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HELMUT BUSKE VERLAG HAMBURG

Ismail Wais

DJIBOUTI : THE POLITICAL STABILITY OF A SMALL
STATE IN A TROUBLED AREA

The political and economic implications of size for a given country is a variable that cannot be emphasized strongly enough. It is especially so when the country is small or very small; furthermore smallness is a phenomenon often associated with the weak and poor.

In theoretical discussions there remains the problem of defining a small country. When scholars of different disciplines (politics, economics, sociology, etc.) come together, each has an important criterion, that should help with the definition 'small' as applied to a country. The following list should demonstrate the scope of the various criteria: population; population density; total area; arable land; gross domestic product (GDP); GNP per capita; size of the national market; degree of self-sufficiency; degree of dependency on external economies; range of possible industries; diversity of resources; institutional stability and strength; class structure (especially its elite element); bureaucratic stability; military capability, etc.

It should be clear that a country need not be small with regard to all these factors and in certain cases there can even be a compensating factor, for example Kuwait (oil), Luxemburg (efficient bureaucracy), and Monaco (excellent functioning political institution). Nonetheless, taking all these factors into consideration, size is seen as a relative factor, and is important in a comparative analysis.

In this paper, however, for the sake of simplicity I will apply three often used criteria (total population, arable land and GNP) in order to arrive at a clearer general understanding of the political, economic and social implication of small size.¹

Of 190 states and territories about which information is available (however difficult to obtain) not less than 100 of them have a population under 5 millions and 59 have under 1 million. If we consider only the developing countries (underdeveloped, Third World, etc.) of 133 states 78 of them have a population of under 5 millions and 49 have less than 1 million (see: World Bank Atlas 1980).

Djibouti has a population of about 350.000, arable land of 10 km² and GNP of \$ 130 million (1977). According to this data, Djibouti is in global comparison a small or even a very small country.

Table I. Indicators and size index in selected countries

| Country | Country Size Index | Population in thousand | Arable Area in sq. km | GNP US \$ mio. |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Djibouti | 0.042 | 300 | 10 | 130 |
| Yemen (Dem.) | 0.265 | 1717 | 2650 | 600 |
| Somalia | 0.490 | 3660 | 10660 | 430 |
| Rwanda | 0.563 | 4379 | 9550 | 710 |
| Burundi | 0.581 | 4156 | 12720 | 550 |
| Yemen (Arab) | 1.088 | 4982 | 15700 | 2540 |
| Kenya | 2.092 | 14614 | 22700 | 4300 |
| Uganda | 2.364 | 12049 | 55380 | 3140 |
| Tanzania | 2.567 | 16363 | 51000 | 3440 |
| Sudan | 3.517 | 16919 | 74950 | 5650 |
| Ethiopia | 4.965 | 30245 | 137300 | 3280 |

Source: Jalan (1982:46-47)

Two questions seem particularly important: What are the political and economic roles of small states in today's world? Can the international environment affect stability in small states?

Nobody today denies the fact that different states and regions of the world are unequally developed. It is a reality that a relatively small group of countries, more active and dominant than others, shaped and formed the global economic structure as we know it today, that is to say the capitalist worldsystem. In this system the dominant ones have decided and divided the political, economic and social roles of today's states. These leading states developed into political and economic centers of power and at the same time caused the dependent development of the subordinate states by integrating them into the capitalistic system. The result we see today in the form of the 'International Division of Labour', which developed and matured under the dominance of the metropole states (First World, core-, industrial-, or developed countries). It was they who decided and determined the rules and regulations of the so-called 'International Division of Labour'. In the economic sense the periphery was totally penetrated by them and forced into a satellite position. Their socio-economic structure was deformed and reshaped simply to complement the development needs of the metropole states.

In such a global economic and political order, the very small, economically underdeveloped areas are seriously affected. They are on the one hand too weak and unimportant to influence the international system in their favour, and on the other hand even lack the resources and skill to plan and implement national development. Their chance for economic 'take-off', the hope to be 'self-sustained' and to achieve economic transformation is limited by their dependency on foreign assistance (physical and financial

capital, know-how, management skills, marketing, communication, etc.). This situation is a source of instability for all underdeveloped countries and especially for small ones.

Djibouti is integrated into the capitalist worldsystem, but on the periphery. Its lack of strategic resources reduces its bargaining power and position in the international arena to a minimum, but at the same time, increases its dependency to a high degree. Djibouti's dependency on the international capitalist system takes concrete forms and manifests itself in the following characteristics:

- strong dependency on foreign physical and financial capital. This in turn leads to further dependency on human capital (technicians, industrial managers, experts as advisors for economic and political institutions, etc.).

The first 'Round Table' organized by the Planning Office with the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) manifests Djibouti's financial needs. The conference, attended by 7 states and 19 international organizations took place from 23rd - 26th February 1981 in Djibouti. The participants were presented with 86 projects which the government was trying to realize with their help. For these projects a total sum of about 51.5 billion Djibouti Francs (DF) were needed.

A similar conference (Conference des Donateurs) is to convene in Djibouti at the end of 1983. The participants will be presented with about 72 projects. They will cost about 64 billion DF and have to be realized within five years (see "La Nation" of July 7, 1983).

In spite of the Djibouti government's strong physical and financial capital need Table 2 should illustrate the international resources flow into the country since independence;

Table 2. International Foreign Aid to Djibouti from 1978 - 1982

| | <u>in million DF</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| I. France | 51.990 |
| 2. Saudi Arabia | 14.135 |
| 3. UNDP and other UN branches | 3.824 |
| 4. EEC | 3.455 |
| 5. Italy | 2.345 |
| 6. Kuwait | 1.836 |
| 7. United States | 1.799 |
| 8. Libya | 1.179 |
| 9. West Germany | 1.076 |
| 10. Arab League | 980 |
| 11. Iraq | 875 |
| 12. Abu Dhabi | 710 |
| 13. Qatar | 335 |
| 14. Oman | 156 |
| 15. Bahrain | 88 |
| 16. OAU | 68 |
| 17. South Korea | 15 |
| 18. Sweden | 11 |
| | ----- |
| total | 84.877 |

Source: Rep. de Djibouti, vol. I, November 1983, p. 139

- strong dependency through foreign ownership, and foreign effective control on key economic sectors. This situation goes back to the long years of colonial rule and economic practice. It affects especially the service sector, and, notably, international commerce;

- dependency through foreign trade: primary and manufacturing production is insignificant in the small Republic of Djibouti. This makes the country totally dependent on foreign trade for goods of all kinds. This also explains why the combined foreign trade to GNP ratio is very high (about 57.5% in 1979).² Dependency is aggravated by the fact that foreign trade is nearly under the total control of alien nationalities. In addition to this is the very high commodity and geographic concentration of Djibouti's export and import, which in itself also means still stronger dependency. The table on the following page gives further elaboration;
- dependency through imported consumption, which also dates back to the colonial days. Such a demand structure constrains national production and favours imports to a high degree, thus accelerating the drain of badly needed foreign exchange. It should also be mentioned that imported 'cultural values' and the way of life cement the structure of imported consumption dependency;
- Djibouti is vulnerable dependent on foreign forces (France) to control and defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty. It should be kept in mind that apart from their economic influence and cultural deformation the theoretical option exists that such forces could also be used against nationals and to stabilize undemocratic regimes;
- the dependency on organizational skill and institutional structure, which are products of foreign influence, is not of minor importance. The government itself is under discussion, its staff and the way it is run. This is a subject that needs an elaborate analysis, but I would like to stress that it is a source of severe dependency for a long time to come.

These points show the dependent structure, that are at the

Table 3: Foreign Trade of Djibouti in Mio. DF

| Year | Export | | Import | | Balance | Rate of coverage in % |
|------|--------|---------------|--------|---------------|---------|-----------------------|
| | Total | E.E.C. France | Total | E.E.C. France | | |
| 1970 | 2105 | - | 8175 | - | -6070 | 26 |
| 1971 | 1133 | - | 9248 | - | -8115 | 12 |
| 1972 | 1627 | 1242 | 10733 | 6895 | -9106 | 15 |
| 1973 | 3499 | 3025 | 12675 | 8186 | -9176 | 28 |
| 1974 | 3678 | 2121 | 21698 | 15658 | -18020 | 17 |
| 1975 | 2639 | 1946 | 24166 | 17759 | -21527 | 11 |
| 1976 | 2920 | - | 21284 | 15447 | -18364 | 14 |
| 1977 | 3364 | 2622 | 18507 | 12704 | -15143 | 18 |
| 1978 | 3154 | 2634 | 28103 | 18627 | -24949 | 11 |
| 1979 | 2023 | 1815 | 31477 | 20663 | -29454 | 6 |
| 1980 | 2221 | - | 49005 | 32147 | -46784 | 5 |

Source: calculated from different numbers of "Annuaire Statistique" République de Djibouti, Direction National de la Statistique

same time realities, that determine the political and economic environment at the present time in Djibouti. These are factors that affect every national and his expectations. When the people realize that their just hope, that the political independence would better their living conditions, does not materialize, they become discontented, show their disappointment and their demands for personal and political change have important consequences. There can be no doubt that such a situation endangers social peace and political stability.

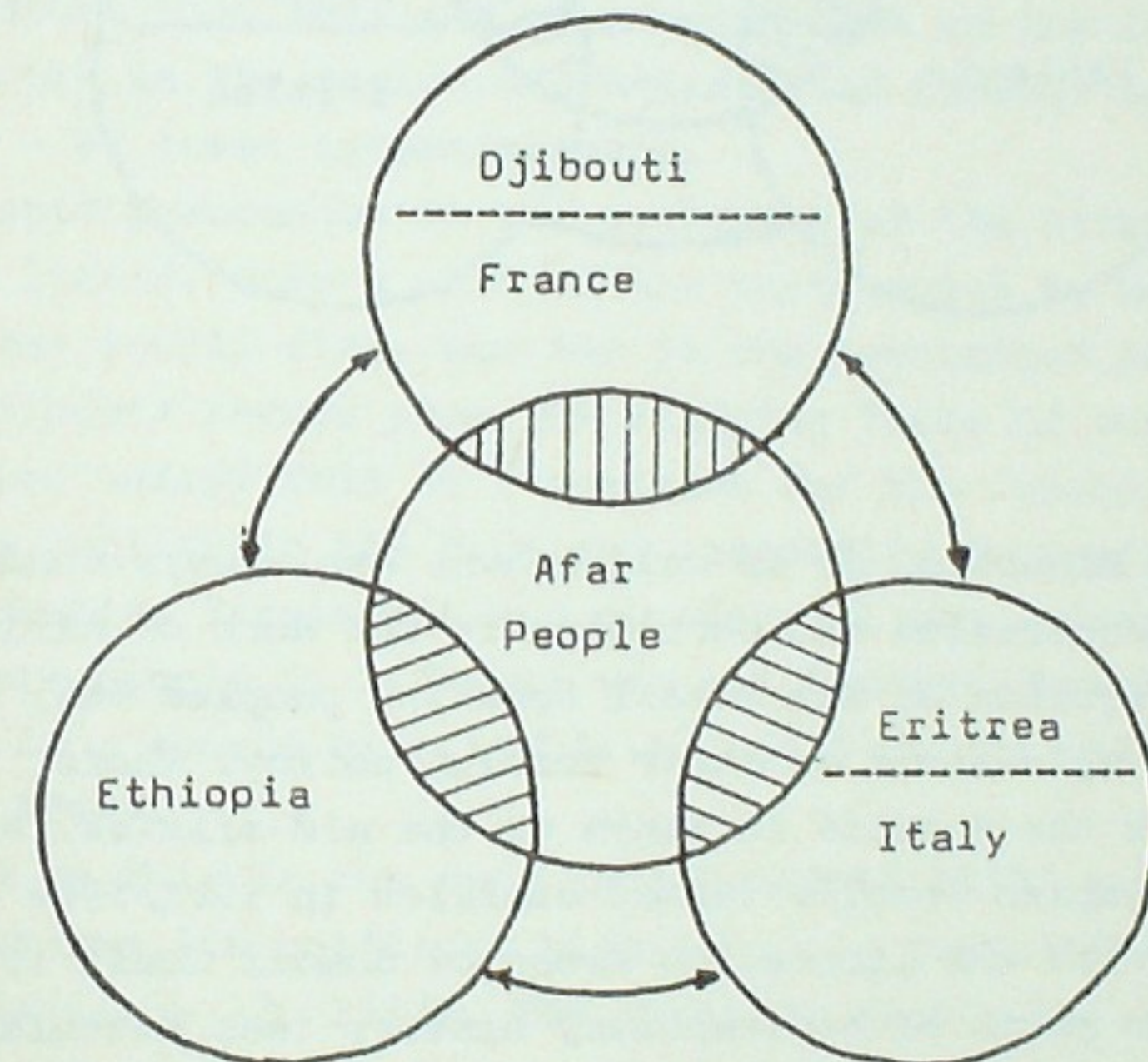
A country like Djibouti needs a chance and a "promotion by invitation" (Wallerstein) from outside in order to safeguard internal social peace and to ensure political stability. When, however, the strategy is too ineffective, the authorities are forced to implement aggressive means and measures for sustaining themselves. This does not necessarily ease the tension on the contrary it can make the people more militant and politically engaged. In such a case the destabilising factors are cumulative, and the political, economic and social environment reproduces itself. As a result, the country joins the list of 'high risk countries'. The result is even weaker bargaining power, misuse and wastage of scarce resources, less inflow of foreign resources and limited economic openness of the country.³

The regional context is also relevant for the political stability of a country. When a country like Djibouti is surrounded by warring states (Ethiopia and Somalia) with both internal and external contradictions, it is obvious that it cannot escape the off-spread and back-wash of such conflict. Besides, Djibouti being a member of the Arab League and a littoral of the Red Sea, has to consider regional politics in a wider context.

The historical causes of the conflict in the Horn of Africa is identical to the history of Djibouti itself: the

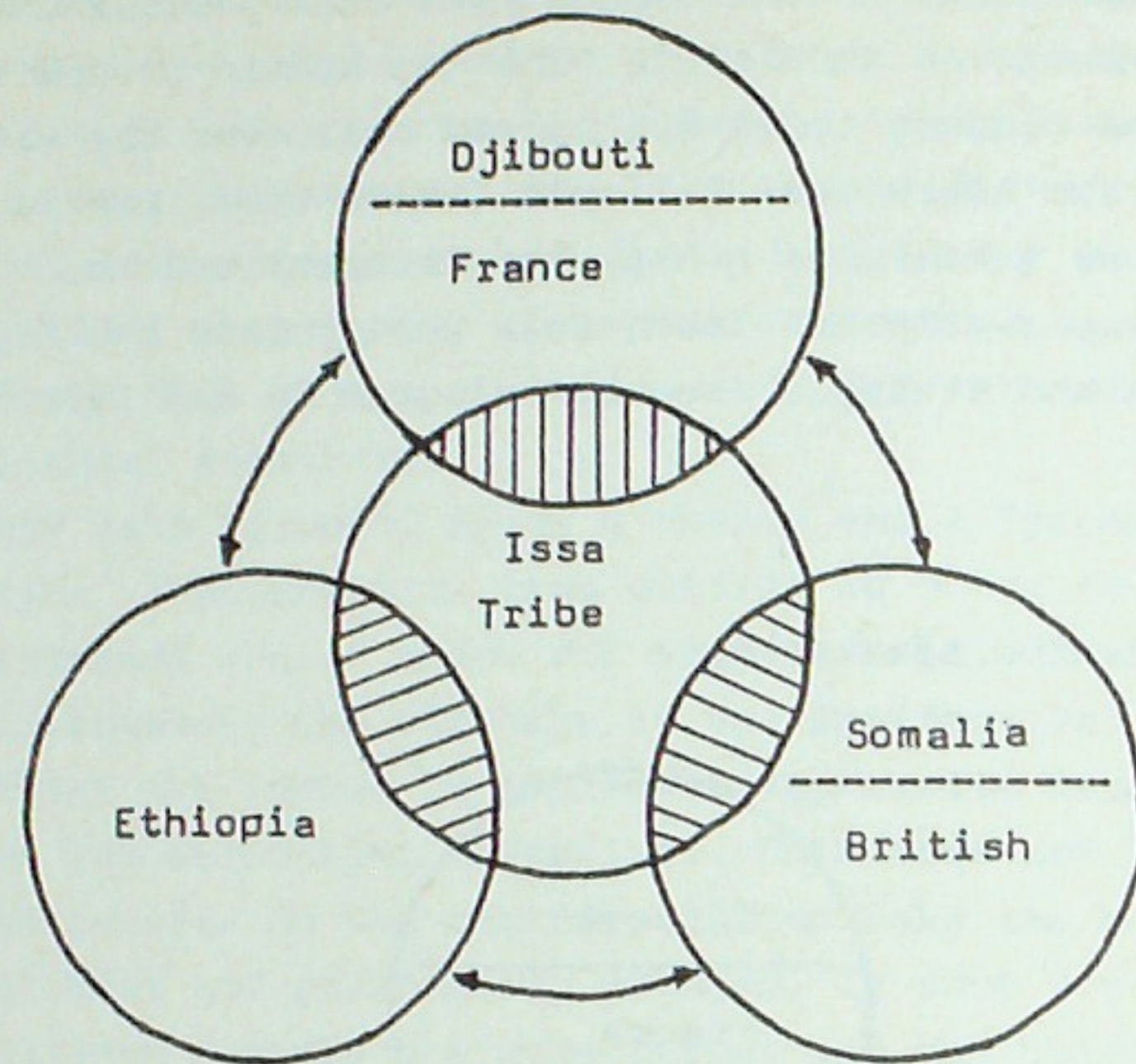
history of the colonial penetration and partition of the Horn of Africa on one hand and the partition of its people on the other hand. Let us demonstrate this phenomenon on taking Djibouti as an example. The two ethnic groups who inhabit the country today are spread well over the national boundary: the Afars into Ethiopia (where they live in three provinces as a minority group) and Eritrea; and the Somalis (especially the Issaq folk group) into the Republic of Somalia and Ethiopia (see the diagram Ia and Ib).

Diagram Ia. The Afar example



Note: The arrows show the traditional connexions and movements.

Diagram Ib. The Somali - Issa example



The Somali Republic, as is well known, has always condemned colonial penetration and partition in the Horn of Africa. The reunification of all Somali speaking peoples was, up to 1978, a mile-stone of their foreign policy. Their support for the Somalis in Kenya in the mid-sixties, as well as the Ethiopian Somalis (armed conflict in 1963/1964 and 1977/1978) and the Liberation Front of Somali Coast (FLCS) are all now parts of contemporary history (see Matthies 1977). The result was bad diplomatic relations with the other two countries (Ethiopia and Kenya) and permanent ten-

sion in the region. All Somalis are not yet united. Furthermore, we have two new phenomena that need fresh consideration.

First, there are two armed Somali groups who are presently fighting the present Somali regime. The Somali Democratic Salvation Front (SDSF) has its base in Ethiopia, and the Somali National Movement (SNM) has its base in Great Britain and is probably represented in Ethiopia.⁴ These two groups already destabilize Somalia and with the support of Ethiopia, which in turn enjoys strong Soviet and Cuban (not to mention other) backing, one question becomes very relevant: What will the aim of Somali unity become? And this is followed by another question: Has the Somali Republic as it is today a future? No matter what the answers are, there is no doubt that this new phenomenon adds to the instability factors in the region and makes armed clashes more likely - at least intermittently.

The second phenomenon is the emergence of the Djibouti Republic itself. Once a part of the territories to be united under one Somali flag, how far is the proclaimed independent Djibouti secure from the unifying force of the Somali quest for unity? This is a question for the future, though present reality in the Horn and especially in Somalia makes this question irrelevant and obsolete. I can imagine that there are people in Djibouti who still think that this factor is a source of instability and I do not refer only to the Afars.

Related to this is the fact that Djibouti still exists and demonstrates its political viability six years after independence (June 27, 1977). The question is how far does its (sole) existence act as an example for other groups, say the Issaq, Gadabursi and Majerteen in Somalia and encourage them to consider and seek independence? Can the example of Djibouti influence other Somali speaking people under alien

domination on the hypothetical day of their independence?

Unstable Ethiopia does not only affect the stability of Djibouti it also endangers the existence of this small country. This interdependence I would like to emphasize with a short comment.

Under King Menelik through his expansionistic politics and cooperation with the European imperialists, Ethiopia contributed to the formation of the conflict in the Horn of Africa. Many people of the Horn, especially the Eritreans, Somalis and Oromos on the lead, upbraided Ethiopia for being a black colonialist. Their struggle for self-determination and total independence and the hard and suppressive Ethiopian reaction is the most important factor that determines not only political events but also daily life in the Horn of Africa. The consequence is that Ethiopia is a country of poor stability and retrading economic and social progress; no wonder, for these factors are a function of national and regional peace that is absent in the Horn of Africa.

Ethiopian political attitudes towards Djibouti had/have several faces. They vary from Menelik's total claim, as expressed in his circular letter of May 1897; Haile Selassie's partial claim and the favoured continuation of direct French colonialism. Let me mention only three factors that explain the strong Ethiopian interest in Djibouti:

- ethnic reasons. The two main groups, Afars and Issas (the latter being a Somali group), also live in Ethiopia;
- strong Ethiopian dependence on the common railway and the Djibouti port facilities. The fact that Assab and Massawa are less secure due to the Eritrean liberation struggle can only emphasize this point;
- Ethiopia's fear that Djibouti would fall into the hands

of the Somali Republic, itself a union of former British and Italian colonies, and the influence that this could have on other Somali people under Ethiopian rule.

This strong Ethiopian interest in Djibouti, and the opposing Somali reaction, in the past served the interests of French colonial politics. It explains the prolongation of colonial domination and today justifies to some extent, at least on the side of the Djibouti government, the strong presence of alien armed forces. Despite the fact that Djibouti is independent, the above mentioned factors remain important. This is because the relations between Ethiopia and Somalia is at its worst (1983), and Djibouti remains a contentious element between the two countries.

How far can Djibouti, under such circumstances, carry out independent regional politics? Must not Djibouti take care not to give the two countries the reason for fighting for?

Just as Ethiopia depends on the common railway and the port facilities for its foreign trade, Djibouti is dependent on this strong Ethiopian interest as a source of income. In addition Djibouti depends on imports of food, vegetables and khat from Ethiopia. Any internal or external circumstances that make Ethiopia unstable and stops these imports, also affects Djibouti very sensitively and to some extent even indicates Djibouti's vulnerability.

The Afars and Issas, who live in Ethiopia, play a keyrole in diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and Djibouti. In the event of open suppression of these two groups, Djibouti would be subjected to strong moral pressure and, if all diplomatic attempts fail, it could be forced to seek help from Somalia. Since this would amount to more than Ethiopian isolation, it explains the differentiated Ethiopian policies toward the different national groups amongst

its peoples. The other side of the coin is that Ethiopia, whenever it is dissatisfied with Djibouti's regional politics, could mobilize and arm one of the ethnic groups and so destabilize Djibouti. Ethiopia's support for the Popular Liberation Movement (MPL) and the National Union for Independence (UNI) in 1977 manifests this. Ethiopia later withdrew this support and on September 7, 1982 the two groups had to return to Djibouti. This demonstrates how good their relations are today.⁵

The other factor, besides the nationality problem, that also affects the stability of Ethiopia is the fight of different ideological groups and the question of the class struggle. EDU, EPRP and AESM remind us of bitter days.⁶ These problems were unsatisfactorily solved, for the time being, when the Ethiopian government used force (like the nationality question). But these are subjects to theorize about especially with regard to their role in the future.

From this brief analysis of the regional factors, I intended to show that the stability in the Republic of Djibouti is also externally determined. It therefore follows that at the moment the prevailing stability in Djibouti, depends to a great extent on how successful it is in carrying out a self-centered, non-aligned foreign policy and how successfully it develops safeguards against interference from neighbouring states.

The internal factor that condition political stability in small countries are not necessarily different from those affecting larger ones. The consequences can, however, be more serious in the case of smaller states. Common to both small and large underdeveloped countries are the economic constraints: political independence is always combined with hopes of the people for economic progress and hence better living conditions. It is not seldom that the masses

have had to realize the fact that there is no automatism about the expected transformation of society. This is the case in Djibouti. Unequal distribution of income and jobs are easy to find. In fact this is a disturbing problem in Djibouti that endangers social harmony and political stability. Even though well over 70% of able-bodied men and women are seeking for one job and one source of income, they know that a few nationals legally have two or even sometimes three sources of income.

Another factor, though not only common in Djibouti, is the regional disparity of income and development. Nearly all political and economic activity in the Republic took place in Djibouti Ville, the capital. Even though there are no detailed statistics about the regional contribution to and distribution of the GNP, I believe that it is an optimistic estimate to put the combined contribution of all other regions to the GNP at 10%; and their percentage of national consumption would not even be as high. The chances in the regions of finding jobs is severely limited; there are government posts (police, military, teaching staff, medical team, etc.), or there is the retail service. Even in this sector, the villages along the railway line have special advantages because they are better located. This situation in fact encourages the movement of people to Djibouti Ville.

The structure of this regional disparity goes back to the colonial economy, which was planned for and shaped by strategic and military purposes rather than local needs. Moreover the present government does not have an easy task in altering the situation, because of economic realities. Djibouti does not have (at least up to now) any strategic resources, the revenue which could have served as an economic pillar to support and help develop the country and

perhaps, given concrete economic planning, could have reduced regional discrepancies.

The only factory in the northern part of Djibouti, the bottling factory for mineral water at Tadjoura, is capital intensive and could serve as a source of income effective for not more than 38 persons. In this case, not only are the chances for linkage effects lost, but it is also the fact that a less capital intensive firm could have also served as a trainee for industrial skills. As it is the dependence on highly qualified foreign technicians and foreign spare parts are real factors determining its operation.

The second factory, to be located on the periphery is the planned Ali Sabieh Cement Factory. Even though an Indian company (Associated Company Cement) got the contract to carry out a feasibility study (financed solely by the Fonds Koweïtien de Développement Économique et Social), and though the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank have all expressed interest in financing the factory, which should produce 100,000 tons per year (planned cost \$ 33 millions), only the authorities know when the work will start and at what rate it will reduce rural unemployment.⁷

These facts demonstrate poverty in the rural areas and serious income and development inequalities. Given that a country like Djibouti is inhabited by different ethnic groups, who, for one reason or another are not equally affected by wealth and poverty, it is inevitable there will be ethnic rivalry and conflict. Decades of colonial exploitation of ethnic sentiment is the main reason why there are often integration problems and difficulties in nation building in most underdeveloped, newly independent states. The theoretical solutions are always easy to state and very

clear; equal political participation and rights, just division of national resources, cultural autonomy - to mention just a few. The urgent question is: Why are these solutions so difficult to implement?

The post-colonial state, its institutions (often new and foreign to the nationals) and its outward-oriented activities can also be sources of instability.⁸ But one should realize that instability is affected by many interdependent factors. And if in this brief analysis it is not only the significance of social and class structure which needs further explanation, then that indicates how important the subject is and that it is worthwhile continuing to discuss it.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ For a detailed attempt to define the size of a nation and its economic implications see the author's "Entwicklung und Außenhandel in kleinen, ökonomisch unterentwickelten Ländern: Das Beispiel Djibouti; unpubl. manusc. (Bremen) 1983
- ² Djibouti's export and import and GNP are as follows respectively (in 1000 DF): 2.023; 31.477; and 50.180.
- ³ It is assumed here that autarkic economic strategy is not convenient for a small country.
- ⁴ For the activities of these groups see, for example: Africa Research Bulletin (ARB), pol. ser., vol. 19, no. 7 (1982), p. 6513-6517
- ⁵ See: ARB, no. 9, vol. 19, October 15, 1982

- ⁶ See: ARB, no. 4, vol. 14 (1977), p. 4398; and for white and red terror see: ARB, no. 12, vol. 14, January 15, 1978, p. 4674-4676
- ⁷ See: La Nation, April 1, 1982, and "African Business", no. 58, June 1983, p. 77
- ⁸ For the post-colonial state refer to the debate in "Review of African Political Economy (RAPE); e.g. von Freyhold, M.: RAPE, vol. 8, January/February 1977, p. 75

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