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THE RÔLE OF FOREIGN COLLECTIONS OF
SOMALIANA IN PRESERVING AND
REBUILDING THE SOMALI NATIONAL
HERITAGE

by

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**The Role of Foreign Collections of Somaliana
in Preserving and Rebuilding
the Somali National Heritage**

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DISCLAIMER: Before beginning, I would like to state that my paper is, under no circumstances to be considered a political statement in any way; it is in support of no cause or group, but rather, it is offered as positive suggestions to any Somali group, either in the country or part of the growing Somali diaspora, who wish to know more about the possibility of rebuilding collections of printed or recorded materials useful in preserving the Somali national heritage.

Introduction In September of 1979, during a conference in Muqdishu, I found myself in the office of the Somali Minister of Information, Hon. Maxamed Adan Sheekh, making a formal request on behalf of the Somali Studies International Association, namely that I be sent copies of the daily newspaper *Hiddigta Oktoobar* for deposit in the library at Indiana University. I had been appointed Secretary of Research and Documentation for the association, and had been asked to use my position at Indiana to establish a regional archive for printed, taped, and otherwise published materials of Somali culture, which the association would undertake to preserve. I used as one of my arguments for this request that Indiana University would help to preserve this material for posterity, even Somali posterity. At first, the minister seems somewhat offended, and produced for me a pair of large bound volumes made up of about twenty-five issues of *Hiddigta Oktoobar*, bound together for the purpose of preservation. He said something to me about the fact that Somalia was involved in efforts to preserve her own culture without any need for foreign assistance. I was somewhat embarrassed at the implications of my request and assured the minister that I was aware of the efforts of the Somali government, but that Indiana University could offer even more security that these materials would be preserved, and he agreed to send me copies of the newspaper. In fact papers came to my office through the mail for a number of months after this meeting. These issues have been microfilmed and preserved, along with a number of other newspapers, including some complete, that I had collected in the 1960s when I first went to Somalia in the U.S. Peace Corps and at later times, among which are *Dalka*, *Somali News*, *National Review*, *October Star* (the English-language issue of *Hiddigta*

Oktoobar published in 1969), *Stella d'Ottobre* (the Italian version), the *Somal Journal*, *New Era*, *Heegan*, *Halgaan* (in Somali and English), *I'Unione*, *La Tribuna*, *The Dawn*, *Hoorseed* (in *Cismanliya* script), the *Somali Herald*, and *The Nation*.

The newspapers from this project were microfilmed by C.A.M.P., a microfilming project at Northwestern, but I have no idea what ever happened to the minister's volumes. It is known for a fact that a number of institutions in Somalia are in almost, if not complete, ruin today. The National Library, which included the very extensive collection of books assembled by Dr. Ariberto Forlani, has been gutted. I visited Dr. Forlani in 1968 and was awed by his rare and extensive collection. The National Museum, which, besides its artifacts, included a number of rare documents including correspondence from the Sayyid Maxamed Cabdille Hasan, has also been almost totally pillaged. In the late 1960s, I visited and used the extensive library in the United Nations compound in Muqdishu. I do not know what fate this library suffered. The Somali National Academy, with its extensive collection of publications and its rather large library holdings, has also suffered destruction. Indiana University assisted this library with a donation in the late 1980s of large runs of the *Journal of American folklore* and the Modern Language Association's *Journal PMLA*, donated by two of my colleagues in the Folklore Institute, Professor Warren Roberts and Professor Emeritus Edson Richmond. Does anyone now even know what happened to the unabridged Somali dictionary files? I was in Somalia in 1989 when the dictionary project personnel completed the Bs in their extensive card-file documentation. What a treasure of linguistic information these files were! Finally, the fate of many archive materials which were in the various ministries of the former state are unknown at this time. One can only hope that if someone took these materials, they will value them and protect them for future generations.

The extensive collection of Somali materials by foreigners and by Somalis living abroad those many years before the beginning of the 1990s, then, have become perhaps the main storehouse of information that can be used in the preservation and rebuilding a substantial portion of the Somali National Heritage in published and recorded

form.

Before continuing with the main thrust of my paper, perhaps it would be useful for me to explain what I mean by *national heritage*. Probably the most precious components of the national heritage of a country are its people and its traditions. Restoring stability to the people of Somalia so that their traditions may be preserved for future generations is out of the scope of this paper, but will undoubtedly be the subject of a number of papers at this conference. My paper will deal with cultural materials which have been printed, published, recorded, and otherwise preserved in some tangible or material form outside of Somalia. Let me begin by giving a short history of this work, insofar as it is known to me, and then I will make some suggestions toward rebuilding some of these collections in Somalia.

History of Data Collection

Perhaps the most extensive collections of Somali printed materials in the United States are to be found in the Library of Congress. I have personally been acquainted with three representatives of the Library of Congress who have been stationed in Nairobi. Indeed, I have sometimes collected materials for them myself, but most of the time, this collection was conducted by a salaried representative in Somalia -- the last one was Ms. Rori Todaro -- in a well-executed and systematic manner. The Library of Congress materials are probably the most extensive and broadest in subject matter of any in the United States with the exception of oral literature.

Various universities in America have also collected materials on Somalia through the years. Eastern Michigan University, which sponsored InTech, later the Lafoole Campus of the Somali National University, undoubtedly has Somali materials in its library brought back by professors and students who worked in Somalia, as is also the case with Goshen College, a Mennonite Institution in northern Indiana, which I have visited. Northwestern University, which has the largest collection of Africana in United States, is often the recipient of duplicate materials from the other libraries in the United States which support African Studies. It is the policy of the Africana Bibliographer at Indiana University, for instance, to share duplicates of any material

port African Studies. It is the policy of the Africana Bibliographer at Indiana University, for instance, to share duplicates of any material accessioned by the I.U. Library with Northwestern first, because of its reputation, size, the availability of its materials to the public, and its computerized listings through InterNet for knowledge of its holdings.

I am most acquainted with the collections at Indiana University, and I will outline the history of the growth of its holdings below. But first, I would also just like to mention that extensive collections of Somaliana also exist in other countries.

As you all know, the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, together with the library in the Senate House at the University of London, have extensive collections of Somaliana, largely due to the efforts of B. W. Andrzejewski, Professor Emeritus at S.O.A.S. This collection will no doubt continue with the efforts of S.O.A.S. librarians and of Dr. Martin Orwin, the present Cushiticist at S.O.A.S. These collections include books, manuscripts, pamphlets, and cassette and reel-to-reel magnetic tapes. The library at the British Museum also contains some fairly rare and interesting materials. I am acquainted with these materials because of my use of them when I was a student at S.O.A.S. from 1969 to 1971. Although I am not acquainted personally with the collections, I know that there are a number of important collections of Somaliana in Italy, Germany, Russia, France and Sweden.

Moreover, since the fall of the Barre regime in Somalia, a number of privately-owned publishing houses have sprung up, some among Somalis who are a part of the diaspora, which serve both the Somali community with teaching materials for refugees or news or political tracts, or a broader audience interested in Somali culture. Haan Associates, here in London is a case in point. This firm offers teaching materials, together with guidebooks for teachers, for use in the education of Somali children in diaspora. They have also recently published the memoirs of a Somali government official. The new *Hal-Abuur: Wargeys-xilliyeedka Suugaanta iyo Dhaqanka Soomaalida*, or *Journal of Somali Literature and Culture*, published in London, states its purpose on the front cover of the Journal, thus: [an] "independent Journal in Somali and English aiming at documentation of Somali literature and national culture." There are also "Somali news pages" in

some of the regional London newspapers as well as some newspapers devoted entirely to the Somali diaspora in Britain today.

Let me now turn to the collections at Indiana University with which I am most acquainted. Prior to my arrival in 1971 as a graduate student, there were only a few field recordings in the Archives of Traditional Music, some government documents (both Somali documents and American documents about Somalia), and a few books which had been ordered as a matter of course by the library. In fact, while still in the Peace Corps in Somalia in late 1960s, I had been contacted by Phil Peek, now a professor at Drew University and a colleague of mine in folkloristics, about depositing my field recordings in the Archives. I agreed to this request, and at the time had no plans to attend Indiana University myself. Two years after leaving the Peace Corps and after finishing my M.Phil. degree at S.O.A.S., I began working of my Ph.D. at Indiana, and deposited my collection of field recordings of Somali poetry in the Archives of Traditional Music. 1978 saw the founding of the Somali Studies International Association in Baltimore, Maryland, and I was appointed to the office which I still hold, Secretary for Research and Documentation. The next year, I moved from Michigan State University to Indiana University, and the First International Congress of the Somali Studies International Association was held in Muqdishu. It was at this meeting that the executive board decided to make Indiana the major depository for Somaliana, and to affirm as one of the society's goals the preservation of published and recorded materials dealing with Somali culture.

Since that time, I have made deposits, sometimes rather large, into the Indiana system of materials I have collected on my own or that have been given to me by different agencies of the Somali government acquainted with the goals of preservation established by the S.S.I.A. I deposited, for example, large field collections on cassette of Somali poetry and interviews with Somali poets gathered in my sabbatical year in 1987 and in a further collecting trip in 1989. I have deposited a number of artifacts gathered under government auspices from the countryside and the markets in Muqdishu and Afgooye into the Fine Arts Museum at Indiana University. On more than one occasion, I have brought back to the African Studies Program

represent various movements and propaganda from the period of Somali history of 1969 to about 1990. A partial collection of Somali language school texts was given to me on several trips to Somalia. Numerous government documents from the Ministry of Information and National Guidance have been donated to the S.S.I.A. regional archives at Indiana over a number of years. A near complete set of publications from the Somali National Academy of Sciences and Arts are now catalogued and available to the public in the Indiana library. I always went to the market near the gold dealers in Muqdishu when I was in the country (plus going occasionally when on sabbatical in 1987) to collect the many Onitsha-market styled novels that periodically for sale to the public. I generally purchase materials from the Africa House bookstore in London when I am here, and I scour rare book catalogues and other adverts I get in the mail for Somali items, which I pass on to our Africana bibliographer at Indiana University, Nancy Schmidt.

But my collecting activities are not the only efforts going on at Indiana. Nancy Schmidt has a Title VI, Section 607 grant for serials, given by the U.S. Department of Education, which allows her to collect in a broad area of African publications, among which are current diaspora materials published by Somalis. Outside the S.S.I.A. charge, but because of my efforts to build a strong Somali collection at Indiana University, she also peruses numerous catalogues in the normal course of her works and makes purchases for the library dealing with Somalia. Among her many acquisitions since the fall of the Barre regime, for example, I just might mention that she has acquired a collection of the *Nightline* news programs on videotape that were broadcast from Somalia when the U.S. Marines "Invaded" the beaches of Muqdishu in 1992. *Nightline* is a late night news magazine appearing on A.B.C. television in the United States.

Three more major efforts by Indiana University bear mentioning here, the first of which also involves the library at S.O.A.S. Two years ago, Professor B.W. Andrzejewski expressed interest in depositing copies of his massive life's work at Indiana University, because of its importance in the field of Somali Studies, and because of its potential availability to so many researchers and students in the United States.

It was decided at that time that duplicates of most of the collection would be deposited both at I.U. and in the library at S.O.A.S. The project is being funded by the office of the Vice-President of Indiana University and the Chancellor of the Bloomington Campus, a joint post held by Professor Kenneth R.R. Gros-Louis. Duplication and shipping costs as well as materials for this work are being provided by Chancellor Gros-Louis, and the work is well under way at the present time. This collection will approximately double the holdings of Somaliana at Indiana University.

A couple of years ago I answered an ad in the *African Studies Newsletter* in the U.S. requesting assistance by the British Broadcasting Corporation in a project which involved the creation of an archives dealing with Somali history and culture. This archives was to be drawn from the massive recordings of the B.B.C. Somali Section since the 1950s. I agreed to pursue the effort by seeking funding agencies in the U.S. which might be interested in the project. After some time, the project has finally been incorporated into a larger grant which the Indiana University libraries hold from the U.S. Department of Education, and, although there is still some doubt about its funding due to the current uncertainty of the Department of Education's budget for the coming fiscal year, as far as we know at this time, the project will receive funds beginning sometime after October, 1993. Work on the archives has actually already begun, and some progress in this area has been made, but a great deal remains to be done. Suitable portions of the present tape recordings must be chosen for the archives; duplication both for the B.B.C. and for Indiana University must be carried out; and a catalogue of the archives on computer must be compiled.

Finally, a number of private collections have started to be given to I.U. as a result of its reputation in Somali holdings. Most of these collections are being donated from former Somali Peace Corps volunteers who are beginning to retire and clean out their files. Some of the donations contain materials that are unique, which volunteers collected during their service in Somalia in the 1960s.

I should also mention one other collection of materials, mostly photographs and tape recordings, that was compiled by a former

American ambassador to Somalia and his wife, John and Katheryn Loughran. Their collection was made for an itinerate Somali material art show that opened at Indiana University in 1982, and has been displayed at a number of other sites around the country. One more showing is planned in the near future at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and it is my hope that the printed materials and photographs made for this show will also be deposited at Indiana University. The taped recordings of Somali poetry, which were made for this show are already on deposit.

It can be seen from the above description that Indiana University has managed to amass an extensive collection of Somali cultural materials since the early 1970s and continues in this effort. Nancy Schmidt and I have already agreed to produce a pamphlet outlining the collections, their contents and locations, in the near future, when some of the important recent acquisitions are in place. This pamphlet will be available to any interested scholar wishing to use the collections, and will be updated periodically to reflect the growth of the holdings.

So far, I have outlined the more academically oriented efforts of data collection and preservation. But the academia is not the only institution that has been historically involved with the pursuit and even material preservation of Somali culture. In the area of oral literature, for example, a number of broadcasting companies have amassed a wealth of Somali poetry over the years. I have already mentioned the Somali Section of the B.B.C. and its efforts to establish an archive with the help of a grant supervised by Indiana University. Much of this archive will be devoted to Somali oral poetry. I am also acquainted with large collections of poetry on tape in Russia (gathered by broadcast specialists in the former U.S.S.R.), and I know that Florence Akst, director of the B.B.C. Somali Section, has made inquiries concerning the possible duplication of some of these materials for the B.B.C. Archive. There are other collections of poetry on tape in the radio stations in Cairo, Addis Ababa, Peking, and Nairobi. At this time, I am unaware of the fate of the large tape collection that was utilized by Radio Muqdishu. It may still be there, but probably has been lost, like so many of the materials in the capital. Radio Hargeysa

Tapes have been preserved by a refugee in Canada, whom I hope to contact this December in Boston at the Fifth International Congress of Somali Studies. Should she not attend this congress, I hope to be able to contact her with the help of Xuseen Maxamed Adam "Tanzania," who first told me of her efforts to preserve these tapes during the civil disturbances in Hargeysa in the late 1980s.

One other large private collection bears mentioning here, especially if anyone should know of how to contact the responsible persons who are in possession of it. I have made efforts to locate the massive private collection of the late Muuse Kaaji Ismaaciil Galaal, with the idea in mind that this collection might be duplicated and added to Indiana University's holdings. Although I have written a few letters, so far I have not had much luck. I am certain that I could convince the authorities at Indiana to finance the duplication of this collection should it be located. I worked with Muuse in the late 1960s and remember that he had many materials, which he stored in all the spare corners of his home in Muqdishu.

Strategies for Rebuilding

It seems to me that civil stability is the main prerequisite for rebuilding material collections of Somali culture in the country. It will be wasted effort to attempt such an undertaking until some sort of security in the country is restored. It also seems evident to me that a number of other issues are more important in the short run, such as stable economic growth and social order. These matters are not a part of this paper except to point out that if large collections of books, tapes, computer-stored information, and other printed and duplicated materials are to be introduced into the country, there must be some way of protecting them and making them safely available to the parties who will benefit from them.

I should also say that most of the strategies that I recommend here are confined to the potential activities of Indiana University. I cannot speak for the sundry other institutions worldwide, which have been involved in the collection and preservation of materials dealing with Somali culture. But what I can suggest here is that the willing-

ness of Indiana University to assist in this effort may be offered as a model, or one of several models, for future strategies.

In an atmosphere of political neutrality Indiana University is willing to share everything in its collections to any patron. Access to knowledge of all its collections in the library and the Archives of Traditional Music is available through an automated catalogue (termed I.O.) and is available worldwide through the InterNet System. Bear in mind that everything is not yet catalogued and that this process is ongoing. Library materials are available in the United States through interlibrary loan and document delivery of photocopied materials. The Archives of Traditional Music offers duplication of its holdings to the general public based on the kind of contract the depositor of the tapes has signed with the Archives. Under option one, materials are available to the public with no restrictions, though there is a nominal fee for cost of duplication, shipping and handling. Duplication under option 2 requires permission from director of archives, but the fee is the same. Permission from the depositor is needed for duplication under option 3, again with a similar fee for cost of duplication, shipping and handling.

Indiana University is also taking a more active role in the area of information collection. We have grant applications pending for further acquisitions and cataloguing, including current poetry collecting trips for me to Somalia, should order be established and safety restored for foreign researchers. New technologies offer avenues for sharing heretofore not available. A new procedure, called "electronic scanning" allows printed text to be converted into machine-readable computer files, which can be sent (either hand delivered, mailed, or modem-shipped through a telephone line) to Somalia, collected on computer discs, and utilized as a basis for reprinting in Somalia. These methods might be very useful, for example, in restoring the Somali-language school texts to a reestablished education ministry, should the need arise. In a more expensive manner, photocopies, either microfilmed, microfiched, or xeroxed can be shipped to Somalia. And tapes could be duplicated and shipped back to Somalia for use on radio stations.

Please bear in mind that these procedures are expensive and

radio stations

Please bear in mind that these procedures are expensive and Indiana is not prepared to carry out these tasks without grants to facilitate the work. But while I.U. can't take on the expense alone, it is actively seeking assistance to accomplish these goals by applying for grants, and is prepared to cooperate, as mentioned above, in an atmosphere of political neutrality with any authorized Somali representatives who wish to reestablish educational institutions, archives, or any other repository of printed, taped, or computerized holdings that constitute cultural materials of the Somali national heritage.