}

The continued strength of Franco-Djiboutian ties does not mean, however, that this relationship has been without problems. Budgetary shortfalls and perceived fiscal mismanagement in Djibouti during the latter half of the 1980s have led to French demands for closer scrutiny and control of the national economy. Most importantly, as of 1989 France imposed a form of ‘conditionality’ in which continued aid was tied to budgetary reform in three major sectors of financial expenditure within the Djiboutian government: defence, the port and the presidency. Needless to say, such demands have led to local complaints – most notably among politicians opposed to President Gouled’s perceived overly ‘cosy’ relationship with Paris – of French violation of Djiboutian sovereignty.\textsuperscript{16} Nonetheless, in one apparent example of Djiboutian acceptance of French demands, the Djiboutian Council of Ministers passed a decree in July 1990 that altered the organization and financial management of the Djiboutian Armed Forces.\textsuperscript{17}

A second, and related, goal of Djibouti’s foreign policy has been the strengthening of traditional links with the moderate Arab world, most notably Saudi Arabia. This basic tenet of Djiboutian foreign policy derives from the historically important role of Islam in traditional Djiboutian society, the country’s geographical location at the crossroads of the Middle East and Muslim north Africa and, perhaps most importantly, the role of the oil-rich Arab countries as significant sources of financial aid. During the 1970s and early 1980s especially, Arab aid was specifically focused on the exclusion of any further Soviet penetration of the region at least partially through the maintenance of a pro-West régime in Djibouti. In this regard, a subtle division of labour occurred in which French military forces
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were expected to provide the military ‘muscle’ should any disturbances arise, while financial resources would be provided by the oil-rich countries of the Middle East. Among the various actions taken by President Gouled in order to play the so-called ‘Arab card’ were the proclamation of Islam as the official religion of the state, joining the Arab League and largely adhering to its major proclamations since independence, and restricting previously closer ties with Israel, such as refusing to handle Israeli shipping at Djiboutian ports.18

The third major foreign policy goal of Djibouti has been to maintain strict neutrality in the Ethiopian–Somali conflict. As a mini-state which serves as one of Ethiopia’s economic lifelines to the outside world and which has been the target of Somali campaigns for unification within a pan-Somali state, regional conflict between its larger neighbours is an ever present concern. During the 1977-78 Ogaden War, for example, actions taken by both Somali and Afar guerrilla groups disrupted the functioning of the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway and plunged Djibouti into economic chaos. Although reopened in 1978, this action clearly demonstrated the negative impact that fighting among its larger neighbours could exert on the stability of the country. Indeed, several political analysts predicted just prior to 1977 that Djibouti would not last very long as an independent entity. Obviously proving these pundits wrong, President Gouled has carefully sought to maintain a balance between his two larger neighbours by aggressively asserting Djibouti’s status as a sovereign state which favours neither Ethiopia nor Somalia. Toward this end, President Gouled has overseen the signing of peace and friendship treaties with both Ethiopia and Somalia, the initiation of border consultations on a semi-regular basis, and the pursuit of specialized economic accords, such as the creation of an independent railway company in 1985 to handle ongoing problems associated with the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway.

The Ethiopian–Somali dispute, however, is but one of many regional conflicts that have taxed the foreign policy reserves and ingenuity of the Gouled régime. As discussed below, ongoing civil wars in both Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as migrations caused by cycles of drought and famine, have contributed to varying and, often large, numbers of Somali and Ethiopian refugees on Djiboutian soil. In the case of Somalia, the intensification of that country’s civil war in 1989-90 has strained Djiboutian–Somali relations as members of the Somali Armed Forces sought and received political asylum in Djibouti over the strenuous objections of the Siyaad government.19

Across the Red Sea, civil war during the first month of 1986 in South Yemen (which, as of 1990, has united with North Yemen) led to the evacuation of over 7,000 foreign residents from Aden to Djibouti
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City. Even the crisis initiated by Iraq's illegal invasion and annexation of Kuwait in 1990 has reverberated in Djibouti. According to the Djiboutian weekly newspaper, *La Nation* (q.v.), the Gulf crisis has cost Djibouti nearly $US 218 million in such areas as decreased shipping revenues and higher prices for oil.

A final major foreign policy goal of the Gouled régime has been the promotion of regional cooperation and development. Fully aware that Djibouti's long-term economic fortunes are inevitably intertwined with the economic health of its much larger neighbours, President Gouled has been the fiercest proponent of IGADD, a regional organization with headquarters in Djibouti City whose membership includes Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Kenya, Sudan and Djibouti. The purposes of IGADD are threefold: to provide member governments with a forum for exchanging information on plans for countering drought and desertification; to facilitate the formulation of joint development projects that will benefit the region; and to provide a mechanism for collectively presenting project requirements to the international donor community. Toward these ends, IGADD has coordinated numerous foreign missions to donor countries and international organizations, hosted a relatively successful donor's conference in 1987, and concluded three summits of heads-of-state, the most recent taking place in January 1990. Among the regional development projects undertaken under the auspices of IGADD and of direct benefit to Djibouti are the construction of a road linking Djibouti with Berbera, a northern port town of Somalia, and the rehabilitation of the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway, most notably with funds provided by the European Economic Community (EEC). Both projects embody the IGADD ideal of regional cooperation by fostering greater regional trade.

Equally important to the ideal of regional economic cooperation, IGADD and President Gouled have played seemingly substantial roles in contributing to the brokering of regional peace initiatives, most notably between Ethiopia and Somalia. As Hubert Edongo, former high commissioner of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Djibouti, once noted: 'When there is a conflict between nations, a neutral ground is very important, and a leader willing to pursue opportunities is especially important.'20 Indeed, using the IGADD heads-of-state summits as a neutral meeting ground for Ethiopian President Mengistu and Somalia's President Siyaad, President Gouled was able to contribute to the brokering of the April 1988 Ethiopian–Somali peace accord which included an exchange of prisoners of war, a withdrawal of military forces away from their common border, and a resumption of diplomatic relations. This does not mean, however, that IGADD as a
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component of Djibouti’s foreign policy is destined for greatness in the Horn of Africa. Rather, numerous obstacles, including continuing conflicts in the region, economic nationalism, opposing national ideologies, lukewarm financial support from international donor agencies, the inability of some member countries to pay their allotted budgetary commitments, and preferences for national, as opposed to regional, projects (to name just a few), ensures that genuine success and, thus, alleviation of regional development problems will be at best difficult and at worst impossible.

Economy

Almost completely lacking in natural resources and any meaningful agricultural or industrial capacity, Djibouti suffers from economic problems indicative of most African countries, including rising budget deficits, increasing foreign debt and high unemployment. Yet, Djibouti is unique among African countries in that the ‘services’ sector has constituted the mainstay of the economy since independence in 1977. Djibouti’s leaders have sought to capitalize on the country’s unique geographical location by strengthening and expanding its role as a financial, telecommunications and trade hub for the Horn of Africa. Indeed, the Gouled régime would like to make Djibouti the ‘Switzerland’ or ‘Hong Kong’ of Africa.

Due to Djibouti’s harsh landscape and limited levels of arable land, the country produces less than five per cent of its food requirements. As a result, almost all agricultural products must be imported at great cost to the local economy. The government has attempted to overcome this external dependency by sponsoring experimental agricultural projects and the development of fisheries projects in conjunction with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). In the case of agricultural development, advances in sedentary agriculture have led to a growth in the number of small-scale farms producing vegetables and fruit from 180 in 1980 to 930 in 1985. As far as the fishing industry is concerned, Djibouti’s Livestock and Fisheries Service (SEP) and the Marine Fisheries Cooperative Association (ACPM) have succeeded in producing marketable yields exceeding 400 metric tons. However, the rejection of fish as food by the Cushitic peoples of the Horn of Africa constitutes a major constraint on fisheries development. For example, the extent of disdain for fish among the Somali peoples of the region is noted by the following traditional Somali proverb: ‘Speak not to me with that mouth that eats fish’. 21

Djibouti is also heavily reliant on the import of consumer products
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due to the rather limited development of its manufacturing and industrial sectors. Despite liberal investment laws and Djibouti’s status as an economic free zone, high labour and energy costs, a small domestic market and regional instability have hindered the attraction of foreign investors. The government has sought to overcome this handicap by sponsoring the creation of state-owned companies (parastatals) in specifically targeted industries. Among these are the construction of a mineral-water bottling plant at Tadjoura, a dairy plant outside Djibouti City and the exploitation of significant geothermal activity in the hopes of making the country energy self-sufficient. As in many African countries, however, the parastatal sector has been plagued by inefficiency and, thus, the need for significant budget subsidies. For example, political motivations have led to the doubling of the number of parastatal employees almost every three years since independence despite the lack of commensurate growth in revenues from these same companies.22 As a result, the Djiboutian government since the mid-1980s has initiated a privatization campaign in order to make these companies more profitable and productive.

Problems in the agricultural and industrial sectors are compounded by high unemployment and recurring budget deficits. Estimates of Djibouti’s unemployment rate range from forty to seventy per cent of the national work force, an alarming statistic that is compounded by thousands of illegal economic migrants willing to work for less than the minimum wage. As concerns the budget, recurring deficits have been recorded since 1982. These deficits have only been brought into balance by generous gifts from France and other international donors, as well as greater reliance on international loans. As a result, Djibouti’s external debt nearly tripled from $US 106 million in 1982 to approximately $US 300 million in 1988, with debt service payments constituting nearly ten per cent of government revenues in 1987. Attempting to rein in the budget – one of the key demands of foreign and, particularly, French donors – is a very delicate issue. Public spending not only provides the government with political patronage to reward political supporters and reduce unemployment, it also constitutes one of the largest mainstays of the economy (roughly thirty-five per cent of GDP).

The services sector, which contributes to an estimated forty per cent of Djibouti’s GDP, is the most crucial element of the economy and the basis of plans for future development. In the financial realm, Djibouti boasts a currency (the Djiboutian franc) that is pegged to the US dollar at a fixed parity and is freely convertible into any currency. Moreover, liberal investment and banking laws allow businesspersons free movement of capital. Subsequently, foreign and,
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particularly, Somali and Ethiopian businesspersons have utilized Djiboutian banks as financial havens for investment capital and as centres for generating import transactions in order to avoid the more regulated banking systems of their respective countries. The downside of Djibouti’s liberal financial system, however, has been the depreciation of the Djiboutian franc during the 1980s in conjunction with the decline of the US dollar.

The second component of Djibouti’s services sector is an increasingly sophisticated telecommunications system designed to facilitate the country’s role as a financial and business hub. In addition to the 1985 upgrading of an international telephone exchange, a new ‘earth station’ was built in 1980 linking Djibouti to the Arab Satellite (Arabsat) Communication Organisation. Finally, the connection in 1986 of a new undersea cable with Saudi Arabia made Djibouti the African landlink of the Western Europe–Middle East–Southeast Asia telecommunications system.

The most vital aspect of Djibouti’s service economy and the key to its continued economic prosperity is its role as a regional trading centre, built upon its modern international port and the Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway. Djibouti’s international free port provides capabilities for bunkering, transit of goods to Ethiopia and Somalia and trans-shipment of goods to other countries in the region. Although proceeds from the port account for over fifty per cent of the government’s service earnings, revenues dropped off in the early 1980s as the number of ships calling at Djibouti dropped from 1,474 in 1977 to 955 in 1986. According to Djibouti’s Port Authority, this drop-off in revenue is due to the worldwide collapse of refuelling and oil traffic as ships have become bigger and more technologically advanced. Recent attempts at diversification, most noted by the construction of a new ‘roll-on, roll-off’ container terminal in 1985 and the refurbishment of two berths in 1988, have centred on capturing a larger share of the worldwide trans-shipment of goods along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Although the port still operates well under its maximum capacity, attempts at diversification have borne fruit as the volume of container traffic increased to over 200 ships in 1986.

The 778 kilometre Djibouti–Addis Ababa railway constitutes another important source of financial revenue for the Djiboutian service economy. Upgraded with the financial support from the EEC, the railway transported over 199,000 tons of transit goods in 1986 to Ethiopia, the majority of which constituted the importation of food staples and agricultural products. Also important from a revenue standpoint are the nearly 1.13 million passengers transported yearly by the rail system. Sadly, although revenues from rail traffic gradually increased during the 1980s after closure of the line in 1977-78, the
railway does its best business, when famine conditions affect Ethiopia and Ethiopian ports (such as Assab) cannot handle the enormous traffic of food aid. Such was the case during the 1983-85 drought, which accounted for increased Djiboutian revenues during 1984 and 1985. A Djiboutian–Ethiopian trade agreement signed in 1985 was designed to stabilize trade between these two countries and reduce Djibouti’s significant trade deficit with Ethiopia.

Since 1982, however, Djibouti has suffered from an overall trade deficit. The country imports almost all goods for final consumption and almost all goods listed as ‘exports’ are either re-exports for neighbouring countries or for the nearly 10,000 expatriate personnel living within the country. Due to its former colonial links with France, it is not surprising that roughly twenty-nine per cent of Djibouti’s imports come from France, with nearly fifty per cent coming from the European Community in general. Similar to most other African countries, its regional trade is minimal, with its dominant regional trading partner being Ethiopia. Indeed, the darker side of Djibouti’s trade habits concerns its daily importation from Ethiopia by air and, to a lesser degree, by rail of eight to ten tons of khat. This item of trade, which is managed by a government-sanctioned private syndicate, is said to constitute nearly one-quarter of Djibouti’s total imports and represents a financial drain of roughly $US 20 million. The Djiboutian government continues to support the khat trade, however, because it employs nearly eight per cent of the working population and contributes to a windfall in government revenue through taxes.

Social conditions and welfare

Although Djiboutians are on average better off than the populations of their immediate neighbours, several facets of Djibouti’s social fabric require the ongoing attention of the Gouled régime. First, the combination of Djibouti’s high unemployment rate and the growing numbers of high school and college graduates unable to find jobs within the economy constitutes a structural problem that will be difficult to resolve. One small step in seeking a solution was the creation in 1987 of the Association Nationale pour le Développement Économique et Sociale (ANDES; National Association for Economic and Social Development), an organization specifically targeted towards Djibouti’s unemployed youth and designed to support private sector initiatives, especially the creation of small and medium enterprises.

A second social problem concerns the issue of infant mortality. In
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one attempt to gather data such that the problem could be addressed properly, the Djiboutian Ministry of Health, in conjunction with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund, interviewed a total of 5,526 households in Djibouti City from 27 April to 16 May 1985. The results of the survey are rather alarming: the mortality rate in 1984 was 200 per 1,000 births (twenty per cent) meaning that two out of every ten infants born did not survive past their first birthday. Of the twenty per cent that die in their first year, 4.6 per cent die within the first ten days, 1.7 per cent between eleven and twenty-eight days, 45.2 per cent between one and six months, and 48.5 per cent between seven and eleven months. The most frequent causes of death are diarrhoea (forty-nine per cent), respiratory illness (seventeen per cent) and measles (nine per cent). Not surprisingly, the higher the education level of the parents, the lower the rate of infant mortality. 23

A third social problem centres on the widespread chewing of khat throughout Djiboutian society, the usage of which is at least partially the result of the high unemployment rate within the country. In an attempt to gather data on the problem prior to the convening of a conference in Djibouti from 17-20 December 1984, the Djiboutian Ministry of Health and WHO carried out a survey of 500 households in Djibouti City. Similar to the above-mentioned report on infant mortality, the results of this report were again rather alarming: seventy-five per cent of all households chew khat; 86.4 per cent of the chewers are men; seventy-two per cent chew daily (sixteen per cent two to three times weekly); seventy-five per cent chew at home; and the average time spent chewing is 5.5 hours daily. 24 In addition to the obvious negative physical side effects associated with prolonged use, an important economic dimension of this drug’s widespread usage is its effect on that portion of the Djiboutian work force which is gainfully employed. Indeed, it is widely recognized that the drug has a severe impact on labour productivity.

The issues of ‘legitimate’ refugees (who face a well-grounded fear of political persecution should they return home) and ‘illegitimate’ economic migrants (who migrate simply to improve their economic condition) constitute the final social problems which, perhaps, have generated the largest amounts of international criticism of the Gouled régime. In addition to thousands (who some say number as high as 20,000 at any given time) of illegitimate economic migrants who, on an ongoing basis, clandestinely enter Djibouti and illegally assume a variety of jobs, usually in Djibouti City, the country has been periodically inundated with waves of legitimate refugees fleeing political persecution in neighbouring Ethiopia and Somalia. At the end of the 1970s, for example, Djibouti was host to over 40,000
Ethiopian refugees who had fled their country due to a combination of drought and famine and the political excesses of the Mengistu régime. At the end of the 1980s, the intensification of the Somali civil war led to the arrival of an estimated 30,000-40,000 Somali refugees. In both cases, the Gouled government’s handling of the refugees caused international outcry. As concerned the Ethiopian refugees, a ‘voluntary repatriation’ programme overseen by the UNHCR (which eventually repatriated over 25,000 refugees) included several cases of mistreatment of refugees. Among these were an incident on 20 December 1986 in which five Ethiopians being returned by rail to the border suffocated to death in a closed box-car, as well as a hunger strike-turned-riot at a Dikhil-based refugee camp that led to the involuntary return to Ethiopia of three UN-recognized refugees. In the case of the Somali refugees, the Djiboutian government has refused to recognize their status as legitimate refugees and, therefore, their right to international protection. As a result, the UNHCR has been unable to provide either legal or practical assistance, except in a few cases. This most recent action has been resoundingly denounced by Africa Watch, a non-governmental organization that monitors human rights practices in Africa.\textsuperscript{25}

Toward the future

Despite its artificial creation as a multi-ethnic country under the tutelage of French colonial rule, Djibouti has managed to steer clear of the domestic upheavals that continue to plague its immediate neighbours of Ethiopia and Somalia. Despite the existence of inter-ethnic conflict and a host of other problems, such as the social ills associated with the chewing of khat and the presence of large numbers of refugees on Djiboutian soil, Djiboutians for the most part correctly believe that they are better off than their compatriots in neighbouring countries. In this regard, President Gouled and his relatively even-handed domestic and international policies deserve a significant amount of credit. However, the keys to Djibouti’s future stability and prosperity will ultimately rest on two major factors. First, a smooth presidential succession in 1993 that maintains an ethnic balance within the government and, perhaps, gives greater credence to Afar demands for increased political power and spoils, will ensure domestic tranquillity for many years to come. Second, Djibouti’s future economic viability is inevitably tied to the economic situations of Ethiopia and Somalia. In this regard, Djibouti must continue to press for further regional co-operation and economic agreements designed especially to enhance regional trade. Unfor-
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Unfortunately, the still unsettled political situations in both Ethiopia and Somalia make this objective much more difficult to achieve.

References

1 The majority of this section was derived from Informations de Voyage sur Djibouti – Djibouti travel facts (q.v.), pp. 6-9.
2 The lower figure is derived from Djibouti: les institutions politiques et militaires (q.v.), whereas the higher figure is derived from a Djiboutian government-sponsored travel brochure, Republic of Djibouti (no date). The population figures discussed in this section are derived from the first source.
3 See I. M. Lewis, 'Physical and social geography', in Africa South of the Sahara (q.v.), p. 430.
4 These examples are drawn from Philippe Oberlé and Pierre Hugo, Histoire de Djibouti: des origines à la république (q.v.), p. 23.
5 For an excellent brief discussion of this period from which much of this section is drawn, see Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, Djibouti and the Horn of Africa (q.v.), pp. 3-22.
6 See Richard Pankhurst, ‘Fire-arms in Ethiopian history (1800-1935)’ (q.v.).
7 See Robert Tholomier, Djibouti: pawn of the Horn of Africa (q.v.), p. viii.
8 See Margaret Dolley, ‘Recent History’, in Africa South of the Sahara (q.v.), p. 430.
10 Ibid.
11 See Military powers: the League of Arab States: Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia (q.v.), p. 11, 14.
14 See, for example, the following articles carried in The Indian Ocean Newsletter: 'Djibouti: Issa-Issaq deal' (3 February 1990): 1, 4; 'Djibouti-Somalia: tension mounts' (12 May 1990): 1-2; 'Djibouti: Gadabursis – a target' (13 October 1990): 1, 3.
15 This was a common figure accepted by analysts at the US Embassy in Djibouti City, Djibouti.
18 For a good overview, see John Creed and Kenneth Menkhaus, 'The rise of Saudi regional power and the foreign policies of northeast African states' (q.v.).
19 See, for example, two articles in The Indian Ocean Newsletter: 'Djibouti-Somalia: a thin line' (10 November 1990): 1; and 'Djibouti: polemic over relations with Somalia' (6 January 1990): 2.
20 Personal interview, Djibouti City, 1987.
21 Quoted in J. F. Simmons, 'Rejection of fish as human food in Africa: a problem in history and ecology' (q.v.).
22 Interview with a French 'coopérant' in Djibouti City during 1987.
23 Statistics are drawn from Mohamed Mahdi et al., Résultats de l'enquête sur la mortalité infantile dans la ville de Djibouti (q.v.).
24 Statistics are drawn from République de Djibouti: Ministère de la Santé Publique, Direction de la Santé Publique, Résultats de l'enquête sur la consommation du 'khat'
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dans la ville de Djibouti (q.v.).
25 See Africa Watch, Djibouti, ill treatment of Somali refugees: denial of refuge; deportations and harsh conditions of detention (q.v.).