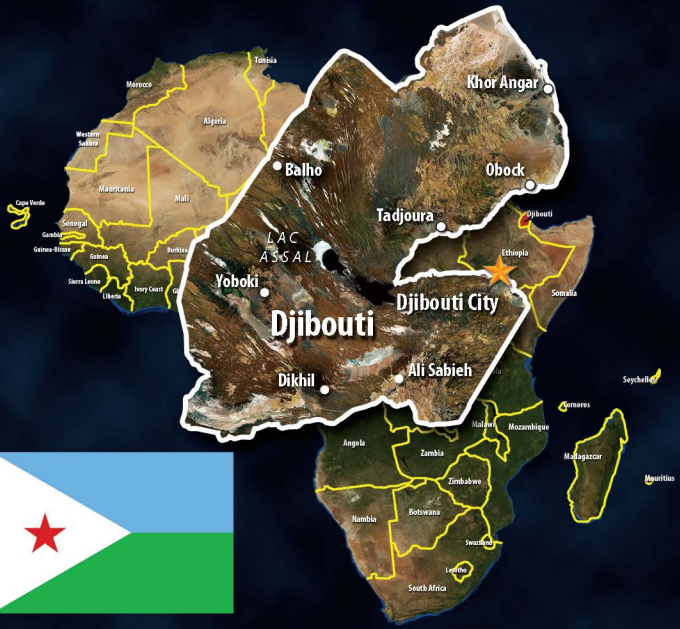
Expeditionary Culture Field Guide



DJIBOUTI

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 introduces "Culture General," the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment.

Part 2 presents "Culture Specific" Djibouti, focusing on unique cultural features of Djiboutian society and is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location.

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact AFCLC's Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and

economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for

universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard.

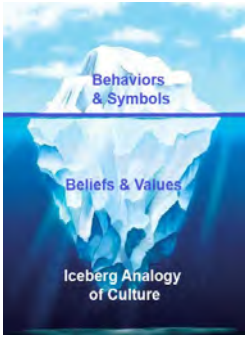
As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Consequently, we assume that individuals falling into the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview– how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the

deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout the African Continent, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common among most African countries. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

Africa has a history that spans the entire existence of humankind. In ancient times prior to the emergence of written languages, history and wisdom were preserved across generations and

ethnic boundaries through oral folk legends or myths. Most early human evolution began as hunting and gathering cultures in East and South Africa, with countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa renowned for their early human sites. In the last several millennia, the development of agriculture and pastoralism (animal herding) replaced hunting and gathering lifestyles (Photo: *Kutubiyya Mosque* courtesy of CultureGrams, ProQuest, 2013).

Ancient civilizations evolved in all corners of Africa, inspired in part by peoples from the Middle East bringing trade, beliefs, customs, language, and on occasion, colonization. Far from being isolated empires, the African civilizations were intimately connected by commerce and marriage throughout various regions of the continent, and when confronted by outsiders, managed to adapt to their influences. Eventually, Arab traders introduced Islam to Africa and also instituted the Trans-Saharan African slave trade that lasted from the 7th to 19th Centuries.

The “golden age” of European exploration, which lasted from the 18th to mid-20th century, prompted the wholesale exploitation of Africans resources – first human assets through slavery, followed by natural resources such as minerals, precious gems and metals, and wildlife, thereby diminishing most of what was traditional and African.

The introduction of the European Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade altered the slave trade through both the sheer number of Africans enslaved and through the cementing of a racist ideology of Black inferiority to legitimize the institution of slavery. Slavery decimated the African continent for over 400 years through the forced relocation of an estimated 25 to 30 million Africans worldwide. This figure does not include those Africans who died aboard ships or during capture. While abolition of the slave trade dissolved the institution of slavery, it did not end the European

presence on the African continent nor did it drastically alter their attitudes towards Africans.

Starting in the mid-19th century, European colonialism served to redefine African ethnic relations on a large scale; however, as African societies began to resist colonial rule and seek their independence, widespread ethnic conflict and genocide occurred. Sustained westernization and globalization continue to shape the continent through poverty, disease, and social reform. A history still to be recorded, Africa's future identity faces many challenges in critical areas such as environmental change, ethnic strife, women's health and security, and education.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Traditional African political organizations in the form of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms have existed for several millennia and continue to influence contemporary African governments. Uncommon in modern society, bands are limited to hunting and gathering economies, such as the !Kung of the southern African Kalahari Desert and foragers of central African forests.

Tribes are still represented today across the African political landscape, although the use of the word "tribe" is sometimes misinterpreted due to its western notion of "primitiveness" and oftentimes substituted with the term "ethnic group." Lacking centralized authority, tribes are organized around segmented descent groups or in some cases age groups.

Everyday governance is discharged through councils of respected elders and sanctioned through ritual and other means. East African pastoralist groups such as the Maasai,

along with some West African tribes and the Berbers in North Africa, represent this type of organization.

Chiefdoms or kingdoms are ruled by kings or queens from a royal clan and generally incorporate millions of subjects. Kingdoms such as the Zulu or Swazi in southern Africa developed through conquest, while others like Ghana's Ashante developed through an association of related traditional states. However, colonialism eventually diluted the power and reach of these empires, whose leaders were often retained as indirect rulers or figureheads.

Today, all three of these political organizations still exist, although in the confines of modern African nation-states created by colonial powers who had little regard or understanding of African cultures. This juxtaposition of modernity with tradition has caused severe conflict throughout the continent.

Challenged to construct their respective "national" identities, regional leaders attempt to do so by diluting the traditionally cohesive power of ancestry. These national ruling elites, who derive their power from wealth and commerce rather than tribal affiliation, feel threatened by loyalty to these traditional organizations, labeling their rule as "tribalism."

This "class versus descent" scrimmage for power has resulted in conflicts across the continent and a dramatic divergence of interests. As a means to overcome these and other issues on the continent, a 55-nation federation, the African Union (AU), was formed in 2002. AU's charter is to promote "greater unity and solidarity between African countries and peoples" by building partnerships in all segments of "civil society."

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer

individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Prior to the arrival of Islam and Christianity, the African continent consisted of orally transmitted indigenous religious practices. As in many societies, African indigenous beliefs influenced diet, subsistence patterns, family structures, marriage practices, and healing and burial processes. In essence, Africans constructed their worldview through their indigenous religions.

Today, the African continent is primarily either Muslim or Christian. Other faiths such as Judaism and Hinduism exist as pockets in different regions of the continent, primarily in urban areas. The historical trajectories of Islamic and Christian expansion in Africa offer intriguing commonalities in how Africans across the continent initially reacted to the introduction of each of those religions. For example, it is common throughout the continent to find a blending of many elements of indigenous religious practices with local Islam and Christianity (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia).

Consequently, many African native religions share similarities with religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in their understanding of God as the creator and ruler of all life, although He is considered untouchable by humans.

However, unlike Christianity and Islam, many African indigenous religions believe that God is not directly involved in people's lives. To them there is a spirit world populated with former good and bad human beings. The good spirits intercede with God on behalf of their living families to whom they then relay God's will through dreams and acquired possessions. The bad spirits work to bring misfortune through sickness,

death, or natural disasters to those who behave inappropriately.

Many indigenous African religions revere "nature" spirits living in the sky, water, and forests. These impersonal spirits help protect people from harm and provide them with life's essential ingredients such as water, sun, and wildlife. This belief system is commonly referred to as animism.

Just as spirits mediate relations between God and humans, religious specialists act as mediators between spirits and humans to provide protection from harm.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin"). The traditional African family with respect to marriage, family structure, and descent is a much different arrangement than is found in most American families. Likewise, there are several components of the traditional African family that are common to all African cultures.

First, perhaps the most difficult feature to reconcile to Americans is that of polygyny – the practice of a husband having more than one wife. A benefit of this arrangement is that it promotes societal alliances through marriage, procreation, and family wealth through female labor.

Second, due to polygyny, the family in most African cultures has historically consisted of an expanded set of kin or relatives that extends well beyond the American notion of a nuclear family. This arrangement created a family environment where children considered all siblings as "brothers and sisters" and all of the wives/mothers as "mother."

Third, the extended African family traces descent through either the male or female side of the family, a practice which differs considerably from the American family. Patrilineal descent (through the male side of the family) is the more common approach and usually features polygyny. The matrilineal (through the female bloodline) marriage pattern is more uncommon and almost always features monogamy – it is rare to encounter a wife having more than one husband.

Lastly, it is common for two or more blood lines (lineages) to share a common ancestor and collectively form a clan, which is the largest social unit. Clans do not have formal leaders or organizational structures. Membership is transferred from father to child and cuts across ethnic and social boundaries.

The dramatic social changes in Africa during and after colonialism in the last 4 decades have obviously affected the traditional family, and variations on these 3 features can be found across the continent.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles. Gender roles in Africa follow no single model nor is there a generalized concept of sex and common standard of sexual behavior.

Prehistorically, gender role differentiation in Africa's hunting and gathering cultures was based on a division of labor featuring different, yet complementary, sets of responsibilities for males and females, adults and children. Females gathered over half the caloric needs from natural vegetation, while also reproducing and raising offspring. Males were primarily hunters but also assisted with gathering.

These gender patterns continued as agricultural practices advanced.

Females shared in farming while continuing to provide for the family's subsistence, and males produced the cash crops. Pastoralists like the Maasai of Kenya traditionally have featured males involved in cattle-raising and females in food production.

The 19th-century European colonial period introduced a cash economy into Africa, with female labor used to produce the cash crops. By inserting male authority over females, colonial administrators disrupted the distinct yet complementary male/female relationship that had been traditionally African.

More recently, western influence across the continent has dramatically altered the traditional gender roles. Educational and professional opportunities for females, along with increased family migrations to urban areas, have radically altered traditional male and female gender roles.

Likewise, the number of singles parents and even child- or other relative-led families has increased with the predominance of HIV/AIDS-related deaths and warfare, further altering traditional gender responsibilities. Additionally, ethnic conflicts involving abuse of women are prevalent in many unstable countries, and while the rubric of traditional African gender generally remains, the forces of change are gradually ripping it away.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. America is predominantly a monolingual society, where traditionally, fluency in a second language has been considered a luxury rather than a necessity. Conversely, national survival for many societies in Africa required them throughout their existence to adopt multilingual

practices, if for no other reason than to preserve their native heritage.

You may find it challenging to comprehend the scope of Africa's linguistic diversity. There are over 2,000 African languages (many spoken-only) from 6 major language families, and perhaps 100 of these languages are used to communicate among the more dominant ethnic groups such as Berber, Swahili, Yoruba, and others.

Official languages of African nation-states are few, yet the linguistic diversity expressed across the continent (Nigeria has 250 languages) has prompted an awareness of the value of Africa's linguistic traditions. While most areas of the continent speak the adopted language of their colonial past – such as French and Portuguese in West Africa, French and Arabic in Morocco, and English in Kenya and South Africa – the majority of people also speak one or more traditional "indigenous" languages of their and other ethnic groups. As African independence spread throughout the continent, ethnic groups continued to depend on their indigenous identifiers, such as language, to celebrate their "release" from colonial rule and to preserve a sense of indigenous identity.

While communication styles tend to vary by ethnic or social groups, Africans generally are friendly and outgoing people although they tend to communicate with reserve to avoid confrontation. As in most kin-based societies, Africans believe that saving face or protecting one's honor and dignity are of utmost importance; therefore, they avoid public criticism and controversial topics at all costs – even to the extent of withholding their honest opinion or modifying the truth.

Africans admire and even expect extended greetings and small talk, and to attempt to rush or avoid social graces is considered disrespectful. Similarly, Africans avoid direct eye contact when communicating with new acquaintances and people of status,

particularly elders. They also are fond of non-verbal gestures, and it is common throughout African societies for members of the same gender to hold hands or touch while conversing.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

The contemporary African educational system hardly resembles the traditional pre-colonial structure, whereby community elders were primarily responsible for preparing youth for adulthood. Their instruction included fundamentals of ethnic ritual and ceremony, along with customary protocol for their distinctive gender roles. A rite-of-passage commemorating their successful journey from childhood to adulthood served as a form of graduation.

European colonialism brought a more structured, formal educational system that catered to a small group of African elite who demonstrated potential to administer expanding colonial territories. Following independence, many African nations adopted the European system because they believed it would prepare them to be more competitive in intra-continental and global marketplaces, thereby enhancing their quality of life.

However, progress in developing and maintaining reliable educational institutions has been slow for a variety of reasons. Since most Africans live in rural environments, they continue to rely heavily on child labor for family survival, resulting in decreased school enrollments or early withdrawals. Likewise, widespread HIV/AIDS epidemics, ethnic conflict, teacher and resource deficits, and inaccessibility to remote rural areas also hamper progress. According to 2017 statistics, only 80% of the

continent's children were enrolled in primary school, leaving over 33 million African children without any schooling at all.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In low-context western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Conversely, most African cultures are traditionally high-context societies, whereby people center their activities on socializing and establishing close associations, having little regard for the passage-of-time.

Only after establishing trust and honor will your typical African counterpart agreeably proceed with business. In his worldview, time is a precious commodity used to establish relationships and form alliances. Any attempt to accelerate the tempo at the expense of social pleasantries will likely result in deadlock.

To an African, close physical proximity between individuals encourages cooperative trust, and for centuries they have viewed human linkage as a core element to survival. This closeness is best represented in a traditional African village where strong kinship connections are evidenced by a display of close interpersonal relations among family members.

While conventional African concepts of time and space remain intact, throughout the continent western influence and globalization have stepped up the pace of African living, mostly in urban areas. Consequently, rural-to-urban migrations have reshaped traditional social and subsistence patterns.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Prior to 19th-century European colonization of Africa,

recreation served a vital subsistence role, whereby adolescents and adults alike participated in intellectually stimulating leisurely activities that concurrently served to develop essential hunting and pastoral skills.

Games of chance and skill were important to early childhood development, providing social outlets within and outside their community. Featuring wrestling, jumping and running; traditional African sport was steeped in religious ritual.

Along with colonialism came the introduction to Africa of western sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and track and field. This emphasis on western sport continued to thrive with African independence and globalization, as seen in sporting events such as the Olympics and the World Cup.

Leaders such as Nelson Mandela skillfully employed sport to promote a unified South African nation. Importing the predominantly “white” game of rugby, Mandela used it to fuse a racially divided country following his election in 1992. This event is the theme of the motion picture “Invictus,” exemplifying how sport can serve to create national identities and overcome ethnic division. His efforts have inspired many other African nations to follow suit.

Likewise, East African countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia have produced the world’s dominant male and female distance runners, and South Africa, Cameroon and Nigeria emerged as strong contenders in the 2010 World Cup. African nations are now competing in leagues such as the International Basketball Association (FIBA) World Championships, and there is also a

growing number of African basketball players on US college campuses and in the National Basketball Association (NBA).

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Despite having only 17% of the global population, Africa is a victim of many of the world's debilitating health disorders. According to the World Health Organization, 70% of the global HIV/AIDS cases and 92% of malarial diseases occur in Africa.

These and other medical conditions are attributed primarily to viral infection and widespread poverty caused by extreme climatic conditions and civil unrest, coupled with inadequate preventative measures. While extensive drought generates widespread famine, civil disturbances generate millions of displaced persons. Likewise, with only 63% of the Sub-Saharan African population having access to safe drinking water, water-born bacterial diseases such as cholera and schistosomiasis are common.

Many people in Africa lack access to western medicine, and as a result depend on traditional health practices to combat disease. In addition, some traditional beliefs run counter to western medical practice and perhaps discourage individuals from utilizing those services even when they are available. This problem is further intensified by lack of federal regulatory healthcare management.

While modern healthcare procedures are more common in urban areas, many rural people rely on traditional practitioners who use a variety of plants and herbs to treat patients. Similarly, many families have their own secret remedies. While in some cases traditional medicine proves effective with fewer side effects than modern drugs, traditional practices do not adequately treat many of the more serious conditions.

On a positive note, western influence has stimulated some progress in combating Africa's health crisis. More resources are devoted to achieving basic human security by assessing disease symptoms early and with scientific accuracy.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Traditionally having an agrarian-based economy, Africa today remains predominantly agricultural, featuring less industrialization than most other parts of the world. Post-colonial adversities such as civil war, disease, poverty, and unstable dictatorships posed unusual hardship on several young African nations; however, Africa currently stands at the cross-roads of economic development with many nations becoming some of fastest growing regions in the world.

Colonialism institutionalized the exploitation of Africa's mineral resources, resulting in today's oil industry dominating the economic market in several coastal regions. A surge in global oil prices; a growing African middle class; and reduction in civil wars, foreign aid, and inflation collectively promise a more positive outlook for the future.

Countries such as Botswana, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and South Africa are economically the wealthiest on the continent, with regions such as East Africa showing signs of economic stability. Despite the economic upswing, much of sub-Saharan

Africa's future economic prosperity is held hostage by devastating diseases such as AIDS, particularly in areas of southern Africa, and the growing effects of climate change and man-made environmental degradation throughout the subcontinent.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Africa lags far behind most of the world in manufacturing capacity and output. Even the more economically-developed nations such as South Africa are competitively weak when compared to non-African industrialized nations. During the 1970s and 1980s, Africa experienced some growth in raw exports although this increase did little to boost long-term manufacturing capacity.

Today, Africa is experiencing an actual decline in manufacturing capacity due primarily to a lull in the global economy, along with other indigenous issues such as environmental stress, poor physical and organizational infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled personnel. Likewise, African manufacturing capacity is no match against global powers such as China and significant Southeast Asian markets.

International aid from both governmental and non-governmental organizations has helped African nations establish preliminary economic footholds. For example, many of them have dedicated industrial developmental zones to attract foreign investment and increase export-related manufacturing capacity, although Africa is far removed from having a significant role in the global marketplace in the foreseeable future.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize African society at large, we will now focus on specific features of Djiboutian society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

As a tiny country in a strategically important location, Djibouti has long been a crossroads on major international trade routes linking the Indian Ocean and the African continent.

Early Djibouti

Djibouti is located on the Horn of Africa (HOA), a peninsula on Africa's eastern coast which also includes Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia. HOA is home to some of the earliest sites of human occupation, where a number of the most complete early human remains continue to be found. For example, the oldest known hominid skeletons ("Lucy" and "Ardi") were found in 1974 and 1994 respectively within 100 mi of Djibouti in the Afar Region of Ethiopia.

Linguistic evidence suggests that the ancestors of the Somali and Afar ethnic groups (see *Political and Social Relations*) had reached Ethiopia by 7000 BC. Fragments of cattle teeth found in Ethiopia and Somalia suggest that those populations had adopted pastoralism (animal herding) by 1500 BC. Agriculture probably developed in Ethiopia between 3,000 and 7,000 years ago. Rock paintings depicting cattle are common in the region, further attesting to the early importance of pastoralism.

Punt

First mentioned in written records around 2450 BC, Punt was a region that traded with ancient Egypt for centuries. Although historians still debate the precise location of Punt, it probably extended from a base in northern Ethiopia to outlying coastal territories in present-day Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, or Somalia. Egyptian texts rarely mention Punt after 1100 BC, suggesting that its importance in trade had declined by that time.

Axum

The next state to emerge in the HOA was Axum, an empire based in a city of the same name in northern Ethiopia. Although no one knows when Axum was founded, historians agree that the city was a thriving center of trade by the 1st century AD. Axum reached its apex around 500 AD, when it controlled part of what is now the Sudanese and Eritrean Red Sea Coast (Pictured: An obelisk in Axum).

Axum was one of the greatest empires of the early Christian era, trading with the Byzantine Empire, the Nile Valley kingdoms, Arabia, India, and Persia. Through its port at Adulis on what is now Eritrea's Red Sea Coast, Axum exported gold, ivory, slaves, and aromatic resins in exchange for olive oil, metals, textiles, and wine. Axum started to decline in the 7th-century AD when merchants from Arabia introduced Islam along the Red Sea coast (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Zeila

By the mid-7th century, many Arabs already had settled along the Horn of Africa's coastal inlands then controlled by Abyssinia, a Christian kingdom in Ethiopia. A collection of trade-based Muslim city-states eventually formed in this region. The most important such city-state—at least as far as Djibouti's history is concerned—was Zeila (Saylac in Somali) located just 30 mi southeast of present-day Djibouti City. In addition to Arabs, Zeila's population included Persians and Afars.

By the 9th century, Zeila and other city-states had begun to form sultanates, asserting their independence from Abyssinia. Centuries of warfare ensued as the lowland Islamic city-states fought the highland Christian kingdom for control of the region. During most of this period, present-day Djibouti remained under Islamic control. By the late 13th century, Zeila had become the capital of the Ifat Sultanate which waged war against Christian Abyssinia until its sultan was killed in battle in 1415, prompting the rest of the Walashma dynasty to flee to what is now Yemen.

The Adal Sultanate

By 1420 the Walashmas had returned to the HOA and created a new and more powerful Adal Sultanate. Like the Ifat Sultanate, the Adal Sultanate extended across the entirety of present-day Djibouti. Unlike its predecessor, Adal was based inland from Zeila (Pictured: King Salomon I of Abyssinia in battle against the Sultan of Adal).

Muslim Adal and Christian Abyssinia soon resumed their earlier battle for control of the region, which continued for more than a century. During this time, the greatest Adal leader was Ahmed the Left-Handed (Ahmed *Gurey* in Somali; Ahmed *Gragn* in Amharic). Under Ahmed's leadership, Adal captured most of Abyssinia by 1535. The Abyssinians eventually received help from the Portuguese and later defeated Ahmed in 1543.

Afar Sultanates and Indian Ocean Traders

Adal declined after Ahmed's defeat, creating a power vacuum in present-day Djibouti. That vacuum eventually was filled by a few independent Muslim Afar sultanates based in such places as the modern Djiboutian towns of Obock and Tadjoura.

Despite the decline of Adal and the rise of the Afar sultanates, regional trade driven by monsoon winds on the Indian Ocean continued to flourish well into the 19th century. From their centers at Tadjoura and Zeila, Indian Ocean traders carried firearms, cloth, and salt along caravan routes to inland Ethiopia. They returned with such commodities as slaves, hides, coffee, perfume, and wax.

Arrival of Europeans

Although Portuguese explorers visited the coast of present-day Djibouti during the 16th century, Europeans did not colonize the area until 1862. At that time, the French signed a treaty with Afar chiefs to purchase Ambado, Obock, and a strip of coast to the north of the Gulf of Tadjoura. Apart from planting a flag at Obock, the French did little with their new possession for the next 2 decades (see *Political and Social Relations* for a map that shows Obock and the Gulf of Tadjoura).

The French finally began to develop the territory in response to several strategic factors, the most important of which was their increasing colonial activity in Madagascar and Southeast Asia. Coupled with the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, this French expansion presented the need to establish a port at the mouth of the Red Sea, as the French could not afford to be strategically dependent upon the British port of Aden in present-day Yemen.

Consequently, in 1884 the French sent Léonce Lagarde, a 24-year-old diplomat, to lead Obock and Dependencies, as the colony then was known. While developing Obock as a port, Lagarde negotiated with local chiefs to extend French control throughout the lands surrounding the Gulf of Tadjoura.

In 1888, the French and the British signed a treaty that defined a border between their respective claims in the HOA. This treaty gave France unambiguous control over Djibouti City, which was uninhabited at the time but showed more promise than Obock as a port and capital city. In addition to having a better supply of drinking water, the new location was easier to access from the interior and therefore was better suited to handling trade going to and from Ethiopia.

French Somaliland

The French moved the capital from Obock to Djibouti City in 1892 and in 1896 they renamed Obock and Dependencies as French Somaliland, or *Côte française des Somalis* (“French Coast of Somalis”). From then until the end of World War I, the French focused on developing the new capital (Pictured: Djibouti City as depicted on a postcard from 1905).

One major aspect of this focus was the construction of railway between Djibouti City and Addis Ababa, the newly established capital of Ethiopia. Initiated in 1897 yet plagued by financial difficulties, the project was not completed until 1917. Djibouti City nevertheless grew quickly due to an 1897 treaty that made the city the official port of the Ethiopian Empire. Djibouti City also benefitted from bustling black markets in arms and slaves.

During the colony's early years, indigenous inhabitants and the French administration got along relatively well. Since the French had acquired French Somaliland through peaceful means, both Afars and Somalis typically respected agreements that their leaders had made with the French. Apart from a few violent incidents, resistance to colonial rule only surfaced when the French tried to tax or disarm indigenous nomads.

Ethnic Tensions

In contrast to relations between French officials and indigenous inhabitants, relations between French Somaliland's indigenous Afar and Issa groups (see *Political and Social Relations*) were troubled during the early years of the colony. To a large extent, those bad relations were the result of efforts by Britain, France, and Ethiopia to expand their control in the region. This expansionary activity spurred competition among the region's indigenous inhabitants to control ever scarcer cattle, pasture, and sources of water (Photo: An Afar man in traditional attire – see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

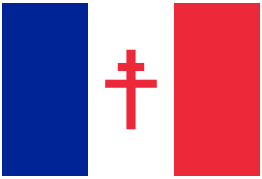
Since most such conflict occurred in the sparsely populated hinterland, the French largely ignored it until the late 1920s, when they sent Alphonse Lippmann, an administrator who had learned local languages and converted to Islam, to arbitrate. Although he had some success, the conflicts did not subside. Lippmann theorized that the British were intentionally stoking conflict to prevent France from expanding into Ethiopia.

Italian Expansionism

Like Britain and France, Italy established a colonial presence in the HOA during the late 19th century. While unsuccessfully invading Ethiopia in 1885, Italy acquired a frontier Red Sea province, which they named Eritrea, and a portion of southern Somalia. This invasion heightened tensions between France and Italy since the French quietly supported Ethiopia while the Italians demanded the cession of French Somaliland to Italy. Italy's actions in the region also increased tensions with Britain, which at the time controlled what is now northern Somalia.

World War II

These tensions were consumed by broader issues with the outbreak of World War II, in which Britain and France aligned with the Allied powers while Italy sided with the Axis powers. France was defeated quickly on its home soil, prompting the collaborationist Vichy French government to sign an armistice that, among other things, demilitarized French Somaliland and left the colony under Vichy French control.



As the Vichy French government had switched sides by agreeing to collaborate with Germany and the other Axis powers, French Somaliland became a target both for Britain and for the so-called “Free French” forces that rejected the authority of the Vichy French government (Pictured: The flag of the Free French). Consequently, the British initiated a naval blockade of French Somaliland and bombed the colony from the air in September 1940.

By that time, French Somaliland was under the control of Pierre Nouailhetas, a French official who used the British attacks as an excuse to implement a cruel and brutal regime. During his 2 years in power, he dealt ruthlessly with those he suspected of treason, confining some while sentencing others to forced labor or death. He executed 6 Africans without trial in order to set an “example.”

Meanwhile, the colony descended into famine as the effect of the blockade was compounded by Britain’s brief occupation of Ethiopia in 1941. These events left French Somaliland with no way to obtain food or supplies. Despite the colony’s dire position, it was not until the end of 1942 that Nouailhetas’ successor surrendered French Somaliland to the Free French and their leader, Charles de Gaulle (pictured). A succession of Free French officials ruled the colony for the remainder of the war. During this period, the famine eased as imports resumed from Ethiopia and Madagascar.

Toward Independence

Following World War II, European colonial powers faced strong international pressure to move their overseas territories toward self-government and independence. Accordingly, in 1956 the French National Assembly passed the *loi-cadre* (Reform Act), which delegated new powers of self-government to its colonies.

In French Somaliland, the *loi-cadre* led to the creation of a local government in 1957 and a referendum on independence in 1958. Many Somalis advocated independence because they wanted to unite with British and Italian Somaliland and form a Greater Somalia. Since many non-Somalis feared marginalization in a Somali-dominated state, voters ultimately rejected independence by a large margin.

The French held another referendum in 1967 after former Free French leader de Gaulle—who by then was the President of France—visited the colony, sparking riots that left several people dead. Although the measure again failed, the margin was considerably smaller, and the French were accused of suppressing Somali turnout in order to maintain control over French Somaliland. Shortly after the referendum, the colony was renamed the French Territory of the Afars and the Issas.

Due to rapid population growth and the temporary closure of the Suez Canal, the decade that followed was turbulent in former French Somaliland. Apart from high unemployment, there were riots in 1968, attacks on Europeans in 1970, and a crime wave in Djibouti City between 1973 and 1976. Over the same period, the Somali population grew.

At the urging of the Organization for African Unity and other groups, France held a third independence referendum on May 8, 1977. As the French had by that point resigned themselves to the loss of the colony, they did little to sway the outcome. The measure was adopted with 90% approval. On June 27, 1977, the French Territory of the Afars and the Issas became the Republic of Djibouti. Having been elected in May 1977, Hassan Gouled Aptidon (pictured), a Somali of the Issa sub-clan, became President.

The Gouled Era

Gouled began his term by trying to achieve an ethnic balance in government, reshuffling his Cabinet 3 times in 2 years in an effort to placate the opposition. The Afars, however, were not satisfied. They noted that the Issas still had the most important jobs after each reshuffle. Their concerns were reinforced when Gouled created the *Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progres* (RPP) in 1979 and banned all other political parties.

Given the lack of legal opponents, Gouled was easily reelected in 1981 and 1987, keeping the country together throughout the 1980s by dispensing government patronage. Nevertheless, his regime was accused many times of human rights violations, such as kidnapping political opponents, harassing journalists, and detaining or executing people without due process of law.

Civil War

Gouled's abuses inspired the formation of several mostly Afar opposition groups during the 1980s. In late 1991, those groups formed the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) and declared war on the central government. By mid-1992 FRUD occupied about 2/3 of the country, although the captured territory was almost entirely in rural areas.

In 1994, FRUD declared a ceasefire that ultimately led to a split in the group. The larger group, known as FRUD-Daoud after its leader, signed a peace accord in 1994 in exchange for a few ministerial positions. The smaller group, known as FRUD-Dini or FRUD-Combattant, continued fighting until the early 2000s.

The Guelleh Era

Gouled at last stepped down in 1999 due to poor health. His successor was Ismail Omar Guelleh, his nephew and long-time confidant. Guelleh (pictured) was elected in 1999 in what international observers described as a "generally fair" election, and was later reelected in 2005, 2011, and 2016. Despite years of civil war and promised reforms, Guelleh has ruled largely in his uncle's tradition. Issas still dominate all aspects of Djiboutian politics, while Guelleh has often been accused of stifling his political opponents through a variety of means (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Djiboutian Myths

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myth is a type of story that members of a culture use to embody their cultural values and explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of heritage and identity to the cultures in which they originate.

In Djibouti, for example, both the Afars and the Issas trace their origins to Arabia in accordance with oral myths. Issa myth further holds that the clan descends from a cousin of the Prophet Mohammed. Other myths are meant to be taken less literally but still capture some of the region's unique culture.

One Somali myth even explains how the sky took its present form. According to that myth, the sky once hung so low that people could touch it easily with outstretched fingers. They liked that the sky hung so low because it protected them from the elements.

One day during the time when the sky still hung low, two women began grinding millet so that they could make meals for their husbands. As they moved their pestles up and down, they began unknowingly to punch holes in the sky. Annoyed and in pain, the sky asked them to stop. When the women ignored this request, the sky retreated to its current position.

According to the myth, the wounds that the women inflicted are still visible in the form of stars, which are lit from behind by the sun. Similarly, clouds are women carrying buckets of water, and rain occurs when they spill water through star-holes. Due to these customary beliefs about the sky, it is known as ***daldaloole*** (“that holed thing”) in Somali.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name

Republic of Djibouti
République de Djibouti (French)
Jumhuriyyat Jibuti (Arabic)
Jamhuuriyadda Jabuuti (Somali)
Gabuutih Ummuuno (Afar)

Political Borders

Somalia: 36 mi
Ethiopia: 217 mi
Eritrea: 68 mi
Coastline: 195 mi

Capital

Djibouti City

Note: Djibouti refers to both the capital city and the country. For clarity, this guide will refer to the capital city as Djibouti City.

Demographics

Djibouti's population of more than 921,804 (2020 est) is growing at a rate of 2.07% per year. With more than 3/4 of its population settled in cities and around 2/3 living in Djibouti City alone, Djibouti is the most urbanized country in Africa. Although the capital is crowded, Djibouti as a whole has a modest population density of 109 persons/sq mi, which is only slightly higher than the population density of the US.

Flag

The flag consists of a white triangle with a red star in its center on the hoist side and two equal trapezoids of light blue and light green on the opposite side. Blue signifies the sea, the sky, and the Issa people; green symbolizes earth and the Afar people; white represents peace; and the red star symbolizes unity and commemorates the country's struggle for independence.

Geography

Located in eastern Africa at the strategically important point where the Red Sea meets the Gulf of Aden, Djibouti borders Somalia to the southeast, Ethiopia to the south and west, and Eritrea to the north. Djibouti and these land neighbors together comprise a peninsula known as the Horn of Africa. Djibouti also lies just 18 mi from Yemen, which is located across a strait known as the Bab-el-Mandeb ("Gate of Tears" in Arabic).

With a total area of 8,958 sq mi, Djibouti is slightly smaller than New Hampshire. Most of the country consists of volcanic rock desert with little vegetation apart from scrub and palm trees. Djibouti has almost no arable land, and only about 10% of the country is useful for grazing livestock. Djibouti's landscape consists of coastal plains in the East, mountains in the North, and plateaus in the West and South. The highest point is Moussa Ali, a 6,654-ft volcano on Djibouti's northern border.

Djibouti has almost no groundwater. There are no major rivers and only two lakes, both of which are saline. Located in the center of the country, Lake Assal (pictured) is both the lowest point in Africa and one of the saltiest bodies of water in the world.

Climate

The climate of Djibouti is hot and dry. The most intense months are May to September, when daytime temperatures in Djibouti City top 100°F and the entire country is buffeted by dusty winds known as ***khamsin***. The climate is milder from October to April, when humidity is lower and daytime temperatures generally stay below 90°F. Djibouti receives slightly more than 5 inches of rainfall each year, although some years are nearly rainless.

Natural Hazards

The major natural hazards in Djibouti are droughts, floods, and earthquakes. Droughts, which occur about once every 5 years, are the most serious natural hazards, as they kill livestock and force nomadic herders to move to cities for work. Floods and earthquakes are less common but still cause serious damage. According to one UN measure, Djibouti faces a 20% risk of a "destructive or worse" earthquake in the next 50 years.

Government

Djibouti is a presidential republic in which executive power is vested in the President and a Council of Ministers (Cabinet), while legislative power is vested in a Parliament known as the National Assembly. The country is divided into 6 administrative units: Djibouti City and the 5 ***cercles*** (regions) of Ali Sabieh, Arta, Dikhil, Obock, and Tadjourah. Originally incorporated as the colony of French Somaliland in 1896, Djibouti became an independent republic in 1977. Although multiparty politics has been legal since 1992, the ruling People's Rally for Progress (RPP) party has consistently dominated Djiboutian politics.

Executive Branch

The President, currently Ismail Omar Guelleh (pictured), is chief-of-state, head-of-government, and commander-in-chief of the military. The President is elected by popular vote to serve a 5-year term. Although the 1992 constitution originally limited the President to two 6-year terms, a 2010 amendment shortened the term to 5 years, eliminated the two-term limit, and set an age range of 40 to 75.

The President is responsible for appointing a Prime Minister, currently Abdoulkader Kamil Mohamed. The Prime Minister advises the President and assumes power if the President becomes incapacitated. By tradition, the President is an Issa Somali and the Prime Minister is an Afar (see "Ethnic Groups"). Similarly, one seat each on the Council of Ministers is reserved for Arabs, Isaaq Somalis, and Gadabursi Somalis. Of the other 13 seats, 7 are set aside for Afars and 6 are reserved for Issas.

Legislative Branch

Djibouti's legislature consists entirely of the National Assembly. Although a constitutional amendment passed in 2010 provides for the creation of a Senate, that second chamber has yet to be established. The National Assembly consists of 65 members known as "Deputies" who are elected by popular vote to serve 5-year terms. In contrast to parliamentary and semi-presidential systems, the National Assembly cannot dissolve the Council of Ministers through a vote of no confidence.

Judicial Branch

The Djiboutian legal system is based on the Napoleonic code (French civil law), ***shari'a*** (Islamic law), and the customary laws of the indigenous population. Consequently, these sources of law are generally used in different contexts.

Customary law deals only with civil matters and is administered through 5 regional trial courts and an appeals court in Djibouti City. ***Shari'a*** deals with disputes arising from Islamic family law and is administered through courts supervised by ***kadis***, or Islamic judges. Civil law is used mostly for prosecuting urban crime and settling appeals arising from customary and Islamic courts. Civil law is administered through 5 regional Courts of First Instance, a High Court of Appeal, and a Supreme Court.

Political Climate

Although the three branches of the Djiboutian government are nominally independent and vested with similar levels of power, all real power rests with President Guelleh and a small circle of advisors. Many laws are enacted by Presidential Decree, and the President controls the income from Djibouti's few economic resources. There is little tolerance for political dissent, and libel laws are enforced so strictly that most reporters self-censor.

The main role of the National Assembly (pictured) is to add an appearance of democratic legitimacy to the President's actions. In 2010, for example, it amended the constitution so that President Guelleh could legally seek a third term. The National Assembly's pro-executive stance parallels its domination by the President's RPP allies, who held every seat in the National Assembly from 1977 until the 2018 election in which the Union for a Democratic Change won 8 seats.

RPP supremacy is linked to ethnic and clan divisions. Although the RPP maintains an ethnic and clan balance in the National Assembly and Council of Ministers, the important positions go to Somalis of the Issa clan, who then provide benefits to fellow Issas. Afars, Arabs, non-Issa Somalis, and even Issas who are not from the President's ***Mamasan*** lineage are often excluded.

Since early in the Djiboutian Civil War (see *History and Myth*), the RPP government has periodically committed to democratic reforms, such as adopting a liberal constitution, legalizing multiparty politics, and decentralizing power. Partly due to the promise of these reforms, the main civil war rebel group now belongs to the same political coalition as the RPP. Many of the reforms, however, have yet to be fully implemented, so many of the grievances that led to the civil war remain unaddressed.

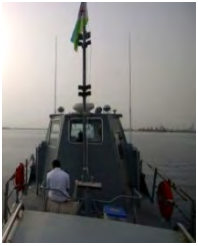
Although the position of the President and the Issa-dominated establishment appears secure for the time being, the country's democratic deficit seems likely to cause more conflict, further political reforms, or a combination of both. The instability of current political conditions was demonstrated clearly in early 2011, when thousands of Djiboutians staged demonstrations—some of which turned violent—to protest President Guelleh's refusal to step down. The protestors eventually were dispersed with tear gas, beatings, and mass arrests.

Defense

The Djibouti Armed Forces (*Forces Armées Djiboutiennes* or FAD) consists of 10,450 active personnel divided between an Army, Navy, Air Force, and Gendarmerie. Since US and French forces based in Djibouti essentially guarantee the country's external security, the FAD focuses on internal security duties. To a limited extent, the FAD participates in multilateral peacekeeping efforts, including the African Union (AU) Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the East African Standby Brigade (EASBRIG).

The Djiboutian Civil War of 1991-1994 is the only major conflict in which the FAD has participated. The FAD underwent a major expansion during that conflict, reaching 15,000 personnel with the help of a temporary policy of conscription. After the 1994 ceasefire, the FAD demobilized and began assimilating rebel forces. This process presented challenges because at that time most of the rebels were Afars, while about 90% of the FAD were Issas. Although ethnic and clan divisions still exist within the FAD, they have not been as prominent in recent years.

Army: Consisting of around 8,000 active-duty personnel, the Army is the largest component of the FAD. Although the Army is a small force that depends on small arms and light weapons, its mobility is restrained by an insufficient supply of armored vehicles. In addition, the Army lacks meaningful artillery and air defense capabilities. President Guelleh has publicly expressed his commitment to modernizing and restructuring the Army.



Navy: Technically a part of the Army, the Navy consists of approximately 200 regular personnel and about 12 patrol boats (pictured). It functions primarily as a coastal patrol force in the Gulf of Tadjoura, although the US's donation of longer-range craft in 2006 enabled the Navy to undertake other roles, such as monitoring sea approaches, disrupting smugglers, and protecting Djiboutian fisheries from environmental threats.

Air Force: Established in 1979, the Air Force consists of about 250 active-duty personnel and a small fleet of fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft. With the exception of two Mi-35 attack helicopters, the entire fleet consists of transport or multi-role aircraft. Accordingly, the main role of the Air Force is to provide logistical support to the other services.

Gendarmerie: Consisting of more than 2,000 personnel and falling under the Ministry of Defence, Djibouti's Gendarmerie is responsible for preventing illegal immigration and policing rural areas. The Republican Guard, an independent brigade charged with protecting the President, is also a part of the Gendarmerie.

National Police Force

Consisting of 2,645 civilian personnel and falling under the Ministry of the Interior, the National Police Force is charged with internal security and border patrol duties. These duties are conducted by a number of sub-components, including the Crime Squad, the Frontier Police, and the Central Directorate of General Information (an intelligence agency). The National Police Force has attracted criticism from a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which claim that the force regularly commits human rights violations.

Djiboutian Air Force Rank Insignia

Security Issues

Refugees: Due to conflict and drought in other parts of eastern Africa, Djibouti currently hosts about 30,000 refugees from the other Horn of Africa countries—Yemen accounts for the majority. Most Yemeni refugees live in camps near Obock, a coastal town in Djibouti. This large and growing refugee population presents a security risk because it places a strain on Djibouti's already stretched food and water supplies and health and sanitation infrastructure.

Land Mines: During the Djiboutian Civil War, both rebel groups and the government planted land mines in various parts of the country. Many of those land mines remain active, especially in the northern highlands but also on the roads outside Tadjoura and in the region surrounding the southern city of Ali Sabieh.

Terrorism: Although Djibouti has not been victim of terrorist attacks, the risk exists due to its porous borders, strategic geographic location, and willingness to host Western militaries. Djibouti's neighbor Somalia is home of al-Shabaab, a cell of the militant Islamist group al-Qaeda, and also lies in relatively close proximity to Yemen, Kenya, and Tanzania. In recent years all three have experienced al-Qaeda attacks on US targets.

The risk of terrorism in Djibouti heightened in late 2011 when it deployed troops to Somalia in defiance of an al-Shabaab threat issued 7 months earlier. Although al-Shabaab did not threaten to attack Djibouti, the risk still existed in the context of the 2010 bombings in Uganda. In May 2014, Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the bombing of a restaurant frequented by "NATO allies" in Djibouti City. The bombing killed one and injured 11.

Piracy: The waters off the coast of Djibouti are infamous for their high incidence of maritime piracy, which mostly emanates from Somalia. Although piracy poses minimal risk to people on land, recent kidnappings of tourists from resorts on the Kenyan coast suggest that the pirates' tactics can be unpredictable.

Foreign Relations

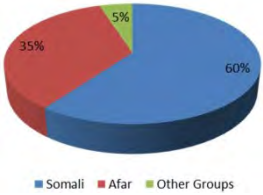
As a bastion of relative stability in a turbulent region, Djibouti seeks a neutral role in regional affairs and generally maintains good relations with neighboring countries. Its closest regional relationship is with Ethiopia, based partly on historic ties but mostly on mutual economic dependence. Landlocked Ethiopia relies mostly upon the Port of Djibouti to handle its seaborne trade, while Djibouti receives a large share of its national income from Ethiopian trade.

Djibouti's relations with Eritrea are more complex. In contrast to several regional countries that have shunned Eritrea, Djibouti has tried to engage with the country, signing a bilateral treaty of cooperation in 2004. Relations plummeted to an all-time low in 2008, however, when the two countries clashed over the disputed border region of Ras Doumeira.

Djibouti's relationship with Somalia is perhaps the most difficult to characterize because Somalia has not been a unified entity since the toppling of the Siad Barre regime in 1991. In general, Djibouti has tried to facilitate an end to the Somali Civil War by hosting peace talks, providing military training, and contributing troops to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Djibouti-U.S. Relations: Djibouti-US relations expanded greatly following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The two countries are now close partners on a range of issues related to security, regional stability, and humanitarian aid. In 2002, Djibouti granted the US an initial lease to Camp Lemonnier, a former French Foreign Legion base located at the airport in Djibouti City. The base now supports about 4,000 personnel and is the headquarters of the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA). For the US, Camp Lemonnier provides a secure foothold in a volatile but strategically important region. For Djibouti, the base provides income from rent and expanded US aid (see *Economics and Resources*) (Photo: President Guelleh with former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in Washington, DC).

Djibouti-France Relations: Djibouti maintains close relations with France, its former colonial ruler (see *History and Myth*). By 2018, French forces stationed in Djibouti consisted of about 1,500 soldiers, belonging to pre-positioned and rotating units that constitute the presence of forces. France also provides substantial humanitarian aid to Djibouti (see *Economics and Resources*), contributing more in recent years since the US now competes for influence with the Djiboutian government.



Ethnic Groups

Djibouti's ethnic landscape is dominated by the Somali and Afar ethnic groups, which jointly constitute about 95% of its population. Both Somalis and Afars traditionally have subsisted as nomadic herders. They speak Cushitic languages (see *Language and Communication*) and historically have valued clan relationships over affiliations with nation-states. Despite their similarities, Somalis and Afars often have been at odds over access to limited resources. During the colonial era, the French fueled those disputes in order to exert power more effectively in the region. Those tensions persist because Afars fear domination by the more numerous Somalis.

Somalis

Numbering about 28-30 million in their traditional homeland in the Horn of Africa, Somalis constitute one of Africa's largest ethnic groups. They inhabit a broad area that encompasses Somalia and parts of Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Somalis divide into 5 clan families, hundreds of clans, and thousands of lineages. More than half of Djibouti's Somalis belong to the Issa sub-clan of the Dir clan family, while the rest belong to the Gadabursi sub-clan of the same Isaaq clan family.

Issas: As with all Djiboutian Somalis, most Issas live south of the Gulf of Tadjoura, with a high concentration in Djibouti City. Although Issas tend to be individualistic and egalitarian, they historically have conceived of individual identity in terms of clan and lineage. Their leadership traditionally has been based not on heredity but on admirable personal qualities.

Afars

Sometimes referred to as “Danakils,” a label now considered derogatory, Afars number about 4 million and live in the Afar Triangle, a low-lying region located in northeastern Ethiopia, northern and western Djibouti, and southern Eritrea. Since Afars traditionally were nomadic and highly cohesive, they have come to identify first with their ethnic group and only second with the countries in which they live. About 32,500 Afars are said to be Djiboutians (Photo: Former Prime Minister Dileita Mohamed Dileita, an Afar).

In contrast to Issas, Afars traditionally have had a hierarchical social structure. In the past, the broadest social distinction was between the ***Asaemara*** (“red ones”) and ***Adaemara*** (“white ones”). The former lived along the coast and were regarded as nobles, while the latter lived in the mountains and were thought of as commoners. In addition to this basic distinction, clans and lineages historically had a specific place in the social ranking. Traditional clan heads made decisions and were respected. Political power historically was vested in 4 sultanates that today are mostly ceremonial.

Other Groups

In addition to Somalis and Afars, Djibouti is home to significant communities of Arabs, Ethiopians, and Europeans. Most of the Arabs hail from Yemen, while most of the Europeans are from France and Italy, the former regional colonial powers. Smaller communities of Indians and US citizens also live in Djibouti.

Most US and many French citizens who live there work on military bases, while many other immigrants in Djibouti run businesses. Those business managers generally must do so in conjunction with a well-connected Djiboutian sponsor who benefits from the profits or other gifts.

Djibouti also hosts transient groups of migrants who stop in Djibouti after leaving regional countries such as Eritrea, Rwanda, and Sudan. Members of these groups typically are attempting to reach the US or wealthy Gulf states such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Social Relations

Although economic inequality in Djibouti is not especially high by African or even global standards, social relations in the country are still colored by stark disparities between the lifestyles of the rich and the poor. The rich generally speak French, live in modern houses, drive personal cars, and travel abroad frequently for business, education, or leisure. By contrast, the poor generally speak only Afar or Somali, live in poorly constructed dwellings, travel on foot or by public transit (see *Technology and Material*), and have little in the way of a meaningful social safety net.

These lifestyles are correlated with, if not fully determined by, ethnic and clan affiliations. In theory, the Djiboutian constitution entitles all citizens to equal treatment and rights of citizenship. In practice, however, both economic opportunity and rights of citizenship depend upon access to the powerful politicians who control most of the income from Djibouti's resources.

Accordingly, Issas who belong to President Guelleh's lineage enjoy the most privileges, followed closely by other Issas and more distantly by Afars, who gained more political power after the Djiboutian Civil War (see *History and Myth*). Arabs are next in the hierarchy, although many of them were driven out of the country before independence. At the bottom of the hierarchy are Ethiopian migrant laborers. Foreign business owners and others who lack political connections can secure a position in this hierarchy by utilizing ties with people closer to the center of power who can exert influence on their behalf.

The social hierarchy described above is most obvious in the capital city, where politicians exercise greater control over the resources and jobs that people rely upon for their livelihoods. By contrast, rural nomads are less integrated into the modern economy and thus are able to retain some of their traditional social structure and lifestyle (see "Ethnic Groups"). Djibouti's nomads often have little interest in modern conveniences, and those who relocate to Djibouti City sometimes are considered as sellouts who have abandoned their community.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Most of Djibouti's inhabitants are Muslim, with estimates ranging from 94% to 99% of the population. The rest are Christians (Roman Catholics, Protestants, Egyptian Copts, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, and Jehovah's Witnesses) or they practice Hinduism or Baha'ism, a monotheistic religion founded in 19th century Persia.

While Islam is the state religion, the constitution protects religious freedom and does not require adherence to Islamic teachings or impose sanctions if citizens practice other religions. Although most Djiboutians identify themselves as Sunni Muslim (see "Muslim sects" below), many combine Islamic practices with local cultural traditions and practices.

Muslim Faith

Origins of Islam

Islam dates to the 6th century when Muhammad, whom Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, the "Holy Book," to guide their everyday lives and shape their lifelong values.

Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is "a person who submits to God."

Muslim Sects

Islam divided very early in its history into two sects based on different interpretations of who should lead the Muslim community (*Ummah*). While the Sunni believed that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community should be elected, Shi'a

Muslims believed the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Djiboutian Muslims are predominantly Sunni.

Five Pillars of Islam

There are five basic principles of the Islamic faith.

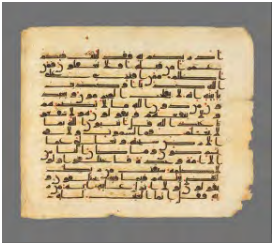
- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray five times a day while facing the Ka'aba in Mecca. The Ka'aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship (Photo: US Marine at the Ka'aba in 2012).

- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (The *Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a lifetime.

Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of two other major world religions, namely Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews "people of the Book," referring to biblical scriptures, because they also share their monotheistic belief in one God.

Abraham: All three faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam, although having different maternal origins. Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac, while Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.



Scriptures: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments. Likewise, Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God (Pictured: Qur'an page from 8th century North Africa).

Jesus: The three religions differ significantly in their understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills the Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge the Christian view of his divinity. Nor do they believe in the Christian Trinity.

View of Death: Muslims believe that the time of death, like birth, is determined by Allah. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death itself as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.

Concept of Jihad

The concept of Jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with Jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism, considering it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

Ramadan

Ramadan is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able are required to fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, one learns to appreciate the good in life. It is common for Muslims to break their fast at sunset with and a

light snack followed by prayer and then dinner. Ramadan is observed during the 9th month of the Islamic calendar (see *Time & Space*) and includes three holy days.

- **Lailat ul-Qadr:** Known as "The Night of Power," it marks Muhammad's receipt of the first verses of the Qur'an.
- **Aïd al-Adha:** Known as is the "Festival of Sacrifice," it commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to the Christian faith), as proof of his loyalty to God. It is celebrated the same day the Hajj ends.
- **Aïd al-Fitr:** This event is a 3-day "Festival of Fast-Breaking" celebrated at Ramadan's end.

Sufi Tradition: Characterized by mysticism and ritualistic prayer, the Sufi tradition historically centered on religious brotherhoods whose members adhered to teachings from their spiritual leaders known as ***sheikhs***. Although these brotherhoods did not have the same level of significance in Djibouti as in other African nations, Sufi traditions have influenced certain popular devotional practices, such as the singing of praise songs (see "Ramadan in Djibouti").

Introduction of Islam to Djibouti

Because of its position just 18 miles across the Bab-el-Mandeb strait from the Arabian Peninsula (see *Political and Social Relations*), Djibouti has been a crossroads for millennia. In the decades following Muhammad's death in the 7th century, Islam spread across the entire Arabian Peninsula. Within a few centuries, Arabian traders had brought the new religion to the area around present-day Djibouti. Over several centuries, Islam became firmly established among the local populations in many of the region's coastal communities (see *History and Myth*) (Photo: Air Force chaplain leads a sunset prayer for Djiboutians).

Religion Today

Islam

Since religion is very important for most Djiboutians, life generally is oriented to the annual cycle of religious rituals and holidays. Over 80% of respondents in a recent survey reported they attend religious services at least weekly. Streets are often deserted on Friday afternoons as people go to mosques, which are found in every Djiboutian community, or their homes to pray. A popular pilgrimage site is the tomb of Sheikh Abu Yazid in the Goda Mountains (Photo: The Sultan of Tadjoura hosts the commander of CJTF-HOA).

For both Afars and Issas in Djibouti, Islamic beliefs are intertwined with local cultural traditions and customs, resulting in a religious landscape much different from that of other nearby predominantly Muslim countries. Examples of traditional beliefs and practices among Djiboutians include appeal to deceased ancestors and the use of rain-making ceremonies.

Djibouti is in many ways much less conservative than many other predominantly Muslim countries. Although forbidden in Islam and mostly unavailable in some countries, alcohol is legal in Djibouti and sold openly in supermarkets, nightclubs, and bars (see *Sustenance and Health*).

Women's attire is also less conservative than that seen in other Muslim countries and is strongly influenced by fashions in neighboring Somalia and in the Arab world. Girls and women usually do not wear a full veil, for example, but simply dress modestly and cover their heads with sheer, colorful scarves (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*) (Photo: US Army captain with Djiboutian schoolgirls).

Christianity

Since Djibouti's Muslim majority is generally tolerant of non-Muslims, there have been no reports of discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice in recent years. The French Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church are well-established institutions that maintain good relationships with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Because Muslim societal norms and customs discourage proselytization, non-Muslim denominations generally engage in few conversion efforts.

Religion and the Law

Shari'a (Islamic) law is combined with elements of civil law in family court, which has authority over matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance for Muslims, while civil courts address such matters for non-Muslims. The government requires the registration of all religious organizations and generally monitors all religious activities in the country.

While the Ministry for Islamic Affairs provides some subsidies to both mosques and Christian churches, the Ministry has full authority over all Islamic matters and institutions, including mosque activities and religious events. Within the Ministry, the High Islamic Council advises the government and coordinates the work of all Islamic non-governmental organizations in the country (Photo: CJTF-HOA chaplain Dinkins meets with Minister of Islamic Affairs in 2007).

Religion and Politics

Although religion generally does not play a major role in internal politics, Djiboutian political leaders and moderate Muslim clerics have recently condemned a perceived increase in Muslim fundamentalist rhetoric. They associate this diversion with the activities of Djiboutian graduates of Saudi Arabian and Yemeni Islamic schools. Some suggest that the government's support in recent decades for Sufi Islamic traditions, such as the singing of ecstatic praise songs to the Prophet and his family in Djibouti's indigenous languages (see "Ramadan in

Djibouti"), is aimed at countering the influence of Arabic language-based fundamentalist Islam while preserving Djibouti's heritage (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Religion and Education

While no religious education takes place within the formal public educational system (see *Learning and Knowledge*), an informal system of Qur'anic schools serves both rural and urban areas. Community-based Qur'anic preschools are also common in which children learn lessons from the Qur'an in addition to reading and writing. The Ministries of Islamic Affairs and Education oversees all such private religious schools.

Ramadan in Djibouti

On a typical morning during Ramadan in Djibouti City, the city center is bustling as citizens complete their errands before businesses close at mid-day. During the afternoon the streets empty, although women in kitchens across the city are busy preparing traditional foods. Similarly, most people are listening to ***nabi ammaan***, joyful praise songs to the Prophet, on the radio. As sunset approaches, the lyrics change to congratulate listeners upon successfully accomplishing their religious fasting duties for the day and encouraging them now to thank God and indulge. When the ***muezzin*** calls for sunset prayer, Djiboutians break their fast by first consuming dates and drinking water, then enjoying fried dough and ***sambusi*** (a Somali eggroll-type snack filled with ground beef). After eating many Djiboutians head to their local mosques for a special prayer service. Djiboutians celebrate the end of Ramadan with the two-day Festival of Fast-breaking during which families come together and children receive gifts of toys and sweets.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

In a country with a harsh environment, few resources, and high unemployment, families serve as mutual support societies that are essential to individual survival. This practice applies to both large and small family units.

Residence

Djiboutian dwellings vary widely between urban and rural areas. Urban homes tend to be modest shacks built with imported materials such as cement, mud, tin, and wood. Since Djibouti does not mass produce building materials in large quantities, the choice of building materials for each specific home depends upon resources available at the Port of Djibouti. Although a small number of wealthy individuals own Western-style homes with such amenities as covered garages, there is generally a lack of quality urban housing.

Since most rural dwellers are nomadic (see *Political and Social Relations*), rural homes tend to be designed for lightness and mobility. Accordingly, the most common type of rural home is the ***toukoul***, a round hut that has branches for a frame and boiled bark for covering. Women generally are responsible for collapsing ***toukouls*** when their families move.

Family Structure

Like dwellings, family structures in Djibouti vary between urban and rural areas. Extended family structures (see “Clans” below) are most common in rural areas, while nuclear families, which consist of two parents and their children, are most common in urban areas. Due to Djibouti’s high unemployment rate and shortage of housing, members of the same extended family often live together in order to support each other and reduce living expenses. In some cases, a household of several dozen people is supported by just one or two workers.

Most Djiboutian ethnic groups are patrilineal, meaning that individuals inherit their clan identity from their fathers, although maternal kinship ties also tend to be strong. Men typically are expected to ensure the financial and physical security of their families, while women are expected to care for children and extended family members in need. In some cases, the men and women of a Djiboutian household live segregated lives, sleeping in different quarters and eating from separate communal bowls.

Polygyny: Refers to a practice in which a man is married to multiple women at the same time. Polygyny is permitted by Islamic law, which allows men to have up to 4 wives. Still, polygyny is rare in Djibouti due to the expense of multiple wives and families.

Clans

For Afars and Somalis, clan affiliations are an important aspect of social relations. A clan, which is the largest social unit, collectively consists of two or more blood lines (lineages) having a common ancestor. Clans affect spouse selection, social security, dispute resolution, inheritance, and networking. Djiboutians of the same clan often help one another, even if they have never met, while members of different clans may regard one another with distrust.

Afar Clans: There are 5 major Afar clans represented in Djibouti. In the North, the Hassoba live near Tadjoura while the Adail and Badoita-Mela live near Obock. In the South, the Adarassoul and Debne live near Dikhil.

Somali Clans: Nearly all Djiboutian Somalis belong to the Dir or Isaaq clan families. The Dir clan family, which includes the Issa and Gadabursi sub-clans, is larger and more politically influential (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Children

Having children, especially boys, is much more than a practice of meeting social expectations. Many women, especially if they lack jobs in the formal sector,

have as many children as possible in order to maximize their odds of having support in old age. Traditionally, nursing mothers were secluded with their child for 40 days after the child's birth. At the end of the 40-day seclusion period, a celebration traditionally was held to introduce the child to society. This practice of seclusion has declined in recent years in order to facilitate immunizations. It is also traditional that fathers not be present for the birth of their children.

Rites of Passage

Djiboutians observe a number of rites-of-passage ceremonies to mark various life stages and events such as birth, marriage, and death. Among Somalis, these life events include festive meals to commemorate these important occasions. Festive meals typically include singing, dancing, or reciting religious poetry (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*). The types of food and the people invited depend upon the wealth of the host family and the nature of the occasion.

Circumcision: Both Somalis and Afars have traditions of ritual circumcision. Most boys are circumcised in early puberty, while girls and young women historically have been subject female genital mutilation (see *Sex and Gender*).

Marriage

Marriage is important because Djiboutians traditionally are not considered fully adult until they are married and contribute in some way to their family's survival, whether through wages or household chores. For most Djiboutians, a series of exchanges and ceremonies marks the transition to married life.

Spouse Selection: Because marriage historically functioned to unite kin groups, older clan males traditionally arranged most marriages. Arranged marriages are less common in modern Djiboutian society, where the main factors influencing spousal selection include love, family background, and socioeconomic status. Afars are stricter than Somalis about the preferred blood relation between spouses. They favor patrilateral cross-

cousin marriage, which occurs when a man weds his father's sister's daughter. Somalis disapprove of this marriage pattern.

Bridewealth: When a man identifies a potential wife, a male relative—usually his father—approaches the girl's father to negotiate "bridewealth." Usually consisting of money, livestock, or ***qat*** (a mildly narcotic leaf—see *Aesthetics and Recreation*), bridewealth is a form of compensation which the groom's family pays to the bride's to account for the couple's children belonging to the groom's family. Bridewealth negotiations are time-consuming and often delay the wedding. In Somali weddings, the bride's family typically provides the couple with items they will need for married life, such as a dwelling and furnishings.

Weddings: Since most Djiboutians are Muslims, nearly all weddings in Djibouti are conducted in the Islamic tradition (see *Religion and Spirituality*). The official wedding ceremony, known as the ***nikah***, is a legal transaction during which the marriage contract is finalized and the bridewealth (see above) is transferred. The ***nikah***, which only men attend, is followed by a party, which occurs up to 1 month later and must happen before the newlyweds can move in together. If the couple is moving into a new home, friends and family may mark the occasion with an additional celebration. If financial conditions allow, the bride's friends and family members sometimes have a separate party of their own (Photo: People from the village of Kontali, Djibouti, perform a traditional proposal dance).

Death

According to Islamic tradition, burials occur as soon as possible after death. The deceased is wrapped in a white cloth and then carried to a mosque for prayers and services. Bodies typically are buried without a casket. Cremation is virtually non-existent, as the practice is considered sinful in the Islamic tradition. After the burial, family members of the deceased sit together for as many as 3 days while they receive condolences. One year after the funeral, family members honor the deceased by sacrificing a goat or sheep and holding a remembrance feast.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

In line with Islamic tradition and Afar and Somali customs, men dominate family life, business, and politics in Djibouti. In recent years, however, women increasingly have assumed the roles of income earner or head-of-household. This shift has been driven by migration, regional conflict, and economic difficulties.

Gender Roles and Work

In both urban and rural areas, men and women perform distinct types of labor. In rural areas, men are responsible for tending livestock and determining the family's movements, while women are responsible for cooking, cleaning, and other domestic tasks. Men who perform female tasks sometimes are disparaged.

The situation is similar in urban areas, although men perform wage labor instead of agricultural work and do not contribute to domestic work at all. Men commonly join the civil service or military, or work at local businesses, the Port of Djibouti, or the French and US military bases. Due to economic conditions, many women also have started to work outside their homes in such industries as domestic service and retail trade (including selling ***qat***, a mild narcotic—see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Gender and Politics

Although men historically have controlled Djiboutian politics, female representation is increasing. This trend is due partly to a law passed in 2002 requiring that women hold at least 20% of high-level public sector posts. Similarly, a presidential decree issued in 2008 stipulates that women hold at least 10% of seats in the legislature.

After the 2018 elections, women held 15 of 65 (23%) National Assembly seats, 2 of 21 (10%) Cabinet posts, and half of all magistracies (judgeships). Despite the seemingly progressive nature of this increased female representation, many women who participate in politics are close relatives of important men.

Gender and the Law

Djiboutian law is a mixture of French civil law, ***shari'a*** (Islamic law), and customary law (see *Political and Social Relations*). Most issues of family law, such as divorce and inheritance, are adjudicated by customary or ***shari'a*** laws which favor men. Although civil law is more respectful of women's rights and can supersede other forms of law, many women are uninformed about or unable to assert their rights. Consequently, legal gender discrimination is common. Under ***shari'a***, for example, sons are entitled to twice of their father's inheritance as daughters, although in theory sons also must care for surviving wives and siblings.

Rape and Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Djibouti's penal code outlaws several forms of GBV, including rape, assault, torture, and "acts of barbarity." Due to social norms, however, few cases are reported and even fewer are prosecuted. Police usually do not get involved unless a death occurs. Consequently, there are no reliable statistics about the extent of GBV, which is left for clans and families to resolve. In this traditional system, harmonious social relations usually are privileged over punishment of perpetrators.

There are are no Djiboutian laws that specifically address spousal rape. Consequently, spousal rape and other forms of domestic violence in most cases are considered family matters that should be addressed by Islamic courts if at all.

Sexual Relations and Procreation

Since Djibouti is predominately a Muslim society (see *Religion and Spirituality*), attitudes about sexual relations reflect Islamic tradition. Accordingly, sex is only appropriate in the context of marriage, while virginity and fidelity are highly valued, especially in women. Although ***shari'a*** prescribes equal penalties for sexual misconduct by either gender, men generally suffer fewer repercussions. This fact reflects the Islamic social attitude that women, in particular, should display modesty in order to guard the family honor.

Despite the pervasiveness of Islamic influence, Djibouti is more liberal in some sexual attitudes than other Islamic countries. For example, Djiboutian women typically wear the ***hijab*** (a shawl that covers the head as a symbol of modesty) only after marriage. Similarly, many Djiboutian women wear bright and colorful outfits instead of the all-black attire common among Muslim women in some other Islamic countries (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Reproductive Health: Djiboutian women bear an average of 2-3 children, or about 20% more than US women. However, Djibouti's statistic may be understated, as some parents do not register their children's births to avoid a fee. Although the fertility rate has fallen sharply since independence, the government continues to promote the use of contraceptives by increasing their availability. About 1/5 of Djiboutian women use some form of contraception.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

FGM is a procedure whereby the female sex organ is modified in a way that decreases a woman's ability to experience sexual pleasure. Although now illegal, FGM remains common in Djibouti. Nearly all Djiboutian women—93% by one estimate—have undergone FGM, which occurs as early as age 5. The practice remains widespread partly because it is closely linked to Djibouti's religious and cultural traditions. In recent years the Djiboutian government has pursued a campaign to educate the public about the dangers of FGM, which has negative health consequences and can be fatal if performed improperly.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality historically has not attracted much attention in Djibouti. Although the practice is illegal, there are no known cases in which a person has been prosecuted for homosexual activity nor known reports of violence or discrimination based on sexual orientation. Nevertheless, adherents of Islam consider homosexuality sinful.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Djibouti's primary languages are Somali, Afar, French, and Arabic. Although French and Arabic are the official languages, the most widely spoken ones are Somali and Afar, which together are used by about 95% of the population. For rural dwellers and the urban poor, Somali or Afar is usually their first and only tongue. Many other Djiboutians are multilingual.

Indigenous Languages

Djibouti's indigenous Somali and Afar languages also are spoken widely in the neighboring countries of Somalia and Ethiopia. The two languages are closely related, as both are Eastern Cushitic languages in the Semitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family. Moreover, both languages have rich oral traditions, as neither had a writing system before the mid-19th century.

Somali: Spoken as a first language by 60% of the population, Somali is spoken widely in southern Djibouti and is the primary language spoken in Djibouti City. Although Djiboutian Somali is identical to the form of Somali spoken in northern Somalia, it differs in vocabulary from the vernacular of southern Somalia. Somalis devised a range of specialized scripts for recording their language during the 20th century. Eventually in 1972, the Somalia government declared the Latin alphabet as the official writing system for the Somali language.

Afar: Afar is the first language of about 35% of Djiboutians and used widely throughout the "Afar Triangle," a region that spans northern Djibouti and parts of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Afar was first documented in the 1970s, when two Afar scholars created an alphabet known as the *Qafar Feera*. Although Afar is rarely used outside of northern and western Djibouti, there are Afar-speaking enclaves in Djibouti City.

The Origins of "Djibouti"

There is little agreement over the origin of the name "Djibouti," as various groups would like to claim the name of the country for their own linguistic heritage. One theory proposes that "Djibouti" is derived from "Tadjoura," the name of the gulf that is adjacent to Djibouti City. Another theory suggests that "Djibouti" means "Land of Tehuti," in reference to an Egyptian deity. Most sources, however, suggest that Djibouti takes its name from the Afar word *gabouti*, which refers to a type of palm-fiber plate that is placed on a pedestal and used in special ceremonies.

French

Introduced by colonists in the late 19th century, French is one of Djibouti's two official languages. Traditionally associated with wealth and prestige, French is the main language of business, government, mass media, and education (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Although modern Djibouti retains many signs of French influence, only around 3% of the population (mostly French expatriates) speaks French as a mother tongue.

Arabic

Used primarily to conduct religious ceremonies in mosques and Islam-based instruction in ***Qur'anic*** schools (see *Learning and Knowledge*), Arabic is the second official language of Djibouti. Although most Djiboutians learn some Arabic at an early age, few speak Arabic as a first language. The main exceptions are Djibouti's Arabs, who are primarily from Yemen (see *Political and Social Relations*).

English

English is a fairly recent addition to the linguistic landscape of Djibouti and not yet widely spoken. Currently, most English-speaking Djiboutians are traders, hotel managers, taxi drivers, or workers in other parts of the tourism industry. Nevertheless, the expansion of international business in Djibouti has led to growing demand for private English instruction.

Communication Overview

Communicating effectively with Djiboutians requires not just the ability to speak French, Arabic, Somali, or Afar but also the ability to interact effectively. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (speech, volume, rate, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Although Djiboutians are known for their friendliness toward foreign nationals, they also value their privacy and place a high premium on respect. Consequently, it is advisable to be as polite and courteous as possible when talking with a Djiboutian. In addition, it is advisable to remain respectful and calm, particularly during negotiations, where diplomacy is crucial when attempting to persuade. Polite individuals are regarded more highly than those who are blunt or use overbearing tones.

Djiboutians typically use language indirectly or in ways that convey multiple meanings in order to avoid offending others. Conversations may also include metaphorical speech such as proverbs and lines of verse.

Greetings

Greetings tend to follow a formal pattern and are essential at the start of conversations in Djibouti, where many linguistic and ethnic groups involve multiple languages. A typical conversation might start with the Arabic-language phrase *As-salaamu alaykum* ("Peace be with you"), to which the reply is *Wa 'alaykum as-salaam* ("And also with you"). Alternatively, conversations may begin with the Somali phrases *Iska waran?* ("How are you?") or *Ma nabad baa?* ("Is it peace?" or "Are you okay?"), to which possible replies include *Nabad* ("Peace") or *Haah, waa nabad* ("Yes, there is peace").

Gender: People of different genders typically are more reserved and distant during greetings than those of the same gender. Same-sexes often touch during greetings, although different sexes usually do not. Men greet each other with handshakes and shoulder embraces, while women may swap ***bisous*** (cheek kisses) (see *Time and Space*).

Forms of Address

Proper titles are a sign of respect in Djibouti. The Somali word ***Mudane*** and the Arabic word ***Sayyid*** (both mean "honorable") often precede a person's last name in order to indicate respect. President Guelleh, for example, might be addressed as ***Mudane*** Guelleh. Somalis indicate respect for elders by addressing all elderly people—even new acquaintances—as "uncle" or "aunt." Similarly, many Djiboutians use such terms as "brother," "sister," or "cousin" to address each other.

Gestures

Like most people, Djiboutians use gestures to substitute for or supplement spoken words. For example, Djiboutians indicate the word "no" with a light thrust upwards of the chin. Similarly, Djiboutians use the chin rather than the index finger to indicate a specific direction.

To summon someone, they extend a downward facing hand in the person's direction and draw one finger toward the body, without pointing at the person directly. To request that another person wait for "just a moment," Djiboutians press the index finger and thumb together and then raise them upwards. To indicate "full"—as, for example, when requesting a full tank at a gas station—they touch a closed fist with a protruding thumb to the bottom of the chin. When Djiboutians make the same gesture with the thumb pointed at the mouth, they are requesting water.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Translations

English	French	Somali
Do you speak English?	Parlez-vous anglais?	Ingriis miyaad ku hadashaa?
Hello	Bonjour	Iska warran?
How are you?	Comment allez-vous?	Iska warran? **or** Sideed tahay?
I'm fine, thanks, and you?	Bien, merci, et vous?	Waan wanaagsan ahay, mahadsanid, adigana?
Yes	Oui	Haa
No	Non	Maya
Okay	Bien	Waa yahay
Good morning	Bonjour	Subax wanaagsan
Good afternoon	Bonjour	Galab wanaagsan
Goodnight	Bonne nuit	Habeen wanaagsan
Goodbye	Au revoir	Nabad galyo
Please	S'il vous plaît	Fadlan
Thank you	Merci	Mahadsanid
You're welcome	De rien	Adaa mudan
I'm sorry	Désolé/Excusez-moi	Iga raalli ahow
Today	Aujourd'hui	Maanta
Tomorrow	Demain	Berri(to)
What is your name?	Comment vous appelez vous?	Magacaa?
My name is __	Je m'appelle __	Magacaygu waa __
I am pleased to meet you.	Enchanté	Waan faraxsan-ahay
Who?	Qui?	Yaa waaye?
What?	Quoi?	Waa maxay?
When?	Quand?	Goorma?
Where?	Où?	Xaggee?
Why?	Pourquoi?	Sababtu waa maxay?
Help!	Au secours!	Caawimaad!
Stop!	Arrêtez!	Joogso!

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 50%
- Male: 60%
- Female: 40% (2016 UN est)

Traditional Education

Although traditional educational methods vary across clans and ethnic groups, all Djiboutian communities historically have used an informal, oral style of teaching to perpetuate values, skills, and knowledge across generations. Family and community historically have played an integral role in this process.

Both Somalis and Afars use stories and other forms of folklore (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*) to convey morals, history, and political views. Children learn both general storylines and exact wordings of such folktales through repetition and memorization. In some cases, traditional education is gender-specific, passed down from father to son or from mother to daughter.

Other forms of traditional education include songs, proverbs, and riddles, which typically convey cultural values. For example, the Afar use these media to demonstrate their pride for military strength, importance of camels, and value of family relationships.

Islamic Schools: Since precolonial times, religious instruction has been an important part of education in Djibouti (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Since the introduction of Islam, for example, Arabic-language ***Qur'anic*** schools have provided both academic instruction and religious guidance. Since ***Qur'anic*** instructors historically taught mostly from personal experience rather than objective academic standards, instruction in those schools has tended to be lacking. Today many Djiboutian students still study at ***dugsi***—informal, neighborhood ***Qur'anic*** schools where students learn basic ***Qur'anic*** literacy and memorize prayers through repetition.

Introduction of Formal Education

In 1884, Catholic missionaries living in Obock established Djibouti's first formal, Western-style schools. Although it remains unclear who attended these schools, some historians claim they were open only to European settlers. Nevertheless, these mission schools lost government funding in 1905 after political movements in Europe prompted France to enforce a separation of church and state in both France and all French colonies.

Secularization: Consequently, the mission schools closed temporarily while they sought new funding sources. Eventually, they were able to reopen in 1906 as secularized mission schools staffed by a number of priests who had taught in the former mission schools. Although they did little to educate the indigenous population, mission schools were the only provider of Western-style education in French Somaliland (see *History and Myth*) until after World War I.

Public Schools: Mission schools declined in popularity after French Somaliland's first public schools opened in 1922. Since many public schools lacked resources, the quality of education remained low. The public schools awarded only two certificates: "elementary," for learning to read, write, and count; and "superior," for acquiring reading comprehension skills.

Moreover, public schools were unpopular with the indigenous population. Nomads were especially wary, as the curriculum neither related to their lifestyle nor reflected their beliefs. Many nomads believed that the public schools were meant to convert them to Christianity. In order to expand enrollment, public schools began offering ***Qur'anic*** education to Muslim students in 1964.

Modern Education System

After Djibouti attained independence from France in 1977, the new government continued to follow the French school model. As time passed and resources dwindled, educational quality decreased. This trend was marked by low attendance, teacher shortages, and a crumbling educational infrastructure.

In 1999, a collection of teachers, students, parents, and officials gathered at a National Education Conference to discuss ways of overhauling the education system. This gathering led to a series of plans designed to improve educational quality, boost economic growth, and promote national unity. Specific priorities included increasing female enrollment, introducing instruction in Somali and Afar, and creating adult literacy programs. Many of these priorities have yet to be implemented.

Primary: Primary school extends for 5 years and is compulsory, although because the law is not enforced universally, only an estimated 66% of Djiboutian children are enrolled in primary school and only 66% of the cohort complete primary. Likewise, improvements in attendance and completion have been constrained due to many parents either lacking the money for supplies and school lunches or needing their children, especially girls, to assist with household tasks. Nevertheless, enrollment has grown slowly in recent years—66% of enrolled students were female in 2019 which represents significant improvement.

Secondary: Secondary school last for 7 years. Due to recent educational reforms, schooling is compulsory through age 16. Of the 66% who enroll in secondary, 50% complete lower, and 30% graduate. Although French is the language of instruction in most secondary schools, advocacy groups continue to demand for instruction in Somali and Afar (see *Language and Communication*). Arabic and English are taught as foreign languages in some Djiboutian schools.

Rural Students

While 234,494 children are enrolled in Djibouti's schools, over 80,000 are out-of-school. This is due partly to the fact that many rural dwellers do not trust the formal education system. Another factor is a continuing lack of access and resources in rural areas, which the Djiboutian government has been slow to address in educational policies.

Boarding schools are scarce and poorly maintained, causing many families to worry about security, especially for girls. Some rural children live with city-based relatives while attending school, although this type of arrangement leads to financial difficulties for both sides. Despite these issues, years of drought, famine, and cattle losses have compelled many nomads to seek an education for their children.

Higher Education

Higher education is a new but fast-growing commodity in Djibouti. Until recently, Djiboutian students could pursue higher education only by studying abroad. Between the 1920s and the 1960s, about 20 students each year received scholarships to study at universities in Europe and other parts of Africa.

In 2000, however, *Pôle Universitaire de Djibouti*, the country's first institution of higher education, opened in Djibouti City. Since a name change to the University of Djibouti in 2006, the school now offers many courses of study beyond its original arts curriculum, including science, technology, economics, and law. With the addition of 2,000 students in 2012, the university now educates around 7,000 students. Roughly 5% of Djiboutians enroll in tertiary education.

Vocational Education

Djibouti's government sponsors vocational training to promote economic growth. In practice, most training is gender-specific to reflect common stereotypes. For example, men's courses include auto repair and electrical installation, while women's courses include handicrafts, tailoring, and hairdressing.

Refugees

Approximately 28,300 dispersed people from Yemen, Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia currently live in Djibouti (see *Political and Social Relations*) and look to the Djiboutian education system to accommodate their children. Some non-governmental organizations have sought to ease that burden by educating refugees, especially females, and offering skills training that contributes to economic growth.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

As in many kin-based African countries, Djiboutians tend to value interpersonal relations over strict time management. Due to their longstanding involvement in global trade, they are also accustomed to the Western concept of time. Djiboutians tend to be wary of strangers yet eager to offer warmth, hospitality, and assistance once relationships have been formed.

Time and Work

Djibouti's work week extends from Sunday through Thursday. Working hours run from about 7:30am until 1:00pm, when most businesses, offices, and schools close for lunch, and townsfolk await the daily ***qat*** shipment (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Businesses usually reopen from 3:00pm to 6:00pm. Djibouti's time zone is 3 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 8 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST).

Punctuality

Perhaps due to their long experience with international trade and Western influence, Djiboutians tend to be more punctual than other inhabitants of the Horn of Africa. Accordingly, it is advisable to arrive on time for appointments, especially when doing business in Djibouti City. In social situations, however, punctuality is more relaxed. Similarly, time in rural areas depends less on clocks than on seasons, weather patterns, and the grazing needs of livestock.

Negotiations

Negotiation requires time and patience in Djibouti, as some Djiboutians, especially rural people, can be deeply suspicious of outsiders. At the least, foreign nationals should take time to exchange greetings and make personal inquiries about health and family before "getting down to business." In some cases, a longer-term relationship may be required before serious negotiations can occur.

Holidays

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- May 1: Labor Day
- June 27: Independence Day
- December 25: Christmas Day

Religious Months and Holidays

Religious holidays occur on variable dates set by the Islamic calendar (see "Lunar Islamic Calendar"):

- ***Maulid***: Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad
- ***Al-Isra Wal-Miraj***: Ascension of the Prophet
- ***Ramadan***: Holy Month of Fasting
- ***Aïd Al-Fitr***: End of ***Ramadan***
- ***Aïd Al-Adha***: The Festival of the Sacrifice

Lunar Islamic Calendar

Muslims in Djibouti use the Islamic calendar to calculate when Islamic holidays should be celebrated. Since that calendar is based on the phases of the moon, specific dates fall 11 days earlier each year from the perspective of the Western calendar. There are 12 months in the Islamic calendar, all of which have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what Westerners would consider the previous day.

Personal Space

Along with many other aspects of interpersonal interaction, the meaning of personal space in Djibouti varies with the gender group composition.

Same Sex: Conversations between people of the same sex often involve touching (see *Language and Communication*). Friends of the same gender also often hug each other or hold hands for extended periods of time—behaviors that indicate platonic affection. When Djiboutians of the same gender chat, they tend to stand an arm's length apart.

Opposite Sex: Conversations between unmarried Djiboutians of different sexes tend to be respectful or professional rather than familiar. Conversations usually occur at a distance of 2-3 steps and do not typically involve touching. Indirect eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures are appropriate in mixed-gender conversations as long as the people speaking maintain an appropriate distance.

Due to the standards of social propriety associated with Islam, avoiding physical contact is especially crucial when male foreign nationals converse with Djiboutian women. On a related note, female foreign nationals are advised that Djiboutian men may refuse to shake hands with women if these men are highly devout or if they have just completed their ablutions (purification rituals) and are ready to pray. In such cases, it is appropriate for a woman to greet a man by nodding and crossing her arms on her chest.

Elders: In the presence of elders, adults may offer a slight bow. By contrast, children often kneel and kiss elders on the knee, who typically reciprocate by kissing the children's heads.

Left Hand Taboo

Like people from many cultures in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, Djiboutians typically reserve the left hand for personal hygiene and therefore consider it unclean. Consequently, they use their right hand when eating, gesturing, accepting items, or greeting another person. Foreign nationals are encouraged to follow suit, as Djiboutians may take offense to use of the left hand in social contexts.

Photographs

Foreign nationals are advised to always ask permission prior to photographing a Djiboutian. Moreover, they also should be aware that even subjects who consent may expect money or a copy of the photograph. Taking pictures of public infrastructure, such as government buildings, bridges, or ports, is illegal in some cases and can result in confiscation of equipment or even arrest.

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Djibouti's clothing, games, arts, and folklore represent a blend of indigenous practices, Islamic traditions, pan-African culture, and Western influence that has accompanied urbanization.

Dress

Men: Although most Djiboutian men wear Western-style attire such as button-down shirts and trousers, they sometimes wear traditional attire. Afar men, for example, may wear a long, loose white cloth called a ***sanafil***, which is wrapped around the body and tied at the hip. Some Afars also wear a curved sword called a ***jile*** and, if they are wealthy, a sash called a ***harayto***. Somali men, by contrast, may wear a button-down shirt with a loose sarong called a ***macawees***, a casual outfit usually worn in afternoons or evenings. The most common types of men's footwear are cheap rubber sandals and store-bought dress shoes.

Women: Like Djiboutian men, Djiboutian women mostly wear Western-style clothing. Popular styles include dresses as well as blouses over pants or a skirt. Married women typically dress in more conservative styles and always cover their hair and shoulders in public with a ***shalmat***, or head scarf. Some Djiboutian women veil their heads as a sign of modesty (see *Sex and Gender*).

Although Djiboutian women no longer wear traditional styles as often as Western styles, there are a range of traditional female garments. Somali women, for example, historically wore a long, flowing gown known as a ***dirra*** over an embroidered underskirt called a ***googgarad***. Afar women, by contrast, historically wore a brown ***sanafil***. As was the tradition, many Djiboutian women still wear jewelry such as gold nose studs to complement their clothing. On special occasions, some women adorn their arms and hands with henna, a brownish dye made from a plant of the same name.

Recreation

As is common in many societies, Djiboutian children gather to play games (see below) for recreation. Since Djiboutian homes tend to be crowded, children usually play in adjacent streets. Djiboutian women generally enjoy drinking tea at home with friends while talking or sewing. The dominant form of recreation among men is chewing ***qat*** (see text box below), often in a ***mebraz*** (café).

Qat

Qat—a leafy plant grown in Kenya, Yemen, and the highlands of Ethiopia—is a major part of daily life in Djibouti. Around noon each day, a shipment of ***qat*** arrives from Ethiopia and is distributed to markets in Djibouti City. The city then effectively shuts down for hours as users chew the leaves, which are mildly narcotic and have a stimulating, euphoric effect. ***Qat*** is more than a simple afternoon pastime, as it is used in religious services and even political deliberations—it is said that "no political meeting in Djibouti is held at which ***qat*** is not used."

Although ***qat*** consumption has some negative health effects (see *Sustenance and Health*), its negative economic effects probably pose a greater threat, as the time and money that Djiboutians spend on ***qat*** drastically affects productivity and economic growth. The Djiboutian government tried to place high taxes on ***qat*** and even ban its sale during the 1970s, although rescinded those measures after public protests and an increase in smuggling.

Cinemas and nightclubs exist in cities, while wealthier families sometimes take vacations to the beach or to northern Somalia or Ethiopia, where the weather is cooler. Among the country's nomads, singing or reciting poetry (see below) during religious or other social gatherings historically have been common pastimes.

Sports

Football (soccer) is probably the most popular sport in Djibouti and throughout Africa. The country has several teams and leagues, including a national team known as the *Riverains de la Mer Rouge* ("Shoremen of the Red Sea"). The national team plays at *Stade Nationale Gouled* (a stadium in Djibouti City used mostly for football matches) and has won only a few matches since its establishment in 1979. Many Djiboutians lack proper football equipment and instead fashion goal posts from stones and soccer balls from water bottles. In order to play ***kwosso***, a game similar to football, nomads make balls out of goatskin.

Running is also popular among Djiboutians. The sport gained much of its popularity after Djiboutian runner Hussein Ahmed Sallah won Djibouti's only Olympic medal—a bronze—at the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, South Korea. Every March, the Djibouti International Semi-Marathon draws both runners and spectators from throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Despite the popularity of running, a stigma still exists in Djibouti with regard to women running. This stigma stems from the fact that some conservative Muslims find it unacceptable for women to be present or active in public without a veil.

Games

Djiboutians traditionally played board games to develop intellectual skills and foster a sense of community. They still play many traditional games today, although to a lesser degree since Djibouti has urbanized. One traditional game that survives today is ***bub***, which is similar to jacks and is played with small stones. In 2007, the Djiboutian government and the United Nations organized a board game tournament in Djibouti to help preserve and promote Djibouti's cultural heritage.

In addition to board games, Djiboutians enjoy card games and dominoes. Some Djiboutians also play ***pétanque***, a French game that resembles ***bocce*** and involves rolling or throwing a ball toward a marker ball while strategically knocking the opponents' balls out of the way.

Music and Dance

Historically, both Somalis and Afars have performed a range of folkloric dances. Since Djibouti nomads historically had few instruments, the bulk of the music that accompanies folkloric dances is vocal. There are certain songs for different occasions and moods. For example, some folkloric songs are war chants, while others are flirtatious songs most commonly performed at weddings. Djibouti also has folkloric songs that accompany such diverse mental states as bravery, pride, and vengefulness. Folkloric dances are seen most often at Afar feasts. Djiboutians also enjoy modern music, including such bands and musicians as Aïdarous, Dinkara, Père Robert, Passengers, and the Soukouss Vibration Band.

Folklore and Literature

Legends and folktales, which traditionally have been passed down orally, provide Djiboutians with a sense of heritage and identity (see *History and Myth*). Still, as Djibouti has urbanized and its literacy rates have risen, folklore's centrality has declined. In recent years, several local cultural associations have created transcriptions and recordings of folktales, poems, and songs in an effort to preserve Djibouti's heritage of oral literature.

Poetry: Somalis are renowned the world over for their complex and richly metaphorical poems and proverbs, which have been used traditionally to transmit history, teach morals and values, express sentiment, convey information, and influence public debates. Many Somali poems feature metaphors based on horses and camels, which traditionally were central to the nomadic Somali lifestyle. As with folkloric songs (see above), Somalis have different poems for different purposes. A Somali man might compose a lengthy ***gabay***, for example, in order to explain a political view. Members of local cultural associations memorize and recite both Afar and Somali poetry.

Literature: Indigenous Djiboutians have produced little written literature most of which is written in French. One of the best known pieces of Djiboutian literature is *Le Pays Sans Ombre* (*The Land without Shadows*), a collection of short stories first published in 1994. Written by Abdourrahman Waberi, the work includes vignettes about Djibouti in the colonial and post-colonial eras. Djibouti is perhaps best known in the literary world for having been the home of Arthur Rimbaud, a French poet, during the late 1800s.

Theater

Djibouti's first European-style theaters were established in the 1950s. Although those theaters gradually incorporated an increasing degree of local folklore into their productions, the French colonial government heavily censored any performances that suggested rebellion against European rule. By the 1960s, the government began to promote the arts in an effort to instill a national spirit and identity in its population. In the 1980s, some Djiboutian theater groups began using their performances to advocate social causes, such as the need for vaccinations and HIV/AIDS awareness.

Theatre des Salines ("Salt Theater"), Djibouti's first and most famous theater, opened in Djibouti City in 1964. Designed to accommodate 1,200 people, the theater primarily hosts cultural events. A second theater and cultural center known as the ***Palais du Peuple*** ("People's Palace") opened in 1994.

Arts and Crafts

Handicrafts traditionally served functional purposes in Djibouti. For example, Djiboutians made baskets not as decorations but as containers. Similarly, people tanned hides so that they could be made into mats for sitting or praying. Women still weave baskets, but now other crafts, such as making jewelry or metal tools, have expanded as materials have become more available. Djibouti's art scene is varied and encompasses both modern art forms (pictured) as well as more traditionally Islamic art forms, which depict plants, flowers, and patterns instead of people and animals.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Djiboutian cuisine reflects the influence of many cultures that have played a role in the country's history, from the Arabs and Ethiopians to the French and Italians (see *History and Myth*). Historically, Djibouti's hot, inhospitable climate has rendered crop cultivation difficult, causing Djiboutians to rely upon imports for most of their food.

Dining Customs

In Djiboutian homes, men and women typically eat in separate gender groups. Most Djiboutians of modest means sit on the floor, using their right hand (see *Time and Space*) or a spoon to eat from communal platters, although the wealthy often use flatware and sit at tables. Most Djiboutians eat 3 daily meals—lunch is typically the largest one. Many schools and businesses enjoy a 2-4 hour lunch break. Because it suppresses the appetite, men often skip dinner in favor of chewing ***qat*** (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Islamic Food Customs: During the holy month of ***Ramadan*** (see *Religion and Spirituality* and *Time and Space*), most Djiboutians abstain from food and drink—even water—during daylight hours. Foreign nationals should respect this practice by not eating or drinking in public during ***Ramadan***. Although Islamic law forbids it, alcohol is both legal and available in Djibouti. Some Afar men drink ***doum***, a palm wine.

Traditional Diet

The traditional nomadic diet consisted of milk and the meat of camels, goats, and sheep. It also included a cereal grain called ***durra***, which was brought to Djibouti by Ethiopian traders and historically has served as a primary source of starch. Following World War II, the Djiboutian diet diversified as vegetables and fruits were imported on a notable scale for the first time.

Modern Diet

Starches: Most Djiboutians alternate between several different starches, the most popular of which are ***bariis*** (rice), ***baasto*** (pasta), and ***lahoh*** (a sourdough flatbread made from a grass called ***teff***). They also sometimes eat ***anjeelo***, or fried dough. Djiboutians eat ***lahoh*** with most meals, covering it with honey for breakfast and scooping stew with it for lunch. When Djiboutians eat ***bariis***, they often spice the grains and serve them with lamb (see ***skoudekharis*** below).

Meats: Although Djiboutians still consume goat, lamb, and camel, persistent drought has thinned herds and compelled Djiboutians to eat meat more sparingly. Djiboutians now eat meat-based dishes mostly on special occasions. One of the more popular meat dishes is ***muqmad***, which is made by drying any type of meat, cutting it into squares, and then preserving it in clarified butter (***ghee***). Djiboutians often eat ***muqmad*** with dates. Although seafood is abundant in Djibouti's waters and available for purchase, it is rarely eaten domestically due to a local preference for meat.

Typical Meals: Breakfast often consists of honey-covered ***lahoh*** or ***anjeelo*** and sometimes includes eggs or coffee. Stews such as the lamb- and rice-based ***skoudekharis*** are typical for lunch, while dinner tends to be a simple dish, such as French bread served with beans, butter, or jam. Djiboutians also enjoy spaghetti, which they usually eat with vegetables or meat.

Health Overview

Although Djibouti has some of the world's highest mortality and disease rates, the Djiboutian government and several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have collectively achieved significant improvements in healthcare. At 64.7 years, for example, a Djiboutian's life expectancy at birth is among the lowest in the world, but it is still 13% higher than it was in 2000. Global life expectancy has grown just 7% over the same period. Despite these types of improvements, Djibouti still faces many health challenges.

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine comprises knowledge, skills, and practices grounded in the beliefs, theories, and experiences of indigenous populations and used to pursue holistic health. The primary practitioners of traditional medicine in Djibouti are Islamic teachers who treat illnesses with herbs and prayer.

Many Djiboutian nomads still rely mostly on traditional medicine and only seek the help of Western-style medicine for serious illnesses or injuries. The Djiboutian government supports this approach by offering training to traditional medical practitioners who are willing to assist as birth attendants and in other roles at local clinics. Traditional medical practitioners of this type now account for about 12% of Djibouti's healthcare providers.

Modern Healthcare

Djibouti's healthcare system has 4 types of facilities. The most basic are health posts, also known as clinics, which provide such basic services as primary and maternity care (Photo: The Guistir Clinic in the southern Djiboutian city of Ali Sabieh). The next level of care is provided at Community Service Centers, which offer more advanced treatments such as surgeries. The third tier consists of 5 regional hospital centers, which offer services like radiology and tuberculosis treatment.

The highest level of care is offered by 5 national hospitals, the largest of which is Hospital General Peltier, having an emergency room as well as maternity and psychiatric facilities. Patients with illnesses requiring serious intervention are sent to Europe, India, the Middle East, or other parts of Africa for care.

As most healthcare facilities are located near urban areas, rural dwellers have little access to clinics or medical supplies. There is also a shortage of medical personnel. According to the World Bank, in 2014 there were 0.23 physicians per 1,000 people in Djibouti, which slightly below average for sub-Saharan Africa (0.3) and well below average for the Middle East and North Africa (1.45).

The government has prioritized healthcare in recent years and has spent between 3.5-10.6% of GDP on the sector. Since most healthcare is subsidized, many Djiboutians do not pay for treatment. While medicine is also subsidized, pharmacies and clinics are usually poorly stocked. Djibouti relies heavily upon NGOs to provide healthcare and supplies in remote areas.

Health Challenges

Malnutrition: Due to poverty, regional drought, and high food prices, many Djiboutians do not have enough subsistence and therefore are malnourished. Nearly 1/3 of Djiboutian children, for example, suffer from stunted growth or emaciation due to insufficient food intake.

Qat*:** The common practice of consuming ***qat (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*) for hours each day has a negative effect on the overall health of Djibouti's population. Although ***qat*** does not cause serious physical dependence and leads to fewer long-term health problems than many other drugs, it still contributes to a variety of health issues. For example, while ***qat*** initially causes mild euphoria, the high eventually fades into depression, which can induce psychosis in susceptible people. In addition, nearly all ***qat*** users experience decreased appetite, which promotes malnutrition and insomnia.

Malaria and Tuberculosis: Malaria is widespread in Djibouti, where approximately 25 per 1,000 Djiboutians reported living with the disease in 2015. Djibouti also has one of the highest rates of tuberculosis infection in the world, with about 260 per 100,000 Djiboutians infected in 2018.

HIV/AIDS: With an estimated 1.2% of adults infected with HIV in 2018, Djibouti has an infection rate almost 3 times higher than the US although lower than sub-Saharan African average of 3.9%. Less than 500 Djiboutians die annually from diseases related to HIV/AIDS. The disease disproportionately affects women, who in 2018 comprised 58% of the population living with HIV/AIDS.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

Due to its near total lack of arable land, natural resources, and skilled workers, Djibouti is largely dependent upon its favorable geostrategic location for income. Accordingly, its economy is based upon trade at the Port of Djibouti and base rentals to the French and US militaries. Although the economy has expanded in recent years due to foreign investment in port infrastructure, unemployment remained at 11% in 2019. Nearly 35% of Djiboutians are poor and 21% live in extreme poverty.

Services

Accounting for 79% of GDP and 42% of employment, the services sector is the largest part of Djibouti's economy. The largest subsectors are communication and transport, tourism and trade, and banking and insurance. Most services performed in Djibouti are linked to the Port of Djibouti (pictured) and the foreign military bases.

Tourism: With its unique landscape, picturesque islands, and attractions such as Lake Abbé and Lake Assal, Djibouti holds significant potential as a tourist destination. The industry has grown slowly due to a lack of promotion, poor access to tourist attractions, and a shortage of skilled personnel. The tourism industry currently contributes about 3% to Djibouti's GDP.

Industry

Accounting for about 12% of GDP, industry is the second largest component of the economy employing 8% of the population. The dominant subsector is construction and public works, which accounts for about 3% of GDP. Manufacturing is limited and consists mostly of small factories that produce building materials, bottled drinks, dairy products, furniture, and ice. Although Djibouti has few minerals or natural resources, it does have large salt pans at Lake Assal and commercially viable quantities of perlite, a type of volcanic glass with a variety of industrial applications.

Agriculture

Although it accounts for just 1.5% of GDP, agriculture is the main source of livelihood for some 90% of rural Djiboutians and for about 49% of the total population (2019 est). The dominant agricultural activity is herding livestock, although herds have been strained in recent years by persistent drought. The most commonly raised animals are camels, cattle, goats, and sheep, and their hides constitute one of Djibouti's few export goods.

By contrast, crop cultivation accounts for only a tiny portion of the agricultural sector and is limited to small-scale production in family gardens of crops such as dates, melons, and tomatoes. This situation is due not only to Djibouti's lack of groundwater but also to its severe shortage of arable land, as less than 1% of the country, or about 25,000 acres, is suitable for cultivation.

Despite the country's expansive territorial waters, Djibouti has only a modest fishing industry consisting of a few hundred boats and 3,000 people. The industry's lack of growth has been attributed to several factors, including excessive government regulation on fish sales, poor fishing technique, and certain Somali groups' traditional aversion to fish consumption.

Money and Banking

The currency of Djibouti is the Djiboutian Franc (Dfr), which is subdivided into 100 ***centimes***. The Djiboutian Franc is issued in 4 banknotes (Dfr 500, 1,000, 5,000, 10,000) and 8 coins (Dfr 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500). The value of the Djiboutian Franc is pegged to the US dollar at a rate of Dfr 177.7 = $1. As Djibouti has no capital controls, the Djiboutian Franc is freely convertible with other currencies. Inflation, historically, has been modest in Djibouti, averaging 2% between 2010 and 2018.

Due to the high quality of its telecommunications system (see *Technology and Material*) and the non-restrictive nature of its banking regulations, Djibouti has become a regional financial center. Many businesspeople from nearby countries keep their money in Djibouti to avoid stricter rules in their home countries.

Foreign Trade

As most of its economic output consists of services tied to the port and bases, Djibouti produces few goods and services for export and must import many necessities. Consequently, the country has a negative balance of trade. Imports, which consist mainly of food, chemicals, petroleum, and transport equipment, totaled $5.5billion, while exports—many of which were re-exports of foreign goods—totaled only $97.8 million.

Key trading partners include Saudi Arabia, which buys almost 45% of Djibouti's exports, as well as China, UAE, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia which jointly account for over 76% of Djibouti's imports. France historically has been Djibouti's largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), although it has been matched in recent years by Middle Eastern states. For example, the government of Dubai in the UAE has invested heavily since 2000 in expanding Djibouti's port facilities.

Foreign Aid

Due to Djibouti's weak economic foundation, foreign aid has been an indispensable source of income since independence. In 2018, Djibouti received approximately $169.7 million in foreign aid from both individual countries and multilateral institutions. The largest single-country donors were France, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and the US, while the largest multilateral donors were the European Union and the Arab Fund (Photo: Officials commemorating a US donation of $2.5 million worth of food aid).

As Djibouti's former colonial ruler, France historically has been the most important of Djibouti's donors. Although the aid that France supplies to Djibouti is small by global standards, Djibouti receives more French aid per capita than any other country.

US aid to Djibouti is tied to US military presence (see *Political and Social Relations*). Besides bringing direct aid to Djibouti, US presence also gives Djibouti competitive leverage to attract more aid from France.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Djibouti's economy is highly dependent upon the country's favorable location (see *Economics and Resources*). While its ports and other physical infrastructure are comparatively well-developed, they are inaccessible to many Djiboutians who do not have access due to their concentration in Djibouti City.

Transportation

For local trips, many Djiboutians simply travel on foot, especially in rural areas. For intercity travel, the most common transport is the private minibus' which usually do not run on a fixed schedule. Instead, minibuses usually depart when full, which tends to be early in the morning. Many minibuses are poorly maintained or operated by drivers who are indifferent to safety. Ferries are sometimes available for travel between the Djibouti City and other coastal towns such as Obock and Tadjoura.

Roadways: Djibouti has about 2,000 mi of roadways, of which less than half—as little as 10% by some estimates—are paved. Most paved roadways are either streets in Djibouti City or main highways connecting regional towns. In recent years, Djibouti's highways have become an increasingly popular way of moving goods between Ethiopia and the Port of Djibouti.

Djibouti's roadways are dangerous since most are unpaved, lack a relative novelty of traffic lights, and the unsafe driving habits of local motorists. Posted speed limits are rare in Djibouti, while excessively fast driving is common in rural areas—even on roads with posted speed limits.

Railways: Djibouti's only railway is a 62-mi section of the 485-mi Djibouti-Addis Ababa Railway, which connects the capital of Ethiopia to the Port of Djibouti. Although this railway was once vital to both countries, it has fallen into disrepair. Nevertheless, an effort to repair and expand the railway is now underway. In the meantime, service remains sporadic when available at all.

Airways: Djibouti has 13 airports and airstrips, of which 3 have paved runways. The country's main air transit hub is Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport located 3 mi southeast of Djibouti City center. In addition to handling civilian air traffic, Djibouti-Ambouli serves as a base for Djiboutian, French, and US military forces. US forces are based at Camp Lemonnier in the southeast corner of the airfield (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Although Air Djibouti is the national airline, the country is also served by regional carriers, such as Ethiopian Airlines and Kenya Airways, and by global carriers, such as Air France and Turkish Airlines. These carriers link Djibouti City with regional capitals, including Addis Ababa, Mogadishu, and Nairobi, and with international cities, including Paris, Dubai, and Istanbul.

Waterways: Djibouti has no commercially navigable inland waterways but does have the strategically and commercially important Port of Djibouti and the new Doraleh Container Terminal (DCT). The Port of Djibouti's operating capacity is 400,000 units per year which accommodates traffic to and from Ethiopia, and meets Djibouti's domestic needs but not much more. DCT is capable of handling 1.6 million units per year, allowing for expansion.

Energy

Djibouti has no known oil or natural gas reserves and depends completely upon diesel generators for electricity. Costs are high because the grid is reliant on diesel. More than 75% of electricity needed by the country is generated by thermal power plants; the rest is imported. Furthermore, electricity is poorly distributed: less than 27% of rural residents have access to electricity while 70% of urban residents do.

Food Warehouse

Unlike any other country apart from the US, Djibouti is home to a food warehouse operated by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The purpose of the USAID warehouse is to position supplies for faster relief of food crises in Africa and Asia.

Media

The government of Djibouti tightly controls the country's media outlets, and almost all reporters work for *L'Agence Djiboutienne d'Information*, the state news agency. Although the government no longer threatens reporters with violence, it still controls their jobs and therefore can pressure reporters into self-censorship (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Radio and TV: The government agency *Radio Télévision de Djibouti* operates the national stations known as Radio Djibouti and Djibouti Television. These stations broadcast in all 4 languages spoken in Djibouti (see *Language and Communication*). International stations such as Voice of America and BBC are also available in the country, as is *La Voix de Djibouti*, an opposition station that is broadcast from Europe over shortwave and the Internet.

Print Media: The state-run daily paper comes in two versions: the French version *La Nation* and the Arabic *Al Qaran*. Political parties are permitted to print publications, although only *Le Progrès*, the journal of the ruling RPP (see *Political and Social Relations*), consistently makes it to print. The government uses harassment tactics such as equipment seizures to discourage opposition parties from publishing their journals.

Telecommunications

The government is Djibouti's only provider of telephone and Internet service and is suspected of monitoring usage of both technologies. Nevertheless, Djibouti has one of the most acclaimed telecommunications networks in sub-Saharan Africa. Increasing rapidly in popularity, cell phones have become more popular than landlines with 45 subscriptions per 100 residents.

Internet access is available at Internet cafés and libraries in Djibouti City and has reached a penetration rate of 56%. Social media sites such as Facebook are popular, particularly for coordinating political protests, as demonstrated when online discussions about the February 2011 protests (see *Political and Social Relations*) led to several arrests.

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