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A Quick Glimpse at Public and Academic Libraries in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Marie Paiva

University of Utah, marie.paiva@utah.edu

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Satisfaction Guaranteed ...
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This new browsing/requesting process has eliminated the biggest barrier between me and a good book — effort. Because I can put a hold on up to ten books at a time, I only go to the library when I know my trip is going to be successful. Every time I go to the library I leave with at least one book. Often, I pick up my book on hold and browse the new shelves, and pick up some more. I probably check out between ten and 20 books a month using this method. I always have ten books on hold, thanks to my very long “to read” list. As soon as I check out one book, I put another on hold. I can even put books on order on hold, which let me check out the fifth **Harry Potter** book from the library the day it was available for sale in bookstores.

I have heard people argue that browsing books on a shelf is better than browsing online. The opposite is true for me. It's easier to click on a link in an online bookstore catalog than to pick a book up off the shelf to read the cover blurb. All I have to feel is a tug of interest, and it goes on the list. I don't have to have any real sense that I am going to even like a book to put it on my list, and eventually check it out from the library. Friends and family use my list for gift giving, insuring that I get something every time that I am interested in reading, and that **Amazon.com** gets something out of offering their fabulous wish list service.

I am reading more books now than I ever have before, and reading more widely than ever. I check out more books from the library, and buy more books from the bookstore because I have an easier way to learn what is available, and to decide where I am going to get it.

But the bottom line, for both printed and audio-books, is that in the online world, I hear about and get intrigued by and stumble upon lots and lots of books that sound really interesting — through many more channels than I did in the pre-online world. And, because of the ease of keeping track and remembering that I wanted to have a look at something, I actually put my hands on a lot more books. And I read more of them and a greater diversity of titles than I think I would have in a print world.

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A Quick Glimpse at Public and Academic Libraries in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

by **Marie Paiva** (Volunteer Librarian, Addis Ababa University, and Anthropology, Economics, and Psychology Librarian, Marriott Library, University of Utah, 295 S. 1500 East, Salt Lake City, UT, 84112; Phone: 801-581-6273) <marie.paiva@utah.edu>

Ethiopia's 80 million people continue to live in a country with poor infrastructure in the Horn of Africa region. The population of Addis Ababa is estimated at 10-15 million and libraries have just recently been given some recognition. When I first came to this country as an **ALA-USIA Fellow** in 1997, most

people did not know the difference between a library and bookstore. I think that has changed somewhat today.

Public Libraries in Addis Ababa

Public libraries in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city are about 100 in number and vary

greatly in size. On Tuesday, a colleague and I visited the nearby **Addis Ababa Public Library** in Sidist Kilo. The Head Librarian, **Ato Tameru Abdisa**, met with us



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Satisfaction Guaranteed ...
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It's a sort of system for asynchronous desire. Between **Amazon** and the County system, I don't have to find the idea interesting and actually go get the book at this same time. When I'd like to read it, I request it. Later on, I get it and then look it over and remember why it is that I wanted it. It's a new sort of browsing and it has let me read books I never would have read in the print-only world. 🌿

Rumors
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Speaking of newspapers, see this article in the **Wall Street Journal** -- "Why Los Angeles Times Can't Keep an Editor," by **Emily Steel** (1/22/08, p.B1). We know the story. It's a matter of budget. Seems that the publisher wanted \$7 million in reductions. Ouch!

online.wsj.com/public/article/SB120086036844103713.html?mod=blog

Forgot to tell you that the **Georgetown (SC) County Library** was one of five libraries in the US to receive the **National Medal for Library Service** given by First Lady **Laura Bush** and the **Institute of Museum and Library Services**. The subscription library was started in 1908 by Miss Susan Allston. She, with the help of Mrs. Congdon and Mrs. Weston Rosa, canvassed the entire community for book donations and

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and then showed us around the facility.

Public libraries in Addis Ababa are 30 years old, and the municipality moved this one to its current location four years ago... The actual building was constructed about 75 years ago and belonged to a well off individual. It is a solid stone building with an intricate inlaid woodwork interior, and large windows with security grates. It sits in a shaded compound full of trees, bushes, flowers and a few benches off of a major road in Addis Ababa.

This library is one of the larger and better equipped libraries and is open five days a week from Tuesday to Saturday from 9:30-5pm. Everyone has free entrance with any ID. The staff of 15 includes librarians, security personnel, and custodians. The current budget for acquisitions is about USD \$4,500 per year; and they do occasionally receive donations from private organizations and NGOs. The librarian indicated that many of these gifts are older materials.

The users are mostly from nearby high

against the grain
people profile

Head, Government Documents and Microforms Division
(the comma is my favorite part of my title!)
University of Utah, 295 S 1500 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84112
Phone: 801-581-8394 • <kate.holvoet@utah.edu>

Katherine Gail Holvoet

BORN & LIVED: Born in Aberdeen Army Proving Grounds hospital — lived in Maryland, Virginia, Iowa, Nevada, Florida, Niigata prefecture (Japan), and Aichi prefecture.

FAMILY: My son **Jackson** (pictured below) is now nine months old and aspires to be a Labrador retriever — he chews on electrical cords and my shoes, with a particular interest in my good, black, work shoes. He had the brilliant taste to be born on my husband's birthday, March 8th, so I can't forget either (or conversely, I'll forget both at the same time).

EDUCATION: M.A. in Library Science from **University of Iowa**, B.A. in Studio Art from **University of Iowa** — that's why I lived in Japan for three years. I couldn't get a job in the US with a B.A. in Studio Art.

FIRST REAL JOB: Soda jerk in an old fashioned pharmacy.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I went into government documents because the information is fascinating, and because even if everything goes online, people still need help finding what they are looking for.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Quilt, read read read, agitate for greater common grounds freedoms with my home owner's association.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Trashy romance novels, *The Gift of Fear* (it's not about what you think it's about), *A Wrinkle in Time*.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: When people use the word nauseous incorrectly. One never feels nauseous, one feels nauseated.

PHILOSOPHY: Today is the only (insert full date here) that I will get to spend with my family and friends — how do I want to spend that time?.

MOST MEANINGFUL EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT: Finishing my 30-page paper on the symbology of **Elvis'** jumpsuits. As a result of that experience, I learned that writing papers is easier if you have roughly two sources per page, rather than 1/10 of a source per page, and I pass that hard won knowledge on to stressed out college students every semester. 🌿



schools and colleges, and the library contains 220 seats. Current statistics show about 400 users per day. The collection consists of 20,000 volumes which do not circulate. The library does have growth space. Some users come in to use the collections, while others are looking for a reading room where they can use their own workbooks and textbooks.

There are seven computers with word processing only, and a small collection of juvenile materials. Almost everything is in English, with a few items in Amharic. There is a Subject and Author-Title Card Catalog for users.

We toured around the building, which is on two floors, and then visited an annex at the back. Just as **Ato Tameru** indicated, most of the titles I picked up appeared older and well used. The volumes I randomly chose ranged in date from 1974 to 1997 and dealt with architecture, Ethiopian history, and management. We visited Reference and Documents, the Periodicals Room (which only held newspaper) and three Reading Rooms. Almost all the

seats were taken at about 11 A.M., and it was very, very quiet. I saw two public bathrooms, not perhaps as nice as those at home, but they did exist.

The current challenges **Ato Tameru** indicated to us included the problem that the city administration does not show enough interest in the library. If they did, he feels he could have more staff and a bigger budget. Also, theft is a problem everywhere, and **Ato Tameru** suspects about 100 titles a year are stolen. Currently, the library has no cataloger.

Other worries are that the library is unable to provide a photocopy service or Internet access. (The Head Librarian himself has no Internet access in his office). There is no children's area, and he would really like to see one. In this compound, there is a private organization nearby that offers Internet service for a fee. I saw about 4 out of its 36 computers being used.

Our discussion included the importance of

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having a good wish list to provide to possible donors. **Ato Tameru** indicated that textbooks for students are their main priority. I suggested stamping the books more visibly to help the security staff. Of all the library conversations we had during the one-and-a-half-hour visit, **Ato Tameru** became most interested in the suggestion of offering a coffee and tea service to users. I added that offering a reference service would be useful as well. He asked me to return, and I invited him to see our library as well in the near future.

Note: When I visited this same library in a different locality ten years ago, it was much more crowded as this was the only public library in the capital. Patrons came to use the library in three shifts. A bell was rung at the end of the shift and the line of people standing outside would be ushered in while the other library users were shown the door.

Academic Libraries in Addis Ababa

Academic libraries are vastly different from public libraries in Addis Ababa. For the most part, only those affiliated with the institution can enter the premises.

Addis Ababa University (AAU), for example, is the oldest institute of higher education in Ethiopia. It was founded in 1950 and has 44,000 students. There are numerous public colleges and universities spread around the highland and lowlands of Ethiopia, with various specialties from veterinary medicine to agriculture. About thirteen newly created private colleges have also sprung up in the past two years. English is the language of instruction for high schools and colleges.

Here at **AAU**, they report a library collection of half a million items. I wonder about this number — as it is the same number quoted ten years ago. There are eleven branch libraries scattered around the city, and the university offers all degrees including an information systems program on this campus. The main library and a few of the branches are now open 24 hours a day (as of two weeks ago) to those who live on campus. Others are not allowed in the gates.

There are computers in the main library, about seven located around the card catalog, to serve the online catalog as well. There is a small computer lab with about 12 computers reserved for graduate students. There are no printers. All staff seem to have access to a computer with Internet (when it works, which might be two to three hours a day on a good day). Of course, there are the usual brownouts during the day and night in this country, (including one just after I started typing up this document.) There is no generator for this campus. There are small computer labs scattered around the campus with from 3-20 terminals available.

In terms of online resources, the **International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications** started a pilot program for public universities in Ethiopia about eight years ago. This program was successful and

against the grain people profile

Associate Librarian, University of Utah
Institute of Ethiopian Studies Library, Addis Ababa University
P.O. Box 1176, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
<marie.paiva@utah.edu>

Marie Paiva

BORN & LIVED: Sri Lanka.

EARLY LIFE: Colombo, Boston, St. Louis, Queens, NY, Manila.

EDUCATION: Anthropology (BA & MA), Library Science (MA).

VOLUNTEER: Utah Museum of Natural History.

FIRST REAL JOB: Camp Counselor, NYC.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Worked here and there mostly in library public services. **ULA, ALA, MPLA**, when I can afford it: **IFLA, Zimbabwe Library Association**.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Travel and explore natural history, read, hike, see independent films, listen to music.

FAVORITE BEVERAGE: Ethiopian coffee.

FAVORITE SPORTS TEAM: Utes.

FAVORITE TREE: Baobab.

FAVORITE ANIMAL: Black Lion.

FAVORITE FLOWER: Frangipani.

FAVORITE PET: Little brown bat (Alexandra).

FAVORITE BOOKS: (Genres) mostly non-fiction (travel, anthropology, natural history), humor, cookbooks.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: War and the current US govt.; Greedy publishers or anything else like that.

PHILOSOPHY: Be proactive in life. Librarians everywhere need to keep fighting for intellectual freedom, ask for equal access to information in all parts of the globe, and not take things for granted or be wasteful with resources they have.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Opportunity to work with a variety of library staff in different work situations and meeting interesting and skilled people; learning new things and sharing with one another.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Travel to other continents.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: In the “developed” world, we will still have libraries but the way information is produced and delivered may continue to change by western vendors. Users will ask for more and hopefully libraries can deliver that and more and be proactive. In the “developing” world, libraries are fast trying to catch up and stay afloat. Let us try and get resources to all countries on the map so that the information divide is not as evident. We cannot depend on world “leaders” to do that and so librarians, through their professional activities can perhaps assist with providing equal access to information resources fairly. 🐼

now about 15 databases are offered, mainly in the sciences. The university pays about 2% of the total database fee.

I have observed that many university faculty and students do not know these online resources exist. Once I share with them the advantages of these resources, such as full text searching, they become very enthused and begin using them.

There is only one Internet service provider — the government — and though broadband exists here at **AAU**, you would hardly know that. Numerous Internet cafés are found throughout the city.

There is no library consortium here as yet. There is a newly created library, archives and

information systems association which was formed about a year ago and is sponsored by the **British Council**. In the recent past, groups such as this were met with suspicion. It was not unusual to imprison members of professional societies. I sense there is Internet censoring today, but that it has eased up very recently.

Overall, Ethiopia’s infrastructure is inadequate, and there seems to be a problem all over the country of not maintaining what already exists. This compounds the problems for everyone, including librarians trying to cope with the needs of their users and get access to the resources they need. But whatever little they do have in libraries, both Ethiopian librarians and library users seem grateful for that. 🐼