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Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia

– Part 2 –

Somali National Regional State¹

JIJIGA, Ethiopia

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By Marc Michaelson

The Somali Region is among Ethiopia's poorest, least developed and most politically-troubled areas. Instability, corruption, and clanism have plagued the Regional Government. Ensnared in scandal and mismanagement, the Regional Presidency has changed hands six times in as many years. Periodic attacks by Islamic fundamentalists and separatist insurgents continue to destabilize the vast Ogaden area.

But ask just about anyone in Jijiga, the Regional capital, and they will tell you things here have never been better.

Politically, these are unquestionably good times for Ethiopian Somalis. Compared to the brutal repression of Somalis during Emperor Haile Sellassie's feudal monarchy (1930-1974) and Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam's pseudo-socialist dictatorship (1974-1991), the nascent federal democracy of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), imperfect though it may be, is cause for celebration.

For the first time ever, Somalis are being recognized as full citizens in Ethiopia; the 1994 Constitution guarantees them equal individual and national rights, on a par with all other ethnic groups. For the first time, they can speak their own language in their streets, schools and government offices without fear. For the first time, Somalis are looking at the Ethiopian flag and seeing it not as the Amhara flag, but their own as well. For the first time, Somalis are responsible for governing their own affairs and managing their own development. The fact that, in many respects, they are doing a lousy job of it does not detract greatly from the welcome bottom-line — that Somalis are now in charge of their own house.

In assessing these early years of Ethiopia's federal experiment, and Somali self-rule in particular, it is important to keep in mind the area's gloomy history,

¹ Ethiopia is divided into nine regional states. Region 5, officially called Somali National Regional State, is the second largest of these regions (Oromiya is the largest), and encompasses much of the east and southeast of the country. Ethiopia's Somali Region, the topic of this article, should not be confused with the country bordering Ethiopia to the east, Somalia. While the people inhabiting both areas are Somalis, the two areas are politically distinct. The Republic of Somalia is a country (albeit one with no central government), and the Somali Region is a distinct region within the boundaries of Ethiopia.

so as to be realistic in analysis of the present and expectations of the near future.

THE RECENT PAST

Throughout this century, Ethiopian Somalis have been marginalized, harassed and treated as second-class citizens. The mostly-Amhara highlanders who ruled Ethiopia viewed Somalis as secession-minded *shiftas* (bandits) and troublemakers. In keeping with this image, they ruled Somali areas with tight-fisted brutality.

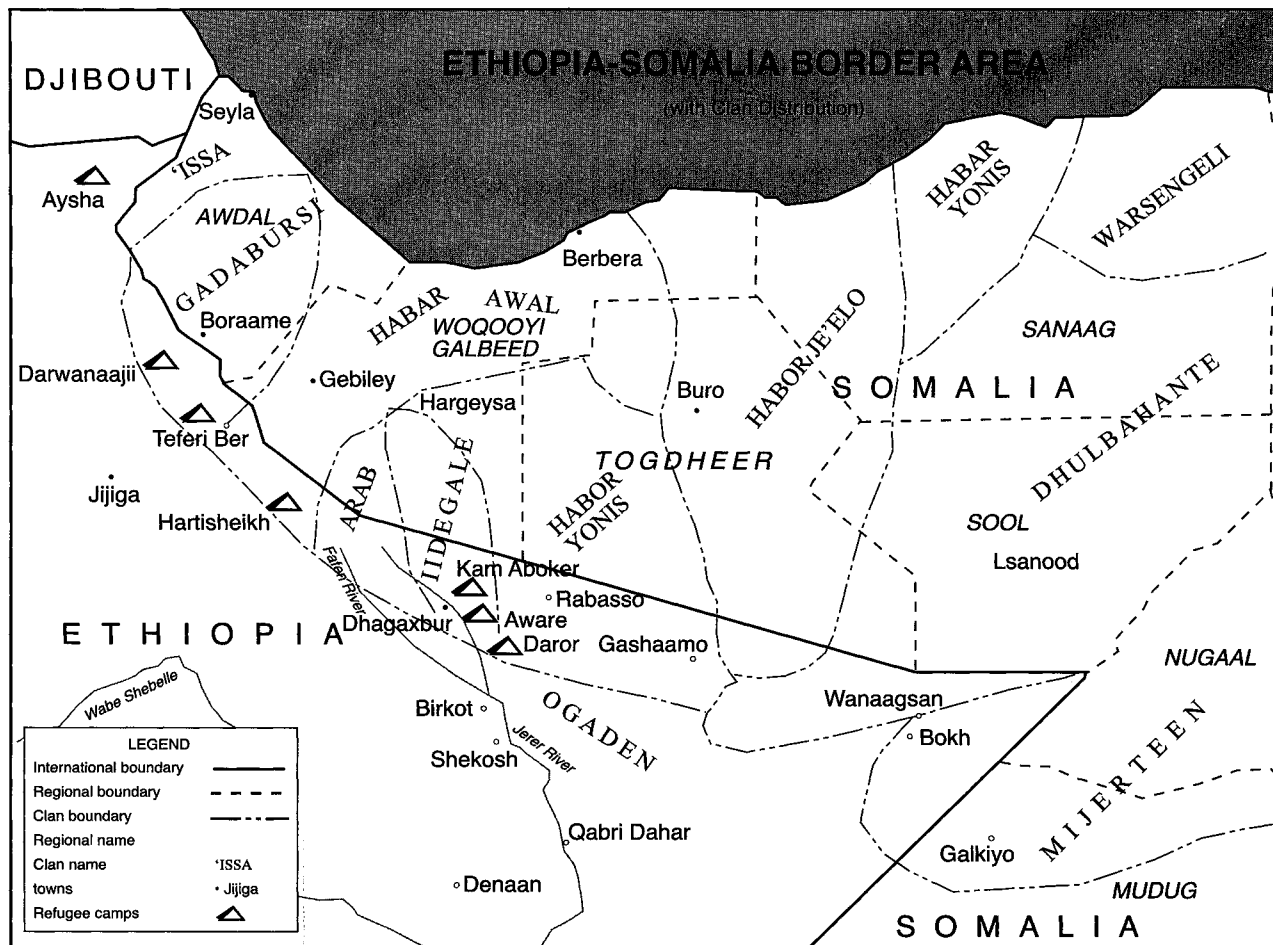
While theoretically Ethiopian Somalis were every bit as "Ethiopian" as the country's other 80-odd ethno-linguistic groups, they have never been treated as such. When asked about the previous status of Ethiopian Somalis, an Amhara friend in Addis Ababa laughed: "We are just now hearing that there *are* Ethiopian Somali people. When I was in school in the 1980s we were taught songs that Somalis are bad people who tried to take our Ogaden area. I never knew there were *Ethiopian* Somalis."

Granted, some of the highlander fears were based in reality. Ethiopian Somalis are indistinguishable from their

ethnic brethren in neighboring Somalia, and have always maintained much closer economic and political connections with Somalia than with the more foreign highland Ethiopian ethnic groups to the west. In the 1960's and 1970's, Somalis throughout the Horn of Africa dreamt of a Pan-Somali state, encompassing the Somali-populated areas of Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya.

In Ethiopia, expressions of Somali nationalism were brutally repressed, and the memory of atrocities such as the slaughter of hundreds of Somalis in Aisha in 1960, lurk just below the collective surface of Somali consciousness. When news of Somaliland's independence from Britain reached Degabur on 27 June 1960, the town's residents celebrated and raised the Somali flag. Emperor Haile Sellassie's forces quickly ended the party, killing 75 people, and sending a clear message: "That's Somalia, *this is Ethiopia!*"

The Pan-Somali project peaked in 1977 during the Ogaden War between Somalia and Ethiopia. By September, the Somali army and Western Somali Liberation Front (a rebel group composed largely of Ethiopian Somalis) had successfully occupied Jijiga and 90 percent of the



Information section UNDP Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia April 1998

All clan boundaries in this map are approximate and do not reflect the views and opinions of the UN whatsoever

Clan map of Ethiopia's Somali Region and northern Somalia. Most sub-clans populate both sides of the border.

Ogaden. To Ethiopia's eventual benefit, the Ogaden War coincided with a Cold War patronage flip-flop in the Horn of Africa. The United States had previously supported Ethiopia, but reduced assistance after the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam successfully courted Soviet and Cuban military aid. With the assistance of these new foreign patrons, Ethiopia was able to regain its Somali territories, forcing Somalia's President Siad Barre to withdraw his troops on March 9, 1978.

Fearing a brutal backlash from Mengistu's government, more than a million Ethiopian Somalis fled the country. Those who stayed were treated as criminals and betrayers. As we sat and chewed *khat* (a narcotic leaf popular amongst Somalis), 25-year-old Awel Dewalle told stories of his youth in Jijiga during the Mengistu era:

"If you were chewing *khat* after dark with your friends, you had to use a flashlight on your way home to show the authorities you meant no harm, otherwise you could be shot. I also remember people would dress in rags, disguised as pastoralists, when they wanted to visit their relatives in Hargeisa [Northern Somalia]. You couldn't leave unless you were dressed as a nomad; if you were caught, you'd be punished. If you wore a Seiko watch, you could be beaten by the police because they knew you bought it in Somalia."

Thousands of highlanders, mostly Amharas, were shipped into Somali Region to settle the area. These *neftanya* (settlers) eventually outnumbered Somalis in many towns. The most prolific construction in the region was of military garrisons. The sparse social services — clinics, schools, roads — were primarily built to serve the settler populations. Few Somalis attended the Amharic-language schools, and the roads were specially planned to facilitate the movement of military convoys.

More than a million Ethiopian Somalis left for Somalia where they had clan connections. Some went to refugee camps, others integrated within Somalia's bigger cities like Mogadishu and Hargeisa. Some later made their way overseas to Arab countries, Europe and North America. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, these Ethiopian Somalis lived, learned and worked in Somalia and other areas outside their birthland.

It was only from 1988-1991, when the political tides turned in both Somalia and Ethiopia, that many Ethiopian Somalis returned. In 1988, Siad Barre's Somali government launched brutal attacks on rebellious Isaaq-populated northern Somalia, sending hundreds of thousands of refugees into Ethiopia. In 1991,

his regime fell and warlord-inspired battles erupted in Mogadishu and the nation-at-large. Just as Somalia was sinking into political chaos, in Ethiopia the EPRDF overthrew Mengistu's regime. The new Tigrayan-led government established a federal state, and the new Constitution promised every ethnic group equal treatment. Ethiopian Somalis returned in droves.

ETHNIC FEDERALISM IN THE SOMALI REGION

General Observations

That the Somali population has skyrocketed during the past eight years, as hundreds of thousands of refugees voluntarily returned to their Ethiopian homeland, is itself convincing circumstantial evidence of hope and improvement. True, this mass re-immigration coincided with the collapse of Somalia, where many Ethiopian Somali refugees had lived. Still, they have come in great numbers. The populations of Jijiga, Gode, and Kebre Dehar — the Region's major urban centers — have swelled by more than 50 percent this decade.

Massive Ethiopian Somali repatriation is a positive sign, but has strained city infrastructures. Jijiga's infrastructure carrying capacity has dawdled at about 15,000, while the population has exploded to approximately 70,000. Water is a major problem. Most of the town has no running water, and the Edom Hotel where I stayed receives its meager daily supply by donkey. Electricity was also erratic until recently, when the supply lines from Koka Dam in Oromiya Region were rehabilitated.

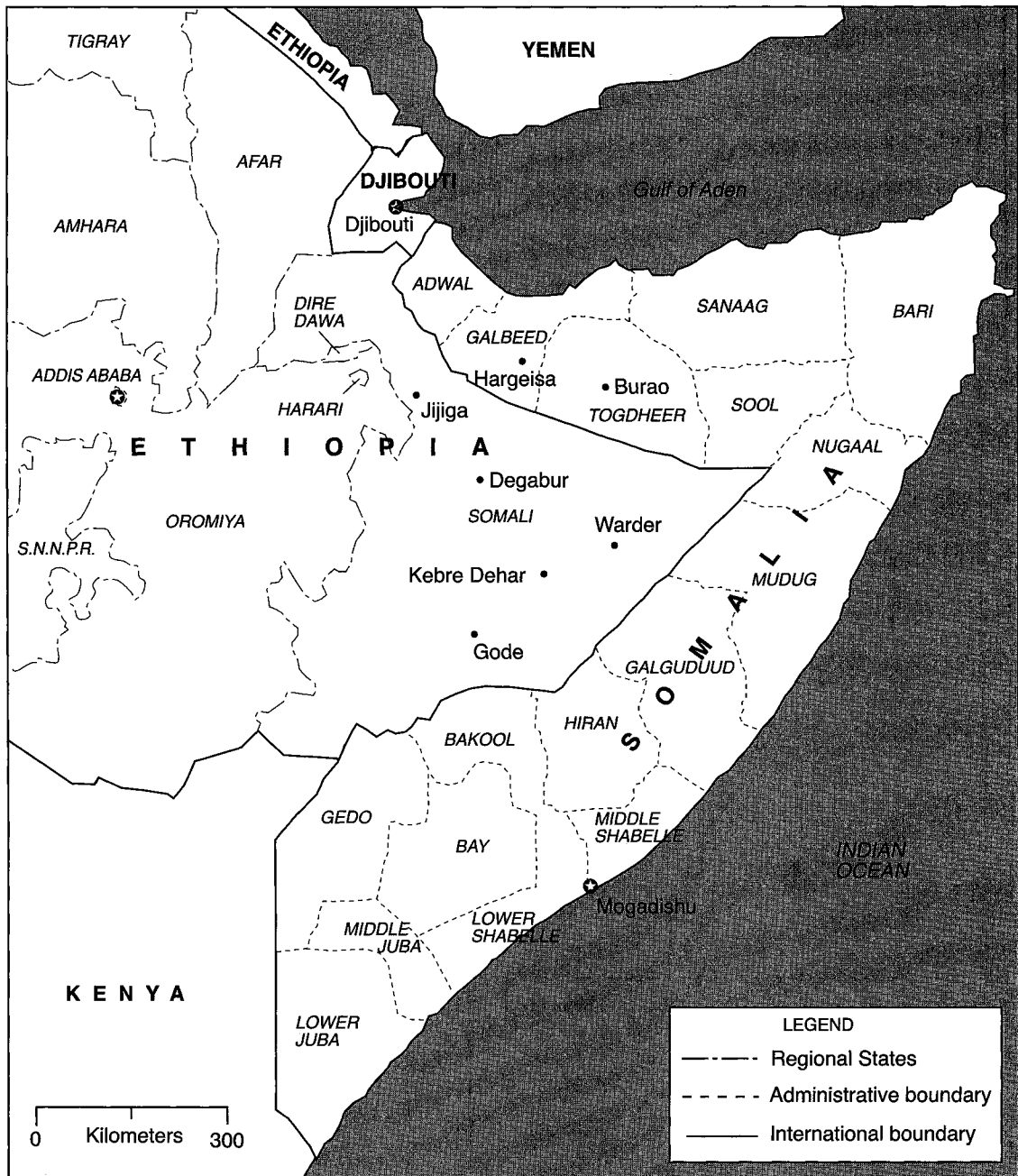
The appearance of several small hotels in Jijiga is new, and I found many, including the Edom, were full. Jijiga is no booming metropolis, but it is a far cry from the scruffy place the British journalist Evelyn Waugh found when he traveled there nearly 65 years ago while awaiting the start of the Italian invasion in 1935: "There was no inn of any kind in Jijiga, but the firm of Mohamedally kept an upper room of their warehouse for the accommodation of the Harar consul on his periodic visits."²

Waugh had brought his own provisions, and "sat down to a breakfast of tinned partridge and Chianti" on his first morning in Jijiga. I had a fresh papaya juice and an omelet at my Gurage-owned hotel.³ Ah, much has changed.

As recently as the late 1980s practically no hotels existed in Jijiga. The town existed primarily as a military garrison, and functioned as the government's last official outpost before the Somali border some 75 kilometers further east. As a constant reminder of the past, the Re-

² Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, London: Penguin, 1986, p. 73. Originally published by Longmans, 1936.

³ The Gurage are an ethnic group noted for their business prowess. Throughout all regions of Ethiopia, one finds hotels, kiosks, restaurants and other establishments owned and operated by Gurages.



All boundaries in this map are approximate and unofficial

gional Administration building is now housed in a former military camp.

In Jijiga and other “near-border” towns, a profusion of small businesses have sprouted in the post-communist era. The market is lively, with women selling *khat*, fresh fruits, grain, oil and many other items imported illegally across the porous border with Somalia. The contraband trade lies at the heart of the region’s economic mini-boom.⁴

Many of the improvements that touch the daily lives

of Ethiopian Somalis, have come about in spite of, not because of, the regional government. The nascent regional administration has stumbled along ineptly for the past seven years. Self-rule has proven a formidable challenge.

POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND THE PLURALISM DEBATE

The first three years of Somali self-administration were characterized by clanism, corruption and misguided leadership. More than a dozen political parties were formed, all on the basis of clan. During the transition

⁴ For a closer look at the contraband trade conundrum, see MM-13: “Border Economics: ‘Contraband’ Trade in Ethiopia’s Somali Region.”



Street scene in Jijiga

(1991-1994), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) assumed the reins of power. Unfortunately, the party lacked unity and common vision, and wallowed in its own confusion and internal turmoil. The ONLF had historically fought for Ogadeni independence.⁵ When the ONLF assumed control of the regional government, a rift formed; the hard-liners resumed their armed struggle for secession while a more moderate wing governed the Region.

The ONLF transitional administrations performed poorly, fueling clan divisions and already-endemic corruption. In 1995, in the country's first democratic election, the ONLF was defeated and a new party, the Ethiopian Somali Democratic League (ESDL) formed a new Regional government.

After three years of ESDL leadership and moderate ONLF opposition, the two parties merged in 1998, creating the new Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP). The SPDP is now the only active political party in the region.

Is the SPDP's emergence as the only political player in the Region a positive or negative development? Some observers believe that pluralism is needed, as true democracy is rarely served in a one-party polity. Others argue that clanism has been self-destructive. Previous political parties, formed along clan lines, have proven

unable to transcend clan loyalties and govern in the interest of the whole region. As one regional parliamentarian put it: "We need to govern by consensus. In our region, the opposition has always been destructive. Political infighting has hindered development. The level of political maturity here is very low. We want to see if one party will be able to encourage cooperation."

The arguments for some semblance of unity are compelling. Thus far, the regional government has been wracked by clan-based nepotism and patronage. For example, an oft-mentioned constraint is the "low level of human capacity." Upon closer inspection, qualified people are available — former ministers, department heads and ambassadors (many of whom are returned refugees from Somalia) are walking the streets. Meanwhile, unqualified and inexperienced but loyal and clan-correct people have been hand-picked to run government departments. As one observer commented: "The right people are in the streets, and the wrong people are in the offices." Others disagree, seeing the need for a new generation of leaders: "Those guys in the streets got their experience in Somalia, a failed state. They are the old guard, experienced in corruption."

The absence of hiring criteria has enabled clan-based hiring of unqualified candidates. Until this year, no guidelines or minimum qualifications existed for important

⁵ The Ogaden is the vast, rugged, central section of the Somali Region. The Ogaden clan is acknowledged to be the largest in the Region. Politically-manipulated censuses, however, have purposefully distorted Somali Region population figures, so no accurate figures are available.



Street scene near the market in Jijiga

regional government posts. During the current fiscal year, specific criteria will be used in hiring processes — a seemingly simple step, but one that has taken the Somali Regional government seven years to institute.

The creation of an achievement-based society will take time. As one Bureau Head frankly admitted: “Like it or not, we are tribalists. Clan will always be a factor. We can’t have a purely merit-based system.” Even Somalis in the Diaspora have found it difficult to set aside their clan differences, to express common interests. Despite a population of about 100,000 Somalis in the Toronto area, clanism has prevented them from electing even one Somali representative to the city government. They can’t agree on common candidates, so they dilute their political voice to the point of anonymity.

Performance assessments of the Somali regional government vary greatly. Predictably, government insiders proffer praise, outsiders lash out with criticism, and the historically most marginalized (and vast majority of the population), the pastoralists, consider this government as irrelevant as any other. As is often the case, the true picture is neither as rosy as the promoters portray, nor as dire as the detractors claim.

Regarding the emergence of one-party rule in the region, it remains to be seen whether the changes will be merely cosmetic or able to overcome the clanism that has proven so destructive in the past. The debates over pluralism are themselves healthy. Throughout history, Ethiopian Somalis have been victims of dictatorship and bad governance. For them, a government is something that

oppresses, not something that provides social services. With this negative historical baggage, it will take time for Somalis to work out effective systems of self-governance, and perhaps longer to convince their constituents that government can play a positive role in their lives.

WHO HOLDS POWER: THE FEDS OR THE REGION?

In all federal systems, the balance of power between the center and regions evokes ongoing debate. In Ethiopia’s Somali region, who is really in control, the Tigrayan-dominated central government or the Somali-run regional government? Are the latter mere show-puppets, manipulated by long strings from Addis Ababa, or are Somalis truly free to manage their own affairs and make their own decisions, free from meddling by the center?

This is a tender topic. Several “outsiders” spoke in hushed voices about the seven Tigrayan “advisors,” young graduates from the Addis Ababa Civil Service College who, they claim, run the regional government from behind the scenes, while preserving the appearance of home rule. They resent these so-called “advisors”, and one local businessman says “these inexperienced kids are *intruders*, not advisors.” “Insiders” predictably present a different viewpoint, claiming the “advisors” are just as their titles imply. They are not meant to make decisions, but to support an administration admittedly lacking in capacities.

One Bureau Head frankly acknowledged: “There are

cases where the “advisors” have made decisions for certain Bureau Heads.” “But,” he added, “that is more an expression of the weakness of those Bureau Heads, who were paralyzed, fearful and themselves unable or unwilling to make decisions on their own. I have one of these advisors. I give him assignments, he reports to me, and I make the decisions.”

There may have been more central control during earlier administrations, when incompetence and self-destructive clan politics were more prominent. At that time, with secessionist-minded ONLF politicians at the helm, the central government feared an unchecked regional government might lead Somalis down the road toward



Flag of the Somali People's Democratic Party

secession. In the aftermath of Eritrean secession in 1993, “domino” theorists worried that Somali Region would go next.

Controversy also surrounds the Bureau Heads themselves, many of whom are young Somali whippersnappers (and classmates of the Tigrayan “advisors” at the Civil Service College). Critics say they are too young and inexperienced. Proponents point to their youthful energy and enthusiasm, claiming they represent a new breed of Somalis who are less susceptible to clan pressure and corruption. There is more than a thread of truth in both positions.

The federal control vs. regional autonomy debate is often heated, evoking strong emotional responses. One tough national parliament member, call him Ahmed, was visiting his home region during the recess. Ahmed places blame squarely on the central government. He believes the devolution of power to the regions has been too slow, and a new “struggle” is needed to attain “functional” equality. Much as the Civil Rights movement successfully

enshrined legal protections for black Americans, but didn’t vastly alter their harsh day-to-day realities, this legislator believes the new Constitution is merely paper, and without changing the entrenched highlander-dominated national mentality, Somalis will remain marginalized on the fringes of Ethiopian reality.

Ahmed shared a story of his recent return to Ethiopia after a trip overseas. When he arrived at the airport, the customs official questioned him in Amharic. He responded in English and said he understood Somali and Arabic, but not Amharic. The government official asked, “If you are Ethiopian, why don’t you speak Amharic?” This infuriated him. Ahmed looks forward to the day that being mainstream “Ethiopian” doesn’t automatically mean you have to be Christian and speak Amharic.

Ahmed also points to continued highlander chauvinism evidenced by the slow incorporation of Somalis into federal government positions and parastatals: “Go to the ARRA (Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs), Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation or the Commercial Bank right here in Jijiga. You won’t find one Somali working in their offices.” A slight exaggeration, but the point remains valid — even on Somali turf, national companies and organizations continue to be largely staffed by highlanders.

While acknowledging continued difficulty, rooted in centuries of marginalization, several bureaucrats offered a different viewpoint: “We can’t blame Addis Ababa

for our problems. They are sending us a decent budget, and we haven’t been able to spend more than 50% of it. Is that their fault? We need to put our own house in order, build our own capacities, and improve our own administrative efficiency and effectiveness. If during the last few years, development has been slow in this region, it is due to our own shortcomings.”

One supporter explained that two of the Tigrayan advisors were actually refused by the Bureau Heads to which they were assigned. This, he claimed, evidenced the independence of the regional authorities from central government interference. However, a critic later retorted: “Try to interview those two Bureau Heads. You won’t find them here. They lost their jobs and were reassigned to Addis.” The debate continues....

DEVELOPMENT INEFFICIENCIES: BUDGET WOES, PLANNING IMPROVEMENTS

The Somali Region has budgetary problems, but perhaps not the type one might expect. The regional budget

is divided into two categories, disbursements from central government and funds raised locally. Of the region's 1998-99 total fiscal-year budget of 250 million *birr* (about U.S.\$31 million), 80 percent came from the federal government. In addition, approximately 56 million *birr* (U.S.\$7 million) was available as loans and other foreign assistance.

Of the total budget, only 150 million *birr* was actually spent. That's just 60 percent of the government funds and 49 percent of the total funds available. With the massive development needs of the Somali Region, this low level of budgetary utilization begs explanation. Both insiders and outsiders again point to the low level of regional-government capacity. The administration simply does not have the ability to implement all of its programs.

Compounding these capacity inadequacies is the Somali cultural fondness for meetings. Somalis love to sit and discuss issues *ad nauseum*. This is exemplified by the daily ritual of *khat*-chewing (a narcotic leaf) during which Somali men congregate, lounge and mull over issues in free-flowing discussion and debate. This cultural feature of endless discourse seems to have spilled over into government affairs. The SPDP's recent annual meeting, planned for three days, lasted for 10 days, during which time the entire regional leadership was absorbed in self-reflective discussion and planning. Just after the SPDP meeting concluded, the Regional President convened another round of consultations with all of the sectoral Bureau Heads and their Department Heads, to review the preceding year's performance. Then came Executive Committee meetings, and then Parliamentary deliberations...

Clearly there is a lot to discuss. However, there comes a time to stop meeting and start doing. While all of the regional leadership are holed up at roundtables, little or nothing is getting done. And this affects budgetary implementation as well. The spending figures cited above were oddly labeled for the fiscal year "Sept. 11, 1998 to July 7, 1999." That's not a fiscal year, it's a fiscal 10 months. Despite the fact that the fiscal year ends in early July, the regional parliament doesn't get around to approving the next year's budget until its session more than a month later.

Another, perhaps positive, limitation on spending is the federal government's tough stance on corruption. The TPLF has attacked corruption, and is carefully monitoring regional authorities to maintain accountability and root out misuse and embezzlement.

Amongst Somalis, corruption is endemic. In traditional Somali society, the looters — those who successfully stole livestock from neighboring tribes — were richly rewarded with respect, beautiful women and wealth. Undoing the positive cultural associations of stealing will take time. Even today, among the governing elite, those who hold the purse strings are expected to dole out cash

and contracts to "relatives," a broad grouping that includes the entire clan.

Some Regional administrators appear unable to function and unwilling to disburse funds for fear they will be held accountable and sacked. Hindered by low levels of project-monitoring capacity, the safe route is often inaction. The result is programmatic, and budgetary, paralysis.

Corruption continues, often through construction "contracts" issued by the Regional Government for infrastructure projects. For example, one disgruntled citizen complained about SATCO, a Tigrayan firm that won the contract to build the region's new Teacher Training Institute (TTI). At the end of the 24-million-*birr* contract (U.S.\$2.9 million), the company filed an 8 million *birr* (U.S.\$970,000) overrun bill. After heavy lobbying by influential "interested parties" in the central government, SATCO received the additional payment.

Other examples abound. Take the 21st Century Trading Company, another contractor. Despite receiving a hefty advance to purchase construction supplies, the firm never returned to do the work. Other critics point to the top levels of regional government, citing the "close family relationships" between high regional officials and the leadership of the Region's largest non-governmental organization (NGO), Ogaden Welfare Society (OWS). They find it peculiar that OWS has received several fat government contracts and acts as informal gatekeeper of all development activities in the area.

Who bears responsibility for these misdealings? The Region issues contracts, and is responsible for supervising them. It seems unreasonable to point fingers at Addis Ababa for local tolerance of funny business. There does, however, appear to be some progress. During the recent SPDP party meetings, several of these corruption issues were revealed and directly confronted, indicating (perhaps) rumblings of increased accountability.

In the past, it was also difficult to hold sectoral administrators accountable since concrete activity plans did not exist. For the first time, an official at the Regional Planning Bureau explained, in the last fiscal year every Bureau had plans. As the Region conducts upcoming performance reviews, he believes "some heads are likely to roll." It appears that "what you do" may slowly become more important than "who you are" and "what clan you come from". That is no small feat in a society plagued by traditions of nepotism, patronage and back-stabbing identity politics.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY: EXPANDING THE VOICE

Authentic democracy demands broad-based participation, not merely elite action on behalf of an inactive, uninformed and uninvolved populace. In Somali Region, democracy is in its infancy. A foundation of democratic



Somali women awaiting transport on the outskirts of Jijiga

institutions has been established; activating and functionalizing them will entail longer-term endeavors — increasing access to education, reordering gender relations and including poor, rural pastoralist voices in the political dialogue. Thus far, governance in Somali Region remains the business of a tiny exclusive group of educated men.

Somali women are strong, dynamic and participate fully in the social and economic life of the community. On the streets of Jijiga, colorfully-clad women, hair covered as part of Islamic duty, parade the streets, busily attending to their daily business. In the marketplace, Somali women are at least as active as men, selling *khat*, trading household goods and produce, exchanging currency and importing contraband through neighboring Somalia.

Somali *political* life, however, is entirely male-dominated. Women are essentially absent from leadership and management positions within the regional government. Unsurprisingly, the Head of the Women's Bureau is a woman, but other females are scarce, found primarily in clerical and secretarial jobs.

As such, the political analysis contained in this article reflects the opinions and perspectives of men, approximately half the population of Jijiga. More specifically, they are elite, educated urban men, representative of perhaps less than one percent of the total region's populace. A few pastoralists and business people were interviewed, but the discussion centered on their economic concerns, not political opinions. In effect, the narrowness

of this investigation reflects the narrowness of participation in Somali political affairs.

Building an inclusive, participatory democratic culture amongst a largely illiterate and nomadic population is no easy task. Yet, it is absolutely necessary if the federal experiment is to become relevant to its grassroots constituencies. The rural population has, at best, a rudimentary understanding of the recent changes of government. To them, on a day-to-day basis, the new federalism probably means very little.

Attracting Somalis to return from the Diaspora presents another massive challenge. Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian Somalis live abroad, where they've had access to good schools and valuable work experience. Small numbers of these highly skilled Somalis have returned to visit; fewer have stayed to work and build a new life.

A few returnees — a businessman, an NGO manager, and a regional government advisor — explained some of the obstacles to convincing Somalis to return. The first problem they raise is the lack of accurate information on the condition of the Region. Diaspora Somalis believe the same chaos and insecurity in neighboring Somalia plagues the Ethiopian Somali Region as well. To clarify misperceptions, they say, "We have to go back and tell them what it's *really* like."

Another problem is the poor level of facilities — schools, housing, medical care — available in the Region. For

those living a cushy life in America or Europe, it's tough to uproot their families and convince them to come to Jijiga. The situation is a classic Catch-22. Without decent facilities, it's impossible to attract Somalis from the Diaspora to come and build up the Region; And without people from the Diaspora, it's difficult to build such infrastructures. That's a chicken and egg conundrum, Somali-style.

SECTORAL PERFORMANCE: EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Self-rule has been slow in delivering economic and social development. One constraint is the continued centralization of development planning. Central ministries continue to dictate development plans, some of which are inappropriate for the regions. Ideally, each region is mandated to work within the national development plan, adopting and modifying it to local conditions. This is easier said than done.

For example, the national agricultural development plan focuses on improving the lot of settled peasant farmers. In Somali Region, the majority of the population are pastoralists who migrate seasonally to gain access to different grazing and water points. The national agricultural development plan scarcely mentions pastoralists. Such incongruities between regional needs and national priorities make plans and activities difficult to synchronize. Rather than confronting central authorities, "copycatism" prevails. Weak regional administrators merely mimic national plans as the path of least resistance, even when those plans are utterly irrelevant and inappropriate to local situations.

Poor regional planning has also hindered progress. For example, in the haste to build new schools and clinics, officials failed to adequately plan to put them to use.

In some of the Region's most distant corners, new school buildings lay vacant, with no furniture, books or teachers, much less students. Likewise, of the 78 clinics in the Region, only 36 are fully operational; the others lack equipment, medicines and nurses to staff them. Overeager to provide new services, regional officials jumped the gun, and made several mistakes.

This is troubling in the short-term, but part of a natural learning process. Within regional Bureaus, the levels of interest, effort and enthusiasm are laudable, but capacities and experience are in shorter supply. Such constraints should work themselves out over time.

At the Health Bureau, plans for the coming fiscal year focus on "operationalizing" existing facilities, and the Acting Bureau Head says they have no immediate plans for new construction. Traditionally, the Regional Parliament has designated about 80 percent of the budget for infrastructure and construction, with just 20 percent of the budget allocated to recurrent costs (e.g. salaries, medicines). To equip and staff regional schools and clinics, a re-ordering of budgetary priorities will need to be approved by the Regional Parliament.

The most pressing challenge facing these two sectors is the lack of trained manpower. Amhara-speaking highlanders dominated the Derg bureaucracy. Very few Somalis had the chance to attend elementary school, much less higher-learning institutions, in a system that discriminated against them. Thus, most of the trained doctors, nurses and teachers in the region in 1991 were non-Somalis. The Education and Health Bureaus say they remain heavily dependent on outsiders to staff schools and medical facilities.

The Region is placing great emphasis on building



Hashi Mohamed, a pastoralist from Chedelay village, with a load of wood he brought by camel to sell in Jijiga

human capacities. Of the 1,389 teachers in the Region, only 564 (40percent) had received any training at all, and of these, only 91 studied above the high school level (57 hold Diplomas and 34 Degrees). The newly constructed Teacher Training Institute (TTI) in Jijiga is conducting a series of upgrade courses, and certified its first group of 284 teachers in August 1999. Overflow classes are being held at the Secondary School, and in a notable example of cross-regional cooperation, 274 additional Somali trainees have been sent to the TTI in Harar, the neighboring regional state. Similar, albeit smaller scale, trainings are being conducted in the health sector. The Jijiga Nurse Training school opened this year and its first class of 44 Junior Nurses will graduate shortly. Plans to double the capacity of the 48-trainee center are scheduled for the coming year.

These graduates will provide desperately needed Somali-speaking teachers and nurses to some of the most remote schools and clinics. Of the Region's 40 doctors, half are native Somalis. Seven of the 40 are posted in the Health Bureau, and two-thirds of the total work in Jijiga, the regional capital, leaving just 10 to cover the rest of the vast Region. Highlanders have repeatedly refused postings in parts of Somali Region because of security fears and poor housing facilities.

Increasingly, the regions are forced to compete with new private facilities in more attractive urban centers. For example, a Somali pharmacist earning 600 birr/month (\$72) with the Regional Government recently resigned to take a much higher-paying position in a private hospital in Addis Ababa. Health professionals can earn four times as much in private clinics or hospitals as they can working for the government. And the Regional government is somewhat handcuffed, since salary scales are nationally mandated. As a creative solution, the Regional Health Bureau has asked Parliament to increase hardship allowances (for tough, rural postings) from 30 percent to 200 percent of salary. Similar incentives are being proposed by the Education Bureau; both represent innovative initiatives to help ease the difficult transition from national to regional administration.

Actual changes in service provision since the coming of the EPRDF government in 1991 are difficult to gauge. It is particularly tough to determine quantitative changes (e.g. in the numbers of schools/clinics). When asked for statistics, these two Bureaus could only provide vague responses, claiming there were practically no schools or clinics during the Derg. Records from previous governments are scanty and inaccessible. Further complicating comparison are changes in administrative boundaries — during the Derg, what is currently Somali Region was subsumed within four other administrative Districts.

Modest qualitative improvements are evident. Previously, nearly all health professionals in the Region

spoke Amharic and no Somali. With the newly trained Somali nurses, sick people will be able to explain their ailments in their native tongue. Likewise for schools, which previously taught exclusively in Amharic. Now the Education Bureau is developing and implementing a new Somali language curriculum. Such changes take time. The Curriculum Department appears riddled with problems and inefficiencies, and thus far has developed and printed only a few of the needed texts and teaching guides. For now, most classes continue to use the old Amharic curriculum. Eventually, however, Somali students will have the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue.

SECURITY CONCERNS

Occasional security lapses perpetuate the Somali Region's reputation as a dangerous, lawless frontier. Every few months or so, an isolated incident — an attack by secessionist-minded ONLF rebels or Al-Itihad Islamic fundamentalists — tarnishes the Region's image. Rebels kidnap expatriate development workers, bandits commandeer Landcruisers and supply trucks, and armed insurgents periodically clash with the Ethiopian army.

Two external factors exacerbate these insecurities. The absence of a government and corresponding lawlessness in Somalia have enabled Al-Itihad and other rebel groups to operate there with relative impunity. They slip across the border, attack a bus or steal a vehicle, and dart back to their safe haven in Somali.

Weapons also traverse the border for sale in the Region. An old Russian AK-47 can be bought for as little as 50 birr (\$6). Inter-clan conflicts, previously fought with knives and rocks, now escalate more quickly — dozens of men can be killed in a rapid-fire reaction to the looting of a camel or illegal grazing. Traditional disputes and conflict in the region have thus become much more lethal. In the small town of Gerbo, for example, 54 people were killed in March 1999 before local elders and government officials were able to intervene.

The second factor is the Ethio-Eritrean War. Despite being far from the disputed border in Tigray, the Somali Region has been the second-most affected part of the country. A proxy war has bubbled in Somalia, with the Eritrean government allegedly arming Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and ONLF rebels based there. In July 1999, the Ethiopian Army went deep into Somalia to root out these destabilizing forces. By mid-August, they claimed to have killed or captured more than 1,000 of the rebels, and said only about two hundred remained.

Even American Ambassador David Shinn, much loved by the people of Somali region for his several visits to outlying areas — areas most foreigners would never venture into — was prevented from visiting parts of Ogaden just one week before my visit to Jijiga. The Ethiopian Army forbade him to go there, saying they could not guaran-

tee his safety. I also twice planned to visit Ogaden, and twice postponed my trip due to safety considerations.

These security problems negatively impact the Region in several ways. Local authorities are distracted, forced to squander time and resources on maintaining security, rather than on much-needed development activities. Likewise, international development agencies, NGOs and donors, are reluctant to service the region for fear that their staff might be targeted.

EARLY SELF-RULE IN SOMALI REGION: GROWING PAINS

Growing pains are a fitting metaphor for the current developments in Somali Region. When viewed in historical context, there are unmistakable signs of growth and progress. Somali refugees are returning, establishing businesses and starting life anew. A culture of self-governance is slowly taking root — oppressive external regimes are being replaced with nascent homegrown structures.

Several obstacles have retarded progress. The

Region's leaders are struggling to overcome a self-destructive political culture of clanism. Current human capacities seem woefully inadequate for a region faced with such overwhelming tasks of rehabilitation and infrastructure development. External challenges also hinder progress — the federal government has been reluctant to relinquish control to a historically-rebellious region; serious instabilities and lawlessness in neighboring Somalia continue to spill over the porous border; and levels of foreign assistance and investment remain extremely low due to security problems.

The challenges confronting Ethiopian Somalis loom large. As with Ethiopia's neophyte federal system as a whole, definitive analysis of Somali Region's performance at this point is premature. To date, the performance has been mixed, but several positive trends are evident. Perhaps most importantly, the future depends not on Amhara or Tigrayan highlanders, but on Somalis themselves — their own ideas, their own plans, and their own sweat. More than anything else, this is what is new and exciting for Ethiopian Somalis — for the first time, their fate lies largely in their own hands. □

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