

# Rise and fall of a Revolutionary Somali Generation

## Part II. Jigjiga: Past and Present

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### Preamble

In part one of this series, [Prelude to a Revolutionary Generation](#), I discussed factors that partly contributed to the political consciousness of the youth of Jigjiga. I also ruminated about the influence of dissident poets and Musicians from Somalia. Remarkable about this crop of dissidents (Abdi Adan Qays, Hadrawi, Said Salah, Gaariye) was how they used the epic poems of Siinlay to express the socio political challenges in governance in the Somali society.

In this section (Part II), I will do a cursory review of the history, architectural and political development of Jigjiga, to be followed by Part III, where I will appraise the genesis of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution and the demise of the feudal system from a Somali perspective. I will argue that with the demise of feudalism ended the idyllic life style of the youth, and the awakening of the Somali youth was born. Part IV will appraise the challenges of joining the now-defunct Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), and the ensuing death of a revolutionary era.

### Changing Political Landscape in Jigjiga

On December 8, 2013, a large delegation from Somali speaking regions in the Horn of Africa converged into Jigjiga. Delegates were from Djibouti, Kenyan Somalis, and the Federal Government of Somalia as represented by Mogadishu, Puntland, Somaliland, and Jubbaland); this is how the political geography of post 1991 Somali speaking nation looks like. Each delegation came on its own and participated the 8<sup>th</sup> annual commemoration day for nations, nationalities and peoples in post-Dergi Ethiopia. Were the Somalis there to be shown how different nationalities coexist, or to show their own regional relationship to the Jigjiga administration? Nonetheless, the presence of Somali leaders in Jigjiga calls for a sober revisiting of the political conditions of the city 40 years ago. The political gap between now and then would provide a context for the historical contours through which Jigjiga had travelled in the last 150 years.<sup>i</sup>

The coincidence of such a commemorative festive occasion and the unveiling of an impressive Bronze statue erected in the center of Jigjiga in memory of the anticolonial

leader of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sayyid Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, must be treated as more than a historical accident.



*Jigjiga's new statue (left), and Mogadishu's ransacked (right ) Status for Sayid M. Abdulle Hassan*

- 1) The statue for Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan in Jigjiga replaced Dajasmaj Afaworke's unpopular statue that stood up until recently in the center of the city. Dajasmaj Afaworke was a noted feudal lord who served Haile Selassie in the 1940s to put Somalis under servitude and oversaw a historic massacre carried out in the Qorahay region;<sup>ii</sup> Afaworke's statue was a constant reminder of colonialism and social injustice in the region. Its replacement with the statue of Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan as the symbol for local historical recognition is perhaps a reminder that Somalis in Ethiopia have travelled a long way, and may even go farther to seize the promise stipulated in Article 39 of the Ethiopian constitution – *the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination, including and up to secession* (Ethiopian Constitution, 1994).
- 2) The original monument for Sayyid Mohamed in Mogadishu (right picture) is destroyed and its wreckage was sold as scrap metal to Arab countries. In the aftermath of the 1991 civil war, coupled with entrenched clan politics, national statues such the one for Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan could not resurrect again inside Mogadishu, at least not yet. Mogadishu at this juncture appears to have lost the capacity to house pan-Somali national symbols.

Both Mogadishu and Jigjiga, two Somali cities with rich political history, are being swept by winds of change that are profoundly different. One hopes that Mogadishu will regain its pan-Somali stance soon. In social change timeline, whether the current winds of change blowing in Jigjiga represent a reversal of historical trends of the last 150 years, or a new strategy of cooptation and accommodation by Ethiopia to expand to the Somali

peninsula through its new command and control center, i.e., Jigjiga city, remains a thing in the future.

### **Jigjiga: Center of the Periphery**

The name Jigjiga is said to have originated from the sound that follows an earthquake. Being a site for water wells for pastoral communities, it used to have earthquakes with aftermath vibrations that produced sounds like jig-jig-jig-jig. The city's origin of urbanization dates back to the late 1700s; today it is the largest modern city in the Somali inhabited region under Ethiopia.

Having been a farming valley and a site for valuable water wells for several clan families, oral history has it that Garaad Wiilwaal (Hersi Garaad) liberated the area from intermittent invasions by the Oromos; in a bitter and bloody war in the late 1700s and early 1800s, Garaad Wiilwaal killed the legendary horse-galloping expert named Gaal Guray, the leader of the Oromo invaders, and finally consolidated his rule in the Jigjiga-Shabeelay Valley bounded by Karamadha (Karamardha is an Oromo word for "*passage through the hills*" denoting the demise of the Oromos in the region). To his north was another powerful Garaad, Garaad Aadan, whose rule extended up to the gates of Harar (Burton, 1855).

The city is nestled between the mountain ranges of Gurays to the west, the [wheat] prairie farming plains of the Geri Diida Waaleed to the north, the sandstone-rich gorges of Garabcase (red shouldered Valleys), the famous and historical water wells of Ceel Yare, and the valleys of Shabeeley (tiger country) as well as the Jarar River to the south. It is located in the middle of a rich and highly dense agricultural zone, with heaps of alluvial soil that is conducive to agriculture; satellite communities to the city include Xaadow (5 KM), Jinacsani (30 KM), Tuli Guuleed/Agaajin (25 KM), Ceel Axmaar (20 KM), Lafa Ciise (40 KM), Camadhle (5 KM), Haroorays (35), and Togwajale (60 KM). Whereas Tuli Guuleed/Agaajin represents the richest agricultural district, Togwajale on the other hand is a gateway of commerce to Somaliland. Moreover, Jigjiga's potentiality for becoming a regional hub is augmented by the central location it occupies within the former Haud and Reserved Area region, a region so central to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century history and culture of the Somali speaking race.

Jigjiga is only about 160 km from Dhagaxbuur, 120 KM from Hargaysa, 140 KM from Djibouti, and 105 KM from Dir-dhabe, the last being a gateway to the land-locked central and highland Ethiopia. The city's enviable geographic location of being the *center* of the periphery lends it a geopolitical importance within the Ethio-Djibouti-Somalia beltway. It

represents a linkage between border towns in the greater Haud and Reserved Area and modern urban centers such as Djibouti, Hargaisa, Diridhaba.

In the past, however, Ethiopia misused the locational advantage Jigjiga offers in that it reduced the role of the city to being the command and control center for military activities against Somalis who always fought for social justice and against aggression. The current administration of the Somali Regional state has implemented two most strategic steps which may bode well for the entire region in the long term. First, designating Tuli Guuleed/Agaajin a district in 2013, probably the richest and most populous agricultural district in the entire Somali region, was a major policy shift to emphasize agricultural productivity. With this designation, the new district may soon attract development dollars so as to enhance the region's capacity in food production and in tax revenues. Second, the proposed road construction that would connect Jigjiga to Djibouti via Tule Guuleed/Agaajin would enhance the region's potential to export food and agricultural products to Djibouti, thus minimizing the dependency of the latter country on the Oromia region. Fostering a linkage between the center and the periphery may also require a resurrection of the 1920 British-funded visibility study of a rail line connecting Jigjiga to Kismayo, passing through Dolow, Afdheer, Goday and Dhagaxbuur.

### **Harmonious Diversity**

Jigjiga has always set historical trends for the region. In an 1858 letter to Garad Wiilwaal, Sir Richard Burton, author of *"First Footsteps in East Africa,"* whose expedition opened doors for the eventual penetration of the Somali Peninsula by the East India Company, a precursor to colonization, recognized this geopolitical importance. In that contact with local leaders, Sir Burton pleaded to his dismay with Garad Wiilwaal to pass through Jigjiga on his way to the "lost city" of Harar. In the end, though, Sir Burton formed a Faustian pact with Garaad Adan and used Bank Diido Waaleed via Tuli Guuleed/Agaajin as his passageway to Harar.<sup>iii</sup>

Despite Sir Burton's *divide and rule* of the two historical figures, the city was born out of harmonious diverse communities; Somalis and Arabs made up the largest proportion, notwithstanding Indians, Highland Ethiopians and Hararis who settled in droves in the 1940s. Jigjiga's diversity has been at two levels; within Somalis and with non-Somalis. According to Dr. Tibabe Eshetu, author of *"Jigjiga, the History of a Strategic Town in the Horn of Africa,"* the city was *"the first major administrative town, first major urban center...with cosmopolitan character hosting different ethnic and expatriate groups such as Indians, Arabs, and Greeks."* It has been, and to a large extent still remains, a focal

point of commerce for several major communities that have lived together and coexisted peacefully.

For example, the most known grave sites that are still recognizable include those for Garad Ali Garad Koshin (Geri), Garad Dool Garad Xirsi (Bartire), Suldan Xaashi Cilmi (Issaq), Suldan Sheik Hassan Yabare (Yabare-Jidwaaq), Ugaas Rooble Doodi (Gadabursi), Ugas Maxamuud (Ogaden), Suldan Odowaa (Akisho), several sons of the late Omar Samatar (Majeerteen), and many more.

A simple visit to the largest and oldest graveyard (Xaabaalaha Sheikh Ali Guure) would easily reveal the burial sites of Garaad Wiilwaal. Next to Garaad Wiilwaal decidedly lays that of his adopted brother, Haji Jama, the most prominent mufti of all the students of Sheikh Abdul-Rahman Saylici of Qulunquul (Garaad Wiilwaal and Haji Jamac became so close to each other their decedent's intermarriage continues till this day). Within a walking distance of these grave sites is located the burial site of Garaad Adan Garaad Koshin, who, in 1858, made a strategic deal with Sir Richard Burton of England. Garaad Adan was married to Ugas Doodi's siser, Doobiro Doodi, referred by Burton as Garaada.

The most recognizable historical relics, which are also unique to Jigjiga, are the numerous famous religious mosques or "maqamis" named after saints who had descended from the Sheikhaash family - ala rer- aw-Qudub (Sheikh Ali Guure Guuled, Sheikh Shariif, Shiekh Xaaji Faje, Sheikh AbdiSalaam, Shiekh Yusuf Baxar and e.t.c). For a comprehensive understanding of the weighty nature of religious relics and the prominence of muftis or sheikhs in the daily life of the city, please refer to Abdi Adan Qay's meditative song "Awliyo Alaay" that calls upon the powers of these Jigjiga-bound saints.

As diversity promotes tolerance, harmonious communities are achievable. As such, Jigjiga had less clan conflict throughout its history. Rather, the region's people have boasted mutual respect, coexistence and an impressive degree of unity against outsiders. With the exception of two clan wars (one between the Bartire and the Habar Awal in the late 1960s, and a second bloody conflict between Habar Awal and Arab, in 1968, the latter conflict's origin being inside the Republic of Somalia but exported to Jigjiga), conflict is less prevalent. Not a single clan conflict, for example, between the Geri and Gadabursi for over 250 years has been recorded, despite their proximate settlements to one another.

Instead of perpetual conflict, there is a strong bond of intermarriage among the groups (for example between Geri and Gadabursi, Geri and Habar Awal, Geri and Jidwaaq, Bartire and Sheekhaash, or Bartire and Issaq, and also Somalis and Arabs). These intermarriages were more visible among the top echelon of the society: for example, Garaad Aadan's sister was married to Garaad Wiilwaal, whereas Garaad Adan was married



to Ugas Doodi's sister. Such cross clan intermarriage, often multi-generational, thus created a rare rainbow of stable clan fraternities – a phenomenon in a short supply elsewhere in the Somali society. It is common in Jigjiga that 8 out of 10 people are interrelated – a relationship that had been a factor in the more harmonious diversity which has sustained Jigjiga through difficult times.

### **Islamic Influence in the Architecture of Jigjiga**

According to Burton, Jigjiga emerged as a reliable trading outpost and a midway for caravans headed to the “lost city” of Harar in the early 1800s. However, after the city fell under a merciless expeditionary invasion by Abyssinian highlanders, in the 1870s, the Neftanghs highlanders or gun-toting Amhara colonizers, turned it into a military fortress. By late 1890s, the first modern buildings were erected by Arab (Yamani) mercenaries at the service of Ras Mekenon, conqueror of the Somali region. Initially under the command of one Abdalla Taha, the Yamani mercenaries believed to be a formidable challenge to the Darwish fighter so they were hired for their skills in desert warfare. They established their first outposts in Jigjiga.

The architecture and built environment of the city's early 1900s reflect heavy Arab and Turkish influence. Originally, the city's urban form was organized into several permeable quarters: Suuq Yara (little village), Sakatal Ubaax or Suuq Wayne (where most of the city's Garad's and sultans owned real estate), Xaafatul Carabta (Arab neighborhood), Xaafada Baniyaalada (Indian quarter), Dasoolay (the neighborhood of huts or early squatter settlement within the city), and Suuq Xabashi (Ethiopian neighborhood, where all the government services, bars and dance clubs, and thriving prostitution business sector were traditionally located).



*Locally known as Fooq-dheere, it is one of the oldest commercial buildings with an Arabic accent*

Early buildings of the city consisted of one- or two-stories brick buildings, facing narrow boulevards. The residential quarters were always built away from the streets as enclosed

compounds, or *daarad* in Somali. The Enclosed compound or courtyard would always be covered by store fronts or protective, 6 ft. tall walls facing directly the streets, thus hiding private and wider open space inside the walls. Surrounding the interior open courtyard are always the living rooms, kitchen and enclosed bath/toilet rooms colloquially known as “balytamy”.

In addition to Arab influence in the city’s architecture, there are also unique landmarks and technologies to be attributed to Turkish influence that predated the Ethiopian conquest. For example, as a focal point for providing water wells to the region’s livestock, selling and buying water as a commodity has been a big business for the last three centuries. During Turkish suzerainty of Egypt’s Mohamed Ali, two omnipresent technologies centered on the use of water were introduced into Jigjiga. The first one is the donkey or camel assisted pulley system, which makes the deliverance of water with ease from deep wells into huge containers called Barket, possible. In the large Barket takes place a rudimentary filtration system, thereafter channeling pristine and cleaner water to smaller outlets of Barket in the perimeter of the larger one; from that point on, livestock consume (camels, cows, goats and sheep). Water for residential uses is often collected in a different and protected outlet.

Another unique Turkish/Islamic inheritance that dominated the landscape of the city was a network of Musqaala, or Xamaam (all male bathrooms) systems that proliferated in the town. Surrounded by rich agricultural districts, the town served for generations a market for commodity exchange by outlying farming communities. At any given day, thousands of villagers with products ranging from coffee, Chat, fruits, vegetables, crops, grain, livestock for slaughter/livestock products, and fire wood are exchanged in the markets of Jigjiga. Once business is completed, these villagers as well as working class urbanites use the bathrooms for showering and grooming. Except for women, this network of bathrooms served the city’s residents including but not limited to students, shopkeepers, chat traders, and even in later days, Ethiopian soldiers stationed in the region. In passing, most middle class families maintained medium-sized urban gardens (*bustaan*) where plenty of fig tree fruits, guava, lemon, orange, corn, beans and a host of agricultural products were raised for local consumption.

Although users were initially all Muslims (Somalis, Arabs, and Hararis), the city’s bathrooms have seen a surge of Christian Ethiopians patronizing them in the 1970s, which created subtle cultural conflicts. Muslims use these bathrooms as single-user spaces, whereas Christian males who started patronizing these facilities had the habit of two naked men using one single bathroom, and often scraping one another’s back. Both the owners and Muslim users of said facilities were appalled by the alien behavior exhibited by Ethiopian users.

## Colonization and Political Disorder

The city has been a center of sociopolitical conflict between Ethiopian colonialism and Somalis in the Haud and Reserved Area. In the year 1900s, for example, the Darwish leader, Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, successfully invaded the “Neftienga” settlers who, in the words of Major Swain, author of “Two Trips into Somaliland,” continuously harassed Somalis in the area (see Faisal Roble, Horn of Africa Journal, Vol. number viii, 2011). The defeat of the Darwish ambush in Jigjiga came only after England and Ras Mekonen of Ethiopia coordinated their military efforts to set up a noose to defeat the Darwish leader. At his defeat and while sickly, Ras Mekonen contacted Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan to denounce his war for liberation and humbly accept to become the Ras of Harar, a proposal which the Sayyid consider blasphemous.

Owing to incessant invasions and subjugations, in 1941 and again in 1948, the Geri revolted against Ethiopian occupation, registering the first Somali armed mass revolt with defined political objectives. Those two revolts almost ejected the troops of Haile Selassie out of the region. At about 1948, the Darwish-inspired king of Ajuran, Olol Diinle, also opened up another new front against Ethiopians in the East (It was the Ajuran raids that inherited Ethiopians to settle in hill tops in the region). Forward fast, the movement by Al-nasrulahi started its clandestine organization and practically started an open conflict with Ethiopian authorities 1956, followed by the historic 1963 guerilla warfare lead by the charismatic liberation leader, Garad Makhtal Garad Daahir (New (New York Times, 1965). Since the Anglo-Abyssinian military cooperation against the Darwish fighters, Jigjiga remained not the commercial center that it could have been, but the command and control center for Ethiopia’s occupation and raids against Somalis.

The city’s governor in 1917 was a close kin of Emperor Haile Selassie, a member of the nobility by the name of Fitawarari Takle-Hawariat Takle Mariam. Mr. Takle-Hawariat received his education in Russia and is believed to have later on authored the first Ethiopian constitution in 1931. With that constitution came to the Somali region the first set of social services, despite that the constitution’s implementation policies did not recognize Somalis as Ethiopian, butt as “non-believers,” or “Somaale aramene.” Providing services to Somalis was predicated upon conversion of school-aged children to Christianity.

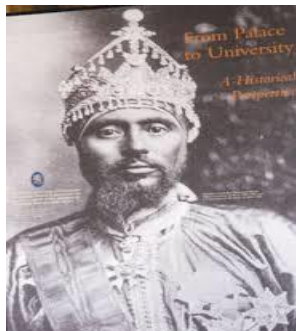
The first school in Jigjiga, (Lual Ras Mekonen Junior), was built in 1930. Soon after, Mr. Takle-Hawariat introduced a new conceptually progressive grid system- based town planning for Jigjiga. The Plan developed by Talke-Hawariat’s design envisioned a city organized around a huge bazar-like commercial center, or “faras magala,” featuring a massive open public space, or “Adabaabay,” dominated by a 15-foot high towering laud



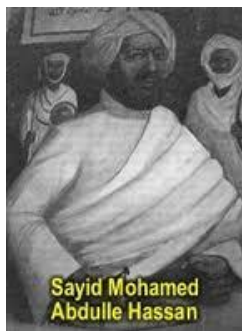
speaker, or Sameecad. At noon and in the early hours of each evening, the city's adult population will come out to the public space in the center of the city, walk, mingle, and listen to the news broadcasted by the towering loudspeaker. Soon, Somali language broadcasting became the only non-Amharic language on air (for an original research on the early history of Jigjiga, see Mohamed Abdi Darbad, a B. A. thesis for Addis Ababa University - 1996).

Jigjiga's comprehensive plan called for commercial buildings facing wide streets, while placing residential quarters away from main boulevards. The Plan was based on the Euclidian zoning concept coupled with the British garden city concept. This indeed was one of the highlights of an era that was otherwise difficult. Because of political instability in the Somali region, most of the policies and goals of Mr. Takle-Hawariate's vision and comprehensive city planning staled for much of its existence.

However, he succeeded to implement his social engineering to settle Oromos in the northwest farming districts of the town, a geographic region known as Bank Diida Waaleed (or the plains of the Geri resistance). Each Oromo family who was resettled in the Somali region was allotted about 49 hectares so that they can farm for the Amhara Neftenghs. Oromo resettlement schemes in Issa, Nagele, Babile and elsewhere have also created today's social conflict between Oromos and Somalis centered on Oromo claim of key Somali districts.



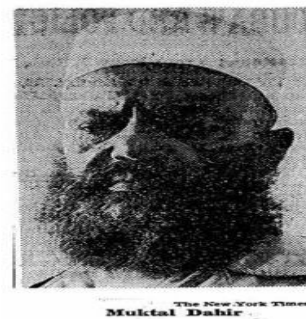
*Ras Mekonen  
Dahir*



*Sayyid Mohamed*



*Haile Sellasie*



*Makhtal*

Despite Grad Ali of the Geri resisting the settlement of Oromos in his country, the Ethiopian government under the auspices of Governor Takle-Hawariate indeed succeeded in his social engineering through coercion and intimidation. A dangerous demographic politics, this public policy today haunts the Somali region and serves as a source for political instability. The first time this demographic bomb erupted was in 1941 and again 1948 through 1957, by unleashing the devastating Geri revolt and the subsequent political riots by the Somali Youth Club (SYC) and Somali Youth League (SYL) (for a

critical analysis of the 1941 and 1948 Geri revolt, see Faisal Roble’s “Critical Evaluation of Tibebe Eshetu’s views).

Although defeated, Somali Geri revolts in the region left behind a cultural repository anchored on resistance and pan-Somali ideology. The hanging of seven Somali freedom fighters in 1957 in the city’s very square planned by Takle-Hawariat sent the most devastating shockwaves into the spines of Somalis in the region, thus strengthening the resolve of the Somalis to fight for their rights and freedom. Political problems associated with socially engineered Oromo settlements in Somali regions still haunts modern Ethiopian political discourse and the body politic of the Somali region in Ethiopia. In 1992, for example, a new conflict flared up between Geri Somali and Oromos over territorial claims and Somali district such as Nagel, Babili, Jinacsani, Hurso, and Diridhabe.

In 1960, Grimame Neway, a precursor to the left’s movement and a graduate of Colombia University, was banished from Addis Ababa to serve as the mayor of Jigjiga; he instantly championed the rights of the Somalis, and openly disapproved the hanging of those freedom fighters four years before assuming his office. It is because of his disapproval of the hanging that he later on befriended “prince Usman”, the prince of the Geri and son of Garad Ali, who fought the Oromo Settlement. Mr. Neway in particular, who was the first left-leaning modern Ethiopian mayor of Jigjiga, is believed to have advocated a populist message -- to reinvest taxes in the very regions that they are collected from, received warm reception from the Somalis. Prior to his administration and thereafter, taxes collected from Jigjiga, which is a substantial amount compared to any region in Ethiopia, were spent in financing developments in Nazret or Haadaame, according to student movement slogans of the 1970s.

Mayor Neway’s proposal to the Imperial court – to bring meaningful development into the Somali region - sat well with Somalis of all stripes, but offended the imperial court of Haile Sellasie” (Faisal Roble, 2010). Mr. Neway’s sympathy with the Somalis plausibly contributed to the urgency of the botched coup he and his brother organized against the late emperor Haile Selassie. In the end, Mr. Neway was captured and condemned to death by public hanging in 1961. Public opinion about Mr. Neway in the Somali region remains strong.

Part III will be published soon.

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## Reference

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<sup>i</sup> This was the first time since the 1940s and 1950s that the Haud and Reserve Area saw such an assembly of many Somali leaders or activists from different geographies of the Somali inhabited beltway of the Horn of Africa.

<sup>ii</sup> To complete the commemoration of the history of the Somalis in the region, a second statue for the seven men who lead the Somali revolt between 1948 and 1957, who later on were condemned to death by public hanging in the City's square (faras magela) in 1957, would positively compliment the statue for Sayyid Mohamed Abdula Hassan (see Hussein Bulhan, Horn of Africa Journal).

<sup>iii</sup> Richard Burton, "First footsteps in Africa,"

IV. for a detailed discussion on Timeline of the development of secular education from 1930 to 201, see The Role of Education in Livelihoods in the Somali Region of Ethiopia", A Report for the BRIDGES Project.

[http://biblio3.url.edu.gt/Libros/2011/the\\_role.pdf](http://biblio3.url.edu.gt/Libros/2011/the_role.pdf) , accessed May 1, 2014