

Beyond clannishness and colonialism: understanding political disorder in Ethiopia's Somali Region, 1991–2004

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes an alternative interpretation of political disorder in Ethiopia's Somali Regional State since the rise to power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991. Some observers have perceived contemporary politics in the former Ogaden as an example of 'internal colonisation' by highland Ethiopians. Others attribute political instability to the 'nomadic culture' inherent in the Somali clan structure and the ineptness of its political leaders. This study argues that neither of these two politicised narratives grasps the contradictory interactions between the federal Ethiopian government and its Somali periphery, nor the recursive relations between state and society. With reference to the literature on neo-patrimonialism, I elucidate political disorder in the Somali Region by empirically describing hybrid political domination, institutional instability, and patronage relations, showing how neo-patrimonial rule translates into contested statehood in the region and political devices ranging from military coercion to subtle co-optation. Rather than unilateral domination, a complex web of power and manipulation between parts of the federal and regional authorities animates political disorder in Ethiopia's Somali Region.

INTRODUCTION¹

The year 1991 marked a turning point for Somali nationalism in general and for Somali-Ethiopians in particular.² Resulting from the downfall of the Derg regime and the total disintegration of neighbouring

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Somalia, new institutions and political manoeuvres emerged within the Somali-inhabited territory of Ethiopia. The former Ogaden, now the Somali Regional State (SRS) or Region 5,³ became one of nine member states within the decentralised, ethnically structured Ethiopian polity established under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (Aalen 2002; Pausewang *et al.* 2002). Ever since incorporation of the Ogaden into the Ethiopian Empire, politics in the Ethiopian Somali region has been fashioned by the region's double identity, first as a peripheral part of the Ethiopian nation-state, and second as a division within the larger Somali political economy including the former Somali Democratic Republic, Djibouti, and north-east Kenya. The EPRDF's granting of national self-determination to Somali-Ethiopians significantly altered political interactions between the Ethiopian highland and its Somali periphery. While it did not lead to effective pacification of the region, new political dynamics were unleashed.

Young's (1999: 322) observation that governments, development agencies, and political analysts ignored Ethiopia's western regions of Gambella and Benishangul applies equally to the Somali Region. Due to a decades-long history of conflict and inaccessibility, the Somali Region is characterised by an astonishing data gap. Consequently, 'the usual geographical and anthropological literature prevalent in other pastoral situations is lacking' (Abdi N. Umar 2004: 4). Neglect of the region by Ethiopianists, Somali studies specialists, and other foreign scholars working on Ethiopian issues has been lamented before (Mohamud H. Khalif & Doornbos 2002: 88). Chronic insecurity in large parts of the region – mainly due to fighting between the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the Ethiopian federal army, as well as sporadic intrusions by armed groups from Somalia – has rendered data collection in the 250,000 km² territory an unpredictable and cumbersome undertaking. Apart from selected field reports by Ahmed Y. Farah (1995, 1997), Hogg (1996, 1997) and van Brabant (1994), as well as short briefings by Markakis (1994, 1996), contributions on political developments in the Somali Region since 1991 have been rare and meagre in empirical information. Many contributions focus on the pre-EPRDF period or provide a general overview of the region (for example, Brons *et al.* 1995; Escher 1994; Mohamud H. Khalif & Doornbos 2002). Notable exceptions are Schröder's (1998) unpublished manuscript and, more recently, Abdi I. Samatar's (2004) instructive political analysis since the EPRDF's rise to power.

In this study, I offer an explanation of political and institutional disorder in the Somali Region since the Somalis' integration into the 'new political order' (Markakis 1994) of federal Ethiopia in 1991. I propose an alternative interpretation to the prevailing discourse imputing political turmoil in the Somali Region to either the federal Ethiopian government or the Somali-Ethiopian polity. Neither of these politicised narratives fully captures the rationality of political disorder within the area.⁴ Drawing upon first-hand empirical material, this study argues that political disorder in the Somali Region is embedded in characteristic patterns of the post-Derg period that result from recursive relations between centre and periphery, state and pastoral communities. My goal is to provide a coherent explanation of seemingly contradictory political phenomena in the region, drawing on the literature on neo-patrimonialism in Africa to explain and illustrate these phenomena. Hence this study neither aims at an exhaustive chronology of political developments in the Somali Region since 1991 (see Abdi I. Samatar 2004), nor does it assess politics primarily in light of the flourishing literature on Ethiopian federalism and state-building (Alemseged Abbay 2004; Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003; Young 1996, 1998). Although the region's nine zones enjoy varying degrees of state presence, stability, and political freedom, an analysis of nuanced intra-regional developments is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that all of these zones have witnessed large-scale inter-group conflicts at one point or another within the past fifteen years.⁵

The empirical data presented in this article stems from open and semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted in Jijjiga, Harshin, Godey, Qalafo, and other localities within Somali Region between May and July 2003, and between May and July 2004. During these periods I regularly discussed administrative and political matters with civil servants of different regional ministries. Names of all sources are withheld to guarantee personal safety of the informants. This study is divided into five sections. The first section introduces existing narratives or supposedly 'explanatory hypotheses' of political and institutional disorder in the Somali Region. The second section construes the concept of neo-patrimonial rule and presents its relevance for the Somali Region. The third section describes hybrid political domination, institutional instability, and patronage relations as characteristic features of past politics in Region 5. The fourth section depicts variegated actors' strategies that contradict the two narratives I seek to refute. Finally, I conclude by critically discussing the strengths and limits of the neo-patrimonial model for understanding politics in the Somali Region.

SOMALI REGION: CLANNISHNESS OR COLONIALISM?

Ever since the Ethiopian Empire gained control over the Ogaden in 1897, 1947, and 1954, the region has been 'one of the most problematic examples of colonial partition' (Doornbos 1997: 490). Historically, relations between the Ethiopian highlands and its Somali periphery have been characterised by successive phases of Somali resistance to their Christian highland rulers. This resistance partly manifested itself in the 'proto-national' Dervish rebellion of Mohammed 'Abdulla Hassan and culminated in large-scale modern warfare in the 1977 Ogaden war, producing deeply entrenched distrust between the Somalis and the highland settlers and administrators. Yet amicable relations and partial integration into the Ethiopian state were and continue to be manifest (Barnes 2000; Gebru Tareke 2000; Lewis 1989, 2002; Tibebe Eshete 1991, 1994). The slow and incomplete incorporation of the Somali Region into the Ethiopian nation-state is an ongoing tale of the central government's repetitive yet futile attempts to establish a monopoly of violence by forceful and political means. It is also a tale of the highlands' continuous marginalisation of the Somali lowlands and, conversely, of Somalis' elusive attitude towards state institutions. Consequently, successive Ethiopian regimes perceived government action in the Somali Region primarily in military rather than political terms.⁶ Violent confrontation between Somali and Ethiopian armed forces is not only linked to a struggle for territorial control, but also has an economic dimension. Historically, attempts to tax the predominantly mobile pastoralists and more recently to stop cross-border 'contraband' trade with neighbouring Somaliland and Somalia have frustrated Somali-Ethiopians.

The Somali-inhabited area of eastern Ethiopia enjoys a particularly negative image that is sometimes reproduced rather uncritically by external observers, Ethiopian as well as non-Ethiopian. In the past two decades the region has become synonymous with drought, famine and conflict, 'each disaster exacerbated by political turmoil that has gripped the region' (IRIN 2002). Lister (2004: 20) qualifies the Somali Region as 'perhaps the most problematic of the "peripheral" regions' of Ethiopia, characterised by 'widespread political, organisational, and financial disorganisation within different branches of government'. Gebru Tareke (2000: 667) speaks of 'a volatile region where nationalist or ethno-nationalist aspirations clash with each other'. Behind these descriptions of the problematic character of the region lie two opposing interpretations of political turbulence within the Somali Region.

Two dominant narratives – both of which appear in folk and scientific discourse – confront one another. First, the highland narrative attributes

political instability in the Somali Region to the 'nomadic culture' of the Somali. It portrays the Somalis as enemies of Ethiopian identity and culture including Christianity, as lawless troublemakers with an 'unwavering insurgency attitude' (Faisal Roble 1996), and deplores their incapacity to organise themselves in stable state institutions. Thus it sees them as unable, if not too immature, to benefit from Ethiopia's ethnic federalism that – at least formally – allows for national self-determination. This paternalistic perspective puts heavy emphasis on the Somali social fabric to explain the ongoing turmoil in the region. This view is partially echoed by Markakis (1996: 570), who states that 'the new political order in Ethiopia does not seem to have affected the categorical imperative of Somali political practice, which is clannishness'. Escher (1994: 656) speaks of the 'disintegrative forces and relentless fighting for power and influence among the Ogaden Somali themselves'. Van Brabant (1994: 16) too talks about tribalism having entered Somali politics in eastern Ethiopia. Paradoxically, the highland discourse on its Somali borderland oscillates between the official party-state discourse and popular Ethiopian perceptions of Somali compatriots. The EPRDF's state ideology of ethnic federalism praises the 'process ... of "de-colonisation"' underway in what are paternalistically termed Ethiopia's "backward" or "emerging" regions"⁷ (Walta Information Center 2000), and perceives the Somali-Ethiopians as one among the many 'peoples, nations and nationalities' of federal Ethiopia. Contrary to this somewhat idealistic view, most Christian highland Ethiopians perceive the Somali-Ethiopians primarily if not exclusively as Somalis who are alien to Ethiopian nationhood.

The lowland narrative proposes a sharply contrasting view of the permanent turmoil within the Somali Region. This view stresses the oppressive nature of the Ethiopian state, which is accused of 'practicing colonialism' (Said Yusuf Abdi 1978: 22) similar to past British, Italian, or French colonialism in the Horn of Africa. In its more radical, yet quite widespread version, it stresses the continuity of Ethiopian domination: 'Successive regimes have not only failed us, but even worsened the lid of oppression on us, massacring at will and letting their security machinery rape our mothers, wives, sisters, and kill our fathers, sons and brothers' (Abdi Aden Mohamed 2001). Although many observers emphasise the comparatively more liberal character of the current EPRDF government, others maintain that 'the present regime is not different from its predecessors in substance' (Abdurahman Mahdi 2000). Ogadeni nationalists accuse the federal government and military of committing outright genocide against Somali-Ethiopians. The theme of widespread human rights violations, atrocities against civilians including extra-judicial killings, and

arbitrary (federal) military rule in the region is also addressed by Mohamud H. Khalif and Doornbos (2002). According to this perspective, political instability, chronic insecurity, the absence of social services, and continuous humanitarian crises are ultimately the fault of the *Habesha*, i.e. the Ethiopian highlanders. A more differentiated view is proposed by Abdi I. Samatar (2004: 1151), who gauges politics in the Somali Region from the viewpoint of ethnic federalism; he ascertains ‘a glaring absence of regional autonomy’, coupled with incompetence of Somali leaders.

With few exceptions the analysis of the Somali Region’s political trajectory in the 1990s reproduces elements of the (Ethiopian) highlander ‘clan hypothesis’ or the (Somali) lowlander ‘colonial hypothesis’. Neither of these politicised narratives adequately captures the causes and dynamics of sustained political disorder within the region. The highland view and its insistence on the ‘tribal’ nature of Somali politics advances a primordial interpretation of Somali kinship. It overstates individual loyalty to clan lineages and neglects Somali exposure to ‘modern’ politics and institutions of the nation-state. Despite the collapse of the former Somali Democratic Republic and the politicisation of the Somali kinship system, the cliché of archaic Somali tribalism is unwarranted. Conversely, the anti-colonial discourse proposed by some Somalis ignores two basic facts. First, the Ethiopian government is far from exerting a hegemonic control over its Somali borderlands. Its territorial control remains limited to military outposts, and its capacity to deliver social services is nominal. Despite political marginalisation and recurring federal military action against Somalis, the latter do have room for manoeuvre. Second, accusations of federal interference and manipulation overlook the fact that Somali-Ethiopian positions towards the centre are neither cohesive nor homogeneous.

Before discussing key dynamics of neo-patrimonial rule, a brief survey of post-1991 political developments in Region 5 is in order. The EPRDF coalition’s establishment of multiparty democracy based on ethnic identity led initially to a proliferation of clan-based political parties in the newly constituted Somali Regional State under the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1991–5).⁸ The ONLF, which was allied with the victorious EPRDF alliance, won the first elections in the region with a landslide victory, and established regional administration under its hegemony. The non-Ogadeni clans of the region soon felt marginalised by the ONLF, and increasingly sought federal government support amid fears of the region’s secession after an Ogadeni announcement of a referendum on self-determination. By 1992 the EPRDF had fallen out with *Al-Itihad*, a radical Muslim group that lacked a proper social constituency in the region but was funded by foreign fundamentalist groups (Ahmed Y. Farah 1996).

Two years later, ONLF leaders were imprisoned or fled into exile, and the front exchanged politics for the barrel of the gun.⁹ The regional capital was transferred from Godey, situated in the Ogadeni heartland, to Jigjiga in the north. The Ethiopian Somali Democratic League (ESDL), a coalition of non-Ogadeni¹⁰ clans supported by the EPRDF, took over the regional government. The League had won the 1995 elections after a late ONLF decision to participate and a redefinition of electoral zones, which strongly disadvantaged the Ogadeni. In 1998, moderate elements of the ONLF merged with the ESDL, by then in decline, to form the EPRDF-friendly Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP). The SPDP has been described 'as wracked by infighting and political disputes' (IRIN 2003), but it continues to be the only relevant party in and through which the different Somali factions can operate. It won the 2000 and 2004 elections with vast majorities.

TRAITS OF NEO-PATRIMONIAL RULE

I rely on the literature on neo-patrimonialism in developing countries to reconstruct the rationale of disorder in Region 5. Rather than a precisely delimited theory, neo-patrimonialism provides the heuristic foundation for the subsequent empirical analysis. A number of reasons motivate adoption of a neo-patrimonial approach. First, the neo-patrimonial concept circumvents the normative biases of both the highland and lowland discourses. Second, it renders intelligible specific types of political authority and social relationships, both conceptualised in Weberian terms. Third, the concept of neo-patrimonial rule fits the Somali Region typologically (as an example of authoritarian rule)¹¹ and ontologically (as a frontier marked by weak state penetration). While this section demonstrates the applicability of the neo-patrimonial concept to Region 5 politics, the next section provides a more detailed empirical analysis.

Political science literature proposes varying conceptions of neo-patrimonial regimes and politics.¹² There is no definite consensus on the scope of neo-patrimonial practices and attendant phenomena. Previous work has discussed neo-patrimonialism in sub-Saharan Africa in conjunction with the political instrumentalisation of disorder (Chabal & Daloz 1999), the confusion of the public and private sphere (Médard 1991), its traditional and 'personalist' variants (Le Vine 1980), political clientelism and patronage (Lemarchand & Legg 1972), transition of authoritarian regimes (Bratton & van de Walle 1994; 1997), or economic development (Engleberrt 2000). Neo-patrimonialism has been described as 'hybrid regimes in which the customs and patterns of patrimonialism co-exist with, and suffuse,

rational-legal institutions' (Bratton & van de Walle 1997: 62), 'politics that stress the importance of personal political relations' (Hansen 2003: 203), or as a state that is 'simultaneously illusory and substantial' (Chabal & Daloz 1999: 9). The informalisation of politics, the resource exchange between key government figures and strategically located individuals, the rapid turnover of government personnel, and insecurity about the role of state institutions are all features of neo-patrimonial governance (Bratton & van de Walle 1994; Chabal & Daloz 1999; Erdmann & Engel 2002; Theobald 1982). In this article, I concentrate on three central traits of neo-patrimonial rule. They concern the hybrid nature of political domination behind the façade of legal-rational authority, institutional instability as an inherent feature of neo-patrimonial rule, and patron–client relations. Subsequently, I demonstrate the pertinence of each trait, and thus of the wider conceptual model, in the context of the Somali Region.

First, neo-patrimonialism refers to the co-existence of a patrimonial system of personal relationships with the legal-rational one of the bureaucracy. Although public norms under neo-patrimonial rule are formal and rational, their actual practices are often personal and informal. As a result, the patrimonial logic undermines and partly deforms the functions of supposedly legal-rational state institutions (Erdmann 2002; Erdmann & Engel 2002). In the Somali Region, hybrid political domination manifests itself in the co-existence of the customary order of segmented, patrilinear kinship including inter-group contracts (*xeer*), and the legal-rational logic of the Somali-Ethiopian local government and the federal army. As we shall see, political action within the region is fashioned by a strong interplay between a politicised clan matrix and its traditional representatives, the elders, on the one hand, and the party and government on the other. Communal leaders such as the *sultan*, *garad*, or *ugaas* act both within and outside local, regional, and federal state institutions. They play an important role in channelling kinship interests through the formal political structure. Permanently lobbying for representation of their lineage within the legal-rational administration, they act as jealous watchdogs who ensure a balance of power between clans.¹³

Second, instability of government institutions is an inherent feature of neo-patrimonial rule. Rulers regularly rotate officeholders 'to regulate and control rent seeking, to prevent rivals from developing their own power base, and to demonstrate their own power' (Bratton & van de Walle 1994: 463). Generally, the insecurity of state institutions and agents engenders systematic instability (Erdmann & Engel 2002). Ever since 1991, instability has been omnipresent within the executive branch of the Somali region. Under the EPRDF regime, regional presidents have

become 'perishable commodities' (Mohamud H. Khalif & Doornbos 2002: 81). No former president lasted for more than three years, and for half of this period they were subject to federal investigation. The first three presidents were charged with corruption, abuse of authority, and other crimes (Markakis 1996), and their successors usually met a similar fate.¹⁴ The ruling party's central committee dismisses large parts of the regional cabinet each year, usually at the start of the new budget year (July). In addition, it is common for government officials to circulate between the regional bureaus, seldom maintaining their position longer than one year. This has led to a situation in which the people never ask themselves 'How does the regional government perform?', but rather 'How long are they going to stay in power?'.¹⁵

Third, neo-patrimonial rule is characterised by patron–client relationships that involve mutually benefiting obligations and transactions. Although discontinuities arise regularly within patron–client networks, administrative and military personnel are ultimately responsible to the patron and not to the electorate they claim to represent (Erdmann 2002; Lemarchand & Legg 1972). Linkages within patron–client relations are supplied through intermediary brokers and middlemen 'who bridge gaps in communication between persons, group structures, and even cultures' (*ibid.* 1972: 154). In the case of the Somali Region, the EPRDF represents the main provider of patronage to selected and constantly rotating Somali-Ethiopian political groups. Consecutive ruling regional Somali parties never formally belonged to the EPRDF coalition. Yet, with the exception of the first ONLF-led administration (1991–4), all were allied to it. The regional party directly depends on support and approval of the EPRDF patron, which plays a discreet role in the region's decision-making. Thereby federal representatives including the military accommodate certain Somali-Ethiopian factions judged to be loyal, while alienating or repressing others. Conversely, political groupings within Region 5 rely on federal patronage for their political survival in the harsh factional competition. EPRDF patronage also provides temporary protection from political or legal prosecution by federal institutions. The following section empirically reviews these three central traits of neo-patrimonial rule in the Somali Region in more detail.

CONTESTED STATEHOOD AND POLITICS IN REGION 5

Hybrid political domination

Before the February 2004 local elections,¹⁶ which produced elected councils for almost all districts of the region, *kebele* chairmen, district

administrators, and zonal representatives were appointed in a top-down process. This meant that politicians at the regional level nominated their allies, usually from the same clan lineage, to the zonal administration. The zonal administration appointed the district officials, and the district authorities selected the *kebele* chairmen. Despite the multiparty rhetoric evoked by the regional and federal governments, elections in Somali Region mainly result from such top-down nominations within distinct clan networks. Apart from the formal and technical weaknesses of electoral processes in the region (EHRCO 2004), candidates are thus systematically pre-selected by the ruling party and elected on a clan-ticket.¹⁷ In daily politics the close interrelation between party and government structure in the region is based on the predominance of the party structure. Whenever senior bureaucrats or politicians are dismissed, they are first excluded from the party (SPDP) and only then dismissed from government office. Thus, the position one enjoys in the party determines political advancement and survival as well as one's relative weight in the political process, not the holding of office.¹⁸

Rivalry between Somali-Ethiopian political parties concentrates on appointments at regional, district, and increasingly at *kebele* administrative levels. The state figures primarily as a honey-pot of resources to be absorbed, appropriated, and shared by politicians and appointees. Holding office brings about a number of material opportunities, namely, a regular income and, depending on one's position in the bureaucratic hierarchy, access to or control over the public budget. Control over local security forces, privileged access to senior EPRDF functionaries, adjudication of scholarships, public contracts, or job promotions represent additional motifs to compete for state control. Considerable amounts of the region's past budgets and development projects have been consumed by these patrimonial networks. However, hybrid political domination is not limited to interaction between Somali lineage groups and their legal-rational bureaucracy. The federal government constantly engages in politic dealings with the regional administration (see Abdi I. Samatar 2004). Access to government positions is conditional upon explicit support of the ruling party for appointments in the lower echelon bureaucracy. Tacit support of the EPRDF is necessary to assign senior government officials and cabinet members.

Members of the ruling Somali-Ethiopian political party and the various kinship-based factions within it are best understood as 'consortia of competitive identity groups' (Matthies 1977: 261). These consortia amalgamate kinship, ideological, and material interests and thus correspond neither to a political party, a strictly parochial interest group, or a

political entrepreneur, although they share characteristics of all three. Different orientations within party politics are not only determined by kinship loyalty. Important divisions across the clan divide exist among the 'realists' who reject the idea of an independent Ogaden state, the 'nationalists' who pursue the goal of liberation, and the 'moderates' who would settle for an autonomous status within a decentralised Ethiopian state (Brons *et al.* 1995: 47). Political struggle is indeed mostly enacted along the contours of genealogical identity in the Somali Region. This said, the existence of segmented patrilineal kinship *per se* does not lead to instability of state institutions. Rather it is the politicisation of kinship through the expansion of the state and associated public resources that motivates institutional instability. Religion plays a minor role in competition between Somali-Ethiopian consortia. Islam primarily assumes importance as an identity marker in the general confrontation between Somali lowlanders and Ethiopian highlanders.

Institutional instability

After the massive exodus of Somalis from the region following the 1977 Ethio-Somali war, few educated people were left behind when the EPRDF established the regional government in 1991 (Hogg 1996: 162). Consequently, higher positions in the Somali Region were initially taken by politicians and senior bureaucrats formerly active in Somalia's Siyaad Barre regime. These politicians and high officials were systematically removed from office between 2002 and 2004, on grounds of having previously served a foreign government, and replaced by persons judged to be loyal to the EPRDF. Despite this change of senior personnel, the principle of periodic rotations within the government workforce did not alter significantly. The position of regional politicians and senior bureaucrats (especially the bureau heads) is a particularly difficult one, as they are subjected to numerous pressures. Officials have to appear legitimate in the eyes of their own kinship constituency, i.e. they have to succeed in furthering clan interests and provide a material 'dividend' to relatives and those clan leaders who put them into power. At the same time, they must avoid being perceived as 'puppets' of the party or the highland government.

Senior bureaucrats and civil servants have been dismissed and re-appointed at an impressive pace since 1991. The constant reshuffling and replacements within the line ministries are usually justified by individual misbehaviour, mostly corruption. However, it is indicative of the lack of separation between government and bureaucracy, as the two are

perceived as undifferentiated within the neo-patrimonial logic. Individuals are appointed to or sacked from government positions because of their membership in and loyalty to Somali-Ethiopian consortia. For example, when a bureau head is dismissed from his office, somebody from the same clan usually replaces him.¹⁹ In reality, there is no job security for bureaucrats, who lack terms of reference and knowledge of their duties and responsibilities within a fictitious rational administration. As a result, a strong incentive exists for personal enrichment during the short period one usually stays in office within the regional, zonal or *woreda* administrations of the Somali Region.²⁰

The constant redrawing of administrative units and political boundaries is another attribute of institutional instability. Watkins' and Fleisher's (2002) observation on the fluidity of boundary names and shapes in the Horn of Africa finds its ideal realisation in the case of the Somali Region. Up to this day, there is no geographic map featuring the correct politico-administrative boundaries of zones and districts in the region in accordance with on-the-ground reality. A comparison of previous maps as well as of those produced by different organisations demonstrates a great variety of political boundaries and administrative units. This fluidity partly reflects the longstanding tradition of 'cartographic exercises', in which the absence of effective administration in this part of Ethiopia results in boundaries being defined on paper only, but never demarcated on the ground (Bahru Zewde 2002: 114; Tibebe Eshete 1994: 79). More fundamentally, the constant flux of political boundaries can be interpreted as an ongoing process of state formation, as ethnic federalism introduced the principle of political representation on the basis of circumscribed territoriality. As more and more clan groups claim their own districts within the region, the number has risen from an initial 41 districts during the 1995 elections to 50 in the 2004 elections. This translates into repeated modifications of the region's formal political architecture.

One consequence of institutional instability is derisively weak state performance. The observation made a decade ago that 'the area is still lacking anything resembling an effective administration' (UN-EUE 1995) remains valid to this day. Regional and district governments²¹ of the Somali Region present themselves formally as modern administrations, which are differentiated territorially (region, zones, districts, *kebeles*) and functionally (different policy sectors and bureaus). Every imaginable policy sector materialises in its own regional bureau, ranging from women's affairs to tourism, culture, and information. Yet the administration's implementation capacities are extremely limited. In the Somali Region, the state provides no services on a continuous basis. Nor does it possess

the human resources or infrastructure to do so (World Bank 2003). Outside major urban centres such as Jigjiga or Godey, policy implementation is usually sporadic. In reality, it is limited to maintaining or re-establishing security through military means, mediating disputes by dispatching delegations of elders and officials, and distributing food aid through the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC) in collaboration with Western donors and NGOs. Furthermore, the administration is paralysed by frequent absences of senior officials who are regularly summoned to the federal or regional capitals for political and party meetings (Abdi I. Samatar 2004).

Patronage politics

The most decisive federal patron involved in regional politics is the Ministry of Federal Affairs (MoFedA). The ministry plays a critical role in the areas of decentralisation, conflict resolution, pastoral policy, and security matters in Ethiopia's regional states. It heads the federal police among other departments.²² The ministry was established to 'facilitate the communication between federal and regional government and give advice to the prime minister on federal affairs' (Aalen 2002: 85). Between 1998 and 2001 the most controversial involvement in the Somali Region of the MoFedA's predecessor, the Regional Affairs Section of the Prime Minister's Office, took place through so-called 'technical advisors', i.e. senior TPLF/EPRDF cadres who represented the ministry at the regional level. These advisors followed politics within the region on a daily basis and were perceived as 'moving around the Somali region'.²³ Initially, they were directly attached to the regional president's office, as well as to other regional bureau heads. The 'technical advisors' proved to be anything but 'technical' and soon become very powerful, especially the one attached to the regional president. In the words of a senior government official based in Addis Ababa, 'the bureau used to interfere a lot in the regions' without any constitutional basis.²⁴

Despite eventual abandonment of this somewhat crude system of direct influence by the federal government, the MoFedA and EPRDF cadres responsible for the Somali region remained instrumental in electing and sacking the region's senior bureaucrats and politicians.²⁵ This observation squares with previous studies (Pausewang *et al.* 2002, Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003), which observed that EPRDF party representatives constitute a second politico-administrative hierarchy in the regions. Whenever a critical political issue arises, ministers and high officials within the ruling Somali party are summoned to Addis Ababa for consultation with the

MoFedA as well as other federal ministries and EPRDF cadres. These regular meetings reflect the EPRDF's preoccupation with controlling the region. Yet they also allow representatives from the region to mobilise political support from the federal government. Interactions between party cadres from the federal and the regional levels are as subtle as they are opaque. A case in point is the dismissal of a regional president, Abdirashid Dulane, in July 2003. A majority within the SPDP's central committee was ready to sack its regional president after previous attempts to do so had failed. Yet only after approval at the federal level was the central committee able to sack him.²⁶ Barely two weeks later, the prime minister appointed him vice-minister of the federal Ministry of Water Resources Development. This move was later interpreted as a manifestation of a rift in the Somali Region policy of the MoFedA, the federal military, and the Prime Minister's Office (*The Reporter* 2003b).²⁷

Federal armed and security forces based in various military camps within the Somali Region have a strong impact on the region's politics and economy. National army officers in many districts appoint and protect political leaders with low educational background but strong involvement in clan affairs. This makes it easy for commanding officers to manipulate administrators and elders, as well as to exercise a sort of indirect rule over local communities. Somali-Ethiopians recruited in this way continue to depend on the patronage of federal army officials for their political survival. In parts of the 'insecure', predominantly Ogadeni-inhabited zones of the Somali Region such as Fiq, Korrahe, and Degehabur, the federal military exerts permanent control and pressure over nominated officials.²⁸ In some places the army also controls customs and occasionally engages itself in the profitable cross-border trade (Faisal Roble 1996). Officers have also been known to decide who may import goods from Somaliland and Somalia by attributing special permits to local traders and businessmen.

Most past dismissals of regional presidents were jointly supported and co-orchestrated by the MoFedA and the military, sometimes against the will of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Contrary to what one might expect, federal patrons within the Somali Region do not always speak with one voice. The wrangling between them is driven largely by competition for power among federal politicians, who use the region as a theatre to further their interest within the national party, government, and political system. To cite one example, in the framework of the EPRDF's 'renewal phase' or *tehadso* (Medhane Tadesse & Young 2003), the prime minister removed and rotated a number of contending high army officials stationed in the region. Similarly, the region's political elite represents a divided political clientele of the EPRDF patron. While Somali-Ethiopians share a

common mistrust *vis-à-vis* the highland political class, they are far from being united politically. Ever since the establishment of the region, the ruling parties (ONLF, ESDL, SPDP) have been little more than a 'wrapping' in which heavy political rivalries between opposing factions were played out.²⁹ Apart from differences expressed in ideological and genealogical idioms, ruling Somali-Ethiopian consortia rely on federal backing to assert their influence against their competitors within the region. This again contradicts one-sided explanations of Ethiopian colonialism or Somali-Ethiopian intransigence.

Neo-patrimonial rule is furthermore facilitated by a number of influential power brokers who act mainly behind the scenes. These middlemen are not the most powerful in absolute terms, but provide crucial linkages between the highland patron and the lowland clients by mediating and accommodating clashing interests and positions. Among these power brokers are senior party members and ambassadors such as the late Dr Abdulmajid Hussein,³⁰ or the current SPDP chairman and head of the federal Ministry of Mines, Ambassador Mohamoud Dirir. Members of the ruling party's central committee regularly facilitate patron-client relations between federal and regional institutions. They have longstanding experience in the civil service, and enjoy the trust of the EPRDF's top leadership as well as of key Somali-Ethiopians in the region. Interestingly, members of the regional government such as bureau heads rarely count among these power brokers, as they lack longstanding contacts and socialisation with the EPRDF elite. Other key power brokers, this time ethnic non-Somalis, are senior members within the MoFedA who have regular contacts with the region's party and government officials during encounters in Jigjiga and Addis Ababa. Clan elders also broker power among different Somali-Ethiopian consortia and across the federal-regional divide. Some maintain regular contacts with federal institutions, notably the National Election Board, the first institution to be persuaded when one seeks to register a new political party.

Patron-client relations must be understood within the overall balance of power between the EPRDF federal government and Somali-Ethiopians. The federal patron disposes of various kinds of political leverage. Armed forces stationed throughout the region allow the centre to threaten and apply military coercion. As the region generates almost no taxed income, federal budget transfers constitute another major source of leverage for the EPRDF to achieve compliance, by freezing or delaying budget transfers to the region (Merera Gudina 2003: 176–9).³¹ In July 2003 the federal government used the Intervention Bill to create a new instrument exerting continuous political influence on the

regional states (FDRE 2003). The proclamation specifies the conditions under which the federal government can suspend its regional states, i.e. in case of a ‘security deterioration ... in a region beyond the capability of the latter; when gross violations of human rights are perpetrated in a region and the latter fails to stop it; and when a certain region endangers the constitutional order’ (Abraham Gelaw 2003). In the process of the ongoing decentralisation within the Somali Region, the federal government has repeatedly threatened to suspend the regional government. The proclamation serves as a sword of Damocles hanging over the region that the federal government can let fall at any time.

FROM COERCION TO INTEGRATION

Variegated political devices by the Somali Region’s political groups illustrate plural, contradictory, and differentiated relationships between centre and periphery, state and society. Together, these devices contradict the two politicised narratives criticised at the onset of this study. Resistance to patronage politics in the region is expressed, among other factors, by the ONLF and an emerging youthful elite, here referred to as the ‘young Turks’. While the ONLF’s armed insurgency is countered by federal military coercion, the nascent resistance to clientelism and corruption by the young generation of bureaucrats takes the form of an inter-generational conflict. The deliberate instrumentalisation of insecurity for political and financial purposes, denunciations, and pseudo-criminal charges indicate Somali-Ethiopian subversion of the formal legal order and, ultimately, federal tutelage. Politico-administrative evaluations known as *gem gena* allow the appointment and discharge of civil servants and government officials to be manipulated and subverted. Besides the establishment of a regional government formally led by Somali-Ethiopians, the nomination of elders responsible to the government and the ruling party is a telling example of Somali-Ethiopian integration, or conversely, Ethiopian co-optation.

Resistance and coercion

The most important group resisting EPRDF patronage is the ONLF, particularly its armed wing and followers in the bush.³² Supported by Arab countries, Eritrea, Sudan, as well as followers in the worldwide Somali (Ogaden) diaspora, the armed ONLF has increasingly radicalised since the co-option of its more moderate wing into the regional government after 1995. The front draws on broad popular support within the Ogadeni-inhabited zones of the region, where it controls movement of people and

goods (UN-EUE 1995). The ONLF employs guerrilla tactics, and its fighters are deeply entrenched in the local pastoral communities. Large parts of the region are inaccessible for officials from the regional government who fear being targeted by the ONLF. The rebels are known to shoot highlanders as well as senior Somali-Ethiopian officials from the region, burn government vehicles, and beat up lower rank bureaucrats. Organised military rebellion by the ONLF not only threatens representatives of the Ethiopian state, but also divides the Ogadeni clans and families whose personal and kinship loyalties are increasingly torn between support for the front and the government.³³ The example of the mid-2004 murder of a *kebele* chairman in the Fiq district by his own brother (the latter being an ONLF activist) provides anecdotal evidence of this point.³⁴ Despite consistent rumours of secret negotiations between the Ethiopian national army and the ONLF, prospects for peaceful integration of the Ogadeni rebels into the political process as well as subsequent disarmament of fighters seem slight in the near future. The ONLF's ultimate political objective seems to vary over time. It is not always clear whether an independent state of 'Ogadenia', a Somali Region under Ogadeni rule, or a reunification with a future rebuilt Republic of Somalia constitutes its main agenda. Yet the front builds upon popular frustration among a large part of the Ogadeni population that feels oppressed by the highland military, and perceives that it loses out on the spoils managed by the Jigjiga- and Addis Ababa-based political networks. In recent years, criticism of the ONLF has been voiced increasingly by Ogaden Somalis and by some of the rebels' former supporters. The major issue concerns the expediency of pursuing the armed struggle, or conversely, a political alternative.³⁵

Pacifist opposition to neo-patrimonial rule increasingly stems from young male Somali-Ethiopians who graduated from the Ethiopian Civil Service College (ECSC) in Addis Ababa. Locally known as the 'educators' (*sic*) or 'intellectuals', they constitute a new group in regional politics. These 'young Turks' are among the few Somali-Ethiopians who received an opportunity to benefit from higher education. Most of them are urban-based professionals, and many are party cadres occupying important offices within the regional administration. In their view, many of the region's senior officials, including executive bureau heads, have achieved their position as a consequence of their tribalist tactics and close cooperation with the federal military in the fight against the ONLF and other armed groups since the mid-1990s. Members of this young generation take pride in their education, and feel politically close to and inspired by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. They have repeatedly vowed to 'change

the system' once they get appointed to office. Many of them support the idea of ethnic federalism (yet not uncritically), and endorse the concept of a distinct Somali-Ethiopian identity. The older caste of politicians are often ridiculed as illiterate and corrupt puppets of the highland security forces. In return, the 'young Turks' have been mocked as 'mainly inexperienced twenty-something-year-old young men who behave like Barre's victory bearers' (*Wardheer News* 2005). However, the 'young Turks' are themselves pressured by their own clan elders to defend kinship interests, to take up important government positions, or to engage in schemes aimed at increasing benefits for their genealogical group. Consequently, an inter-generational conflict is increasingly observable between the 'young intellectuals' who perceive themselves as the educated elite of the future and the guardians of legal-rational government, and the 'old political leaders' who base their legitimacy on a lifelong struggle in the service of kinship and patrimonial politics.³⁶

Subversion and manipulation

Physical insecurity and violent conflict have been regular features of the Somali Region for most of the past 15 years. A compilation of casualty figures by regional elders puts the combined death toll of violent clan conflicts in 11 districts of the region over recent years at over 700 (SRS 2004). Undoubtedly, federal government representatives and regional politicians maximise insecurity and violent incidents within the region for political and material gain. The imperative of fighting against the ONLF provides the military and intelligence officials a useful excuse to cover up armed forces conduct that contravenes legal regulations. Furthermore, accusing community members and political leaders of ONLF or *al-Ittihad* partisanship represents an easy tactic to harass or get rid of political opponents or economic competitors. Considerable amounts from the regional budget have been used in recent years for security-related purposes and left unaccounted for.³⁷ In some cases regional presidents have used 'security' as a pretext to arm their own clan militia. This has earned them the support of their clan elders content to see an increase of their own group's military capabilities.³⁸

Inciting and nurturing violent conflict in order to access the region's 'conflict resolution' budget line represents another manipulative tactic. Lister (2004: 23) recently noted that 'there was a widespread view ... that some government officials benefited from the increased flow of resources to their areas brought by conflict. They thus attempted to perpetuate conflict, making "a trade on the insecurity".' Central to this strategy was

establishment of a special budget line within the regional Bureau of Security earmarked for resolving the region's multiple and recurrent clan conflicts, after the transfer of the capital from Godey to Jigjiga in 1995. This budget line operated separately from regular finances for the regional police and militia. Whenever a major clan-based conflict erupted within the Somali Region, a delegation of senior officials (usually regional bureau heads belonging to the clans fighting), as well as clan leaders and some militia on government payroll, were sent to the conflict site. Large sums of money were invoked to fund these conflict resolution trips. They usually involved several days of hospitality and *qat* and remained unaccounted for. The attractiveness of the conflict resolution budget line was such that it became known locally as 'the big project'. Most of the money used to 'make peace' effectively disappeared into the pockets of government officials, clan elders, and their local supporters. The existence of an institutionalised lump sum for 'conflict resolution' provided an incentive for politicians to fuel and create conflicts in their home areas that permitted access to such funds.³⁹

Political denunciations and pseudo-criminal charges against party and government officials represent a recurrent device in political disputes. These are mainly used to invoke or legitimise the ousting or imprisoning of officials, and seldom translate into a formal legal process involving the judiciary. Apart from general accusations such as 'hindering development' or 'preventing the people of the region from enjoying the benefits of the transitional period' (*Ethiopian Herald* 9.4.1994, cited in Markakis 1996: 568), two specific types of charges have proved particularly popular in justifying attacks on and dismissals of rival politicians. They are (1) accusations of corruption and mismanagement, and (2) claims of supporting the ONLF, euphemistically referred to as 'the anti-peace elements' – *nabad diid* in Somali or *tsere selam* in Amharic. The ESDL and later the SPDP rationalised removal from office of most of the seven former regional presidents on grounds of unspecified corruption charges or being an ONLF backer. Abdillahi Mohamed Saadi and his vice-president were arrested on accusation of embezzling more than a million dollars (van Brabant 1994: 14–15). Ugas Abdirahman Mahamud 'Kani' left office following 'charges of corruption and incompetence' (Helander 1994), Eid Dahir Farah was removed on grounds of corruption and maladministration,⁴⁰ and Abdirashid Dulane was 'allegedly dismissed for anti-democratic attitude, non-compliance with the law as well as impeding development activities' (*The Reporter* 2003a). The latter was also 'accused of being linked to "anti-peace" groups' (IRIN 2003). Thus the rhetoric used by Somali-Ethiopian politicians, especially party cadres, is mostly of motivated allegations to be

understood in its relation to the federal patron. Neither the distribution of financial resources within one's kinship network (corruption in Western moral terms), nor the tacit or active support given to the ONLF (many Ogadenis support the ONLF in one way or another),⁴¹ constitute 'immoral' acts within the Somali normative framework. Yet both are turned into effective weapons in daily politics, as they formally reflect and take up the democratic multiparty rhetoric of their EPRDF patron. Politicians of different clan origin actively instrumentalise the 'anti-corruption' and 'anti-ONLF' discourse. Within the government and party core structure, these accusations are also articulated in *gem gema* sessions. In the larger public they serve to discredit disliked political figures, and act as warnings to those in office that their appointments might shortly be terminated.

*Gem gema*⁴² functions as an institutionalised mechanism to motivate rotation of personnel within the regional government structure. In its struggle against the Derg regime, the TPLF had used *gem gema* to evaluate mistakes or improve military tactics. Today it has become 'one of the mechanisms that the ruling party is using to maintain its control in the regions all down to *kebele* level' (Aalen 2002: 87). In Region 5 local administrators, party officials, and *guurti* elders all participate in the annual *gem gema*. Young's (1999: 330) reading of *gem gema* as 'EPRDF's preferred method of dealing with corruption and maladministration' only partially relates to its politicised use within the Somali Region. More often, *gem gema* serves as a routine practice that shapes political succession. It is used to ensure compliance with government policy, including the federal military. For example, during a large *gem gema* session conducted at different administrative levels in June 2003, the criteria 'having good relations with federal security forces' was central in evaluating the region's bureaucrats.⁴³ In the Somali Region *gem gema* is a constant threat to political nominees and party cadres. Consequently, Aalen's (2002: 87) claim that 'the central party uses *gem gema* to ensure its interests in the regional governments' applies to the Somali Region. The frequent and at times pre-orchestrated assessment of public officials not only serves as a method of federal control and interference in regional and local affairs. *Gem gema* is also instrumentalised by competing Somali clan factions at all administrative levels, as it provides an excellent means to get rid of rival politicians and, ultimately, to place one's own clan representatives in government positions.

Integration and co-optation

A current and yet under-explored change within the region's political makeup is the integration of elders into the government structure.⁴⁴ At the

initiative of the federal government,⁴⁵ a number of elders and clan leaders were selected to assist the regional government in daily political affairs. Election of these elders, known alternatively as *guurti* (council of elders in Somali) or *amakari* (advisor in Amharic), took place in two rounds at regional and district level at the end of 1999 and beginning of 2000, i.e. before the 2000 elections.⁴⁶ Article 56 on the 'Establishment of the Elders' and Clan Leaders' Council'⁴⁷ of the Somali Regional State Constitution (SRS 2002) provides the constitutional basis for establishing these elders' councils at regional, zonal, and *woreda* level. Basic criteria for elections were 'not being a member of groups opposing the government; being free from clannism and favoritism; having a reputation in the community; integrity; and knowledge of traditional law and Islam with the ability of self-expression' (Donovan & Tsegaye Regasse 2001: 30). So far no written rules or regulations exist regarding procedures, terms of reference, and guidelines on how to discharge these elders, clan chiefs, and community elders. They receive the same salary as other bureaucrats working in a similar administrative position. The *guurti* structure is thus 'parallel to (not under) formal structures at all levels' (Aklilu Abraham *et al.* 2000: 31).

The main objective behind the establishment of these 'government elders' was to assist the government in matters of peace and security. When clan conflict occurs, they assist by applying their skills in customary conflict resolution based on blood compensation combined with state conflict intervention. In the words of a former zonal head, 'the *guurti* elders intervene whenever there are problems or conflict between communities and the government'.⁴⁸ Yet these elders also act as government informers and help disseminate government policies among their community. They thus serve as a bridge between state and communities. This institutional innovation of the *guurti* has contributed to creation of different categories of elders within the region, i.e. 'government elders' as well as 'other elders'. In reality, these two types of elders are closely related. Especially at the local level, they do not rely on different types of legitimacy but are recognised as responsible for managing community affairs and resolving disputes. That said, tensions and competition for community representation between *guurti* elders and non-government elders is manifest in some areas within the Region.⁴⁹ In addition, formation of the elders' council has been instrumental in the ruling SPDP maintaining its position. The elders have been particularly instrumental in campaigning and mobilising voters during elections.



This study lends support to the idea that the establishment of the Somali Regional State has decisively transformed relations between the Ethiopian highland and its Somali periphery. Since 1991, politics in Region 5 have been characterised by a concomitance of Somali-Ethiopian resistance, subversion, and integration, respectively of federal coercion, manipulation, and co-optation. An analysis in neo-patrimonial terms reveals that hybrid political domination, institutional instability, and patron-client relations provide significant elements for an alternative explanation of the rationality of post-Derg politics in the Somali Region. Therefore, one cannot explain political disorder in the Somali Region on the basis of Ethiopian colonial hegemony, Somali-Ethiopian tribalism, or political immaturity.

On the one hand, the federal patron fears any strong and legitimate institution within the region on which it cannot exert influence, and which might one day work towards secession as happened in 1994. The Ethiopian state cannot control the Somali Region without the consent and cooperation of at least part of the Somali clans. The old theme of the centre's inability to achieve a monopoly of violence in its border area continues to shape today's political strategies towards the region (Tibebe Eshete 1994). It must constantly fear eventual secession of the region to a 'Greater Somalia' in case of a rebirth of Somalia. While the EPRDF might genuinely work for stability, peace, and development in the Somali Region, it remains extremely suspicious of any political organisation within the region gaining political strength, popular support, and military equipment. Whenever their Somali-Ethiopian clients become 'too powerful', they are either dismissed or a form of accommodation is sought. Actual relations between federal and regional authorities are thus much more subtle than the formal constitutional provisions of 'ethnic federalism' suggests. Federal functionaries and party cadres are also involved in shaping regional politics, not on an *ad hoc* basis, but on a permanent one.

On the other hand, federal interference via direct pressure through military, financial, or other means is a delicate task, since it needs to be 'approved by and balanced against the internal constellation of the region'.⁵⁰ As the deliberate instrumentalisation of 'security' demonstrates, Somali-Ethiopian consortia skilfully subvert EPRDF patronage for their own benefit. Their political conduct is thus a function not simply of kinship affiliation, but rather of cooperative and conflictive relations with representatives of the federal patron and their peers. Vertical relationships between patron and clients transcend not only genealogically construed divisions among Somalis, but partly also ethnic differences between

Ethiopian highlanders and Somalis. This said, patrilinear descent undoubtedly facilitates the mobilisation of kinship solidarities. Yet decision-making, attribution of spoils, and political orientation of Somali-Ethiopian consortia cannot be reduced to kinship alone. The example of the 'young Turks' reveals that education and political socialisation influence individual political preferences. Generally speaking, Somali-Ethiopian collective action must be explained by scrutinising the interface between patrimonial and legal-rational power, institutions, and legitimacy.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from these observations. First, the notorious divisiveness of Somali-Ethiopian political groups is animated by patron–client relations, i.e. interactions between federal patron and regional clients. In daily politics the fierce competition between Somali-Ethiopian consortia is often triggered by competition over state resources. Yet access to these resources is guarded by organisations loyal to the EPRDF, notably the ruling political party (SPDP) and the federal military. Second, both Somali-Ethiopian and federal representatives rely on both patrimonial (traditional) and legal-rational (modern-state) legitimacy to accomplish their goals. Therefore, hybrid political domination in Region 5 not only represents a motor of institutional instability, but also broadens actors' room for manoeuvre by offering plural political devices. Lastly, it creates opportunities for institutional innovation such as establishment of the *guurti* elders system. Third, although representing ethnically distinct and potentially antagonistic groups, neither Somali-Ethiopians nor the EPRDF federal government are internally homogeneous. Political differences are manifest inside both groups on ideological, political, and strategic grounds. Especially, the EPRDF has skilfully exploited these differences since the forced dismissal of the ONLF-led cabinet in 1994 to institute loyal regional governments. Fourth, this study provides evidence of the fact that state-building under the aegis of the EPRDF does not follow an 'accommodationist' path (Alemseged Abbay 2004) for the entire country. Where statehood is weak and strategic interests of high concern (as in the Somali frontier), the Ethiopian government combines an 'accommodationist' policy with selective repression that reminds one of the former Derg and imperial 'assimilationist' tradition.

The rationality of politics in the Somali Region politics is best described by the idea of a neo-patrimonial bargain.⁵¹ Every strategic policy decision within the region is subjected to this bargain between the federal government and the region, and between the region's leaders themselves.⁵² In its interactions with the region, the federal patron makes use of 'big sticks' and 'small carrots' to condition the fragmented regional elite. Conversely, Somali-Ethiopian clients may either decide to play by the

rules set by their patron or oppose them openly or covertly. Neo-patrimonial bargaining at times involves military coercion, political bullying, and financial blackmail. It also takes the form of negotiated agreements between and among unequal counterparts. Advancing an interpretation in terms of a bargain is not synonymous with advocating a harmonious view of federal–region relations. Rather bargaining describes contested relations and transactions between patron and clients marked by a strong degree of inequality in power (see Weingrod 1968). This observation emanating from the analysis of Somali Region politics squares with a recent article on Cameroonian neo-patrimonialism by Hansen (2003: 222), who concludes that ‘the use of force and the recourse to coercion’ have been missing from the neo-patrimonial model.

NOTES

1. I am indebted to my research assistants Dr Ahmed Mohamed and Abdillahi A. Dakane for translating interviews and discussions, the Pastoral Development Coordination Office, Somali Regional State for facilitating research permission, and Abdi N. Omar, Ahmed H. Wako, Mohamed M. Seid, and Mustafe Mohamed for intellectual and practical guidance.

2. The term ‘Somali-Ethiopians’ is used merely for convenience and does not imply any statement on identity or loyalty of those inhabiting the Somali Region.

3. The designations ‘Somali Region’ and ‘Region 5’ are used synonymously in this text.

4. I define rationality here in the political sense as ‘what ... provides an analytically coherent explanation for a given political conduct in a given historical context’ (Chabal & Daloz 1999: 152).

5. While Shinille, Jigjiga, Liibaan, and Afdeer zones are generally considered as politically stable, Wardheer, Degehabur, Quabri Dahar, Godey, and Fiq zones have gained prominence as the scenes of confrontation between insurgents of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the federal military.

6. A remarkable example of the Ethiopian state’s militarised perspective on its Somali lowlands are the topographic maps of the Ethiopia Mapping Agency dating from the 1970s, which depict major towns and settlements within the Ogaden simply as ‘military camps’ with no reference made to the existing (Somali) names of these locations.

7. Ethiopia’s lowland regions of Somali, Afar, Gambella, and Benishangul are commonly referred to as the ‘backward’ or ‘emerging’ regions in public discourse.

8. The evolution of party politics in the Somali Region since 1991 can only be presented summarily here. For a detailed overview, see Abdi I. Samatar 2004.

9. After numerous party and government officials had been dismissed and imprisoned by federal security forces following ONLF’s decision to opt for a referendum for secession at the beginning of 1994 (AI 1995).

10. Including Ishaq, Issa, Gadabursi, Gerri, Gurgura, Rer Barre, Hawiye, Dulbahante, Majerteen, Jidwak, Shekash, and Marehan.

11. Erdmann and Engel (2002: 15) classify neo-patrimonial rule in the realm of authoritarian regimes.

12. The main difference between patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism lies in the definition of the private and public spheres. In a patrimonial system all ruling relationships are personal relationships. Consequently, there is no difference between the private and public spheres. Conversely, neo-patrimonial rule recognises the differentiation between private and public formally, although it represents a combination of patrimonial (traditional) and legal-rational domination (Erdmann 2002).

13. Already a decade ago van Brabant (1994: 16) observed that ‘political authority and “party discipline” do not mean much where elders, elected officials, political party representatives ... all participate in the political process’.

14. Past presidents of the Somali Region are Abdillahi Mohamed Saadi (January–July 1993), Hassan Gire Qualinle (July 1993–April 1994), Ugas Abdirahman Mahamud ‘Kani’ (April–December

1994), Ahmed Makahil Hussein (December 1994–July 1995), Eid Dahir Farah (July 1995–mid-1997), Mahamed Macalin ‘Khadar’ (mid-1997–September 2000), Abdirashid Dulane (September 2000–July 2003), Omar Jibril Abubaker (since July 2003).

15. Field notes, 10.5.2004, Addis Ababa.

16. In February 2004 each district elected a district council including a spokesman, vice-spokesman, administrator, and vice-administrator.

17. Interview, 18.6.2003, Harshin.

18. Field notes, 9.7.2004, Qalafo.

19. Field notes, 14.7.2004, Godey.

20. Interview, 30.6.2004, Godey.

21. Zones are losing their importance under the new decentralised scheme of the region (summer 2004), while *kebeles* (peasant associations, originally established during the Derg time) have led a rather nominal existence in this part of Ethiopia.

22. The MoFedA's predecessor was the Regional Affairs Section within the Prime Minister's Office, formerly headed by Bitew Belay. The creation of the Ministry of Federal Affairs in 2001 under Abay Tsehaye, another core member within the TPLF central committee, demonstrates the federal government's continuous preoccupation (depending on one's viewpoint) with assisting and supervising or meddling in the regions. This particularly applies to Ethiopia's four border regions (Somali, Afar, Gambella, and Benishangul), where state presence is weakest and federal concerns (mostly security-related) highest.

23. Interview, 18.6.2003, Harshin.

24. Interview, 12.5.2004, Addis Ababa.

25. Field notes, 9.7.2003, Jigjiga.

26. Field notes, 8 & 11.7.2003, Jigjiga.

27. In this particular case, the regional president had opposed the growing influence of the federal armed forces within the Somali Region. His removal from regional office was thus not only a victory for those who opposed him within the SPDP central committee, but also for the national forces based in the region (interview, 1.7.2004, Godey).

28. Field notes, 3.6.2003, Jigjiga; 4.7.2003, Harshin; 30.6.2004, Godey.

29. Field notes, 8 & 11.7.2003, Jigjiga.

30. Former chairman of the SPDP (1998–2004), as well as former chairman of the ESDL (1994–1998) and former Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations.

31. The region's 2002/3 budget of Birr 495 million consisted of 7% regional revenue and 93% federal contribution (World Bank 2003).

32. Publicly available information on the ONLF is next to non-existent; some indications are given by Markakis (1994, 1996) and Ogaden Online (2001). All matters relating to the front's internal organisation and funding are extremely sensitive and thus difficult to gather through field research. The same applies to the national armed forces in the Somali Region.

33. The ONLF has reportedly extorted some kind of 'war contribution' among Somali-Ethiopians working for the Ethiopian government, thus mainly from civil servants (interview, 12.7.2003, Jigjiga).

34. In some cases of politically motivated murders of enemies belonging to the same clan lineage as the perpetrator, ONLF has left the necessary blood compensation in cash with the corpse in order to prevent revenge from the victim's kin (field notes, 31.7.2004, Godey).

35. For an example of an open letter questioning the insurgents' tactics and success, see Max'med Qamaan 2005.

36. Interview, 6.6.2004, Jigjiga.

37. A glance at the monthly current budget of the region for the Ethiopian year 1996 (2003/04) showed that the Regional Bureau for Militia had the highest expenditure among the 30 or so regional bureaus (field notes, 28.7.2004, Jigjiga).

38. Field notes, 10.5.2004, Addis Ababa.

39. Field notes, 19.7.2004, Qalafo; interviews 8.6.2004, Jigjiga, 30.6.2004, Godey.

40. Interview, 18.6.2003, Harshin.

41. As one interviewee and member of an Ogaden clan pointed out 'all the people are ONLF' (interview, 12.7.2003, Jigjiga). Sub-clans of the Mohammed Zubeyr, Bah Gerri, Makahil, and Tolomogge excluding Awilhan genealogical lineages mainly support the ONLF, which is also seen to represent interests of the Absame clan lineages *vis-à-vis* other Darood lineages, and Darood interests *vis-à-vis* Isaaq and Hawiye.

42. Collective evaluation through criticism and self-criticism.

43. Interview, 19.7.2003, Addis Ababa.

44. The co-opting of Somali elders was practiced selectively by Italian as well as Ethiopian governors and military leaders at the beginning of the twentieth century (Tibebe Eshete 1994).
45. A similar integration of elders and clan leaders into regional government structure had formerly occurred in Ethiopia's Afar regional state.
46. In November 1999 an 'enclave of seven hundred of the most prominent clan elders and *ugaszes*' (Donovan & Tsegaye Regasse 2001: 13) elected the *guurti* elders at regional and zonal level. According to Aklilu Abraham *et al.* 2000, they were elected for a five-year term of office. Later on (early 2000) assemblies of 150 community elders representing all the different clans in each of the (then) 48 *woreda* participated in the election of the elders at district level.
47. Yet the corresponding proclamation has not yet been formulated.
48. Interview, 14.7.2003, Jigjiga.
49. Interview, 17.7.2004, Godey.
50. U. Terlinden, pers. comm., 16.1.2003.
51. This idea of a bargain was suggested to me by Stephen Devereux. Neo-patrimonial bargain is also more specific than talking about a *modus vivendi* between Somalis and the Ethiopian state, as Escher does (1994: 655).
52. Major policy decisions include nominations of senior politicians as well as policy implementation that is of strategic interest to the federal government. Recent attempts to decentralise the Somali Region's administrative structure is a case in point of federal involvement.

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