

Decolonized the land and Re-colonizing the People: Post-“independence” Rule in Djibouti

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Some [African rulers] even claim to believe in democracy – democracy defined as one election, one time.
Hillary Rodham Clinton

President Ismail Omar Guelleh will have a double celebration on the coming 27th of June 2011 as his tiny Republic will commemorate the 34th anniversary of independence on the prime time when he is yet rejoicing the 8th April 2011 election result. Regional political observers and analysts argue that the deep-rooted poverty, youth unemployment, rampant politico-economic corruption and undemocratic rule seems to be the fundamental features of Djibouti since it gained independence from the French colonial rule in June 1977. Indeed, prevalent socio-economic problems and mal-administration in the country led thousands of youths to the streets of Djibouti-ville demanding Guelleh to give up the power he holds for the past four decades as a security chief during the reign of his uncle, Gouled and later as the president of the Republic. The attempted Arab-style revolution has failed not because the youths have been easily dispersed as the time for khat approaches (a joke by Guelleh circle); however, peaceful protest turned bloody after the police force fired at protestors, killed number of youths and imprisoned opposition leaders. The president, who went as far for securing Ethiopia’s help in case the situation goes out of his control¹, finally scored double - first by calming down the protestors and second by gaining a landslide re-election victory over his sole challenger, Mohammed Warsama Ragueh, an Issa- Odahgob sub-clan and former head of the country’s Constitutional Council. The president has fired Mohammed Warsama from his former position due to disagreements on the validity of Constitutional amendments demanded by the president to enable him to run for the third mandate. Later on, the president assigned his close relative Ahmed Ibrahim Abdi, an Issa-Mamassan, and on April 2010 the National Assembly of Djibouti amended the Constitution to allow president Guelleh to run for a third term. This situation led both the people and opposition camps to be desperate to see any change on the tune of the country’s political life in the near future. Even the sole “independent” presidential candidate who has run for the general election in which the US election monitoring groups are kicked out and thus boycotted by all opposition groups, has complained by stating as “for 33 years, the same family led this country and the people are fed up. We are supposed to be a republic, but in fact we are a kingdom.” Even though, the ruling of the country seems to be reserved as an exclusive Issa job, these days it is becoming clear for layman citizens as well as opposition politicians that the power circle has been narrowed to the extent of turning the republic into family fiefdom. Before arguing about today’s

¹ The former Djiboutian defense minister, Ougoureh Kifle is reportedly paid a short visit to Addis Abeba where he held talks with Ethiopian high level military and intelligence personnel in early February amid calls for mass protest.

political climate of Djibouti, it is better to briefly review the political life of the country since its birth.

Profile of Djibouti and Its Strategic Significance

Djibouti is a tiny state in the Horn of Africa covering a land area of 23,200 km². In addition to around 370 kms coastline stretched from Ras Doumeria to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, it borders with Eritrea in the north, Ethiopia in the west and south and self-proclaimed state of Somaliland in the southeast. Djibouti is sectioned administratively into five regions and one city. Afars predominately inhabit in regions of Tadjourah, Obock and Dikhil while Somalis dwell in Ali Sabieh and the newly born Arta region. As confirmed by Gamst (2005:182) region of Afar is covering ca. 87% of the territory of the state. The whole political life of Djibouti revolves with these two major ethnic groups. Indeed, small minority of Yemenites are also the social fabric of Djibouti. The capital city, *Ville de Djibouti*, already absorbs around 75% of the Republic's population. According to data from the US Department of State, the population size of Djibouti for the year 2009 is estimated to be 516,055 out of which Somalis (mainly Issa, Gadaboursi, Issaq and other stock) constitute over half of total size while Afars cover the remaining portion with small number of Arab communities. Since its birth, Djibouti serves as an umbilical cord that connects Abyssinia to the sea. In fact, Djibouti retains its historical value by playing the major role as sea outlet to the land locked Ethiopia. The newly constructed natural deep-water port at Doraleh as well as the planned 'bridge of the Horn' at the strait of Bab-el-Mendeb that would connect the continents of Asia and Africa, could possibly boost up the geopolitical significance of the tiny but one of "member of IGAD, a seven-member regional organization, one of the fifty-six members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, one of the five sub-Saharan member countries of the Arab League, and one of the fifty members of the Organization Internationale de la Francophonie" (Rotberg 2005:49). Beyond being a base for the largest French overseas military, the U.S. was also using Djibouti's air and sea space as a controlling site to monitor all naval traffics in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean with particular focus on the Soviet's naval activities. Yet after the collapse of the socialist camp, US rising demand to secure its share of African oil and the campaign against terrorism, derive her to establish a military base, *Camp Lemonier*, in Djibouti that serves as a headquarter of US-led East Africa Anti-Terrorism Task Force. Moreover, Djibouti's intervention in the politics of Somalia as a major mediator has further boosted her political role as a 'stabilizing force' in the region. Since its inception, Djibouti has experienced undemocratic rule of the French colonials and later Somali dominated post-colonial administration.

Arrival of the French: Playing the Ethnic Card

Prior to the arrival of French in today's Djibouti territory, Afar fishermen and South Arabian merchants frequently visited and later settled on the Red Sea coastal areas across the Bab-el-Mendab whence the interior portion of the region were dominated by the traditional Afar sultanates [of Rahayta, Tadjourah, Goba'ad] that still exist to this day. The French whose

contact with the Horn dates back to 1830s, made an initial negotiation and deal with the Afar chieftains in Obock, Tadjourah and Goba'ad in order to possess pieces of land, which later became colonial territories of French after concluded the last treaty with the Issa-Somali chiefs on 26 March 1885 at Ambado that confirmed the transfer of southern edge of the territory located between the Bay of Ambado (10km to the west of the capital) and Ras Djibouti, which Afars had already lost possession at the time. After acquiring Obock in 1862, French expanded its possession and reached to establish 'Territory of Obock and Protectorate of Tadjourah' in 1884. Subsequent to the 1885 treaty signed with Issa/Somalis, France that initially made a number of treaties with Afar chiefs which indeed enabled her to control 3/4th of the territories, however, has chosen to misleadingly rename the territory as 'French Somaliland' in 1888. The French Colonial rulers might sway to adopt the naming style of the neighboring British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, and Abyssinian Somaliland that led Somalis to believe that entire Djibouti is also a Somali country. As indicated in Morin (2005:640) the name of "*Cote francaise des Somalis*" itself is said to have been proposed by haġgi Diideh [Mahad-Ase clan of Gadaboursi . He was Prosperous merchant of Zayla who built the first Mosque in Djibouti Ġami ar-Rahma in 1891] to the French administration in imitation of British Somaliland. Howbeit, as commented by Said Y. (1978) French Somaliland "was a misnomer because most of the territory acquired by the French was under Afar sovereignty." Indeed, in most cases of colonial history, colonial rulers preferred to deal with the latecomers and minorities in order to smooth the path that would reach them to the ultimate objective envisaged. Regardless the French plan to establish themselves physically in the Afar's area; traditional leaders reacted aggressively by refusing French's claim for ownership. Hence, the French-Afar relation has been driven severe and characterized by rejection and retaliation in which Sultans of Goba'ad, Tadjourah and Rahayta were exiled to Madagascar.² Lewis M. (1955) supports the above-mentioned claim against French and stated that "the French policy was to negate the existence of the Afars-also called Danakils at the time-who were viewed as an obstacle to further colonial penetration. The second name chosen, 'French Somali Coast', reflected this negation." French did not only baptize and change the name of the territory with Somali flavor but also transformed the capital of the colony in 1892 from Afar dominated north (Obock also called Hayou) to today's capital Djibouti-ville. The main reason for the French decision to change of the capital of the colony is told as the strategic location of the new capital. Howbeit, change of the capital significantly altered the power balance between the Afar and Somali until the present day. As supported by Somali writers such as Daoud, "the newly prosperous port city of Djibouti becomes a home for

² Afar sultans imprisoned by French colonial rulers and deported to Madagascar are the following: Wizir Houmed Mohamed Mandaytou, arrested in July 1928 and after five years of imprisonment in Madagascar he came back in Tadjourah in 1933. Sultan Laoyta Houmed together with his brother and assistant Ali Houmed dit Hajji Ali from Gobaad were arrested in March 1930 and they were deported for five years of internment to Madagascar in May 13th 1931. Sultan Laoyta Houmed died in prison on July 9, 1931 while his brother came back to Djibouti in 1937. After the death of Governor Bernard in January 1935 by the attack from Afar of Baadu, Two members of Gal' ela tribe (one of whom was Tour Louba, a great warrior) were arrested and deported to Madagascar while others imprisoned in Djibouti. Chief of Namm'Ad'ali confederation, Houmed Mohamed, arrested in 1943 imprisoned in Madagascar for five years and later came back to Tadjourah. In addition to this chief, many other chieftains and members of various Afar clans of this confederation had also be arrested, some executed without trial and others were imprisoned in Djibouti for about ten years. (Information received from Aramis Houmed, an Afar historian and whose father [Houmed Mohamed-Soulé Aramis] was among those Afar chieftains imprisoned in Djibouti.)

different nationalities. Moreover, frequent migration especially ethnic Somali tribes of Gadaboursi, Issa as well as Darod transformed the geographical tiny Djibouti to demographical giant city that holds more than half of the territories population.”³ As the Issa/Somalis were exposed to the urban life in the then British Somaliland, they have migrated in huge number to Djibouti from surrounding areas that later led them to outnumber the Afars in the new capital, Djibouti. Consequently, the gap of inequality in political as well as socio-economical spheres between the rural Afar and relatively urbanized Issa/Somalis gets wider.

The Colonial Rule: Shifting Alliances

Apart from politicized the ethnic identity, misnaming the territory and relocating the capital city, the French colonial rulers have constantly shifting alliances along with ethno-regional lines. In the post Second World War, France revised the politico-administrative system in her African colonies. Accordingly, the law proclaimed on 5 November 1945, opened the first chapter that enabled indigenous people of *CFS* to have a role (at least in principle) in the government of the colony. In 1946 the twenty members Representative Council has established in which half seat was given for the native electorates to share it together with the Arabs and migrant Somalis. As majority of Afars inhabited the interior portion of the territory and isolated from modern political life, they had little consideration about the ethnic based quota system, which French had introduced. Whereas Issa politicians who had a better political orientation due to their interaction with the cross border kin under Italian and British Somaliland were able to mobilize the society in order to demand a separate quota for seats by rejecting the general quota for Somalis.⁴ Consequently in 1950, Issas have secured their share in the Representative Council electorate apart from other Somali immigrants while the Afar’s share remained as it was and had equivalent quota with the immigrant Arabs. France’s tilting the power balance against the majority Afars continued till the 28th September 1958 referendum in which Somalis who were highly influenced by the late 1950s Somali nationalism voted for independence by assuming that the territory would thereafter be part and parcel of the ‘Greater Somalia’ while Afars who feared of Somali’s domination in the independent state or possible future annexation by neighboring Ethiopia and Somalia, voted for the continuation of France presence. Since then France seemed to shift its position of alliance and designed a policy that would bring the Afars in the scene. France continued its calculated pro-Afar policy in a way that guaranteed its presence in the region. On 21st October 1958 French dissolved Somali dominated territorial assembly and reestablished an assembly with 32 electorates’ proportioned to all territories in which for the first time native Afars got an equal seat with that of Somalis. As clearly cited in (Schraeder 1991), “in early 1960s, the French administration shifted its weight from the Somali to the Danakil side of the equation. In preparation for the elections of 1963, the French redistricted the territory in such a

³ In 1899 the population size of the city of Djibouti were 10,000 inhabitants and in 2006 Djibouti counts approximately 500,000 inhabitants, which is about three fourths of the population of the country.

⁴ “Issa firmly condemned the election of Gadaboursi man, Djima Ali, and an Arab Ali Coubèch, for the Council of Republic and Union of Assembly respectively. Issas made an assassination attempt against both electorates.” (Thompson/Adolf 1968:63-64)

way as to reduce Somali influence by increasing the Danakil representation in the legislature.” Consequently, the situation allowed the Afars to dominate the political life of the territory prior to its independence. In the mid 1960s political life of the colony was uptight due to the split among Afar politicians, aggressive nationalism sentiment of Djibouti youths as well as Somali’s hostility and resentment against the Afar-dominancy. Subsequently, violent Issa-Somali nationalists, youths of Djibouti and migrant Somalis laborers organized demonstration and demanded for immediate independence of the territory on the 25th of August 1966, the date when General de Gaulle was expected to have a ‘restful stopover’ in Djibouti in his way to official visit in Addis. Thereafter, on 2nd September 1966, Gaulle announced from Paris to an immediate referendum to be held prior July 1967 to determine the wish of the majority of the territory’s population. Afar politicians in the territory agreed to postpone the case of independence for sometime in the future because as majority of Afars in the colony were yet isolated from sedentary life and demographic imbalance relative to Somalis (due to heavy influx of people from neighboring Somalia as well as Afars’ low birth rate⁵), independence of the territory would mean, for the Afar either being swallowed by Ethiopia or dominated by Somalis. On the other hand Somalis ambitiously waited for independence of the territory that according to them would incorporate with the ‘Greater Somalia’⁶. The French colonial rulers have expelled a significant number of Somalis immigrated from neighboring British and Italian Somaliland and declared that only those who holds the territory’s identity card could be eligible to vote. Then after, it is reported that the 19 March 1967 referendum is concluded as majority of the electorate voted for continuation of French presence.⁷ French, furthermore, has changed the name of the territory again from French Somaliland to the French Territory of the Afars and Issas (TFAI) not only as a response to the Afar’s discontent but also in order to trim down Somali’s sentiment to the politics of irredentism. According to the Somali’s version, the French chose the dominant Issa name in the new TFAI to further try ‘to fragment the Somalis, loosen Somali identity and exploit clan differences.’ Despite all these claim and counter claims that aggravated the already simmering rivalry between the two major ethnic groups, the French further made shift of alliance on the eve of independence of the country which led the relation between both parties to deteriorate further. This time Issa-Somalis became their good allies. Subsequent to intense political and diplomatic activities, the independence of Djibouti seemed inevitable. French pressured by regional and

⁵ Thompson and Adolf (1968:26) analyzed how prolonged separations of couples and timing of marriage in the Afar influenced the falling of birth rates.

⁶ The pan Somali sympathizers continued their resentment against the French rule. Particularly the Front de Liberation de la Cote Somalie (FLCS) founded by Mahamoud Harbi Issa-Furlaba in 1960 had began armed activities within the territory in mid 1960s. The government in Mogadishu used to provide extensive political, military and financial support to FLCS.

⁷ As written in (Thompson/Adolf 1968:95-96), “During the 1967 referendum out of the total registered voters, the majority about 22,004 were Afars while Issas and other Somalis constituted 14,698 and the remaining 1,408 and 923 were Arab voters and Europeans respectively. Then in the referendum held on 19 March 1967 ethnic identity among voters clearly followed ethnic lines. In districts where the Somalis predominantly inhabited, the number of negative votes is higher. For instance In Djibouti and Ali Sabih where Somalis outnumber the Afars, it showed around 6862 and 4645 negative votes while the affirmative votes were limited to 2798 and 93 respectively in the two districts. On the other hand, in Afar inhabited districts like Dikhil, Tadjourah and Obock only a handful of negative vote were cast in each circumscription.”

international organizations commenced to prepare a ground for decolonization of the territory. TFAI's two neighbors similarly made great effort to realize their ambition of incorporating the territory. Ethiopia that refers Djibouti as 'one of the lost provinces of the empire', accepted the independence through serious negotiations. Likewise, Somalia supported independence of the territory as they reached to consensus on the irrelevance for military confrontation as the "demographic weapon was sufficient." (Berket 1980:112) Afars, however, have boycotted the March 1977 discussions held in Paris by accusing the French to be more compassionate for the cause of Issa/Somalis. Despite all these odds, the flag⁸ of newly created Republic of Djibouti⁹ has been officially hoisted on 27th June 1977. As Neir (1990:70) indicate the scenario "one point of the five-pointed Pan-Somali star has been broken off and taken root in Djibouti." Indeed, the power of extremist Issa/Somali factions that opposed the idea of 'demographic weapon is sufficient' gradually weakened and Gulleed who showed no desire to involve the territory in the Darood-Hawiya dichotomy of the political life of Somalia Republic took power.

Reign of Gouled: Foundation for Never-Ending Rule of Issa/Somali

The first president of Djibouti, Hassan Gouled Aptidon expressed his wish to the newly born Republic in an interview quoted in Osman S. (1982:49) as "politically our image as a country of peace and conciliation will make Djibouti the Hong Kong of the Middle East and Africa." Unfortunately and unlike his 'wish' too, the country is ended up with human misery where poverty, rampant corruption, inequitable share of economic resource and political power, ethnic rivalry and bloody civil war yet suffocating the socio-economic and political atmosphere in the country. Afars accused Gouled for his 22 years rule of Djibouti with an iron fist where ethnic domination, marginalization and massive military attacks and humiliation by the government army were basic features of his régime. Nevertheless, Issa/Somalis remember Gouled's era as a golden years that brought independence to the country as well as a foundation period for Issa's long live domination. The Djibouti opposition journal published online from France, Uguta-Toosi (2009) explaining about Issa/Somalis historical dominancy in the territory. "Thanks to the railroad passing through their [Issas] territory and the capital built in the islands of Djibouti, their integration into the colonial administrative system has been early. Indigenous Issas of CFS were

⁸ Schraeder (1991:75) wrote as "While the blue and the green are for the major population groups, the Afars and Issas, with the triangle indicating the unity between them in their struggle for independence as indicated by the red star, Djibouti's president explained the blue as a symbol of the sea and sky, green for the earth, and white for peace'. Afars are said to favour green as representative of their Muslim heritage, while the Issas are said to favour blue as it is the primary colour of the Somali flag." (The Somali flag also contains a star, one point of which is representative of Djibouti as one part of the still divided Somali nation).

⁹ According to Gamst (2005:179) Somalis call the terrain *guban* (burnt land) while Afars claim the word Djibouti derived from an Afar word *gabouti* (a plate woven of doum-palm fibers and braised on a small pedestal (Thompson et al. 1968:8) According to (Al-Shami/Al-Shami 1997:389) when a Frenchman asked an Afar fisherman who was cooking food in the shore about the name of the local name of the country by pointing to the land, then the Afar guy thought that the French man was asking him about what is the name of the pot he was using for cooking. Therefore he replied its Gabouti which means a pot. Bollee (2003:211) also confirms this discourse as 'The origin of the name is not certain, but it is probably derived from an Afar word meaning 'pot'.

absorbed between 1900 and 1950. Other Issa came from Ethiopia or Somaliland.” The new comers have enjoyed privileged access to strategic positions in the political and economic sectors of the Republic. As for the civil service, as criticized by Mehler (2005:9), the government payroll is gradually ‘homogenized’; not only by Issa but also the small Mammassan bloc. In the early stage of independence, there were some Afars in the cabinet who later get off from the train that has been driven entirely by Issas. Successive Afar Prime Ministers, Abdulla kamil and Ahmed Dini resigned in the same year. Ahmed Dini as quoted in Mohamed K. (1996:513) refers the situation as ‘a tribal *coup d’etat*’. The Afars quest for exercising factual power in politico-economic structure of the country seemed to fall on deaf ears. The LPAI that later [reduced to its Issa component as refers by Mohamed K. (1996: 513)] and renamed as RPP in 1979 became the sole legal political party in the Republic. Gouled attempted to overcome all challenges in his era by repressing the Afars’ grievance and encircled by his own stooges.

Eventually, the Afar’s resentment against the Issa/Somali dominated government of Djibouti reached its peak and disgruntled Afars decided to raise their weapon and fight against the Somali dominated government of Djibouti. Various opposition political organizations formed a joint front, FRUD, in August 1991 and opened a massive military operation against the government in Djibouti in which the Front was able to control quarter of the Republic’s territories. Afar youths (from all over the Horn region) including females were joining the front. In view of that, President Guled had rejected any negotiation with FRUD and mobilized all Somali across the Horn region to defend the Afars’ threat under the pretext of Somali solidarity. Schraeder (1993a: 214) cited that the Guled government has recruited and “trained guerrilla fighters among the Issa populations residing in Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as some former Isaak fighters from the SNM.” As a result, the number of Djibouti Army ‘had grown to over 100,000 men.’ As Bollee (2003:482) postulated “since the population [of Djibouti] is only 650,000, all these soldiers could not have been Djiboutians. There was a good number of Somali and even Oromo mercenaries among them. Afars were arrested and executed for avenging their support for the FRUD. Police moved to demolish Afar inhabited localities (Day region 55 km north of Tadjourah and Afar neighborhood of Arhiba in Djibouti-ville) that led to riots in which several Afars were killed. Gouled forced Afars to shoulder over two-decade old Issa/Somali domination and later on, transferred the power to his nephew, Guelleh who enlarged the circle of the stooge instead of striving to bring a lasting solution to the Republic’s internal political unrest.

Era of Guelleh and His Family’s Fiefdom

Ismail Omar Guellhe (IOG)¹⁰, chief of staff, head of security and key advisor for over 20 years during régime of Gouled took the crown from his uncle on April 1999 and in a way secured the

¹⁰ As cited in (Duale 2006) “Guelleh [...] was born in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. He migrated to Djibouti in the late sixties before finishing his high school and later joined the Djibouti police forces as a junior non-commissioned officer. He trained first by Somalia’s infamous National Security Service and later by the French Secret Service. In the aftermath of Djibouti’s independence, Guelleh worked in his uncle’s office until he was appointed head of Djibouti’s notorious secret police and chief of cabinet for president Abtidon.”

continuation of Issa/Mamaasan dynasty. As affirmed by Duale (2006) “Afars were relegated to a second-class status ever since. Oppression and exclusion of Afars continued with the Guelleh rule in more sophisticated but comprehensive way.” Since the June 27, 1977 birth of Djibouti, the Mamassans uncle and nephew, Gouled and Guelleh ruled the Republic over three decades. The Djibouti opposition online journal , Uguta-Toosi (2009), described the ethnic biased monopoly of power within the Republic by stating as “in legal terms, the Republic of Djibouti is intended as a democratic society but, to borrow a phrase well known, the Democrats were absent. ‘Democracy without democrats’: that is the reality we live.” Though the unwritten political power sharing formula of the Republic secured the presidency post for an Issa/Somali and a Prime Ministerial position for an Afar with cabinet posts roughly divided, Afars majorly regarded their politicians in the cabinet as ‘Yes-men of Guellhe’. As indicated in the Table 1 below among the 23 incumbent ministers only eight are Afars. Most of the Ministries held by the Afars have insignificant role in the government structure of Djibouti. Even the Minister of Defense and Foreign Affairs are nominal having no factual authority at all. For instance, in the Ministry of defense, the real authority is in the hands of General Zakaria Cheik Ibrahim, the second person in the army but have strong clan as well as personal connection with the president and better known as the ‘guardian of the régime’. As per the Afar informants ‘the actual Afar ministers in the cabinet are entirely beholden to Guelleh than to their constituencies.’ Some criticized them to the extent that ‘they are even frustrated for being an Afar.’ In the previous Guelleh’s cabinet, all Afars except one are married to a non-Afar. Having a Somali spouse seems the unwritten requirement to be chosen in the Issa/Somali dominated government’s cabinet. As a matter of fact, since the early days of independence marriage with an ethnic Somali seemed to be criterion for selection. As confirmed by a Somali writer, Said Y. (1978:37) “Kamil married a Somali woman, has political integrity, and is regarded as a suitable person to bring about ethnic reconciliation.”¹¹ In respect to distribution of power in the administration of regions in the Republic, among six governorship positions only two left for the Afars and the remaining four were secured for Issa/Somalis for over three decades until the new assignments are announced in May 2011. (See table 2) Furthermore, from the twenty-two Ambassadorial and Counsel General Position until 2010, only five positions are held by Afars.

Table 1. Ministers and Ethnic composition in Djibouti

Number	Name /Position	Ethnic group	Remarks
1	Dileita Mohamed Dileita/ Prime Minister	Afar	Married to an Issa woman
2	Ali Farah Assoweh/ Minister of Justice and Prison Affairs, responsible for Human Rights	Somali/Issa/Horrone	
3	Ilyas Moussa Dawaleh/ Minister of	Somali/Issa/Fourlaba	He is from Dire Dawa and his

¹¹ Kadra’s Afar husband was Abdallah Mohamed Kamil, the former president of the Council of government of the Transition. She has two children for him, a girl and a boy. The daughter, Nazli Abdallah Kamil is married with an Issa Minister of Labour, Ali Hassan Bahdon and the son is Naguib Abdallah Kamil is a diplomat in Paris.

	Economy and Finance in Charge of Industry and Planning		sister is married to the son of the first Lady, from her first marriage, Naguib Abdallah Kamil. His father is an influential businessman
4	Mohamed Kamil Abdoukader/ Minister of Defence	Afar	Married to an Issa woman, niece of the President
5	Mahamoud Ali Youssouf/ Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation	Afar	Married to an Arab woman
6	Hassan Darar Houffaneh/ Interior Minister	Somali/Issa/Ourrouweyne	
7	Ali Yacoub Mahamoud/ Minister of Health	Somali/Issa/Mamassan	
8	Dr. Adawa Hassan Ali / Minister of National Education and Vocational Training	Afar	Married to an Afar woman whose mother is a Somali/Issak
9	Nabil Ahmed Mohamed/ Minister of Higher Education and Research	Arab	
10	Mohamed Ahmed Awaleh/ Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Livestock and Fishery Resources	Somali/Gadaboursi	
11	Mohamed Moussa Ibrahim Balala/ Minister of Equipment and Transport	Afar	Afar Member of the family of the chiefs of Debne Confederation
12	Dr. Hamoud Abdi Sultan/ Minister of Muslim Affairs and Wakf property	Somali /Issa/Rer Goulane	
13	Dr. Ahmed Fouad Aye/ Minister of Energy and Water, Natural Resources Officer	Somali/Issa/Harla	
14	Abdi Ahmed Houssein/ Minister of Culture and Communication, in charge of posts and telecommunications, government spokesman	Somali/Issak	
15	Ali Hassan Bahdon/ Minister of Labour, in charge of administration reform	Somali/Issa/Walaldon	Married to the daughter of the first lady from her first marriage with Abdella Mohammed Khamil. His father was a well known Chiefs Dire Dawa and right-hand of the late Ugass Hassan Hersi
16	Moussa Ahmed Hassan/ Minister for Housing, Planning and Environment	Afar	Married to an Issa woman (sister or family of the most

			influential person in the previous government Osman Ahmed Moussa) and he is cousin of aide of President, Colonel Mohamed Ibrahim
17	Hasna Barkat Daoud/ Minister for the Promotion of Women and Family Planning, responsible for relations with parliament	Afar	Married to an Issa/ fourlaba man, whose mother is Russian. Among the sports teams she has organized one is named Gelle Batal, after the President's great grandfather who was one of the Issa elders who signed the treaty with the French at Ambado in 1885.
18	Ahmed Ali Silay/ Minister Delegate to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, responsible for international cooperation	Afar	The only Afar member of the previous Cabinet who has an Afar wife
19	Amareh Ali Said / Minister Delegate to the Minister of Economy and Finance for the Budget	Somali/Issa/Wardiik	Cousin of the Prime Minister's wife
20	Abdi Elmi Achkir/ Minister Delegate to the Minister of Economy and Finance for Trade, SMEs, handicrafts, tourism and formalization	Somali/Issa/Fourlaba	former Director of the Cabinet of the President
21	Zahra Yusuf Kayad/ Secretary of State to the Prime Minister for National Solidarity	Somali/Issa/Odahgob	Married to an Afar man who is civil servant in Health Ministry and brother of aide to the Prime Minister. His mother is from the same sub-clan of his wife. Zahra's father is a senior officer in the national army
22	Amina Abdi Aden/ Secretary of State to the Minister of Housing, Planning and Environment in charge of Housing	Somali/Issa/Issak	
23	Dr Elmi Djama Okieh/ Secretary of State for Youth and Sport	Somali/Issa/Mammassan	Former Director of President Cabinet

Source: Own sources from interviews

Table 2. Regional Prefects /Governors in Djibouti and Ethnic Composition

Name of Region	Name of Prefect	Ethnic group	Remarks
Arta	Atteyeh Waiss (Acting)	Somali/Issa/Ourrouweyne	This is the newly created region
Ali-Sabieh	Moktar Iltireh	Somali/Issa	Since the independence, this position has not been held by an Afar
Djibouti	Aboubaker Daher Awaleh	Somali/Issa	Since the independence, this position has not been held by an Afar
Dikhil	Mohamed Cheiko	Afar	Since the independence, this position has not been held by an Afar. The importance of this post is in relation with the Issa westward expansion in Ethiopia. The actual Governor who holds this position since 1991 was Moussa Djama Gedi, the son of one of the knowing Issa warrior from Ethiopia. Though Dikhil town is becoming dominated by Issa mostly immigrants from Ethiopia in rural areas still Afars are the majority. The incumbent Prefect, Mohamed Cheiko Is son of the former longtime chief of Cabinet of Barkat Gourat, Sheko Hassan, nicknamed Sheko marhaba (“Yes man”)
Obock	Omar Faradda	Afar	
Tadjourah	Abdourazak Daoud	Afar	

Source: Own sources from interviews

As in most African countries, the key guardians of Guellhe’s government are the army and intelligence unit, which overwhelmingly controlled by the Issa/Somalis. The number of Afars in the national Army and Security Forces are insignificant. As shown in table 3, the national army officers’ index, nearly 78 percent of the share is controlled by Somalis while the rest sixteen and six percent are left for the Afars and Arabs respectively. Even though the data in table 3 is for the year 2000, nothing much has been changed for the last decade rather as cited in journal of Uguta-Toosi (2009d) “Issa’s proportion reached to eighty percent out of which half of (Issas) are of Ethiopian nationals”. Furthermore, chiefs of the four Zonal commands (Dikhil, Ali-Sabieh, Tadjourah and Obock) out of five are from Issa tribal group. There is one Zonal command (Arta) under the responsibility of an Afar, the smallest and the new created almost entirely Issa populated zone of five Zonal commands. As listed in table 6 almost all key government posts including protocol of the President, judiciary and management of the central bank are held by Issa/Somalis.

Table 3. Situation of the National Army in June 27, 2000

Grade /ethnic group	Somali (Issa)	Afar	Arab	Total
General	1	0	1	2
Colonel	6	2	0	8

Lieutenant-colonel	7	1	1	9
Commandant	17	4	1	22
Capitaine	25	5	2	32
Lieutenant	34	7	2	43
Sous-lieutenant	24	7	1	32
Aspirant	9	1	0	10
Elève-officier	11	0	3	14
Total by ethnic group	134	27	11	172
% by ethnic group	77.9	15.7	6.4	100

Source: Réalité (organ of ARD), February 11, 2004.

Table 4. Army Chiefs in Djibouti and Ethnic Composition

Number	Name	Post	Ethnic Group/Remarks
1	General Fethie ¹²	Chief of The Army	Arab
2	Colonel Daher Adan Abrar	Chief of the Air Force	Somali/Issa/ Odahgob, he was member of the Somalia Air Force before joining in 1976 the FLCS
3	Colonel Aden Sheir	Chief of the Naval Force	Somali/Issa

¹² Djibouti's army and security forces fall under the direct control of the president as commander-in-chief. The person who has the real power is General Zakariah Ibrahim (Issa/Mammassan), chief of Defence Staff and armoured company. His second, General Ali Hassan Kamil is an Afar reached the rank of general recently in 2008 and he has no authority but nominal.

4	Colonel Mohammed Djama Doualeh	Chief of the Republican Guard (RG)	Somali/Issa/Mamassan
5	L/t.Col Zakaria Hassan Aden	Chief of Gendarmerie Force	Afar whose mother is Somali/Isaak. This position was held by an Issa Colonel Abdi Bogoreh Hassan until he is claimed to have committed suicide on 11 May 2011
6	Colonel Abdullahi Abdi	Chief of Police Force	Somali/Issa/ Ourrouweyne
7	Colonel Osman Doubad Sougouleh	Chief of the Rapid Action Force (RAF)	Somali/Issa
8	L/t.Col Ladieh Awaleh Boulaleh	Chief d'etat major particulier	Somali/Issa
9	Hassen Said Khaireh ¹³	Chief of Documentation and Security (SDS)	Somali/Issa/Mamassan

Source: Own sources from interviews

Despite realizing the decentralization of government power to regions and strengthening the democratic process, Guelleh's way of calming the political unrest in the Republic seems to be silencing opposition voices by nominal representation and systematic segregation of the Afar from the politico-economic life of the Republic. Despite dissatisfaction of the Afar with his rule, the president rather prioritized balancing the twelve Issa sub-clans in their share within his cabinet. He granted a ministerial post in all sub-clans of Issa/Somalis. In A similar manner, the civil service is highly dominated by Somalis to the extent that there's no room for Afar Job seekers. As confirmed by Soeters (2005:25) "the civil service issue is a clear form of what is elsewhere referred to as 'ethnic nepotism', i.e. favoring the members of one's own groups, and this has unmistakably been proved to be a source of irritation and conflict." Indeed, Djibouti is one of the poorest countries in the sub-Saharan Africa in which the economy is primarily based on port service to the landlocked Ethiopia as well as lease income collect from the US and European military bases since 1998 and 2002 respectively¹⁴. Apart from military aid and rent for bases, Djibouti is heavily dependent upon financial aid from the United States and the French Development Agency, as well as the World Bank. However, the country is yet characterized by

¹³ The three top responsible are from Somali ethnic group. Hassen Said Khaireh and Aboubaker Ahmed Moussa are from Issa tribal group. The chief, Hassen Said, is cousin of the President; while the second, Aboubaker Ahmed, is brother of the former Minister of the Presidential Affairs, an Issa/ Odahgob, Osman Ahmed Moussa. The third is from Somalia and recently naturalized. The few Afar working in the Intelligence service are subalterns employees.

¹⁴ As reported by an investigative journalist Alain Lallemand (2007) "from the port, his government gets 7 billion Djiboutian francs, a little more than \$40 million. ...the lease [of Camp Lemonier] had been costing the U.S. about \$30 million a year...the French pay about \$38 million a year to rent a military camp and training grounds; the Germans pay roughly \$10 million. The Spanish also have a base, but no figures are publicly available for the rent they pay."

deprived basic social services and facilities. Enrolment rate and health conditions are very poor. Unemployment is extremely high and rising alarmingly. Economic development of the country is too minimal in which majority of its public live in extreme poverty and inequality. In addition to the over dependency of the economy in foreign financial support, rampant corruption together with high salaries for government employees leads the remaining scarce resources inadequate to meet basic socio-economic needs of the public. Generally, as declared by Alain Lallemand (ibid) “to think of Djibouti as a nation in the Western sense would be deeply misleading: Its institutions are at best weak and at worst nonfunctioning; its budget is a confusing, unreliable mess.” On top of all these malaises, the Issa/Somali dominated government of Djibouti has been implementing very strong ethnic biased development activities between different regions of the Republic as well as ethnically segregated districts within the capital. Afar dominated northern part of the country, Obock and Tadjourah have very low socio-economic status in relation to the southern portion of an Issa/Somali dominated regions of Ali-Sabieh, southern Dikhil and the newly established Arta¹⁵. The northern region is totally neglected from governmental and non-governmental development interventions as the state has declared the region as crisis zone. USAID report (2004:18) confirmed in the above stated claim as “the Northwest Pastoral Zone (Afar inhabiting areas) is the poorest in the country. This is due to its isolation and its poor integration into the national economy.” Similarly the report (ibid: 22) claims that “the Central Pastoral Zone (is a large but relatively sparsely populated zone, mainly inhabited by Afar pastoralists along the coast or in the foothills and mountains of Tadjourah and Obock districts) is relatively isolated from Djibouti’s main urban markets. However, the Southeast Pastoral Zone (includes the whole of Ali Sabieh district, the eastern half of Arta and southern Dikhil which are entirely Issa/Somali inhabiting areas) as affirmed in (ibid: 27) “has relatively good road and rail access to Djibouti’s main urban centers and people in this zone depend primarily on the sale of rural produce to these urban markets.” Apart from relatively high access to urban employment in the capital, the State invested massively in order to diversify means of livelihood in Somali inhabiting regions like Ali-Sabieh where mineral water plant, cement factory and manufacturing plant of marble are established. Even the capital, Djibouti city has six arrondissement (administrative divisions in French) that are subdivisions of the city in which each arrondissement is sub-divided into several quartiers/districts segregated mainly along ethnic lines. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd arrondissement are the wealthiest locations in the city towards the north of Ambouli River incorporated within the older part of the city. The rest commonly known as Balbala located in the southern part of the river is the poorest area of the city. Even though the 1st and 2nd arrondissement have better infrastructural facilities, Afar inhabited quarters of Enguela and Arhiba in each arrondissement respectively are characterized by substandard temporary housing and slums with very poor access to basic services such as water, electricity, drainage system etc.

The Djibouti state has degenerated into private fiefdom in which privileged Issa/Somalis particularly the Mamassan sub clans and some corrupted yes-sir politicians seems to hold the key

¹⁵ An overwhelmingly Somali inhabited district of Arta is formed by taking some portion from Dikhil and the capital Djibouti

of the country in their pocket. As a private institution, some groups of individuals are allowed to accumulate wealth at the expense of others which in turn derive them to strengthen their power. Duale (2006) wrote as “Djibouti is run like a private gangland by Guelleh’s filthy-rich family and a host of cronies and debauched henchmen.” The president’s family network seems large enough to control all sectors where they have cash cows in that tiny Republic. As Duale (2006) cited “Guelleh’s well-heeled and all-powerful son [Liban Omar Guelleh], notoriously known as Mr. Isuzu, has the sole license for car dealership in Djibouti.” The Indian Ocean Newsletter published on 14 November 2009 further identified Guelleh’s closest family network. Accordingly, “his brother, Youssouf Omar Guelleh known as Yuyé, is a top civil servant in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Djibouti. Another brother, Guirreh Omar Guelleh is at the head of Guirreh Business Group and of several other companies: Madal metal, Djibouti Steel Co and Goubet Trading Services. Saleh Omar Guelleh, who works for Djibouti water authority, ONED, is also involved in the ports business. Saad Omar Guelleh, a retired serviceman, is the head of the Djibouti port maintenance service and often plays a “clandestine” number two in this public body run by Dubai Port World. Meanwhile, one of IOG’s cousins, Djama Ali Guelleh, has been general manager of Electricité de Djibouti (EDD) for over twenty years; IOG also has a nephew, Bouh Idriss Omar Guelleh who runs Investment Bank of Africa in Djibouti.” IOG’s daughter Haibado who has obtained a first degree from American University of Paris and a second degree from Columbia University becomes senior advisor to her father. The Djiboutian first lady, Kadra Mohamoud Haid has also established her own family network in which the new actors, Isaq/Somalis are approaching to the Republic’s power nucleus. Her brother, Djama Mohamoud Haid, is governor of the National Bank of Djibouti. Kadra’s second brother, Elmy is also director of civil aviation of Djibouti. The first lady’s son and daughter from her first marriage with Abdallah Mohamed Kamil have significant status in the power uncles; Naguib Abdallah is a diplomat in Paris while the daughter, Nazli Abdallah is head of a department in Djibouti Chamber of Commerce and married to the Minister of Labour (Ali Hassan Bahdon).

Table 5. Name of Senior Government Officials in Djibouti and Ethnic Composition

Number	Name	Position	Ethnic Group
1	Aden Cheikh Hassen ¹⁶	Advisor for Diplomatic Affairs	Somali/ Gadaboursi
2	Ali Suleiman Miyir	Ombudsman	Somali/Issa/Mamassan
3	Fahmy A. Al-hag	Advisor for Investments	Arab/ his mother is Somali/Issa and he is brother in law of Ismail Tani, General secretary of

¹⁶ Aden Cheikh Hassan Nuria, from Dire Dawa, longtime Djiboutian Ambassador in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries is the son of a great Sheikh of Gadaboursi. During the 1980’s, his brother Ismail Sheikh Hassan Nuria was Ambassador of Ethiopia in Egypt, the other brother, Mohamed Sheikh Hassan Nuria was Permanent Representative of Somalia to the United Nations.

			the President Office
4	Naguib Ali Taher	Advisor for Communication and Public Relations	Arab/his wife is cousin of first lady and he is Cousin of the Djibouti ambassador in France, Mr. Rachad Farah
5	Djama Miguil Wais	Advisor for Financial Affairs	Somali/Issa/Mamassan,
6	Ismail Houssein Tani	Secretary General of President Cabinet	Somali/Issa/Mamassan, He is considered as number two of the regime.
7	Ali Guelleh	Chief of Cabinet	Afar
8	Djama Elmi Darar	Director of Protocol (Since 21 June Ambassador)	Somali/Issa/ Mamassan
9	Mohamed Hassan Abdillah	Secretary General of the Government	Somali/Issak
10	Abdoulkader Doualeh Waiss	Mediator	Somali/Issa/ Foulaba
11	Judge khadija Abeba Moukrea	President of the Supreme Court	Married to an Issa. She is of Tigre/Amhara origin Her mother is an Afar from Tadjourah (aunt of Minister Hasna Barkat Daoud).
12	Ahmed Ibrahim Abdi	President of Constitutional Council	Somali/Issa/Mamassan
13	Judge Djama Souleiman Ali	Public Prosecutor	Somali/Darod
14	Idriss Arnaoud Ali	President National Assembly	Somali/Issa/ Odahgob
15	Jamma Mahmoud Haid	Governor of Central Bank of Djibouti	Somali/Issak

Source: Own sources from interviews

Trends of actions of the president have absolutely eroded people's trust on democratic institutions like that of election because the result of all these drama has already been known by the public at large. In the 2003 Parliamentary election Guelleh's 'Union pour la Majorite Presidentielle' (UPM) [Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progress' (RPP), the main component of the UPM] coalition winning all 65 seats. In the 2005 presidential election the sole candidate, Guelleh, was re-elected for the second term and "final" as claimed earlier. Nevertheless, the president amended the constitution and declared victory in the 2011 general election that enables him to secure his stay in power for the next five years. As most Djiboutian opposition leaders argue as change through the ballot box was almost impossible in Djibouti, some even goes far to claim that IOG is preparing his wife as his next successor.

Any Opportunity for Democracy?

Indeed, after analyzing the trajectories in political ecology of Djibouti since its inception till present, the interesting question that arises from these problems could be: is there any opportunity for democracy to flourish in Djibouti? The answer could be YES. Yes, but only if all stakeholders play their progressive role in the democratic process. Firstly, IOG shall give up on the ill-conceived projects of either the ‘greater Issay Dream’, concept of ‘demographic weapon’, systematic alienation of Afars from education, public services, security, police and military apparatus or collecting Afar stooges in his cabinet. Next the president shall draw lessons from the North African tyrants with whom he used to meet often during the Arab League summits. Transforming the Republic in to a real democratic state where the income would trickle-down to the grass root level, where ethnic groups could exercise their respective self-determination and where a national political consensus could reach through genuine negotiations is a key to save the tiny Republic from the bloody revolutions that we are witnessing in North Africa and the Middle East. Secondly, global powers shall reconsider the so-called ‘anti-terrorism’ projects in the African Horn that in turn build the muscle of African dictators and in a way could be used as an apparatus to sustain their tyranny. The dark and veiled policies of ‘you scratch my back; I will scratch yours’ among dictatorial leaders of the Horn states shall be exposed to view and condemned by western ‘democratic’ powers. Otherwise, the distinction between Western democracy and Chinese democracy on the African soil will remain obscure. Thirdly, Djiboutian opposition political parties shall strengthen their power rather than keep existing only on papers and cyber world. Sophisticated socio-economic and political harms of the country could not offer any more space for political organizations that are either properties of their leaders or that exist solely during elections. Though, the diaspora has a vital role for political transformation in homeland, real change is believed to be a fruit of struggle from within. No freedom without sacrifice.

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