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## MM-20 SUBSAHARAN AFRICA

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## Pastoral Days

CAMTUK, Somaliland

February 2000

By Marc Michaelson

Abdulkarim rapidly counts off his ancestors on his fingers, the names rolling off his tongue in a smooth rhythm.

"Ahmed, Moge, Libaan, Hassan, Hode, Geele, Sharma'arke..." And on and on.

He pauses, unsure of whether he just listed 20 or 25 generations, and settles on the more conservative number. In about a minute, he has traced his descendants for 400 to 500 years.

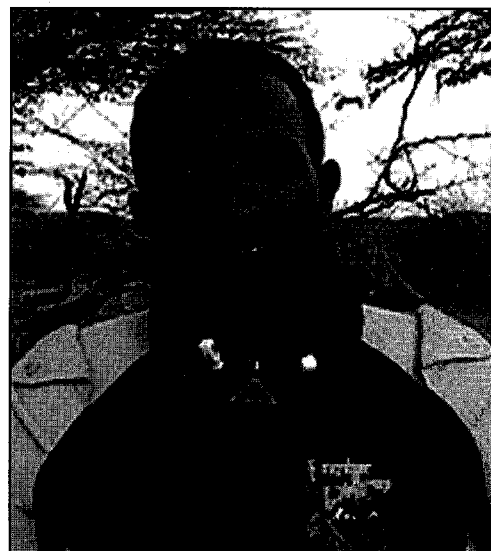
These "grandfathers" provide Somalis a sense of rootedness and identity. They are also a tremendous source of pride — this one bravely defended clan territories, that one multiplied prodigiously, another was particularly learned in the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. Some are revered as warriors, others for camel-herding prowess or generosity to the poor. The respect is deep, almost mythical.

All Somalis learn clan history and are required to memorize the names of the founders. Abdulkarim comes from the Eidagelleh, a sub-clan of Somaliland's Isaaq majority. With the help of fellow Eidagellehs in a tea shop in Camtuk, Abdulkarim draws a clan chart. They start with Da'uud, the father of the Eidagelleh, and work their way down. They list all of his sons, and their sons, and so on.

The men are chewing *khat*,<sup>1</sup> drinking sugary tea with camel milk and laughing as they mention the different clan families. After one particularly rowdy exchange, I ask what's so funny. "Abib Mahamed's family was so small we don't break them down into further sub-clans." This is a shame on the family — they were unable to increase their numbers, one of the cardinal responsibilities of the clan.

\* \* \*

Abdulkarim's grandfather was a wealthy and well-respected



*Abdulkarim*

<sup>1</sup> *khat* (pronounced "chat") is a narcotic green leaf chewed by Somalis and other peoples in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian peninsula.

man in Aboker (Ethiopia): "He brought water in by truck and gave it to people free during droughts. He also traveled around our clan territories resolving disputes over land and water. He was a great man and the people loved him." This family reputation was passed down through Abdulkarim's father, a famous Somali singer who traveled the world but died of diabetes at the young age of 41.

The family greatness translates into intense pressure and lofty expectations. Abdulkarim is extremely patriotic and wants to serve his people, but seems overwhelmed by the daunting reputation of his lineage. He is a highly motivated, talented young man, but he's still searching for his niche — a way to perpetuate (and add to) the accomplishments of his forbears.

I first met Abdulkarim during a trip to Somaliland in October 1998. At the time he was a Project Manager (running a circus for street kids) for Havoyoco, a local NGO (non-governmental organization). He has since resigned, but remains involved as chairman of the agency's Board of Directors.

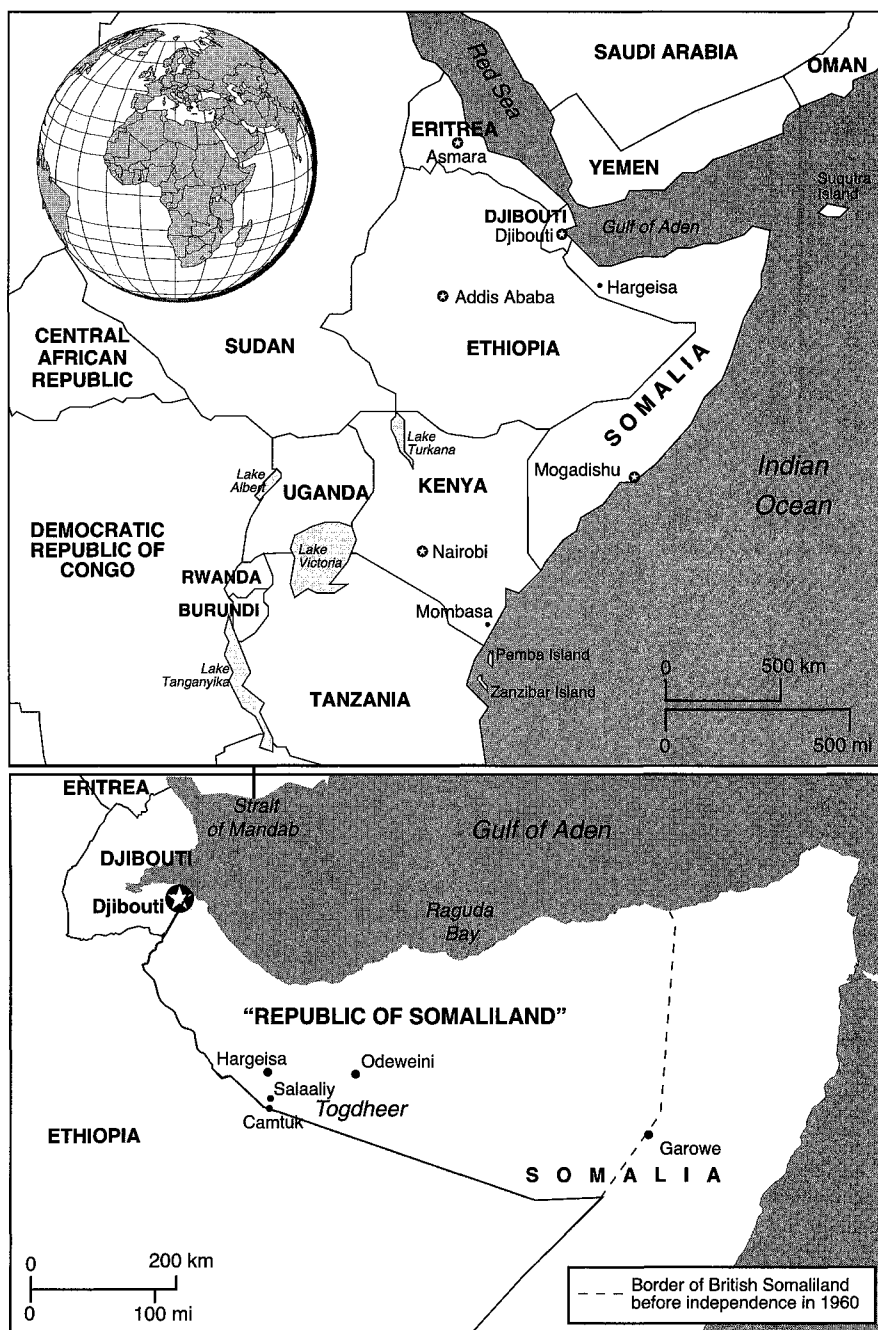
Abdulkarim is a modern Somali stuck in the middle of two extremely different worlds. He was raised in the bush and spent several childhood years herding sheep and camels. When he turned eleven, his father defied his grandfather and took him to Hargeisa to attend school. Abdulkarim thrived; he received excellent marks and completed high school.

In Somali society, you can take the man out of the countryside, but you can't take the countryside out of the man. Pastoralism — a mobile life style based on livestock production — is not merely an economic phenomenon or a primitive means of subsistence. It is much bigger and more sophisticated than that. Pastoralism is a superstructure that guides social, cultural, economic and political relations. It is a worldview anchored deep within the soul of the Somali people. And it is not lost with urban migration, but continuously pushes and pulls urban

affairs like a powerful magnet.

Abdulkarim is typical of the younger urban generation. Like nearly all Somalis (including those in the Diaspora), Abdulkarim maintains strong ties to the countryside where he was raised and where his relatives continue to look after his camels. He regularly sends them rice, sugar and money, and once or twice a year, he spends a week or two with them in the bush, herding camels by day and sleeping under the stars at night.

Abdulkarim epitomizes Somali mobility. He was born in Garowe (northeast Somalia, now Puntland) in 1970. He grew up in Aboker, Ethiopia, the traditional capi-



tal of his sub-clan (Aboker Musse) of the Eidagelleh, and he was educated in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Abdulkarim holds a couple of identity cards from different countries and moves between them freely.

For several reasons, international borders are utterly irrelevant to Somalis. First, as pastoralists, Somalis move seasonally in pursuit of water and grazing lands for their livestock. It doesn't matter whether those lands are in Somalia, Somaliland or Ethiopia — they will go where they must to survive. Second, during colonialism the Somali people were involuntarily divided into five political units — French East Africa (now Djibouti), the British Somaliland Protectorate, Italian Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya). These borders disregarded clan boundaries. To Somalis it makes not one iota of difference which government claims control — Somalis cross back-and-forth frequently, without passports or other documentation.

This vigorous sense of territorial entitlement surfaces on our journey to Camtuk. In Salaaliy, the district capital, local government authorities see Abdulkarim traveling with me and they call him to the police station. They question him about “the foreigner,” and ask where we are going and what we are doing. Abdulkarim angrily recounts the discussion later: “They have no right to ask me anything. I can travel here with whomever I want; it's my land, not theirs!”

The police quickly relent and give him a permission letter (“useless” says Abdulkarim) authorizing my travel. The encounter reveals an inherent conflict between traditional land tenure and modern government. Abdulkarim questions the legitimacy of the authorities — they aren't Eidagelleh so they have no basis to question him in his clan's territory.

The 45-mile journey from Hargeisa to Camtuk takes nearly three hours on bumpy dirt-and-rock roads. Camtuk traverses the Ethiopian-Somaliland border — the tea shop is in Ethiopia, the mosque across the street is in Somaliland. The tiny hamlet's multinational character is evidenced by the variety of money used here. Somali shillings of the defunct Republic of Somalia are most common, but new Somaliland shillings and Ethiopian *birr* are also widely exchanged.

A few mud-block huts and two tea shops serve this rural gathering-post for pastoralists. Camtuk is a “day village” — men come to drink tea, smoke cigarettes,

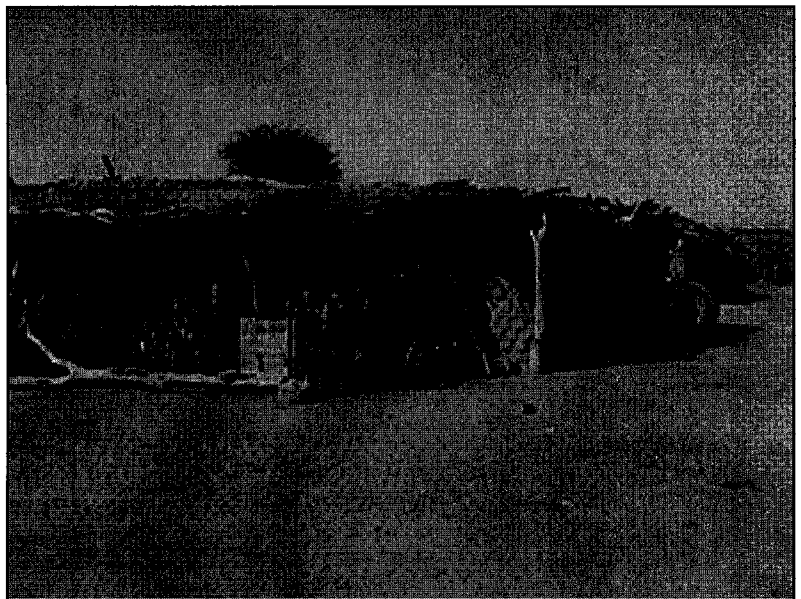
chew *khat* and share conversation, but in the late afternoon the tea shops empty and everyone heads for their dome-shaped homesteads scattered throughout the bush.

The main purpose of Abdulkarim's trip is to check on his camels. Due to his busy schedule in Hargeisa, he hasn't visited Camtuk for a year and a half. Two of his aunts, Saphia and Kissa, have accompanied us from Hargeisa. They had heard that many of Abdulkarim's camels had died and feared that he might react angrily, even violently, when he received the news. That seemed unlikely, considering Abdulkarim's cool demeanor and respect of family elders.

As we stroll toward the tea shop and the second of dozens of cups of sugary tea, relatives greet Abdulkarim enthusiastically with bear hugs and handshakes. Abdulkarim's grandfather Mohamed Ige, the caretaker of his camels, greets him rather more coolly for reasons that only become apparent the next day.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

For dinner we share cans of tuna and pineapple. Abdulkarim had strongly advised me to bring all my provisions along. “You won't find anything decent to eat out *there*.” Later I discover that *he* can't stand the food out there, so he figured I (a foreigner, and thus inevitably a “softy”) would certainly perish if condemned to consume the rations of the bush. Quite the contrary. I was surprised to find small family shops carrying pasta, rice, onions, garlic and fresh tomatoes — coupled with some local fried bread and camel



*Camtuk tea shop during a rare quiet moment*

<sup>2</sup> Mohamed Ige is the brother of Abdulkarim's paternal grandfather. In Somali society, all the brothers of your father are considered your fathers and all the brothers of your grandfather are your grandfathers.

milk, there was more than enough to subsist on.

A wide, starry sky and bright crescent moon envelops quiet Camtuk; a brisk wind chills the streets. This is the winter dry season (*jillaal*) and while I don't have a thermometer handy, I'd be surprised if the temperature didn't dip into the Fahrenheit 40s later that night.

More sugary tea after dinner, and at 7:30 p.m. a converted pickup truck lumbers into town. Abdulkarim yells out to the driver: "HEY!!! COMERRRRRADE YUSUF!!!!!!" Out pops a small, bubbly character whose smile cuts warmly through the darkness. Yusuf grabs my hand and pumps it in an exaggerated handshake. He greets me in short bursts: "Nice to meet you. How is Camtuk? Welcome to our homeland."

Comrade Yusuf is actually retired-Colonel Yusuf, of ousted Somali President Siad Barre's army. He is a native of the northwest, an Eidagelleh by clan and was educated in Russia (military training) and Egypt (Masters degree in Communications). Not the profile of your average taxi driver. Apparently the new Somaliland government tried to recruit Col. Yusuf into its army, but he refused because the monthly salary of 80,000 Somaliland

shillings (\$28) is a pittance. Instead he has established a fairly lucrative transportation business, shipping people and goods between Somaliland and Ethiopia. In so doing he earns more than ten times as much as an army officer.

After a quick dinner, Comrade Yusuf and his fully stocked truck-taxi lumbers into the night en route to Aboker, Ethiopia. Abdulkarim and I unroll our blankets and head for sleep. We bunk on a cement floor in the back room of a small, rectangular house. The mat and blanket provide little cushion from the floor and a small charcoal fire provides little protection from the cold breeze seeping through the windows. We both sleep restlessly, tossing and turning, especially after 4 a.m., when we are joined by a pair of birds tending their nest in our room.

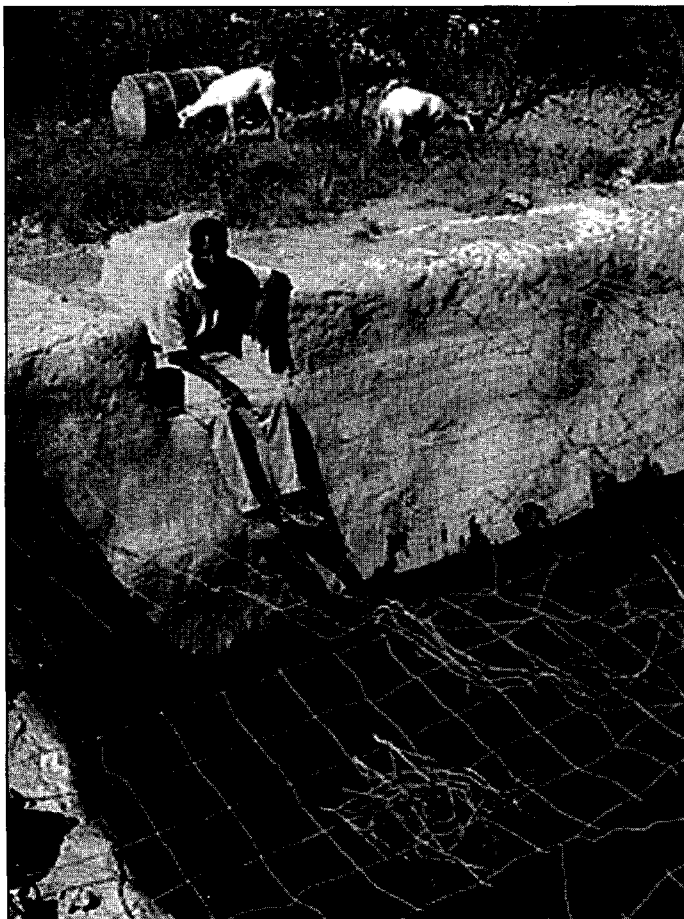
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The next morning we leave Camtuk and head for grandfather Mohamed Ige's house about a mile into the bush. As we walk, turning left here, going straight, then hooking right, I wonder if Abdulkarim knows where he's going. I ask him if we're lost. "Pastoralists know every tree in the bush; they don't get lost." I ponder the intricate internal maps of these people who often trek 15 to 20 kilometers of this scrub brush daily. Much of the terrain looks identical and to my untrained eye lacks definitive landmarks.

We pass Abdulkarim's *berked* (cement-lined water reservoir) and a large, several-hundred-square-meter enclosure constructed by his grandfather more than 30 years before. The perimeter is fenced with pricker branches from local trees. Abdulkarim says the enclosure was built for growing *khat*, but is now used for keeping sick camels while others travel longer distances for grazing. I ask if other people are allowed to graze their animals within the enclosure: "Of course. In Islam it is a crime to keep land from others who need it."

Traditionally, all land was open, free for grazing for all who needed it. Over the years, some people (like Abdulkarim's grandfather) began to fence off their own private plots, either for use as small farms/gardens or as reserves for grazing in times of scarcity. These enclosures are now a source of occasional conflicts in the countryside.

Recently a dispute flared between so-called "agriculturalists" (those with enclosures) and pastoralists in Odeweini, Togdheer District. In early January 2000, the pastoralists, frustrated that livestock-grazing areas were being swallowed up by agriculturalists, challenged for their land rights. Two people were killed in the fighting. The governor of the region (in consultation with the Sultan, a traditional leader) quickly intervened. He ruled that



*Abdulkarim sitting on the edge of his berked*



*Goats and sheep grazing near Camtuk*

the enclosures were illegal and ordered that they be dismantled within 15 days.

Development workers in Hargeisa point to *berkeds* and enclosures as new features (20-30 years old) that are rapidly altering the pastoral landscape and social relations. *Berkeds* provide a reliable source of water for the dry season, enabling pastoralists to move less frequently. One elder, Hiis Aden, says, "Life is better now than long ago. Before, we had to travel far to get water; now it is locally available." These days, many pastoralists move only during severe droughts.

These beneficial *berkeds* also have a downside. Since pastoralists can stay settled for longer periods, the landscape has become denuded. Saphia, a 45-year-old lifetime resident of Camtuk explains: "It was much different when we were kids. There used to be many trees and few people; now there are many people and few trees."

Hiis Aden offers a feeble explanation for the changing landscape, as if his camels were listening and he didn't want to hurt their feelings:

tively whistles and hoots at the animals to keep them from straying too far.

As I snap a few photos, another grandfather walks up and greets us enthusiastically. Abdi Araleh carries an ancient shotgun and, despite his 63 years and graying hair, runs about energetically chasing his 18 camels. Abdi is an animated character, a showboat of sorts, eager to

"We cut trees to build houses and fences. That's what caused the deforestation." Hiis remembers wild animals living in the area: "Once when we were young we found a small baby lion and nursed him with camel milk." These days the only game around seems to be miniature deer (dik-diks).

\* \* \*

By the time we reach grandfather Mohamed Ige's house, the livestock have already left to graze. But the family's 34 sheep and 27 goats aren't far, and we track them down just a few hundred meters away. Gudoon Abdi Araleh, Abdulkarim's seven-year-old aunt, is the shepherdess of these small animals. She carries a stick and alterna-



*Abdulkarim's cousin milking camels*



provide some colorful commentary for the newcomer.

"I've lived in both the towns and countryside. I spent five years in Saudi Arabia and then came back and bought ten camels. By last year my camels numbered 25, but because of the drought, seven died. Still, I've lived in this area for 12 years and am happy here."

I ask how life today compares to the past.

"Now it's getting better because we have peace. Rain is our main problem. But before, during the war with Siad Barre [1988-91], there were "technicals" [trucks with mounted guns] right here in this grazing land. We survived by helping each other. We brought our animals to Ethiopia since the border is right here."

Somali National Movement (SNM) rebels maintained a base in Salaaliy District. Locals supported the SNM fighters with food, animals and guns. Rural militias sometimes actively fought alongside the rebels when their settlements were threatened.

Later in the morning, we assist Abdi with watering his goats and camels. Abdulkarim, Shewane (Abdi's son) and I draw water from the *berked* and dump it in an old 200-liter barrel, cut in half to function as a trough. Shewane has a foot deformity, but limps agilely along with the help of a cane, and appears to work harder and more efficiently than his brothers.

Two of Abdi's other sons corral the camels some 30 meters away, releasing them a few at a time to come and drink. These camels last drank 17 days before, but dur-

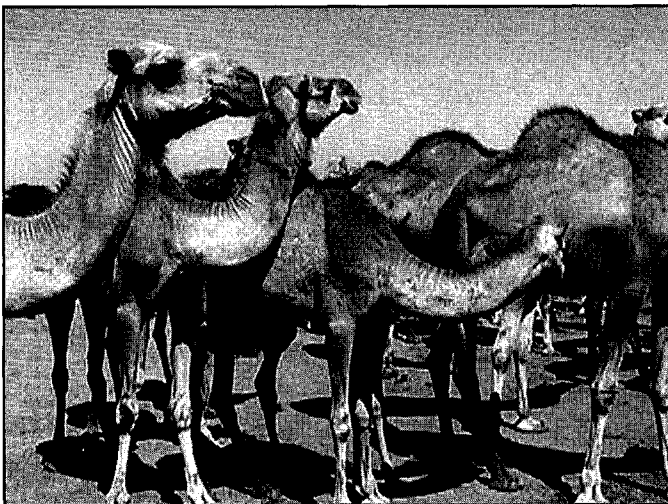


*Abdi Araleh*

ing droughts they can survive for more than a month without water.

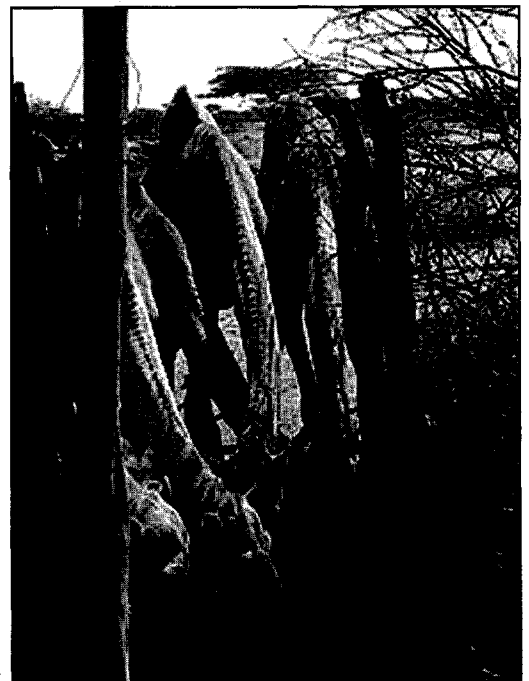
As we water them, Abdi sings the camels songs of praise. He tells them they are wonderful creatures and no one can steal them because they are so great. He also pets, kisses and goofs around with the camels — partly for my benefit and partly because he's generally a ham. "We like our camels a lot. They are like your dogs; we have a relationship together." Abdi's antics notwithstanding, his closeness to his camels, their mutual comfort level and affection, indicates a special bond.

Camels are the lifeblood of these pastoralists. Abdi



*Camels wait for watering....*

*...while others drink by the berked*



says: "Some places that are more developed, they have factories. Here our camels are our factories." To the pastoralist, camels are the primary means of transport and a critical source of milk and meat. But they are more than this. They bring meaning to pastoral life. They are loved and admired by their owners. When Abdi talks of his camels, it sounds as if he's musing wistfully about the first woman he loved.

Hiis Aden says of his camels, "They are one of the pillars of our life. They are our transport." I ask, if they are primarily for transport, why not get a truck? "A camel is better than a truck. It doesn't need expensive fuel, it can go off-road and it doesn't make too much noise [betraying your location during fighting]."

Camels also define and maintain social relationships. Last year one of Abdulkarim's relatives murdered someone from a neighboring clan, obligating them to compensate the victim's family with a blood price of 100 camels. Traditionally, each family paid a portion corresponding to the closeness of their relationship to the murderer. This time the clan elders adopted a more Marxist approach — payment was collected according to ability to pay. Abdulkarim, a rare employed urbanite, was hit with a 1 million Somaliland shilling bill (about \$250 at the time).

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Some development organizations suggest that pastoralists are "undevelopable." For those with a mobile life style, stationary social infrastructures such as schools and clinics are inappropriate. "Experts" thus advocate transforming pastoralists into agro-pastoralists. In addition to maintaining livestock, they say, pastoralists should learn to farm and garden. This would supplement and diversify income and keep them settled in one place. Then schools, health centers, wells and other permanent fixtures can be built to meet their needs.

My encounters with Abdi and other elders caused me to question the logic of promoting a wholesale shift to agro-pastoralism. Many pastoralists have already established small farms, and they certainly move less frequently than in the past. However, it is the camels and other livestock that bring meaning to their lives. These animals help define social relations, responsibilities and interactions within the family and the broader clan community. Camels will continue to represent a focal point of pastoral life; whenever survival of the animals is threatened, their owners will move in search of water and rangeland. And well they should.

Rather than denigrate the pastoral life style, perhaps development agents should adapt their own programmatic thinking. They need to offer creative alternatives

— mobile health teams, seasonal schools, small-scale water supplies, palatable species production, and so on. Prefabricated projects won't fit. Instead of forcing pastoralists to abandon their traditional way of life, the development community should show a bit of humility and respect. Development is about improving people's lives, not destroying cultures and demanding uniformity.

\* \* \*

I've noticed that Eidagellehs don't usually carry guns and knives like some other rural Somalis. Abdi seems an exception, so I ask why he totes the big gun. Are there any dangers or security threats?

"I lost two camels yesterday and went out last night to search for them. The gun is for hyenas. Sometimes hyenas catch and kill stray camels. When such an attack happens, the camel cries out. If I shoot into the air, the hyena will run away."



*Anep Roble loading water containers on a camel*

Abdi is getting visibly antsy. He grins and barks out, "Thank you very much," salutes with his back arched military-style, and then dashes after two stray camels. He quickly runs them down and chases them back toward the herd. Not bad at all for a 63-year-old.

\* \* \*

In the afternoon, Abdulkarim and I return to Camtuk for lunch and, of course, more sugary tea. The usual cast of characters — all men, mostly gray-haired but some youngsters among them — sit inside and outside the tea house chewing *khat*. *Khat* is a social drug, but one that disrupts and threatens pastoralist life. In the past, mature men bore responsibility for tending camels. It is hard work. Camel herders tread long distances every day, continuously chasing strays back into the pack. In the sparse

vegetation of Somalia's drylands, camel care is extremely demanding.

In recent years, many men have left for the towns and many who remain are shirking their traditional roles. It is now common for younger boys to tend the camels while men lounge about small villages like Camtuk, socializing with friends and chewing on the green leaf.

In the mornings, these men can be seen walking into Camtuk with a jug of camel milk. They sell the milk to buy their daily *khat*. This both reduces the amount of milk available for the family and leaves the herd in lesser quality care. As a result, more camels are lost or die. Extra work is being dumped on women and children as the traditional household head relinquishes the respect he earned as primary camel caretaker.

One exchange indicated that some men are well aware of the *khat* effect. As I hung around the verandah of the Camtuk tea shop with two cameras slung over my shoulder, one of the men asked Abdulkarim if I had taken any photos of the men chewing *khat*. I hadn't, but wondered why he was so concerned? "They don't want pictures of them chewing *khat* in any newspapers or magazines." Why not? "They don't want any of their relatives — uncles or brothers who live overseas — to see them chewing and not looking after their camels."

Such remote worries notwithstanding, these men greatly value their *khat*-chewing time. They relax, laugh about old times and discuss issues facing the community. This is their social time, and it's unlikely they will abandon it for knowledge of its more negative side-effects.

\* \* \*

This afternoon, several Camtuk elders (including Mohamed Ige) will meet with district officials from Salaaliy. The authorities have come to discuss establishing an outpost for tax collection. Camtuk is a border town; many goods pass through, making it a potentially lucrative point for charging duties.

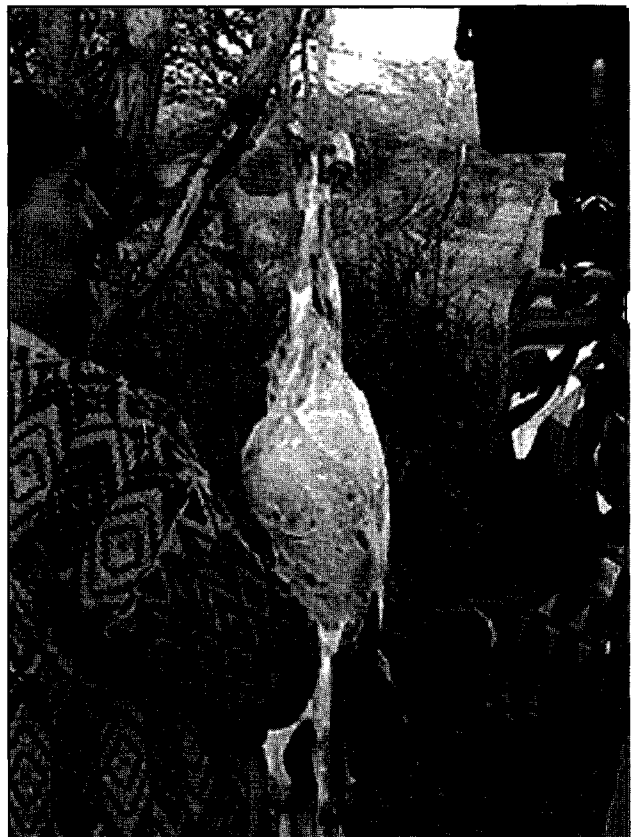
Later we hear the outcome. The elders refused. They had asked their guests a simple rhetorical question: "What has the government [in Salaaliy] ever done for the people of Camtuk?" Having never received development assistance, the elders saw no reason to use Camtuk as a base for collecting taxes. Self-interest may have also played a part in local objections — the people of Camtuk benefit from the border trade and new taxes would eat into profits.

As dusk approaches around 6 p.m. Camtuk literally empties out. The *khat*-chewers pack up for the day, returning to the bush to join their families for dinner and sleep. Abdulkarim and I do the same.

When we arrive at Mohamed Ige's homestead, two teenagers are putting the finishing touches on an *ardah* (sleeping area for guests). They cut large branches from pricker-studded trees and construct a half-moon, open structure. The ground is then cleared of grass clumps and our sleeping mat unrolled. The building of an *ardah* for male guests is an expression of pastoral hospitality and respect. It is also a practical shelter — providing protection from cold winds and a safe, comfortable spot to pass the night.

In honor of our visit, Abdulkarim's aunts slaughter a goat. At 8 p.m. the largest choicest morsels of boiled meat are served to us, while smaller, bonier chunks are distributed among the rest of the family. We eat heartily and I bite my lip twice in my enthusiastic munching of this delicious treat. A half-hour later we are served soup poured over local fried bread.

The rest of the boys and young men share a large bowl of "wheat grey." I taste it and find it is actually wheat *grains* boiled in a watery salty soup. Somali refugees in neighboring Ethiopia receive monthly rations of wheat. They sell some so they can buy other basic necessities, foodstuffs and clothes. Some of the wheat ends up in pastoralist food bowls. Abdulkarim finds wheat grey repulsive — which is why he insisted we bring our own stock of provisions. After sampling the porridge, I have



*Saphia, Kissa and our dinner hanging from a tree*



to agree it isn't the most appetizing stuff I've ever tasted.

After dinner the boys scramble to find me a bar of soap. I watch as they all pick up handfuls of sand, using the grittiness to scrub, and then a bit of water to cleanse, their hands. I try it myself and find it works well, the grease absorbed better by the sand than soap. I tell Mohamed Ige that we have a saying: "When in Rome, do like the Romans." He laughs and quickly counters. "We Somalis have a similar proverb — 'When traveling in the land of the blind, pretend you are blind as well.'"

We recline comfortably on the mat, enjoying the fire and easy conversation. The boys, many of whom have never met a foreigner, watch me with eagle eyes. They ask if we have undeveloped, open land like this in America; do we have camels in America; and have I ever slept outside. They express shock that I can drink camel milk, draw water from a well and live without a toilet.

After some time, the youngsters drift off to their sleeping areas. I am delegated the central spot on the mat, sandwiched between Abdulkarim and grandfather Mohamed Ige. The latter pulls his blanket over his head and is snoring loudly within 30 seconds. I stare skyward and doze off mesmerized by the brilliance of the stars above.

\* \* \*

The next morning, Abdulkarim receives disturbing news from his aunts. His camels have been greatly reduced. A year ago there were 35; now that number has halved to just 18. Many were lost or died from drought, and not one of the females bore offspring in the past year. Abdulkarim appears upset but resolved. He slowly shakes his head and explains that "Allah" took many of his camels because he failed to give the obligatory *saka* (Islamic charity) to the poor last year. In the craziness of his Hargeisa life and hectic work schedule, he had forgotten to make his donation. His grandfather should have reminded him, but it is his own fault.

I suggest that his grandfather's neglect, laziness and *khat*-chewing might have also played a part in the decimation of his herd. Abdulkarim is unconvinced. "It is only Allah who gives and takes life." Perhaps true, but such a fateful worldview seems peculiar for an educated guy like Abdulkarim.

After a hearty breakfast of camel's milk and sautéed liver (from last night's goat), Abdulkarim talks to his grandfather about his camels. The aunts also join the pow wow under a tree. The discussion lasts an hour and at times becomes heated. They finish their business and Abdulkarim promptly tells me to pack my bag. Within minutes we leave for Camtuk. No thank-yous, no good-byes, nothing.

I later learn that this sudden departure was not so

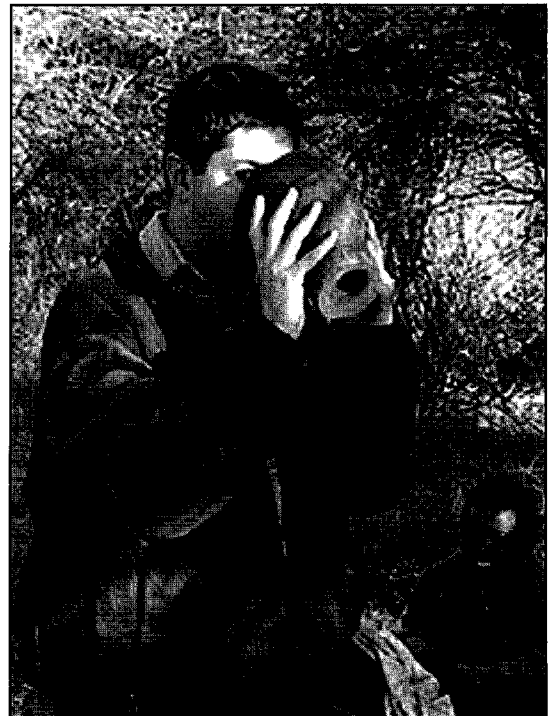
much residual anger as pastoral culture. Lengthy good-byes are uncommon — just inform your host you are leaving, and leave. As we walk toward Camtuk I ask Abdulkarim what was resolved. "I told my grandfather that the camels benefit him with milk, so it is in his best interest to watch them multiply." The grandfather predictably shucked off personal blame — it was Allah who took the camels. In a rare emotional display, Abdulkarim turns to me and confesses "That man makes me angry!!"

Mohamed Ige did pledge to try to take better care of them in the future. He is more of a talker than a doer and is himself too old to actively herd, but he promised to pressure his son Ismael to take better care of Abdulkarim's camels.

\* \* \*

Our final day and night in Camtuk is rather uneventful. Abdulkarim has accomplished his mission and isn't too concerned about the future fate of his camels: "I don't really care if my camels multiply; they are just a symbol. For me they aren't a source of wealth, but they give me status among my people." A man with no camels is not fully a man — he garners no respect and no one listens to him. Abdulkarim's rich family heritage accords him considerable stature in the Eidagelleh clan, but to maintain this position he must prove worthy — and that includes owning camels.

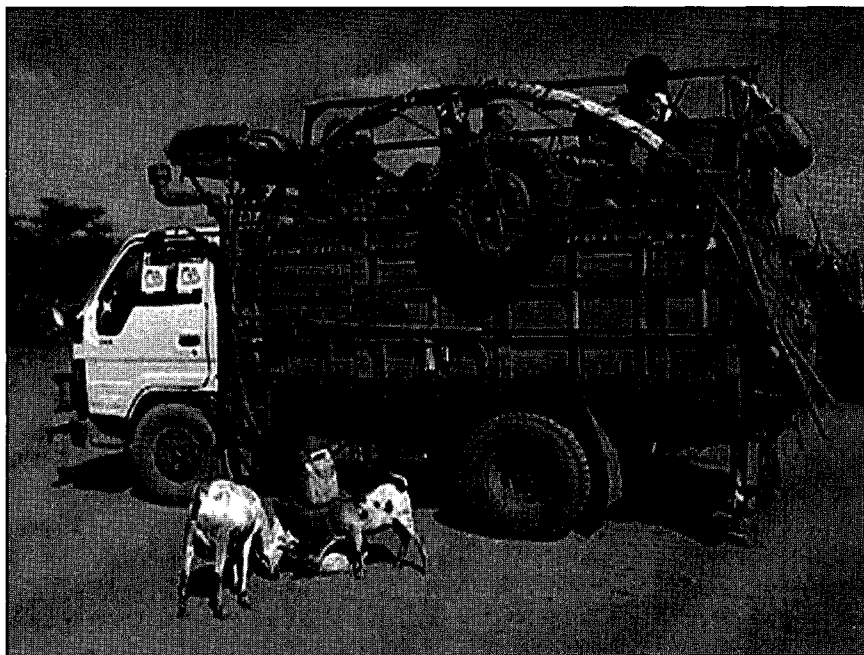
We sit in the Camtuk tea shop and I chew *khat* with some of the elders. I ask them to share a few interesting pastoral adventures. One man laughs and sticks his spear



*The author drinking camel milk*

in the ground beside him. He is squatting as he drinks his tea, not sitting leisurely like the rest. "What would you do if you lost all your fifty camels?" I'm not sure if this is a joke or not, so I say I don't know and wait to see if there's a punch line.

There isn't. Last night, his camels escaped from their pen. After searching all morning, he and a friend are stopping in Camtuk for a cup of tea before heading deeper into the bush for a more prolonged hunt. The men don't seem despondent; actually, they appear mildly amused by their bad luck. Abdulkarim says this cup of tea may be the last their last for several days. They'll comb the countryside, asking others if they've seen an unaccompanied herd passing by with his identification markings (each camel is branded on the neck).



*The converted truck-taxi that took us back to Hargeisa*

Several other elders apologize for the tough conditions. I am visiting during the dry winter *jillal*, the toughest season of the year. They urge me to return during the prosperous *gu* rainy season. At that time, everyone is happy — the countryside is lush and green, milk is plentiful and the camels are engaging in plenty of sex. Camel copulation must be quite a spectacle — I received several invitations to return and witness it for myself.

Before heading for bed on our last night in Camtuk, I realize I haven't yet interviewed any women. This is not particular to Camtuk. In all the Somali areas I've traveled, women are confined to the background and men speak on their behalf. So Abdulkarim arranges a last-minute interview with a female cousin. We sit in her dome-shaped house (with her husband in the background) and I ask her about the roles of women in pastoral society. But before she can open her mouth, her husband answers for her.

Next I ask her "What is the toughest part of life here for women?"

Again the husband quickly interrupts: "I know. When water is scarce and we have to move. The women have to pack our houses and belongings and load up the camels. Sometimes, when a woman is pregnant, she has to give birth in the bush, while we are migrating..."

I've had enough of Mr. Know-It-All, so I inquire sarcastically, "Oh, really? That's very interesting. Have you ever given birth in the bush?" He is a bit insulted, but gets my not-so-subtle point and hushes up in the back-

ground. I repeat my question to his wife. Her response mimics her husband's: "It's when we have to move and pack up the camels..."

\* \* \*

The last night of our pastoral sojourn we sleep on the verandah of what has become our home away from home: the Camtuk tea shop. This spot has the dual advantages of comfort and easy access to that sweet liquid that I can by this point feel rotting my teeth. We awake in the morning, consume another cup of tea and shoot a few photos while awaiting the taxi to Hargeisa.

Abdulkarim has reserved two premium seats (actually, the only two seats) in the truck cab. The other passengers will ride atop cargo in the back. The driver has promised an 11 a.m. departure, but we are unsurprised when he shows up at 3 p.m.

We pay our three-day bill at the tea shop: a mere 8,400 Somaliland shillings (about \$3) for 42 cups of tea and a few glasses of camel milk. Just before our departure, Ismael (Mohamed Ige's son) comes into town bearing good news — he's just found one of Abdulkarim's stray camels. And to make sure we leave in good spirits, Mohamed Ige brings Abdulkarim a peace-offering of sorts — a small goat to raise in Hargeisa. Our trip ends on an upbeat note.

As we pull out of Camtuk, the urban capital of Hargeisa seems to me worlds away. But for Abdulkarim and other Somalis, the two are inseparable — they will always have one foot in the town and one foot in the bush. □

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# Institute of Current World Affairs

## FELLOWS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

### EUROPE/RUSSIA

#### Adam Smith Albion—Uzbekistan

A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is studying and writing about the republics of Central Asia, and their importance as actors within and without the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. Degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University.

#### Gregory Feifer—Russia

With fluent Russian and a Master's from Harvard, Gregory worked in Moscow as political editor for *Agence France-Presse* and the weekly *Russia Journal* in 1998-9. Greg sees Russia's latest failures at economic and political reform as a continuation of failed attempts at Westernization that began with Peter the Great — failures that a long succession of behind-the-scenes elites have used to run Russia behind a mythic facade of "strong rulers" for centuries. He plans to assess the continuation of these cultural underpinnings of Russian governance in the wake of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin succession.

#### Whitney Mason—Turkey

A freelance print and television journalist, Whit began his career by founding a newspaper called *The Siberian Review* in Novosibirsk in 1991, then worked as an editor of the Vladivostok News and wrote for *Asiaweek* magazine in Hong Kong. In 1995 he switched to radio- and video-journalism, working in Bosnia and Korea for CBS. As an ICWA Fellow, he is studying and writing about Turkey's role as nexus between East and West, and between traditional and secular Islam.

#### Jean Benoît Nadeau—France

A French-Canadian journalist and playwright, Jean Benoît studied drama at the National Theater School in Montreal, then received a B.A. from McGill University in Political Science and History. The holder of several Canadian magazine and investigative-journalism awards, he is spending his ICWA-fellowship years in France studying "the resistance of the French to the trend of economic and cultural globalization."

### SOUTH ASIA

#### Shelly Renae Browning—Australia

A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia and the indigenous peoples of Vanuatu to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

### sub-SAHARA

#### Marc Michaelson—Ethiopia

A program manager for Save the Children in The Gambia, Marc has moved across Africa to the Horn, there to assess nation-building in Eritrea and Ethiopia, and (conditions permitting)

availing and unavailing humanitarian efforts in northern Somalia and southern Sudan. With a B.A. in political science from Tufts, a year of non-degree study at the London School of Economics and a Master's in International Peace Studies from Notre Dame, he describes his postgraduate years as "seven years' experience in international development programming and peace research."

### THE AMERICAS

#### Wendy Call—Mexico

A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as a communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

#### Paige Evans—Cuba

A playwright and former Literary Manager of the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York City, Paige is looking at Cuba through the lens of its performing arts. With a History/Literature B.A. from Harvard, she has served as counselor at the Buckhorn Children's Center in Buckhorn, Kentucky (1983-84), as Arts Editor of the *International Courier* in Rome, Italy (1985-86), and as an adjunct professor teaching a course in Contemporary American Playwrights at New York University. She joined the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1990.

#### Peter Keller—Chile

Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

#### Susan Sterner—Brazil

A staff photographer for the Associated Press in Los Angeles, Susan received her B.A. in International Studies and Cultural Anthropology at Emory University and a Master's in Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt. AP gave her a wide-ranging beat, with assignments in Haiti, Mexico and along the U.S.-Mexican border. Her fellowship topic: the lives and status of Brazilian women

#### Tyrone Turner—Brazil

A photojournalist (Black Star) whose work has appeared in many U.S. newspapers and magazines, Tyrone holds a Master's degree in Government and Latin American politics from Georgetown University and has produced photo-essays on youth violence in New Orleans, genocide in Rwanda and mining in Indonesia. As an Institute Fellow he is photographing and writing about Brazilian youth from São Paulo in the industrial South to Recife and Salvador in the Northeast.

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