

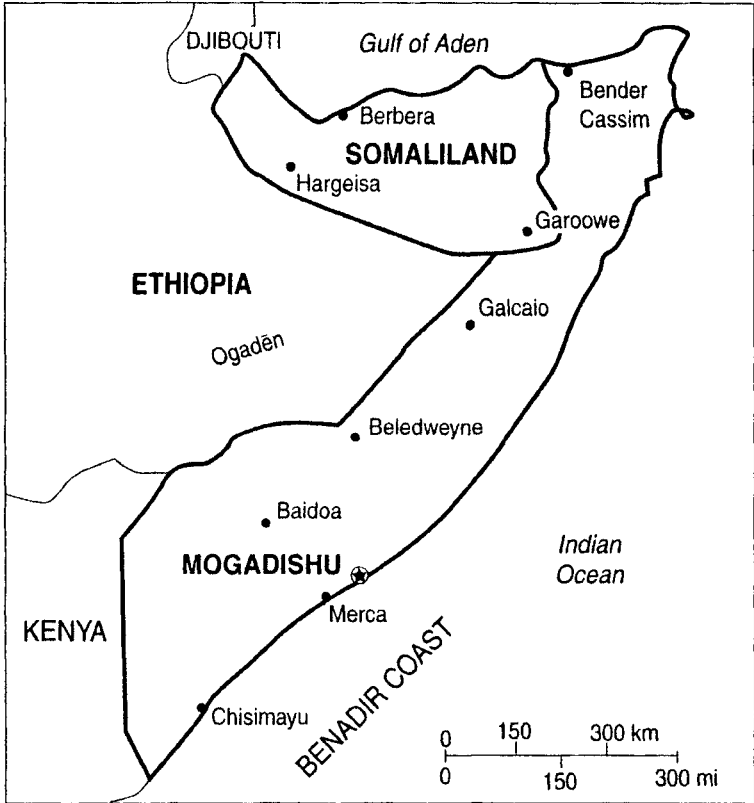
The cover features several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across a pale yellow background. Each motif consists of a stem with two leaves pointing upwards and to the right.

CULTURE AND CUSTOMS OF SOMALIA

Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi

 *Greenwood*
PUBLISHING GROUP

*Culture and
Customs of
Somalia*



The principal cities of Somalia and Somaliland.

*Culture and
Customs of
Somalia*



Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi

Culture and Customs of Africa
Toyin Falola, Series Editor



GREENWOOD PRESS
Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Abdullahi, Mohamed Diriye.

Culture and customs of Somalia / Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi.

p. cm.—(Culture and customs of Africa, ISSN 1530-8367)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-313-31333-4 (alk. paper)

1. Ethnology—Somalia. 2. Somalia—Social life and customs. I. Title. II. Series.

GN650.S65 A34 2001

306'.096773—dc21 2001016169

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2001016169

ISBN: 0-313-31333-4

ISSN: 1530-8367

First published in 2001

Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.greenwood.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5

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In order to keep this title in print and available to the academic community, this edition was produced using digital reprint technology in a relatively short print run. This would not have been attainable using traditional methods. Although the cover has been changed from its original appearance, the text remains the same and all materials and methods used still conform to the highest book-making standards.

In memory of my beloved sister Shamis Diriye Abdullahi
and her husband Col. Jama Hussein (Jama Yare)

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Series Foreword

AFRICA is a vast continent, the second largest, after Asia. It is four times the size of the United States, excluding Alaska. It is the cradle of human civilization. A diverse continent, Africa has more than fifty countries with a population of over 700 million people who speak over 1,000 languages. Ecological and cultural differences vary from one region to another. As an old continent, Africa is one of the richest in culture and customs, and its contributions to world civilization are impressive indeed.

Africans regard culture as essential to their lives and future development. Culture embodies their philosophy, worldview, behavior patterns, arts, and institutions. The books in this series intend to capture the comprehensiveness of African culture and customs, dwelling on such important aspects as religion, worldview, literature, media, art, housing, architecture, cuisine, traditional dress, gender, marriage, family, lifestyles, social customs, music, and dance.

The uses and definitions of “culture” vary, reflecting its prestigious association with civilization and social status, its restriction to attitude and behavior, its globalization, and the debates surrounding issues of tradition, modernity, and postmodernity. The participating authors have chosen a comprehensive meaning of culture while not ignoring the alternative uses of the term.

Each volume in the series focuses on a single country, and the format is uniform. The first chapter presents a historical overview, in addition to information on geography, economy, and politics. Each volume then proceeds to examine the various aspects of culture and customs. The series highlights

the mechanisms for the transmission of tradition and culture across generations: the significance of orality, traditions, kinship rites, and family property distribution; the rise of print culture; and the impact of educational institutions. The series also explores the intersections between local, regional, national, and global bases for identity and social relations. While the volumes are organized nationally, they pay attention to ethnicity and language groups and the links between Africa and the wider world.

The books in the series capture the elements of continuity and change in culture and customs. Custom is not represented as static or as a museum artifact, but as a dynamic phenomenon. Furthermore, the authors recognize the current challenges to traditional wisdom, which include gender relations; the negotiation of local identities in relation to the state; the significance of struggles for power at national and local levels and their impact on cultural traditions and community-based forms of authority; and the tensions between agrarian and industrial/manufacturing/oil-based economic modes of production.

Africa is a continent of great changes, instigated mainly by Africans but also through influences from other continents. The rise of youth culture, the penetration of the global media, and the challenges to generational stability are some of the components of modern changes explored in the series. The ways in which traditional (non-Western and nonimitative) African cultural forms continue to survive and thrive, that is, how they have taken advantage of the market system to enhance their influence and reproductions also receive attention.

Through the books in this series, readers can see their own cultures in a different perspective, understand the habits of Africans, and educate themselves about the customs and cultures of other countries and people. The hope is that the readers will come to respect the cultures of others and see them not as inferior or superior to theirs, but merely as different. Africa has always been important to Europe and the United States, essentially as a source of labor, raw materials, and markets. Blacks are in Europe and the Americas as part of the African diaspora, a migration that took place primarily due to the slave trade. Recent African migrants increasingly swell their number and visibility. It is important to understand the history of the diaspora and the newer migrants, as well as the roots of the culture and customs of the places from where they come. It is equally important to understand others in order to be able to interact successfully in a world that keeps shrinking. The accessible nature of the books in this series will contribute to this understanding and enhance the quality of human interaction in a new millennium.

Toyin Falola
The University of Texas at Austin

Acknowledgments

I EXPRESS thanks to all the people who helped in one way or the other during the writing of this book. It is simply impossible to list everyone to whom I turned to with a particular question or two; however, I thank especially the poet and playwright Mohamed Ibrahim (Hadrawi) for answering my questions about his works; I thank also engineer Mohamed Hassan for contacting him on my behalf and recording the answers.

In addition, I would like to thank my own mother, Osob Ali Hussein, whom I had not seen for sixteen years, for welcoming me back home, and for helping with the collection of traditional material art such as the wooden spoons and milk vessels whose pictures are presented in this book. Last but not least is my niece, Fowsiya Jama, who helped with collecting material art. Any errors are, of course, mine and, I might add, unintentional.

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Chronology

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| Fourteenth century B.C. | Egyptian expedition to Punt. |
| Second century B.C. | Judaism arrives in the Horn. |
| First–seventh centuries A.D. | Axum Empire spanning the Horn of Africa and southern Arabia. Arrival of Christianity in the Horn. |
| First century A.D. | The unknown Greek author of the <i>Periplus</i> gives a description of the coastal towns. |
| c. A.D. 570 | Birth of Prophet Mohamed in Arabia. Defeat of the Axumites, “the Owners of the Elephants” in the Koran. Decline of the Axum Empire. Arrival of Islam. |
| c. tenth–seventeenth centuries A.D. | Rise of the Ifat sultanate, later known as Adal, with Zeilah, on the northern coast, as main urban center. |
| c. fourteenth century | Massive Somali migrations to the south. |
| 1331 | Ibn Battuta, the famous Arab traveler, visits the port cities of Zeilah in the north and Mogadishu in the south. |

- 1415 Negus Yeshaq, king of the Highland Copts, invades Ifat and kills the Muslim ruler Sa'ad ad-Din. First written record of the word Somali.
- 1499–1518 Portuguese expeditions attack coastal towns.
- 1530s Imam Ahmed Gurey (the left-handed), with his Somali armies, defeats the Copts (Amharas-Tigreans) and unifies the lowland and highland areas (later-day Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, and Djibouti). The Portuguese come to the aid of the Copts.
- 1800–1870 European travelers scout out the region for colonial occupation. Richard Burton, an Englishman disguised as an Arab, arrives in Zeilah in 1854 and reaches the Muslim city-state of Harar in the interior.
- 1884 Berlin Conference. Major European powers carve up Africa among themselves.
- 1896 The battle of Adowa. Menelik, founder of modern Ethiopia, defeats the Italian forces and checks the Italian aspiration to occupy all of the Horn.
- 1880–1900 Division of Somali-inhabited areas into spheres of British, Italian, French, and Ethiopian Influence.
- 1900–1920 The “Sword and Fire” years of Mohamed Abdulle Hassan (the Mad Mullah), a Somali from the hinterland. Terrible atrocities committed by the Mad Mullah’s forces in the northern hinterland.
- 1921 Defeat of the forces of the Mad Mullah and the start of a return to normalcy in the northern hinterland.
- 1930s and 1940s The Awakening of the “Somali nation” in its modern conception. The start of political and social organizations.
- 1935 Fascist Italy occupies Ethiopia, creating the Italian East Africa comprising Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia.
- 1940 Fascist Italy invades British Somaliland putting most Somali-inhabited territories under Italian flag, with the exception of northern Kenya, under the British and Djibouti, held by Vichy France.

- 1941 The Italians lose the battle of the Horn and their possessions to the British. For the first time in modern history, all Somali lands come under one authority with the exception of Somali areas in Djibouti.
- 1947 Formation of Somali Youth League (SYL), the major political party that led the South to independence.
- 1951 Formation of Somali National League (SNL), the major political party that led the North to independence.
- 1960 June 26: Independence for British Somaliland. July 1: Independence for Italian Somalia. July 1: Somaliland and Somalia amalgamate as the Somali Republic with Mogadishu as capital.
- 1961 Attempted coup in the North (Somaliland) by young officers fails to take Somaliland out of the union with Somalia.
- 1964 First war with Ethiopia over the question of frontiers.
- 1967 Policy of *Détente* in the Horn. Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, president, and Mohamed Ibrahim Egal initiate a policy of easing tensions with neighboring Kenya and Ethiopia over the question of their Somali-speaking regions.
- 1969 October 15: President Sharmarke assassinated. October 21 : military coup without bloodshed launches General Siad Barre's dictatorship.
- 1971 The writing of the Somali language in the Latin script.
- 1977 Second War with Ethiopia.
- 1981 Foundation of the Somali National Movement (SNM) by Isaaq dissidents to fight the regime in the North (Somaliland).
- 1982 Twenty doctors, businessmen, and civil servants arrested in Hargeisa for daring to organize a self-help scheme to improve the sanitary conditions and services at Hargeisa's major hospital. Students riot and are shot dead by the security forces in Hargeisa.

- 1982–87 Government terror and popular insurgency intensify in the North.
- 1988 In May, the forces of the SNM stage major attacks in the North briefly capturing the main towns of Hargeisa and Buraq. The regime counter-attacks turning northern towns and villages into rubble and forcing the civilian Isaaq population to flee into neighboring Ethiopia.
- 1989 The USC (United Somali Congress), representing the Hawiye of the central regions and Mogadishu, was formed and insurgency against the regime moves from countryside into Mogadishu.
- 1991 January 27: Siad Barre ousted after twenty-one years in power. Members of the USC, Mogadishu section, hastily name Ali Mahdi as president of Somalia but he is rejected by the other movements that fought the regime. Chaos and fighting spread all over the South. May 18: Northern conference delegates abrogate the union with Somalia and declare the restoration of the sovereignty of Somaliland, signaling the end of the Somali Republic.
- 1992 Terrible famine specially in the south-central region around the city of Baidoa, dubbed “the City of Death.” Operation Restore Hope launched by the United States with participants from around the globe, with the aim of securing the delivery of food and aid to the famished populations of southern Somalia.
- 1993 May: The United Nations takes over the operations of the international intervention in Somalia under the name of UNOSOM (United Nations Somalia Mission). October 3: Fierce fighting between Aydid supporters and the Rangers of the U.S. Army’s contingent to UNOSOM leaves eighteen American soldiers and hundreds of Somalis dead.
- 1995 End of UNOSOM and the international intervention in Somalia. General Aydid captures Baidoa from the Rahanwein and brings an end to their regional administration.

- 1998 Puntland Regional State of Somalia established in Garoowe under the urging of the members of Majeerteen subclan with the aim of a regional administration in their immediate area.
- 1999 Second regional administration set up in Baidoa by members of the Rahanwein community after liberating their area from the occupying Aydid militia with help from the Ethiopian army.
- 2000 President Guelleh of Djibouti sponsors a series of talks between invited personalities, including many high-ranking officials from the Barre regime, leading to a highly contested nomination of yet another president, Abdiqassim Salat Hassan. Mr. Hassan, a former interior minister in the Barre dictatorship, is rejected by all the regional administrations and all the armed factions, including those in Mogadishu.
- 2001 May 31: Voters in Somaliland overwhelmingly endorse a constitution which states Somaliland is an independent country.

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Note on Spelling of Somali Names and Words

The transcription of Somali proper names usually varies between different authors; however, it is not difficult to recognize the persons or places that are being referred to. For example, different authors might write down the same name as Sharmarke or Shermarke. As for Somali words, these are given as they appear in Somali Latin orthography, except in cases where that would distort the approximate pronunciation of the Somali word. In such cases, an anglicized version is given. For example, the pharyngeal-voiced fricative, noted by the letter “c” in the Somali orthography, is marked with a superscript “c”; the pronunciation of this sound can be approximated as an “a” sound with a slight retching sound. The pharyngeal-voiceless fricative, noted by the letter “x” in the Somali orthography, has been replaced by the letter “h”; English speakers might pronounce it, roughly, as the English “h.” Additionally, the two letters “dh” represent a sound (a voiced retroflex stop) that might be approximated as the sound “d” in “day”; the letter “q” represents a sound that might be approximated as a “k.” Finally, the two letters “kh” represent an uvular sound equivalent to that found in Scottish “loch.”

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