

The Status of Dire Dawa and the Appointment of a Mayor: 1991-2010:Core-Periphery in the City Council

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Abstract

Dire Dawa has been a disputed city starting from the origin and the meaning of the word “Dire Dawa” among the Oromo and Somali ethnic groups. The federal arrangement has brought dispute and claim over territories ownership and ethnic identity. The dispute was transformed to over ownership of the city as of 1991. The purpose of this study was to investigate the legal status of Dire Dawa and the appointment of a mayor from 1991-2010. Its aim was to investigate how the dispute among the Oromo and Somali regional state over the city was solved. To conduct this study, Historical research method was employed. To this end, both primary and secondary sources were employed. The primary sources include oral account (witnesses, participants, officials) and written materials-unpublished reports, and magazines published at the time. Secondary sources from different academic backgrounds were also utilized. All the data were critically examined, corroborated and analyzed. The finding of the study revealed that the status of Dire Dawa remained undecided from May 1991 to 2004 because of dispute between Oromo and Somali over the city. More importantly, it revealed that the identity of Gurgura was disputed between Oromo and Somali ethnic groups. The 1995 constitution left the issue of Dire Dawa unresolved, that is, the city was neither included in the newly established regional states nor given its own status either as a multi-ethnic city or as one of the regional states. Thus, Dire Dawa was ruled by officials appointed by the central government starting from November 1991 up to January 2008. As of 2004, Dire Dawa became a chartered city- as temporary solution and in 2008 established its own Council. The other important finding of the study was the division of power along 4:4:2(which resembles soccer lineup), 40% to Oromo political party; 40% to Somali political party; and the remaining 20% to other political parties after 2008. This meant that these contending parties were given equal share which was manifested in sharing 5 years- into two and a half year for each party, among themselves. This made Dire Dawa the first city in Ethiopia that had a mayor with two and a half years office terms and two mayors in 5 years. Such transfer also holds true for other offices. Furthermore, this arrangement was claimed to have brought the Somali and Oromo to the core. However, within the Somali ethnic groups, in the city council, Issa dominated the core with reserved post of mayor, while Gurgura was peripheralized as restricted to council spokesperson and city manager post. The paper concluded that such division of power could not be compatible to good governance, democratic principles and meet peoples demand. Such arrangement should be abandoned and Dire Dawa need lasting solution.

Key words: Dire Dawa, Gurgura, Oromo, Somali, ethnic group, Periherpy

1. Introduction

“...[S]ince 1993, as per the decision thereof until such a time that the then claims of the Somalia and Oromia regions would be finally resolved; Dire Dawa has been accountable to and directed by the federal government.”¹(Proclamation No.416/2004)

As of 2004, Dire Dawa became one of the two chartered cities (the other being Addis Ababa) in Ethiopia. The city is divided in to two *Woredas*(districts): the city proper which has nine urban *Kebeles*, and the non-urban *Woreda* of Gurgura which consists of 38 rural *kebeles* of Peasant Associations.²

Since its foundation, Dire Dawa has been a commercial and industrial center attracting large groups of people from different corners of the country as well as foreigners.³ In 2007, the city administration announced that the city had a total population of 341,834 of which 233,224 (67.93%) were urban and the remaining 108,610(32.07%) were rural population. The major ethnic groups residing in Dire Dawa administration were Oromo:-156,958, of which 77,103 were urban, Amhara:-68,982 of which 68,962 were urban and Somali: 83,067, of which 54,807 were urban. The major languages spoken in the region have been Afan Oromo, Amharic and Somali. Amharic is the official language of the administration.⁴

Dire Dawa has an estimated total area of nearly 128,802 hectares, out of which 2,928(2.27%) is urban

¹ Federal Negarit Gezeta, “Dire Dawa Government Charter Proclamation, No.416/2004”.Addis Ababa.

²Dire Dawa Administration Council, *Dire-Mikir-Bet*,1st Year (January,2002) p.2

³ Shiferaw Bekele, “ The People of Dire Dawa: Towards a Social History (1902-1936)”, in *Proceeding of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.1. Paris 1994. pp.611-618.

⁴ Dire Dawa Bureau of Finance and Economic Development Policy Study, *Dire Dawa Population Image*,(December, 2010),p.3

while the remaining 97.73% is estimated to be rural. It is bordered on the North, East and West by the Somali National Regional State and on the South by Eastern Hararghe Administrative Zone of the Oromia Regional State.¹

As the above quoted statement shows Dire Dawa was under the direct rule of the Federal Government. This statement, does not, however, show the condition of Dire Dawa from May 1991 to 1993. Before 2004, however, the city was neither included in the newly established regional states nor given its own status either as a multi-ethnic city or as one of the regional states established after 1991. The paper studied why the status of Dire Dawa remained unaddressed and how the mayor of the city was appointed. It was originally conducted as a primary research paper for MA course fulfillment entitled “Core-Periphery in Ethiopian History”. The paper includes the transition period and the transfer of power, (which sheds light on the general condition of Dire Dawa from May 1991 to 2010. In this paper word ‘mayor’ denotes the official appointed by the central government to administer Dire Dawa with various titles such as “chairman” and “Chief Administrator”.

2. Survey of Sources

The study and writing of history is always based on primary sources found in documents or in oral informants. Therefore, to construct the history of Dire Dawa administration, both primary and secondary sources are employed. The primary sources include oral sources (witnesses) and unpublished materials. Secondary sources, such as journal articles and books, produced by different writers from different academic backgrounds were also utilized.

The written primary sources include unpublished reports, and magazines published at the time. These sources are found in what is termed as “the Ethiopian Collection” located in the building, which houses the office of the Mayor. Oral source forms the major group of primary sources. Data from the informants was collected at different times from individuals who witnessed the events, former officials and fighters of Liberation Fronts. The oral sources were critically examined to minimize the bias of the informants.

All these were used to give a relatively complete history of the period under study. Thus, this paper was an original work constructed from the available written primary sources, from witnesses and other relevant sources (with utmost care) to reconstruct a balanced history of the city.

3. The Transition Period (1991-93) and Dire Dawa: A Lesson from the society

This section highlights the general condition of the city from May 1991 to 1993. Following the collapse of the Derg (military regime) in May 1991, Dire Dawa was over flooded by about 60,000 to 70,000 refugees from the Assab administrative region (through Dewelle road), Djibouti, Hurso and Erer.² The situation was accompanied by the collapse of governmental structures, the proliferation of small arms and ammunitions in to the hands of the civilian population. All these problems made the situation of Dire Dawa very frightening.

The forces of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) arrived in Dire Dawa a week after their entry in Addis Ababa. The city was peacefully transferred.³ The former officials, *Master* Abdullahi Sheik Ahimed Bouh and the Mayor Abebe Eshete, having handed over the city to EPRDF, were allowed to continue their work up until November 1991.⁴ Abebe Eshete was Mayor of Dire Dawa from 1981 to 1991, and *Master* Abdullahi was governor of Dire Dawa administrative region (*ras gez astedader*) for the same period. It seems that, by considering the existing situation and the difficulty in maintaining peace and security, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) had chose to work in collaboration with the former officials, the strategy that proved to be effective in buying time for the Transitional Government.

The former officials and the people of Dire Dawa showed extraordinary civility in managing their affairs in a situation of confusion. Thus, the former governor and the mayor organized the city dwellers and helped the refugees to survive those days. Most of the refugees were children, patients, and women who had suffered from food hunger on the journey. The refugees were given shelter in different schools and at different

¹ Dire Dawa Administration Communication Bureau, *Dire Dawa Year Book* of 2010/2011, p. 73.

² Informants: *Ato* Abebe Eshete, and *Master* (ground technician and is known as his title) Abdullahi Sheik Ahmed Bouh. Most of the refugees were ex soldiers about 15,000 from Assab, the 9th regiment from Hurso, civilians from Assab, local people from Hurso and Erer who in fear of OLF and IFLO reprisals.

³ Informants: *Ibid.*, the city was transferred after negotiation was conducted between the EPRDF groups (led by someone named Tewolde) and city officials including *Master* Abdullahi. Tewolde sent a piece of paper from his base at Dengego with preconditions, which is “Do you like war or peace? If you want peace send a group of people to Dengego until 12:00 local time”. After discussing the ultimatum, a group of seven men led by *Master* Abdullahi, governor of the city, went to Dengego. Then, both group agreed on the transfer of the city. Two days later, EPRDF forces entered in to the city in mid night. This was to avoid clashes with the people. Major General Tadesse Worede-Wold was the commander of the insurgent army. In the morning when the residents saw the flag of Ethiopia removed, they protested otherwise, there was no violence.

⁴ Informants: *Ato* Abebe Eshete. He was imprisoned from November 1991 to 1994. *Master* Abdullahi, who had been the governor of the city, was not imprisoned he was rather allowed to join the TGE.

temporary camps. Dire Dawa Comprehensive secondary School in particular hosted a large number of refugees, who burnt all desks and chairs for fuel, as a result the school interrupted its schooling for one year while other schools resumed their normal function. Food shortage was another acute problem. Bread was supplied by 21 bakeries and the people of Dire Dawa, particularly *Edirs*, played a prominent role. The Sabean neighborhood hosted the largest number of refugees who had settled at Cuba camp. The Sabean *edir*, by using its deposit, bought and supplied *Enjera* (Ethiopian pancake like bread) that fed the refugees.¹

The combined effort of the dwellers and the success of the former officials in mobilizing the people and *edirs* helped feed the refugees. The guards (security offices) secured banks, textile factory and cement factory from looting. They were not paid salaries. The railway line also helped not only by bringing Ethiopians from remote areas like Assab to the city but also transported them to their home area, and to Addis Ababa, thus reducing pressure from the city. The city passed those pressures without big problem between the people. Dire Dawa at the time had no traffic light, police forces did not assume their role, but the people of the city cared for each other at least for a year.²

The Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) established peace and stability committees in the country to provide administrative and policing services thereby ensuring the smooth transfer of power from former officials. In such a way, the peace and stability committees took over the administration of Dire Dawa, which was followed by the imprisonment of former officials and the designation of TGE officials as rulers. Accordingly, Habatmu Assefa Wakjira of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO/EPRDF), was appointed as administrator of the city. He ruled from November 1991 to January 1993.³

If the provisions of Proclamation No. 7/1992 were strictly implemented, Dire Dawa could have been delimited either to Oromia or Somali regional states. However, Dire Dawa remained under the federal government due to the dispute over the ownership of the city. In other words, officials who administered Dire Dawa were appointed by the central government.

In any case, Dire Dawa was ruled by officials appointed by the central government starting from November 1991 up to January 1993. From January 1993 up to 1995, the provisional administration was established according to article 2(5) of Proclamation No. 7/1992 with the agreement of the claimants-the Oromo and Somalis.⁴ However, the disagreement between and inability of officials of the Oromo and Somali ethnic groups to work together, compelled the Federal government to appoint the chief official of the city from outside of these ethnic groups starting from 1995. Solomon Hailu (an Amhara) was, therefore, appointed as chairman of the city. Solomon Hailu served as chairman of the city from 1995-2003.⁵

The 1995 constitution left the issue of Dire Dawa unresolved. The status of Dire Dawa was not decided: it was not included as one federal state in the 1995 constitution, there was no self administration for Dire Dawa, and the administration council was established by the federal government. After the 1995 constitution, different proclamations issued by the federal government were explained as applicable to Dire Dawa as well. In proclamations, the term Region (*kilil*) included Dire Dawa administration.⁶

In 2004, Dire Dawa became a chartered city. According to article 55(2) of the (Charter) proclamation, Dire Dawa Provisional Council was established as a caretaker administration to pave ground for the expected city administration to be established later. Fiseha Zerihun was therefore appointed as the "chief Administrator" who ruled the city up until 2006. It was during this transitional period that the major institutional issues, administrative structures, boundary issues were implemented. From August 2006 onwards the title of officials was changed to "mayor" with Abdulaziz Mohammed being the last of the administrator appointed by the Federal government.⁷

In 2008, Dire Dawa established its own Council. The members of the council were elected by election conducted on April 12, 2008 and the Council was established on June 13, 2008 with Adem Farah (2008-2010) becoming the first mayor elected from the Council elected by the people of Dire Dawa.⁸ Dire Dawa thus was

¹ Informants: *Ibid.*; W/o Etetu Tadese, W/o Tigist Bekele

² Informants: *Ibid.*, Ato Habtamu Assefa. Dire Dawa has no traffic light. It was in 1984 E.C that they started to install traffic light. The first traffic light was inaugurated in 1986 E.C by Habtamu Assefa. This traffic light is a source of pride of Habtamu for who considers it as a fine achievement of his administration.

³ Informant: Ato Habtamu Assefa.

⁴ Habtamu Assefa Wakjira, a member of OPDO, was appointed ruler of Dire Dawa from November 1991 to January 1993; From January 1993 to 1995, Ismail Aw Adem (Gugura) was chairman, Mahmud Ahmed Bouh (Issa), was vice-chairman, and Habtamu was made vice manager of the Economic and Social Affairs Office.

⁵ Informants: Master Abdullahi, Ato Yoseph Getachew, Ato Alemayehu Teshome.

⁶ Federal Negarit Gazetta, "Environmental Protection Organs Establishment Proclamation", Proclamation No.295/2002; "Animal Disease Prevention and Control Proclamation", No.267/2002; "Chambers of Commerce and Sectorial Association Establishment Proclamation", No.341/2003, are some of the examples.

⁷ Informants: Master Abdullahi, *Dire Dawa Communication Year Book* 2010/2011, PP.9-15

⁸ *Dire-Mikir Bet*, P.5, 17

ruled by officials appointed from the central government from 1991 to 2008.

One can raise the question of what is unique with this situation? What is the impact of being placed under the rule of the federal government which was stronger than regional governments? What does this mean to the status of Dire Dawa? In this paper the status of Dire Dawa has been treated in line with legal framework.

4. Dire Dawa and Different Armed Groups

The collapse of the military regime witnessed the mushrooming of ethnic based political groups which called themselves organizations, movements or fronts. Such organizations posed a strong challenge to EPRDF's administration in their respective localities. Eastern Ethiopia in general and Dire Dawa in particular were areas where different ethnic based political groupings were engaged in violent armed conflict with the EPRDF led forces of the TGE.¹

In 1991, more than a dozen parties established their head quarters in Dire Dawa.² In addition to the EPRDF, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO) had their presence in the city. The EPRDF had a bloody encounter with the Issa and Gurgura Liberation Front (IGLF) who had refused to recognize EPRDF's right to keep security in the Issa populated areas in eastern Ethiopia, including Dire Dawa. There was a bloody clash between government forces and IGLF particularly on October 4, 1991, and the IGLF refusal continued to early 1992.³ Consequently, the defiant IGLF fought against EPRDF forces in Dire Dawa along the road from *Sabean to Melka Jebdu*. The IGLF was defeated in this fight and as a result it was forced to limit its activities to its camp at Erer.⁴

The fight between EPRDF forces and OLF forces in Dire Dawa was fresh in the memory of many town dwellers. There were casualties from both sides in Dire Dawa in November 1991.⁵ Furthermore there were clashes between OLF and IFLO, and EPRDF troops between Jigjiga and Dire Dawa which put eastern Ethiopia generally in a very insecure state for about a year, between June 1991 and June 1992.⁶ After the defeat of IFLO and OLF by the TGE troops in eastern Ethiopia and IGLF in Dire Dawa, the city remained a bone of contention between Oromia and Somali regional states which was feared to have degenerated in to widespread ethnic conflict over the question of ownership. Dire Dawa was also at the center of Somali political parties set together to form Somali regional state like other regional states established to represent their respective people.

5. Rivalry over Dire Dawa among the Somali Political Parties

Dire Dawa was also the point of disagreement among different Somali political organizations that formed the Somali Regional State (Region 5). The Somali regional state of Ethiopia was formed by the coalition of two groups: the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) representing the Ogaden clan, and the organization of other non-Ogadeni Somali clans.⁷

Before and soon after the creation of Somali regional state in 1993, there was debate concerning the choice of the capital of the region. The contest was between Dire Dawa, Jigjiga and Gode. The Non-Ogaden clans that formed coalition with the ONLF wanted Dire Dawa to be the seat of the Somali regional government to avoid political domination by the Ogadenis and warned that they would withdraw from the coalition unless Dire Dawa was made the seat.⁸

The first conference of Region 5 which was held in Dire Dawa on January 21, 1993, announced the

¹ Edmond J. Keller, "Ethnic Federalism, Fiscal Reform, Development and Democracy in Ethiopia," *African Association of Political Science*, Vol. 7, No.1 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002) p.29

² Informants: *Ato Abebe Eshete, Master Abdullahi, Tobias Hogmann and Mohamud H. Khalif*, "State and Politics in Ethiopia's Somali Region since 1991 Vol,6 (Bildhan,2006) There were more than 13 organizations claiming to represent the Somalis, and the IFLO and OLF represented the Oromos. The detail of the Somali parties are attached in the Appendix of the paper

³ Thomas P. Ofcansky, "Ethiopia Introduction", The Library of Congress Country Studies(September 10,1993) p.7 [http://workmail.com/wfb2001/Ethiopia/ethiopia history introduction.html](http://workmail.com/wfb2001/Ethiopia/ethiopia%20history%20introduction.html)

⁴ Informants: *Ato Habtamu Assefa, Ato Mohammed Ibro* who underlined that he was one of the IGLF fighters who engaged in the fight with EPRDF. According to him, the casualties on the side of the EPRDF was more than 240 fighters but remained unclear on the number of casualties on the IGLF side. However, he stated the defeat of their front and the IGLF and EPRDF eventually reconciled and agreed to work together.

⁵ Theodore M. Vestal, *Ethiopia, Post Cold War African State* (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999) P.25; Ofcansky, p. 7; Informants: the people of Dire Dawa recall the urban fighting between OLF and EPRDF; they specifically mention the place of fight (for example beneath *Wegagan Bank, Ras Hotel*)

⁶ Koenraad Van Brabant, "Bad Borders Make Bad Neighbors: The Political Economy of Relief and Rehabilitation in the Somali Region 5, Eastern Ethiopia" *Relief and Rehabilitation Network Paper-4* (London: Overseas Development Institute, September, 1994) p. 13.; Ofcansky, p.7.

⁷ Hogmann *et al*, pp. 27-28; Informants: *Master Abdullahi, Ato Abebe Eshete, Ato Habtamu Assefa, DAL, GLF, ILF, RBPP, JDM, EGDO, UDP, JPLF, SPDM, USL, HDF*, the detail of each party is attached on the Appendix of the paper.

⁸ "Y> AESA@ G@)@CE| ½wCEX-ú -ú³Bq" ½™δQÿ` «Æ (*Horn Of Africa*), 1st year, No 6, April, 1993, pp. 21,22.

choice of Dire Dawa as the seat of Region 5.¹ The inaugural speech made by the first president of the Region, Abdullahi Mohammed Sadi (an Ogadeeni) and the decision of the conference invited the direct intervention of the TGE, particularly the then President Meles Zenawi who ruled against it.² Consequently, the Somali regional state was moved to Gode (now Jigjiga is the capital of the regional state) and temporarily it ended the question of Dire Dawa as capital. However, the dispute over the ownership has continued between the Oromia and Somali regional states.

In this way Dire Dawa was used as a means of balancing power between the Ogaden Somali group and other non-Ogaden Somali parties that later on formed the Ethiopian Somali Democratic League (ESDL). The ESDL was formed in February 1994, at the Hurso Conference.³ In June 1998 the ESDL merged with legal ONLF and formed the Ethiopian Somali People's Democratic Party (ESPDP).⁴ Dire Dawa, which was used as a precondition of negotiation to form Somali regional state among the Somali parties in addition to balancing power, was also employed by using Gurgura as a check of balance between the Somali regional state and Oromia regional state.

6. Dire Dawa and Gurgura: Disputed Territory and Identity

Territorial claim also involved identity claims. The Oromos and Somalis disputed over the identity of the Gurgura clan. It is important to shed light on how the Gurgura were identified and administratively categorized during the military regime before moving in to the present condition.

During the imperial regime, Gurgura was one of the two *woredas* (the other Kersa *woreda*) of Dire Dawa *awraja* (sub-province). The seat of Gurura *woreda* was the city of Dire Dawa According to 1951 report of Ministry of Interior, Gurgura *woreda* was populated by Nolle, Alla, Obera, Meta and Gurgura, and were generally referred as children of Kallo-Oromo. However, this report stated that Gurgura was descendant of Dir-Somali but adopted by Nolle.⁵ During the military regime, Dire Dawa and its environs were administratively known as Issa and Gurgura *awraja*. The *Awraja* had two *Woredas* (equivalent to District) Gurgura *Woreda* and Error *Woreda*. The capital of Gurgura *Woreda* was Dire Dawa itself while Error was that of Error *Woreda*. The Gurgura *Woreda* was inhabited by Oromo and Issa. The Error *Woreda* was dominantly populated by Issa, Oromo, Gurgura and Amhara with Somali language, Afan Oromo, and Amharic as the major languages spoken by these nationalities respectively. The city of Dire Dawa was dominated by Oromo, Amhara, Issa, Adare (Harari) and Gurage ethnic groups.⁶ In other words, the presence of Gurgura in the city of Dire Dawa was not recognized and the language of the Gurgura in Error was Afan Oromo as the 1987 summary of survey of population, natural resources and economy of rural and urban population of Eastern Ethiopia has revealed.⁷

The Gurguras under the current administrative arrangement were the inhabitants of the rural areas of Dire Dawa Administrative Council named as the Rural Gurgura *Woredas*. The Gurgura clan was used as rational for both the Oromia and Somali regional states to claim Dire Dawa. This section discusses the main point of argument forwarded by both regions and the identity of the Gurugra.

The contention between the Oromos and the Somalis over Dire Dawa can be traced back to early periods, long before the establishment of Oromia and Somali regional states. These peoples were in contest over Dire Dawa starting from the etymology of the name itself. Although disputed by the Somalis, the Oromos claim the name of the town (Dire Dawa) to have its origin in their language. In their language, depending on the pronunciation of the initial sound of the word "Dawa", it means either "a plain of medicine" or "a plain of fight".⁸ So in both cases the meaning of the town reveals an Oromo word with the plain of fight being accepted

¹ *Ibid.*; Informants: Ato Habtamu, Master Abdullahi.

² "½™δQŸ`«Æ (Horn Of Africa)", pp.21-22; Hogmann *et al*, p, 28, ; Master Abdullahi; According to Ato Habtamu who attended the ceremony: in his inaugural speech, the president of the region made a statement that assert the independence of Region 5 by giving thanks for Ethiopia, for the hospitality of Ethiopian during the time of crisis by adding that " hence forth, Ethiopia and we will be good neighbors."

³ Ofcansky, p.15, more than 11 parties representing the Ishaq, the Issa, the Gurgura, the Gerri, the Rer Barre, the Hawiye, the Dulbahante, the Majerteen, the Jidwak, the Shekash, and the Marhen took part in this conference. ;Hogmann, p.30.

⁴ Hogmann. p.30; Master Abdullahi; Information obtained from Somali Peoples Democratic Party.; "½™δQŸ`«Æ" (Horn Of Africa); pp. 21,22. The founding members of the ESDL were notable personalities like Dr. Abdulmajid Hussein, Abdureshid Dualne, Shemsudin Ahmed, Dr. Mohammed Sarhaye and Ambassador Mohammad Dirrir.

⁵ National Library and Archival Agency: "Y> ÑL ³T³T" Folder, 203, File No. 17.17.15.06. *Mimeographed*.

⁶ oG©»?- ø?« q:ýR- çGû{ é _op| ½HYRe ™ü|Áá¿ ½ø?« `Ó !o»wG o-ŌÄ ÍÓP jð@ ½wÁOÍ wÖÖR- ™üç Gû¿- G`oR- Ö | GÓc>¿ 1977: BOT Gû¿±ü¿ 1979 (The Office of Central Planning Committee, The Plan district of Eastern Ethiopia, April 1987, Harar.) pp.10,19,101,102

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The tow meanings result from the utterance of the initial sound in the word "Dawa" either as voiced, alveolar stop or as its implosive counterpart. That is when the initial sound is uttered with voiced, alveolar stop, it has the meaning "Medicine"; on the other hand, when the initial sound is realized as the implosive counterpart of the first speech sound, it gives a meaning that is equivalent to the English word "fight".

as the meaning of Dire Dawa.¹

On the other hand, the Somalis claim that the first to settle in Dire Dawa were the Gurgura Somali who named the city “*Dire Dhabe*” or Dire Dawa which means in Somali language “the place where *Dir* conquered or hit with his spear”.² For the Gurguras the meaning of the word has been “the plain of fight” which has an Oromo meaning.³ The dispute over the meaning of the word “Dire Dawa” has continued and will continue to be point of debate.

The claim got more impetus by the transitional period proclamation No.7/1992 definition given for the nation, nationality and peoples, and the criteria to delimit the boundary between the newly established regional states.⁴ Accordingly, these criteria were drawn by the claimants to justify their claim and brought the Gurgura in to the political scene of Dire Dawa thereby playing a role of balancing power among the claimants. It seems that securing the identity of Gurgura to either side means greater probability of winning the claim.

The Somalis, who were not happy with the Gurguras acceptance of the meaning of the word Dire Dawa in Afan Oromo, relied on counting the genealogy of the Somali clan families to denote that the Gurgura belonged to a Somali clan. Accordingly, the Issa and Gurgura were found to have common descent. The Gurguras, on their side, accepted the meaning of the name of the city to mean “*plain of fight*” and the Somali origin of their ancestors; hence the Gurgura would belong to Somali, even the oldest brother of Issa. This position of the Gurgura helped both Oromia and Somali regional states to pursue more and more the inclusion of Gurgura and the city in to their respective region.

The Oromia regional state justified its claim by taking the long lasting relationship between the Nolle Oromos and the Gurguras: the language. The Gurguras dominantly speak Afan Oromo. The contest between the two regions was intensified by activities related to the June 1992 election. Accordingly, the Oromia regional state election board launched awareness creation for the electors thereby announcing that the transitional Election Board would delimit Dire Dawa in to Oromia for the forthcoming election. This decision was protested by the Somalis through a series of demonstrations held in the city which was feared to have created a potential ethnic violence. As a result, the June 1992 election and the decision to include Dire Dawa to Oromia were suspended. In any case, Dire Dawa was shaken by a series of demonstrations held by the Oromo and the Somalis day after day.⁵

7. Dire Dawa: “A PLAIN Of [IDENTITY] FIGHT”: The Gurgura

Even though it is beyond the scope of this paper to write about the identity of the Gurgura, I found it imperative to include important points underlined by different groups over the identity of Gurgura and by the Gurgura themselves.

The Somalis and the Oromos equally debated over Gurgura identity. The Oromos claimed that the Gurguras belonged to the Oromo while the Somalis claimed that the Gurguras were Somali. The Somalis have several clans and clans confederations of which the Darod and the Dir are among the major ones. Each has its own sub clans that further brokdown into numerous lineage segments.⁶ The Issa are the second largest Somali clan in Ethiopia, after the Ogaden. The Ogaden belong to the Darod confederations. The Issa clan belongs to the Dir clan families which are further divided into three major sub-clan families.⁷ They occupy Shinile zone in the Somali regional state - north of Dire Dawa but share the city with all other Ethiopian nationalities.⁸ Dire Dawa was the seat for the last two Issa “Ugases” or the spiritual leader of the entire Issa clan, who was chosen only

¹ Informants: Ato Mohamad Amin,; Ato Jemal Yuya,; Information on the meaning of Dire Dawa has survived orally among the Oromos with various version-“*plain of medicine*”. However, the Oromos seem satisfied with the status-quo and accepted the ‘fight’ version.

² Informants: Somali elders

³ Informants: Haji Yusuf, Aliyi Umar Ibrahim, Mohammed Ibro.

⁴ Proclamation No. 7/1992, Article 2(7) defines the term “Nation, Nationality or Peoples” to mean “a people living in the same geographical area and having a common language and a common psychological make up of identity” CF article 39 (5) of the 1995 FDRE constitution.

⁵ Informants: Ato Habtamu, Ato Mohammad Abdullahi: Dire Dawa was first included in the Oromia Regional State. Regarding this point, most of the Somali groups refused to accept such decision made in favor of Oromia. In addition I cannot get the written document about the decision of Election Board, however, except some Somalis all informants agree on the decision of the city to be under Oromia.

⁶ Patrick Gilkes, “Somalia Conflicts within and against the Military Regime”, *Review Of African Political Economy*, Vol. 44, 15 years on(Taylor & Francis.Ltd,1989) p.53.

⁷ Peter J Schrader, “Ethnic Politics in Djibouti: From ‘Eye of the Hurricane’ to ‘Boiling Caulddron’”, *Journal of African Affairs*, Vol.92, No. 367(April, 1993), p.206. The Issa are divided into three major clans, two of which are further subdivided into several sub clans. The Abgal clan, the Dalol clan and the Wardick clan.

⁸ John Markakis, “Anatomy of Conflict: Afar and Ise[a] of Ethiopia”, *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol.30, No.97(September 2003), 447; Van Brabant, P.14

from the Wardick family.¹ The Somalis therefore, claimed Dire Dawa to them.

According to the Somalis, the Gurgura is another Somali clan that belongs to the Dir clan family. The Issa and Gurgura share common descent-Dir. Gurgura is son of Madawoine Dir while Issa is the son of Madobe Dir. Gurgura is the eldest son. The Gurgura have three major sub-clans of which two are further divided in to three families and the remaining one sub-clan is divided in to two lineages forming a total of eight lineages. The first sub-clan (called the Sadan[three]-Libano) consists of the Gufatile, Saseniya and Sanchule lineages. The second sub-clan named Quwahide includes Nibidor, Bi'ida and Galwaq lineages. The third, Kunduble sub-clan consists of Ali and Abdul lineages.² However, the document of the 1950s on Gurgura lineages had some divergence from the above counted genealogy by the Gurgura spiritual representative. Accordingly, the Gurgura was divided in to two main clans namely Dudub and Dar. Dudub was divided in to two major lineages namely Quwahide and Libano (the subdivisions of the two are similar with the aforementioned lineages). Dar on the other had one lineage named kunduble. Kunduble was further divided in to Diyal and Awargab lineage segments.³ It is therefore on the last two lineages of kunduble that difference occurred.

The Gurguras have their own "Ugas" like other Somali clans. The "Ugas" has been chosen from the three-Libano clan family.⁴ According to Haji Yusuf, the Gurguras had reached their 52nd "Ugas" who died before five months. The next "Ugas" would be the 53rd chief. In the absence of an "Ugas" (due to death), they have the "Gurgura Ugas Committee" composed of eight elderly persons chosen one from each eight families of the Gurguras. This committee also works with "Ugas" and the "Ugas committee" would have nine members. This committee is assisted by an additional body of 16 individuals, two individuals being chosen from each family. The "Ugas Committee" is the ultimate decision maker and in the absence of "Ugas", the chairman of the "Ugas" committee works as the highest person acting as "Ugas".⁵ By analyzing this tradition of appointing and choosing the "Ugas" which is the tradition of the Somali, it is possible to infer that the Gurgura belong to the Somali clan.

The Oromo on the other hand claim that the Gurgura are Oromo because of their adoption by the Nolle Oromo. The Gurguras themselves underline that they had long period of friendly and brotherly relationship with the Oromos. The friendly relationship that had existed between these two groups survived as parts of the oral tradition of the Gurgura.⁶

Unlike other Somali clans, the Gurgura are predominantly settled agriculturalists. Due to sedentary agriculture, they have intermarried with the people near whom lived, particularly with the Oromo. As a result they adopted Afan Oromo. However, there are Gurguras (those who live in around Shinile zone of Somali Region) who speak Somali language. In general the Gurguras speak both Afan Oromo and Somali language.⁷

The Gurguras openly states that, before 1991, they considered themselves as "Oromo-Nolle".⁸ The tradition of brotherliness and the sedentary way of life, greater degree of intermarriage and the adoption of Afan Oromo by the Gurgura brought the assimilation of the Gurgura into Oromo culture.⁹ They definitely identified

¹ *Ibid.*

² Informants: Haji Yusuf Ibrahim Boru, chairman of the Ugas Committee of the Gurgura, Ato Usman Ahmed- member of ESPDP, Ato Aliyi Umar Ibrahim member of the former IGLF.

³ National Archival and Library Agency, *Sile Gosa Zirzir*

⁴ Informants: *Ibid.* The choice of a new "Ugas" is conducted according to Gurgura tradition which initially nominates three persons from each family of the three-libano. These individuals are believed to be free of adultery, having fear of God and treat others equally. Once the three men are selected, they would be put under sun shine for certain days until cloud comes and the shadow of the cloud clouded on one of the three. The one shadowed by the cloud would be accepted and blessed as Ugas. The whole activities of choosing new "Ugas" have been assisted by the Kunduble clan family. The kunduble are well known and respected for their praying and receiving immediate impulse from God. As the position of "Ugas" has been left for the three-Libano, the task of choosing, praying and blessing for the whole Gurgura is undisputed task of the Kunduble clan family.

⁵ Informants: *Ibid* of note 35.

⁶ Informants: *Ibid*; Ato Jemal Yuya, Ato Mohammed Amin: According to the tradition of both Oromos and Gurgura, the relation between Gurgura and Nolle Oromo could be traced back to earlier periods. The relation started as a form of coalition against the enemies of the Gurgura. The Gurguras were fighting against the Babelle, Alla, Oromo clans. The Gurgura had asked the Nolle to help them fight the enemies and the Nolle helped the Gurgura. They defeated the enemies and from that time the Gurgura and Nolle considered themselves as brotherhoods and the Gurguras identified themselves as Nolle.

⁷ Informants: Haji Yusuf, Mohammad Abdullahi Ahmed, Aliyi Umar,

⁸ Informants: Haji Yusuf,"the reason for shifting to Somali identity was the provocation made by Oromo Liberation Front(OLF). That OLF explained that "the minorities like Gurgura are the obstacles for the freedom of Oromia and Oromos, and the solution is to eliminate all these minorities". From that moment onwards, the Gurguras felt as deserted by the Oromo Organization which the Gurguras believed could have represented the Gurguras as well. However, as the researcher understand this justification hardly acceptable because it is a kind of finding plausible reason based on the understanding of the political wind of the time.

⁹ As the researcher observed all of the Gurguras I met at Haji Yusuf's house, speaks Afan Oromo including the Haji Yusuf himself. I also observed at the Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP) office, the use of Afan Oromo by rural Gurgura farmers in their written application letter submitted to the office. Date of observation 12/03/12.

themselves as Oromos. This notion was strong among the Afan Oromo speaking Gurguras. They used to call themselves Gurgura than Somali.

The Oromos who claimed the Gurguras as Oromo felt that the Gurguras had deserted them. In any case, the Gurguras were then dragged between the Somali and Oromo ethnic groups. The Gurguras themselves made their ethnic position unclear because they claimed that culturally they (the Gurguras) belonged to the Oromo and genealogically to the Somali ethnic groups. This might be because of the ethnic federal arrangement that created ethnicity as a key point for individuals and groups to enter into power circles thereby securing access to resources. The dispute over Gurgura identity came to an end in favor of Somali (at least formally) even though the Oromos still doubt the Gurgura identity. On the other hand, the debate over the ownership of Dire Dawa still remains unresolved.¹ The next section discusses the impact of this dispute over the city, and how the issue was addressed by the Federal Government.

8. The Appointment of Officials and its Impact on a City of Dire Dawa

Due to the dispute over the city, the legal status of Dire Dawa remained undetermined even by the 1995 constitution. The major reason for this has been the dispute raised between Oromia and Somali regional states over the ownership of the city.

The claim has resulted in fear of potential violence and ethnic conflict that caused the city to be designated a federally administered city. Dire Dawa had no representatives in the House of Federation, because it is not a regular federal unit, but a multi-ethnic administrative region where the administration was directly responsible to the federal government.² Hence, Dire Dawa began to be run by a council formed directly by the central government.

The “Dire Dawa Provisional Administration” which was established in January 1993 remained in charge up to January 1995. The title of the official was “chairman”.³ From 1995 to 2003 the name of city administration was changed from “Provisional Administration” to “Dire Dawa Administration Council” with the title “chairman” continuing to be used to the administrator. From 2003 to 2006, the administrator was entitled “Chief administrator” with the name of city administration changed to “Dire Dawa Provisional Administration”. From August 2006 onwards, the title of the administrator was changed to that of “mayor”.

The Dire Dawa Administrative Council was a regional administrative unit for the local administration. It had three tier administrative structure-the regional administration council, the 4 Higher (*kefitegna*) Administrations (which were equivalent to *Woreda* level administration), and 25 *kebele* administrations which were the smallest unit in the administration hierarchy. The higher decision making bodies and the overall coordination of urban management functions was carried out by the regional administration council which was formerly undertaken by the municipality. In other words, after the disintegration of the municipal structure (municipality), the responsibility of the urban administration fell directly on the administrative council.⁴

The undecided status of Dire Dawa had a negative impact on effective urban development plans and actions. It also affected the municipality and city administration. Many problems related to good governance and development were pointed out due to the absence of a legal framework.⁵ Lack of legal framework resulted in many interrelated problems including wide range of overlapping and duplication of duties with various government agencies, lack of clear definition of power with respect to the prevailing order, and lack of legal framework to pass laws related to the city. These problems created difficulties that hindered the development of the city which in turn deprived good governance that resulted from the undefined status of Dire Dawa. These problems were believed to have affected not only the city and its dwellers but also the people of neighboring Oromia and Somali regional states and the eastern region in general.

¹ Informants: Mohammed Abdullahi, Hajji Yusuf, Aliyi Umar: the Oromos have accepted the identity of Gurgura as Somali after a long meeting involving Nolle, Issa, Alla, Jarso, Babilie and Obora which lasted for four months. By that meeting the Gurguras are identified as Somali. This idea though needs verification, I wrote it as it is presented by the Chair Man of the Gurgura, because he is representing the whole Gurgura clans.

² Lovise Aalen, “Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000”, *Report R 2002:2* (Norway, Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute of Development Studies and Human Rights), p.4.

³ This arrangement was made in accordance with article 5 of proclamation No.7/1992.

⁴ ‘*ÆS Fä#209;#209;*’ (Dire-Magazine), Year 2, No.2. Biannual, January 2007, pp.9, 10, 17. ; Dire Dawa, “Dire Dawa PINA (Problem Identification and Need Assessment) Study” 1998?, p.21.

⁵ There are unpublished draft materials presented to the city people of which I benefited a lot. ”>ÆSÄ® »wG TMYwÄÄT ½fTWT ouÆ« »eÆ ½ÆSÄ® »wG FYwÄÆT »«ÄÎ >GÄRÊ| ÎT ½wçç±ú ½DÐ G®ñ... >FeOâ ½w±ÏÈ” QEBWp 1995 ”_H ; ”ÆSÄ® fTWT ³ÐË| ÎT owçç± oGûCEWú ÜqÖ... ?Á >¬úÄÄ| FCE\ ½`Oo” by Bekalu Tilahun Sepiember, 2004, Addis Ababa. ; ”½ÆSÄ® TMYwÄÄT fTWT T®Ë >GqRR| ½w±ÏÈ T®ÛT FÐ>Ú” ;ÄT.1996 EC, Addis Ababa, (November 2003); Dire Dawa PINA study, Ministry of Federal Affairs,; Dire Dawa Development and Improvement Project Office(DDDIPO), September 2003.

the urban center and the rural Oromo people almost double the rural Somali people of the administration.¹

A careful examination of a 40:40:20 formula can give a good insight to the political arrangement. In other words, the addition of 40% allotted for OPDO and the remaining 20 % allotted for other EPRDF groups simply bring 60 % for EPRDF over that of 40% of ESPDP. This means, the city government of Dire Dawa could have been established by OPDO/EPRDF alone without a coalition given the electoral law of Ethiopia that allows the establishment of government with a 50+1 majority in the parliament and in the case of Dire Dawa in the council.

Some commentators suggest that it is to payback the 2005 worth of the ESPDP that EPRDF has pursued such political strategy. In 2005 election, Dire Dawa was divided in to two electoral poll. In one electoral poll EPRDF was defeated by the then strong opposition party named Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD). The remaining poll was won by ESPDP. It was this victory and loyalty of ESPDP members that helped EPRDF to claim leadership over the city. The Oromos on their side again were not on the side of EPRDF in 2005 election. It is again to avenge for their switch in to opposition parties other than OPDO among the Oromo ethnic groups of the city.

There is difference in forming the core of power among the Somali themselves. The Oromos are the periphery within the core of Dire Dawa administration. The Somalis are at the center of the core particularly the Issa clan than the Guruguras. The Gurguras were not happy by the domination of the Issa which appears to be not historically belonging to the city. There is clear shift of power in favor of Issa Somalis than Gurgura. This is because the Issa “Ugas” is living in big compound protected by guards while the Gurgura “Ugas” is living in his own home without guard. The city manager and the council’s spoke persons position has been assigned for the Gurguras.²

The paradox in self administration of the city people is the appointment of Mayors and managers from the ESPDP and OPDO personnel from the Oromia and Somali regions which were not familiar with Dire Dawa even though the charter states the self administration of the city. Dire Dawa has not been free from the influence of the two regions. Even the city council is responsible to the Prime Minister.

The analysis of the existing situation denotes marginalization of the urban natives. The native Oromo children of Dire Dawa are peripheralized from the appointment and leadership of the city. This can be inferred by analyzing the former and the reigning ruling staff of the city: Abdulaziz Mohamed former mayor-from Haromaya, Bahar Amme former city manager from Haromaya, Assad Ziyad the reigning mayor from Hirna. It is only Adem Farah –Issa Somali born and grown in Dire Dawa, who was chosen and served mayor of the city from 2008 to 2010/2011.

Dire Dawa as a multi-ethnic city should be open at least for native children of the city from other ethnic background. Even though the Oromo ethnic group in general is drawn in to the core of the city administration, there is marginalization of native Oromos of the city of Dire Dawa. Moreover, there is marginalization of the native of the city outside of Oromos and Somalis who in relative terms are allowed to rule the city. There is marginalization of Christians in the city council. Out of 189 members of the Council only 31 are listed with Christian names (including Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant).³

The existing political situation has an adverse effect on the city. The Somali mayor has to set plans that best benefits the Somalis within that two and half terms of office and the Oromo mayor in his turn is also expected to do the same thing. This means to draw two development plans for this city to be implemented in five years. The office works therefore, is not properly running because of the competition and commitment of the two groups for their respective ethnic groups. The city is again noted for its widespread corruption among officials. Some former officials of the city are now in jail.⁴ The city is characterized by lack of stable leadership. There is frequent change of leaders in the city which in turn affected the effective execution of administrative and municipal tasks.

In general, there is a discrepancy between what is stated in the charter and what is there on ground. The objective realities seem that the establishment of the council has been for the incorporation of different political groups feared to have created problems if they are peripheralized. The content of the charter is almost good but the political implementation has illicit ignorance of the charter. For example, the charter states that the city manager is a qualified person employed but none of the managers so far came to the office are employed but

¹ Central Statistics Agency, Population size of Dire Dawa by Nations, Nationalities and place of residence 2007, p. 10. The total number of rural Oromo population is 78,153 almost as double as 39,773 of the Somali. Out of the total 341,834 population of Dire Dawa administration, 258, 765 are non Somali ethnic groups.

² This can be inferred from studying the back of City Manager and spokes persons so far appointed to this post. Mr. Abdulaziz Ahmed Spokesman, Mrs. Biftu Mohammed also spokesperson; City Manager, Mr. Behar Ame. Cf *Dire-Mikir Bet-*

³ *Dire-Mikir Bet*:pp.28-33.; One can infer this simply by studying the list of individuals written down on the magazine. According to CSA, 2007, Analytical report, p.7; Christians of all sects accounts 28.9 % of the population size of Dire Dawa.

⁴ The former manager of the city named Bahar Amme is in prison. There are others who are in jail and others escaped to other countries.

appointed.¹

Conclusion

The status of Dire Dawa has shown the inclusion of groups-Gugura which once whose existence in the city of Dire Dawa was not mentioned, in to the center of power at least in their local areas. On the other hand, the difficulty in resolving the status of Dire Dawa, illustrates the regional, clan, and ethnic conflicts that followed the new administrative arrangement and suggests some of the difficulties in devolving power to local administration. There are greater opportunities for the city to develop and secure good governance. The region at present is capable to develop clear vision with respect to the typical urban development duties and functions and has the authority to issue proclamations and other important enactments related to the city.

There are again challenges in addition to those discussed so far. This is the unsettled boundary with Somali regional state. Dire Dawa is an enclave surrounded to a greater part by the Shinile zone of the Somali Regional state and is the seat of Shinile zonal administration. There is dispute between Somali regional state and Dire Dawa administration over claim of a plot of land let alone the entire city of Dire Dawa. The compound of Dire Dawa University for instance has been claimed by the Shinile zone and has jeopardized building and construction in the area. It could have been greater help for the development of Dire Dawa if Shinile town has been delimited to the city. The charter is not a final solution but has been designed as a temporary solution until the final decision on the claim would be given. Therefore there is greater opportunity in remedying the existing problem of the city.

Before taking certain activities, one should look on different angles. Considering the socio-economic development level, historical and administrative experience and the way ethnic, religious and political conflicts were handled in determining the status of regions and cities would be a better way to bring common understandings among different ethnic groups living together in Dire Dawa areas.

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List of Informants

Abdullaihi Mohammed Bouh, he is commonly known as “Master” for he is ground technician. He was governor of Dire Dawa from 1981-1991. Interviewed at his office in Magalla on Garad Building on different days.
Abebe Eshete. Age 71, former mayor of Dire Dawa from 1981-1991 and now lives in Ganda-qore. Interviewed in his home on 28th of February, 2012 afternoon from 8:00 -12:00 local time.
Aliyi Umar Ibrahim. Age 71. He was former fighter of IGLF and had been soldier of the Military regime for eight years from 1982-1990. Interviewed at Haji Yusuf’s house on the 16th of March 2012.
Etetu Tadessee. Age 60. She has been member of Ketena (district) one of Sabean *Edir* and now lives in Sabean. Interviewed at her home on March 5, 2012.
Gezahegn Yilma. Works in Communication Bureau. Interviewed in his Office on February 23, 2012.
Habtamu Assefa Wakjira. A middle age Oromo background and he is the head of Garhi Health College of Dire Dawa. Interviewed at his office in the morning of February 24, 2012.
Haji Yusuf Ibrahim Boru. About 70s. He is serving as chairman of” the Gugura Ugas Committee” and lives in Laga-Hare. Interviewed at his home in afternoon of March 16, 2012.
Jemal Yuya, a middle aged Oromo man, who was born and now living in *Hafata-Issa* .Interviewed in his home in Dire Dawa afternoon on March 13,2012.
Mohammed Abdullahi Ahmed. An Oromo working in Dire Dawa mass communication office. Interviewed in the morning of March 15 2012 at his Office.
Mohammad Amin. Age 65, an Oromo, who was born and now dwelling in *Laga-Harre*. Interviewed in his home on afternoon of 14th of March, 2012.
Mohammed Ibro. Age in 50s. He was former fighter of IGLF but now lives civilian life. He now lives in Sabean neighborhood. Interviewed in Sabean on the evening of March 17, 2012.
Tigist Bekele. Age in 50s. she was member of Ketena One edir of Sabean neighbourhood. She now lives in Sabean. Interviewed on Mrach 5, 2012.
Usman Ahmed. Age 38. Gurgura man and member of ESPDP. Interviewed at the house of Haji Yusuf on 16th of March 2012.
Yoseph Getachew. Officer of Ombudsman office of Dire Dawa. Interviewed at his Office in the Morning of March 17, 2012.