

# **HUSSEIN MOHAMED ADAM "TANZANIA"**

**In Honour of an Extraordinary  
Scholarship**

**Edited by  
Jama Musse Jama**

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# LIVESTOCK BRANDS : IDENTITY AND MEANINGS IN SOMALILAND

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## Abstract

This chapter focuses on the ancient livestock branding systems still in use among Somali herders in Somaliland. It documents symbols, meanings, and identity for livestock at the sub-clan level for shared recognition. It also reflects on the development of these systems in the era of new technology, where the identity of the owner is linked with the telephone number. Consequently, the identification of animals transferred from the sub-clan level to individual ownership.



*Photo by Jama Musse Jama, 2014*

## 1. Introduction

Ownership, individual, and collective identity represent fundamental aspects of any community and are approached through various methods. Such aspects often involve personal characterization and property marking, which are frequently depicted through body markings signifying a sense of belonging. Tattooing has served as a commu-



nicative practice in diverse historical contexts and periods. Different communities have employed tattoos for various purposes : marking enslaved people and criminals in Greece, for decorative purposes in Japan, and to signify bravery and social status among the Maori tribes of New Zealand. These markings have also represented spirituality, health, cure, aristocracy, tribes, sexuality, fertility, and beauty (Hawkin, 2022). In Ethiopia, some communities mark newborns with a hot iron for protection from evil spirits (Solomon, 2023).

The marking of identity and belongingness also extends to people's property. The concept of marking ownership dates back to early times when enslaved individuals were tattooed and marked, similar to livestock. Livestock brands, for example, consist of unique markings seared into animals' hides with a hot iron, specifically designed to indicate ownership. Although they may seem like simple logos or trademarks, livestock brands adhere to rigorous standards and are developed using a specific language dictated by their social environment. Livestock branding dates back to 2700 BC, as evidenced by ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. It is a common practice not only in Africa but also outside the continent. Many herders, such as cowboys in the United States of America, Mexico, Spain, and Australia, utilize branding to identify a cow's owner, protect livestock from rustlers, and separate them when it comes time to drive to market, rail yards, or stockyards. See for further background and details in Irwin, (2001); Krutak, (2015); Hawken (2022) Coleman, (2022) and Solomon (2023).

## 2. Livestock marking in Africa

Historical evidence regarding African livestock property marking is limited (Baroin, 2010). Nevertheless, accounts describing practices such as ear cuts have a long-lasting history. In the 1920s, it was reported in Madagascar (Birkeli, 1926), where it was already a well-established practice. Across the continent, the same technique (though not necessarily the same marks) is documented among the Fulani people, well-known livestock herders spread throughout the Sahelian zone south of the Sahara, from Senegal to Sudan. Concerning livestock branding, it appears to be more widespread than ear cuts. Most African pastoral peoples, including cattle and camel herders, brand their livestock (Baroin, 2010).

In 1913, H. A. MacMichael conducted research on the practice of branding among the main camel-herding tribes of Kordofan in North-



ern Sudan, most of whom were Arabs. MacMichael's work describes 133 brands used by these tribes, including information on their names, sizes, and positions. However, MacMichael notes the difficulties of such research due to the countless varieties and exceptions that occur, making it challenging to formulate a rule. He also found that some brands are specific to one tribe or tribal section, indicating a common ancestry. In some cases, the original brand falls into disuse (MacMichael, 1913).

The research account by Emil Birkeli on livestock earmarks on the Western coast of Madagascar in 1926 examines both the practice of earmarking and its role in tracking the migration of communities. His pioneering work was continued in the late 1960s by French anthropologist, Suzanne Chazan-Gillig, who studied the evolution of the same earmarks. Highlighting the social significance of earmarking among the Menabe kingdom in Western Madagascar. She observes that livestock earmarks are associated with a lineage tomb and that these marks are a sign of the king's extraordinary influence. However, using a lineage mark does not necessarily indicate a kinship link. She stated that it may also signify a political one since, in the case of allegiance between two groups, the subordinate group will adopt the marks of the dominant one.

The following publications further explore cultural rituals associated with the practice. In this regard, Marguerite Dupire's publication (1954) addresses livestock ear-cuts among the Fulani mentioned above. These livestock earmarks are cut out during a ritual, which the author describes as indicating the owner's identity and protecting the animal against bad luck, illness, or death. Dupire also emphasizes that a mark is not individual but rather belongs to the primary patrilineage. Therefore, the segmentation of a patrilineage automatically leads to creating a new mark. Livestock earmarks thus illustrates a tribe's cohesion or diversity. As for the individual, his situation will be read through his use of patrilineal marks on the left ear and matrilineal ones on the right ear (i.e., the opposite of Madagascar). Dupire also observes that marks do not solely refer to kinship ties. Another type of ear-cut, known by a different name, designates an animal as part of a borrowing contract, a type of social exchange widespread among and specific to Fulani herders (Dupire, 1954).

Anthropological research among African pastoral people intensified in the 1960s, bringing forth more material on livestock marking. In

his famous book on Somali camel herders, "A Pastoral Democracy," published in 1961, Ioan M. Lewis briefly indicates that camel brands do not belong to individuals but to lineage groups. These usually are Dia-paying groups (i.e. relatives who jointly pay compensation for murder), who are also responsible when camels are stolen by raiders (p. 83). Lewis's description is concise, and stresses a critical point, namely, the relationship between brands and camel theft (Lewis, 1961). This is far from negligible in a society where livestock raiding was standard.

The French administrative officer Albert Le Rouvreur published a book about the Sahelian and Saharan tribes of Chad in 1962. It provides extensive data about the numerous tribes of Northern Chad and includes 15 tables on camel and livestock brands. The author considers these brands as a type of group signature (Rouvreur, 1962). In 1966, Ian Cunnison published his anthropological study of an Arab livestock-herding tribe, the Humr of Southern Kordofan (Sudan) as cited in Baroin, 2010. Following MacMichael's footsteps, he lists their brands and briefly discusses their social use. Each of the two Humr tribal sections has its brand, and it is common for major or minor lineages to have exclusive brands. These brands aid in the search for stray animals and serve as a means of mystical protection for their livestock. They change them when they no longer appear effective. The mystical use of brands as a form of protection, which may prompt herders to change their marks in case of bad luck, is similar to that noted by Dupire (1954) regarding Fulani livestock ear-cuts.

Neville Dyson-Hudson conducted a study on the Karimojong, livestock herders in southern Uganda, who belong to a group of East African herders organized by generation and age sets. This social structure significantly differs from that of other pastoralist communities. Age societies are spread across Africa from Southern Sudan and Ethiopia through Uganda and Kenya, down to Northern Tanzania. The age systems determine political and ritual activities involving men according to their age or generation group. In these societies, a "succession ceremony" takes place every fifteen years or so, during which the ruling "fathers" hand over their responsibilities to a younger group of "sons." Rituals play a significant role in these societies due to this ritual succession of age groups. During the succession ceremonies, a formal branding of livestock representing the tribal herds is performed.

In the following days, all unbranded stock will also be branded. Dyon-Hudson's book, published in 1966, provides precise drawings and information about the Karimojong clan livestock brands.

### 3. Components of Brands

At its most basic, a livestock brand comprises a few simple letters and numbers, possibly combined with basic shapes or symbols like a line, circle, heart, arc, or diamond. This symbolic presentation is culture-specific. Literature presents the rock shelters and paintings on them as spaces to gain an explanation about the meaningful crafting of animal branding. In the case of Lukenya Hill, for instance, the rock shelters have walls with geometric symbols associated with meat-feasting ceremonies. Meat-feasting shelters exist from northern Tanzania through Kenya to Lake Turkana. They are places where Maa-speaking initiated men, who are not permitted to eat meat in their homes, gather to kill and feast on animals, predominantly livestock. During or after feasting, symbols of the animals eaten were painted on the shelter ceiling in white or, less often, red. Maa speakers brand their livestock and camels with symbols that signify the lineage of their owners but may also indicate if an animal has been treated for a particular disease. Different symbols may be used for male and female animals. The sites of Namoratung'a near Lake Turkana in northern Kenya showed a similar visible relationship. The southernmost site is well known for its 167 megalithic stones marking male burials on which hundreds of geometric motifs are engraved. Some of these motifs resemble the brand marks that the Turkana mark on their livestock, camels, donkeys, and other livestock in the area. However, local people claim no authorship for the funerary engravings (Russell, 2013 :4).

Recent research by Russell (2013) has shown that at Namoratung'a, the branding of animals signifies a sense of belonging rather than a mark of ownership as we understand it in a modern farming context; all livestock—cattle, camels, goats, sheep, and donkeys—are branded according to species and sex. Ethnographic accounts document that clan membership can only be determined by observing someone with their livestock (Russell, 2013). The symbol itself is not as important as placing it on the animal's skin, and local people have confirmed that they never mark rocks with brand marks. Thus, local Turkana may have borrowed the geometric motifs on the grave markers to serve as identity markers, but in a different context. Some geometric rock art is



located in the open landscape and on graves in the Horn of Africa. It has been suggested that these, too, are brand or clan marks, possibly made by camel-keeping pastoralists to mark achievement, territory, or ownership (Russell, 2013 :18). Some nomadic pastoralists, further afield, such as the Tuareg, place their clan marks along the routes they travel, carved onto salt blocks, trees, and wells (Mohamed, 1990; Landais, 2001).

It is evident from the literature that arriving at a singular answer to what brands signify is challenging, going beyond sociological speculation of power status, ownership, and associated explanations. Nevertheless, it also suggests that brands serve purposes beyond identity, encompassing purposive decisions to communicate messages of togetherness, wishes for prosperity and health, and space for strengthening cultural governance systems, as observed in the case of the Karamojas.

#### **4. Livestock Branding for Somali Nomads**

The Somali pastoralist nomad community takes great pride in livestock ownership, with camels holding a special place of honor. Camels symbolize prosperity and serve as a means of bringing together families through marriage and reconciliation. The number of camels a person owns is considered a measure of their worth, and the loss of life due to unfortunate circumstances is compensated through 100 camels for a male and 50 for a female. The harsh and arid environment in which they live makes camels vital to the community's livelihood. No other community in the world places such importance on camels in their local economy and culture as the Somali community does.

Possessing a certain number of livestock and physical strength are the primary requirements for survival and success in the demanding environment of Somali pastoral nomads. However, the importance of the camel for the Somalis arises primarily from its provision of milk and meat within the subsistence economy and its use as a burden for transporting milk to the market, water from wells, and household belongings when families move to new areas. Besides its economic importance, the camel holds social and cultural significance for the Somalis. Among the domestic livestock they raise, camels are the most highly valued. Somalis have eloquently described the practical uses of the camel in their vast oral literature (Abokor, 1986). Apart from their value in milk and meat and as transport animals, camels are prized

for their role in traditional social relations, such as the payment of bride-wealth and compensation for injured parties in tribal feuds. In the case of tribal feuds, camels are the sole means of payment of blood money to the deceased's lineage (Hussein, 1993).

According to Hussein, 1993, Somali pastoralists also view camels as a form of banking system or security against drought, disease, and other natural calamities that can severely impact smaller livestock stocks. In times of need, lineage members often provide camels to households that have lost their livestock due to drought. Camels also serve as a unifying factor between different lineage groups, fostering group solidarity. Although camels are individually owned and a man typically inherits them at birth from his father, they are simultaneously considered the collective property of a particular patrilineage. Despite the extensive urbanization and commercialization of livestock, particularly camels, the social and economic value of camels remains high. The camel milk market and the prevalence of camel meat-serving restaurants, even in urban centers, are evidence of the community's enduring connection with their camels. Accordingly, ensuring the identification and proper marking of ownership of such a valuable asset serves both as a depiction of social status and as security for the owner. The branding of livestock for Somalis is aligned with this dual purpose, mirroring practices found in the wider global pastoral community, as discussed in previous sections.

## 5. The brands, the branding, and their meaning in Somaliland

Branding holds significant importance within the Somali nomadic community, much like in other parts of the world, as it serves as crucial evidence of ownership and aids in identifying stolen or rustled camels among rival clans. Livestock rustling, a prevalent practice among pastoralist communities like the Karamoja in East Africa, the South Sudanese, and Somalis, is often used to assert power. Unbranded camels, referred to as *Sumadlaawe*, can easily be claimed by different rival groups, highlighting the critical role of marking in securing ownership. Historical accounts also indicate that rustled livestock are not rebranded, showcasing the power of the group that rustled them. Additionally, rustled livestock are kept separate from self-owned livestock within the Somali community, as they are considered impure compared to those owned by the family or community. This separation ensures that rustled livestock are not used for religious sacri-

fices during celebrations. Consequently, recognizable brands make it easier to recognize ownership and return lost animals or inform the owner of their whereabouts.

Brands in the Somali community hold both individual and collective identities, with families inheriting brands from their ancestors and making adjustments to signify the growth of their lineage. Although the exact origins of this practice within the Somali community are uncertain, it is speculated to date back as far as 5000 years. The animal paintings found on the walls of the Laas Geel caves in Somaliland, depicting animals adorned with distinctive markings, serve as vivid examples of this tradition. This observation aligns with Russell's research (2013), which explores the relationship between cave paintings and animal branding, although determining which came first remains a topic for further investigation. Regardless, animal branding, whether for ownership, identity, or as a ritualistic social practice, has been ingrained in Somali culture for centuries. Narratives in "A Pastoral Democracy," published in 1961 by Ioan M. Lewis, also suggest the existence of camel brands within the community, primarily as a practice among lineage groups. These groups, often Dia-paying groups (relatives who collectively pay compensation for murder), also assume responsibility when raiders steal camels. Lewis's emphasis on camel raiding as a customary practice among the community underscores the importance of having distinct brands to identify lost camels and facilitate their recovery.

In camel trading, brands convey critical information during exchanges. Typically, selling a camel is not the first choice for a Somali nomad, occurring only when necessary due to economic challenges or the camel's inability to produce sufficient milk. In such cases, ownership rights must be clarified through oral narration, especially if the camel bears the brand of a different family group. Since the community operates within a shared market system, the history of camel purchases between different family groups is communal knowledge, facilitating smooth trading processes. During a camel exchange, the conversation between the trader, the purchaser, and the broker begins by acknowledging the ownership of the camel, either by family affiliation or through a documented statement of transfer of ownership. Proof of ownership typically takes the form of verbal narration provided by the family that owns the particular brand, corroborated by a listing of clan lineage, family names, and place of residence familiar to the



traders. Once the verbal narration confirms the ownership rights, the owner can proceed to sell the camel. If ownership is being transferred through a purchase from another group that owns the camel with the specific brand, the seller must present a document, typically a written paper, stating the clan affiliation, the name of the person who transferred ownership, and the new owner's details. This document is essential if the intention is to resell the camel. Failure to produce this document can result in accusations of theft and subsequent consequences.

Typically, brands are retained even after a purchase, with the new owner having the right to add their brand alongside the previous one to indicate the ownership history of the camel. When a purchased camel gives birth, the brand of the new owning family is marked on the offspring, contributing to the expansion of the family brand, which serves as a signifier of wealth. Additionally, marking the newborn with the mother's brand adds to the complexity of identification and mixing within the herd. Consequently, the brand of the purchasing family continues to be placed on any offspring born from the purchased camel. Some families opt to change their brand, believing it may influence the productivity of their camels. Consequently, a family may select a new brand and apply it to their livestock to change their fortunes. At a higher sub-clan level, similar marks may be retained, but a new mark is added alongside them. For example, an individual from a certain clan may have the brand *Faruur iyo*(and) *Xariirad*. Since *Xariirad* is shared by the main clan, it is retained, while the individual may change the *Faruur* to another mark. While his family may continue to use *Xariirad iyo Faruur*, he adopts the new mark. Although not always appreciated, this practice has been observed in the past and has contributed to the diversity of brands within the community.

## 6. Branding Day

Branding Day is a communal activity observed by many pastoral and livestock-breeding communities worldwide. In Western Canada, farmers perceive marking livestock as both an art form and a modern marketing technique, blending ancient traditions with contemporary practices. Similarly, Somalis have their distinctive cultural ritual for animal branding, which takes place at the end of the rainy season and the beginning of spring. This timing ensures that branding is completed before the grazing season commences and anticipates the mix-

ing of livestock. The Somali calendar consists of four seasons, each comprising three months : *Xagaa* (Summer), *Dayr* (Autumn), *Diraac* (Winter), and *Gu'* (Spring). *Xagaa* and *Diraac* are dry seasons known as '*Jiilaal*,' while *Dayr* and *Gu* are rainy seasons (Hussein, 2012). In a traditional seasonal pattern, *Gu'* months are designated for branding young livestock.

During this time, all animals of the same age are collectively marked in a festive atmosphere. The branding symbol is applied using hot ironing, ensuring it remains permanent and unalterable, particularly for camels. This process, though necessary, is excruciating for the animals and requires extensive preparation by the owning family. Another method of marking involves cutting the animal's skin or a part of their body, such as the edge of the ear, known as the "symbol of milk" or *xi* indicating the marking at the baby's age. Ear cutting is primarily done on smaller livestock like goats, while branding is mandatory for camels. The "symbol of milk" serves as a unique identifier, with each tribe having a major brand shared among its members. Other communities identify through the sub-group to which the "*summad caanood*" belongs. To differentiate similar brands, factors such as the type of symbol(s), the order of symbol combinations, and the location of the symbol on the body are considered. Camels are typically marked between the ages of 1 and 2 years old.

Livestock branding day is considered a collective effort, similar to tasks like watering livestock or constructing a new house, although the workload may not be as extensive. On an average branding day, around 20 livestock are typically branded, necessitating collective effort to hold the animals still and apply the mark to the appropriate body part. This need for assistance is even greater when branding camels. Traditionally, branding camels is primarily the responsibility of men, with women rarely participating due to social norms rather than strict rules. However, if women were to undertake this task, it would bring shame upon the family's men, although women may brand miniature livestock like goats. This division of labor is guided by notions of strength and pride, influencing job classification within the community. There is no strict age limit for who can participate in livestock branding, although older, respected men are often preferred to perform this task as symbols of prestigious social ritual. Families

with large herds may conduct branding as a family activity, or it may occur within the neighborhood, often involving close relatives belonging to the same dia-paying group living nearby. In such cases, group branding ceremonies are held, accompanied by Somali tea and qat to enhance the communal spirit of the occasion.

## 7. Names and classifications of some brands used in Somaliland

In Jama Musse (2013, reprinted in 2024 on *Dhaxalreeb*), approximately a hundred different livestock brands were gathered and documented. The article described the meaning behind these brands, accompanied by some visual imagery, and then categorized them based on the type of livestock they were used for (camels, cattle, sheep, and goats). Some of the specific brands mentioned include *Alif, Barkin, Baxaro, Bil, Birqaab, Calan, Canjiid, Cawaag, Dacal, Dacarimo, Dakhar, Dhaad, Dharan, Dheg-dalool, Dheg-jeex, Dhud-baxar, Dildil, Far, Farxuunsho, Fiid, Fur, Gabal, Gadh, Galgaal, Galoolooyin, Ganaf, Garab wayn, Garoof gaane, Gawl, Godol, Goobo, Gorod, Gorof, Haneed, Hangool, Hareed, harreed, Hawaar, Heensaraar, Idan, Iskutallaab, Jiim, Kabaal, Kabaal jab, Laanqayr, Laba dhaad, Liin, Maqas, Marag, Marag godan, Marag jiifa, Marag taagan, Mareeg, Miim, Milow, Qalimmo (Qalin), Qalqale, Qanjagub, Sakamad, Saneeg, Shax, Shumme, Taraar, Toojad, Xariir, Xariiro, Xaynboorme* and others.

Animal branding in Somaliland can be categorized primarily by the techniques used. The most common method is the application of a hot iron, which is predominantly employed for branding camels and cattle. Another frequently used technique involves cutting specific parts of the animal, such as the ears or lips, which is particularly common for sheep and goats, though it can also be applied to camels. Additionally, branding can be classified based on the location on the animal's body. The main consideration is ensuring that the brand remains visible from a distance, especially for camels, allowing for easy identification. Another important factor is minimizing harm to the animal. Therefore, brands are typically placed on areas of the body that are less sensitive and won't cause significant injury. Common branding locations include the head, cheeks, hips, upper legs, and neck, while cuts may also be made on the ears and lips.



The collection of Somali camel herders' brands contains symbols that may evoke apparently religious meanings associated with Abrahamic faiths, such as the crescent for Islam, the Cross for Christianity, and the *Shax*, which sometimes resembles the Star of David for Judaism. However, according to Jama Musse (2013, reprinted in 2024 on Dhaxalreeb), there is insufficient evidence to conclude that these brands have inherent religious significance for the herders. Nevertheless, the Arabic influence is visible in the signs and names used, as exemplified by the letters *Alif* and *Miim* (see paragraph 9 below).

### 8. Selected brands with descriptions

In this section, we have chosen 18 brands used by camel herders in Somaliland and provided images<sup>209</sup> and further details about them. It is uncommon for a camel to have just a single brand; typically, the brand of a sub-sub-clan consists of a combination of two or three symbols, like 'two *Alif*-s and a *Shumme*.'

209 All the photos used in this section is coming from the research done by Jama Musse in 2013 and with the photo by Esse Musse Adan of the Hargeysa Cultural Centre (see Jama Musse, 2013, reprinted in 2024 on *Dhaxalreeb*).



**Laba Alif**

For camels only: the symbol used is alif (in this case two alif-s), which is the first letter of the Arabic alphabet (ألف - [ʔalif]). The symbol resembles the letter ʔ and is placed on the animals' cheek. It is also known as qalimmo (lit. pens) or dacarimmo.



**Barkin**

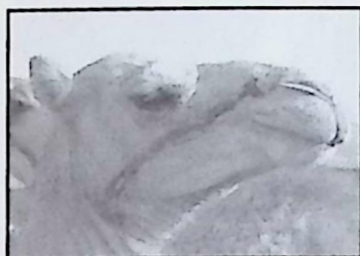
For camels only: a barkin (lit. a "wooden-neck-rest", with the plural form being barkimo, meaning pillows) is a four-edged symbol that is placed on the animal's cheek.



**Bil**

"Bil" (meaning "crescent" in Somali) refers to a curved line that is placed on the cheek of animals. This shape resembles a crescent moon, with a downward-facing curvature.





### Canjiid

For camels, goats and sheep: the term canjiid is a compound word, where can means "cheek" and jiid means "push it to make it longer." It is a symbol used for branding the cheek of camel, sheep or goats, either to mark them or, in some cases, to treat a condition called "shimbir" (which is a disease known as "bird").



### Shumme

For camels, the "shumme" is a large marking simila to a bug dot on the upper part of the camel's neck. This *shumme* symbol is often combined with other symbols to create a distinctive brand or identifier for the camel to be of sub-sub clan. The overall brand here consists of "*laba farood iyo shumme*" (two far-s and *shumme*).



### Dhegjeex

For camels, goats, cattle, and sheep, the symbol is a type of cut known as *dhegjeex* (literally "cut-air"). It is also referred to as *fur* (literally "open") and it is one of the few cuts made on camels.



### Dhudbaxar

*Dhudbaxar* also referred to as *galoolooyin*, consists of two elongated lines running along the neck, starting from the head and extending down to the lower part of the neck. The term *dhudbaxar* is a compound word, where *dhud* means "thread" or "a constituent element of a rope," and *baxar* translates to "sea."



### Far

For only camels: Far (literally meaning finger) is unclosed circle on the cheek of the camel. In this case, the overall brand consists of *Far* and *Qalimmo* (*far iyo laba qalin*).



### Goobo

For camels only, a *Goobo* (which literally means "circle") is a circular symbol typically placed on the outer side of the animal's shoulder.





### Hareed

Specifically for camels, the symbol *hareed* is also known as *har-reed*, and in Somali, the word refers to the hair that grows on the side of the face, otherwise known as sideburns or whiskers of an animal. As brand, it is stright lines that runs from the top of the camel's head down to the lower jawbone.



### Laanqayr

The *laanqayr*, which literally translates to "cross," is a unique marking found exclusively on the necks of camels. It consists of two vertical lines that intersect to form a perfect cross shape.



### Shax

The *shax* symbol, which is exclusive to camels, is an isosceles triangle with the point facing upwards on the camel's cheek. The term "shax" in the Somali language refers to a traditional game that is akin to the game of *nine men's morris*, and it utilizes the same game board (See Jama Musse, 2000).



### Marag-godan

For camels only, *marag-godan* is a compound word (where *marag* literally means "witness, proof or testimony" and *godan* means "curved") that represents a curved symbol typically placed on the outer side of the animal's hip or thigh.



### Marag-jiif

For camels only, *marag-jiif* is a compound word (where *marag* literally means "witness, proof or testimony" and *jiif* means "laid in horizontal or oblique (but not vertical)") that represents a straight symbol typically placed on the outer side of the animal's shoulder.



### Miim

For only camels: *miim* (from arabic [mi:m] (ميم), looks like the م (*meem*) in arabic alphabet, and it is always on the neck of the camel.





### Dhaad

The *dhaad* symbol is the only one that has been registered and is placed on the front leg of the camel. It consists of a horizontal line. In this particular case, the actual brand is made up of two *dhaad* symbols and a *shumme* symbol.



### Mareeg

The term "mareeg" literally translates to the rope used for the neck of a lamb or young goat. In the context of branding, it is an oblique line on the neck of a camel.



### Bil kor u jeedda

For only camels: *bil* (lit. "crescent") has the shape of 'sickle moon'. It is a curved line put on the animals' cheek. This time is *bil* looking upwards.

## 9. The changing aspects of Livestock Branding

While branding and marking methods have evolved in the digital era, with sophisticated identifiers like microchips being used in well-developed nations, the practice of branding remains common in the Somali community. The increasing number of livestock inspection facilities, particularly for livestock export, has led to the adoption of scientific methods for identifying and sorting livestock. As a result, the role of branding and marking has expanded beyond mere ownership and identity verification. While this trend is observed globally, one intriguing phenomenon in the Somali pastoral community, particularly as livestock move into urban centres, is the inclusion of telephone numbers on the brands. Today, livestock grazing in Hargeysa and surrounding areas often bear the telephone numbers of their owners written in black permanent ink on their skin. This practice serves as a convenient means for resolving issues such as accidents involving livestock or locating lost animals. If a vehicle hits a camel or a goat and causes a fatal injury, or if stray animals are found, or if a free-roaming camel damages property, individuals can simply call the number on the animal, contact the owner, and settle the matter. Compensation agreements can even be facilitated through mobile electronic money transfers.



In Western countries, livestock branding has evolved into a significant business, with methods such as implanting microchips with radio-frequency identification (RFID) under the animal's skin<sup>210</sup>. These microchips are typically injected into calves at birth and serve for identification, monitoring, and tracing throughout the animal's life until slaughter. While other techniques for livestock identification exist, including ear tattoos, earmarking, ear tagging, and inner lip tattoos, both Western countries and Somali communities maintain traditional approaches to livestock branding for ownership identification.

Traditional Somali techniques often involve iron branding or small cuts on the animal's skin, which can be painful and damaging. Each sub-group within the community has its unique brand, typically consisting of one or more symbols burned onto the animal's body or sometimes cut into the skin. The position of the marking on the body also provides information for identifying the owner. The emergence of technology, particularly the use of telephone numbers as unique identifiers for Somalis, presents an intriguing social phenomenon. Telephone numbers have become a means of identifying and assigning ownership, integrated into the animals' labelling process. This development has introduced a new dimension of social consciousness and responsibility, especially in situations where third-party observers are absent to witness or enforce accountability in accidents involving animals.

The use of telephone numbers allows access to the owner's full name (first name, father's name, grandfather's and great-grandfather)<sup>211</sup>, as this information is readily available through electronic money payment systems provided by telecom companies. Individuals may ex-

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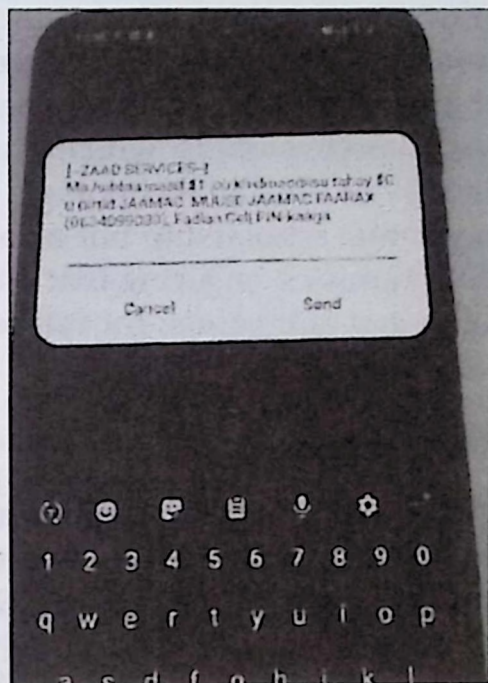
210 Implantable microchips are cylindrical devices that are implanted in the subcutaneous tissues using a hypodermic needle. These devices contain four components: a capacitor, antenna, connecting wire and a covering. The devices are battery-free and sealed in biocompatible glass or polymer covered by a sheath to prevent migration. Microchips are activated by a low-power radiofrequency signal emitted by scanners; electromagnetic induction generates electricity in the antenna and transmits the information stored in the microchip. When activated by the scanner, the microchip transmits a unique, preprogrammed identification number. Some microchips also collect and transmit body temperature data. (<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/microchipping-animals> retrieved on 28th of May 2020)

211 See the image that shows the message requesting confirmation for electronic payment on Zaad telecom services.



exploit this accessibility by initiating a fake money transfer attempt to extract the owner's full name. Unfortunately, there is no consent procedure available to protect privacy when opening an electronic mobile money account.

When opening an electronic mobile money account, there is no consent procedure technically available for you to protect your privacy. The use of telephone numbers for livestock identification represents a social and natural progress aligned with this technology, which has become a very resourceful tool in the Somali community since it is used frequently for money transfer. Hence, by writing their number, owners are claiming ownership and are also creating a bridge to facilitate communication in times of necessity by substituting traditional marking procedures. This transition is inevitable and demands action in preserving, documenting, and keeping the indigenous knowledge stored in the symbols before number identification and labelling take total control. Today, one can see livestock, goats, or sheep with telephone numbers placed on their skin, making it easy to trace the owner of the animal.



## 10. Conclusions

The practice of livestock branding is deeply embedded in the socio-cultural framework of pastoralist communities worldwide, where ownership, power dynamics, identity, and cultural meanings converge. This intricate relationship is increasingly influenced by both social changes and technological advancements, as highlighted in this chapter. A thorough examination of the historical and contemporary aspects of livestock branding is essential for documenting the invaluable cultural symbolism associated with this practice. Such documentation is vital for comprehensively understanding the evolving nature of these symbols and the driving forces behind their transformation. In particular, Somali livestock branding presents a rich area of study



that has received limited academic attention, despite its multifaceted implications for social structure and community identity.

The chapter also touches upon the social and psychological dimensions of change within the practice of branding, providing insight into how these factors affect interpersonal and communal relationships among pastoralists. The urgency of this research is underscored by the need to preserve both the practice of livestock branding and its associated symbols, which are at risk of fading in the face of change in way of life and technology. This exploration is critical not only for academic scholarship but also for the cultural heritage of pastoralist communities, ensuring that vital aspects of their social fabric are documented and valued for future generations.

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## THE SOMALI TRANSLATION OF OSCAR WILDE'S 'THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE'

*Ahmed Ibrahim Awale*

*Suubaangarawadii iyo Ubaxii ee uu qoray Oscar Wilde*

*Waxa tarjumay hordhac iyo guudmarna u sameeyay  
Axmed Ibraahin Cawaale*

Suubaangarawadu waxa ay ka mid tahay shinbiraha yaryar ee quuta cayayaanka sida qudhaanjada, kabajaaga, dirxiga, iyo qaar kale ba. Waxa ay ku caan tahay codkeeda halalaasiga ah ee labkeedu ku soo jiito dheddiga xilliga taranraadintooda. Suubaangarawadu waxa ay ka mid tahay shinbiraha hayaama. Jiilaalkii waxay ay ammin ku qaa-dataa Afrika, xagaagiina waxa ay u laabataa qaaradda Yurub. Magaca shinbirtan oo Af Ingiriisi ahi waa '*nightingale*' oo tilmaamaya in ay inta badaan heesto xilliga habeenkii - in kasta oo maalintiiba marmar la maqlo. Shinbirtani Afafka Iraaniga iyo Hindiga waxa ay ku tahay '*Bulbul*', Af Carabidana 'غندليب'. Carabtu mararka qaar heesaaga codka macaan magacan ayay naanays ahaan ugu ladhaan.

2015kii waxa jirtay daraasad ku saabsan shinbirta Suubaangarawada oo ku soo baxday wargeyska caalamiga ah ee *Independent*. Daraasad-du waxa ay isku deyaysay in ay daaha ka rogto sirta ka dambaysa heesidda aadka u quruxda badan ee shinbirtan oo labkeedu yahay midka heesa iyo sida uu tuur iyo tirbiico isugu yeelayo in uu codkiisa macaan ugu gudbiyo dheddiga iskagana dhaadhiciyo, isaga oo raba in uu 'xiloodiyo', yahayna mid u qalma 'sey' wanaagsan, aabbo fiicanna u noqon doono dhashooda. Saynisyahannada cilmibaadhis-ta sameeyay waxa ay sheegayaan in shinbirku heestiisa ku gudbiyo, kuna xayaysiiyo qiyamka wanaagsan ee qoysnimo, markaasna shinbirba midka uu ka cod wanaagsanyahay uu ka kale uga roon yahay xagga xannaanaynta qoyskiisa, quudintooda iyo ka difaacidda cad-owgooda.

Suubaangarawadu waxa ay caan ka dhex noqotay sheekoxariirada, dhaqannada iyo suugaanta dadyow badan oo ku nool dacallada dunida sida Giriigga, Carabta, Beershiyaanka, Hindida, iyo Shiinaha.