



“Technology and latest human inventions brought new ways to not only communicate but also preserve heritage”

Hargeysa Cultural Center's Archival Cassettes



I love stories and I love music too, and working in archival job especially a one about Somali sounds and music, is a very interesting business! In the last few months, I have woken up thinking about the upcoming Somali music cassettes that I would discover and that I would help others discover or perhaps rediscover. Some days I keep thinking about the story that inspired this poem or this play or songs. And how we could have ended up with a completely different song had the situation that inspired the song changed. Hargeysa Cultural Centre Archives is a rich archive

holding thousands of cassettes from different generations and genres, from music to message, from plays to oral poetry. Among these, a selection of four thousand is collected in very beautifully labelled cassettes that once were the only means to collect and preserve Somali music. But times are changing. Technology and latest human inventions brought new ways to not only communicate but also preserve heritage and that is why we at Hargeysa Cultural Centre started working in digitizing and converting cassettes into a modern digitalized and accessible format.

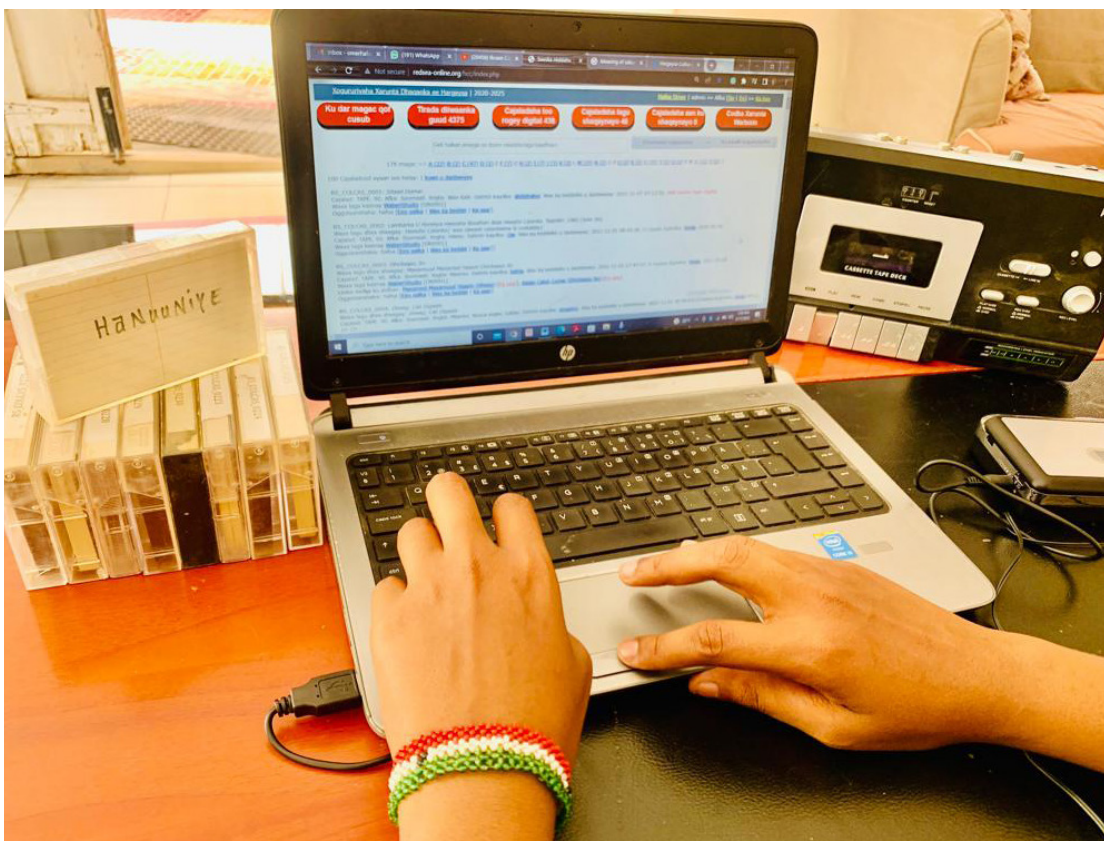
It is impossible to see a country or people who do not have their own culture or a way of entertaining themselves or expressing their different way of feelings. Somali music originally involved a combination of different instruments, Oud, small drums and sometimes flutes with which musicians make up the kind of music they wanted while using different melodies. Some of those songs were produced and recorded in studios like Radio Hargeysa, which was previously called Radio Kudu 1943 and later, Radio Mogadishu and Radio Djibouti, all of them state-run institutions, and a then after other private studios (or music shops) came in to business, like Boodheri, Liibaan and Waaberi Studio. Boodheri studio was the first music-shop and recording studio in Djibouti and they had lot of cassettes but when time went on the studio closed its doors in 2003 and the HCC traced the archive and found some of these cassettes, to establish the first HCC Cassettes' Archive. Since then the archive grew through donations and small scale purchases (see Woolner & Jama Musse, 2021, for more details on the historical background of the archive).

How the digitization process works?

The cassette digitization is the first step in the process of converting music to MP3 using Audacity Software. To begin, the tapes, cassette recorder, and audacity app are inspected to ensure they are in good working condition. Second, the cassette player is inserted into the recorder, and the digitization process begins after connecting to the audacity app. The length of time it takes to digitize depends on the information in the player; poetry is typically longer, thus it takes a long time. We save the MP3 versions according to their categorized numbers (RS_COLCAS_xxxx) and the categories are Songs, Oral poetry, Plays, Quran, Hymns, Traditional dances, and Others. The cassettes are already numbered and registered in excel with their numbers, and these same numbers shown on the physical label. At the moment a total 470 cassettes are digitalized and a pretty good number of 4789 cassettes are cataloged among these catalogued 61% are songs, 0.6% plays, 0.8% poetry, but also 95 cassettes contain traditional dance, 111 hymns and 25 Quran. The most mentioned artists in these cassettes are Mohamed Mooge Liibaan, Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame "Haddaawi", Khadra Daahir Cige, Xasan Aadan Samatar, Xaliimo Cumar Khaliif "Magool", Maxamed Saleebaan Tubeec and Sahra Axmed Jaamac. There are many more artists

but this shows how those seven were more known and people used to listen them more.

The recent new collection of the cassettes are a total of 313 cassettes which are foreign language as they were donated by the Hargeysa Cultural Center friends, The biggest percentage are English and Amharic but there are other languages like Canfar, Congolese, Arabic, Hindi and Portuguese.



RCF developed an in house database to catalogue, classify and easy consult the digital archive. In addition to this, we aimed at making this program to make users familiarize themselves with the prominent personalities who produced all these beautiful songs and poems so that young people will know and old people relive the moments they enjoyed in the past. The newly developed program could maintain and collect a lot of information about the people who are mentioned in those cassettes, in this way we collected the biographies of every person by mentioning when and where they were born and when and where they died. The unforgettable part is that we could know how many songs they sung and also in what plays they were presented in, mostly those Cassettes were recorded starting from the 1950's till 2000. We collected information, like who digitalized every cassette, when was it digitalized and there is a part of note in the system where you can record whether there were any difficulties while digitalizing the cassette or any other further information you can add up.

Recently we started sharing some of the songs and poems from our archives on our social media pages and the response was spectacular to say the least. We could follow as people from Facebook kept talking about this song and how they didn't know so and so sang this particular song. Some expressed nostalgia in seeing this song posted, others came to know who the musician was who produced this beautiful. For many of us, it is not a song, but it's a life history relived and reimagined and this project is working in not only preserving this heritage but also relive it and present it. The first song we profiled was Cishqi: Ma Naxoo Jacayl by Sahra Ahmed Jaamac back in the year 1978 but the first cassette we profiled was The History of the Father of Love Cilmi Boodheri and it was narrated by Muuse Maxamed (Xaaji Wareer) 1970s-19780s.

This program came on a needed time and our goal was to find a way we could preserve and maintain these collections so that it does not get lost and also a way it could help researchers who are writing about Somali music or stories behind any plays or songs know more about them and finding them digitalized easily rather than looking out for information that sometimes could not be accurate or sometimes could not even be found. It is difficult to find some songs while the singers already died and sometimes, they do forget who did the melody and the lyrics of the songs they did sing before, it is not only a

way we could help researchers but also others could help us by collecting the information about the songs and when the songs were written.

The intent of this project in 2022 is to target producing a high quality digital version of these cassettes and aiming a way where young writers or researchers who are interested in Somali music and culture may benefit from this program and the goal is to write more about Somali music and create a path where a lot of Somalilanders could understand how important old Somali songs were and maybe comparing this newly produced music where they have different instruments and different ways of making melodies. So this could be said that it could be a motivation and a way to know more about old music. This will hopefully usher a new period of reviving old Somali music and literature into modern, lively and accessible thing.

Hafsa Omer is the cassettes archival manager of the Hargeyssa Cultural Center. She is leading a team of interns who are working on the digitalization of the cassette archives. She is a Social Work student at Hargeysa university. She is interested in community service and historical archives to tell the stories of the past and connect the generation gaps. She can be reached at hafsa.omer@redsea-online.org