

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

3 December 2012

SOM104240.E

Somalia: The Bravanese (Barawan) ethnic group, including the location of their traditional homeland, affiliated clans and risks they face from other clans

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

The Bravanese people [also known as Barawan, Barawani, Baravani, Reer Brava, Reer Baraawe] are an ethnic minority group in Somalia (UK 17 Jan. 2012, para. 19.21; ACCORD Dec. 2009, 17). They originate from the coastal city of Brava [also known as Barawe or Baraawe] and speak Chimiini [also known as Chimwini, Chimbilazi, Af Baraawe] (Academic 15 Nov. 2012; MRG Oct. 2010, 11), a dialect of Swahili (*ibid.*, 16; Norway 22 July 2011, 11). According to Minority Rights Group International (MRG), the Bravanese also speak a local Tunni subclan dialect, Af-Maymay (Oct. 2010, 11). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a UK based academic of Bravanese origin who has researched and published on the Bravanese explained that Bravanese people are called Waantu Wa Miini in Chimiini and are also known as Wa Mbalazi in Bravanese religious poetry (15 Nov. 2012). According to a report based on a lecture given as part of a workshop on clans in Somalia organized by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), by Dr. Joakim Gundel, a political analyst specializing in Somali studies, the Bravanese are of Arabic descent (ACCORD Dec. 2009, 17).

The ACCORD report on the Joakim Gundel lecture states that minority groups in Somalia "are not counted and their languages and cultures are neither accepted nor respected" (*ibid.*, 14). Minorities are reported to suffer "daily violence and persecution" (*Somalia Report* 18 May 2011). Additionally, MRG writes that minorities across the country experience "denial and abuse of the whole range of basic human rights," including subjection to hate speech, limited access to justice and education, and exclusion from "significant political participation" and employment (Oct. 2010, 3, 14).

1.1 Relationship of Bravanese to Benadiri

Some sources consider the Bravanese to be a sub-group of the Benadiri [also spelled Banadiri] (MRG Oct. 2010, 11; UK 23 Oct. 2012, para. 3.9.3), which the UK Border Agency describes as an "umbrella term for a number of minority groups from the coastal area roughly between Mogadishu and Kismayo who share an urban culture and are of mixed origin" (*ibid.*). MRG writes that the Bravanese are the division of the Benadiri that live in the city of Brava and have a "partially separate historical and urban cultural identity deriving from the sixteenth century ..." (Oct. 2010, 11). Meanwhile, a report by the UK Border Agency states that the "Benadiri ... are also known as Reer Hamar or Reer Brava" (23 Oct. 2012, para. 3.9.3).

In contrast, the ACCORD report indicates that the Bravanese and the Benadiri are two separate coastal ethnic groups (Dec. 2009, 17). The UK-based academic explained that, historically, Brava was considered to be part of the Benadir region and that Bravanese people were part of the Somali African National Congress political party (also known as SANU or Banaadiri) in the colonial and post-colonial era (15 Nov. 2012).

Although the term Banadiri historically included the Bravanese as well as other groups such as the Bajuni, in the contemporary context it does not include the Bravanese (Academic 19 Nov. 2012). The academic also noted that while the Bravanese speak Chimiini, other Benadiri people speak various dialects of Somali (ibid. 15 Nov. 2012).

For additional information on the Benadiri, see Response to Information Request SOM104241 of 3 December 2012.

1.2 Bravanese Sub-groups

According to the academic, the Bravanese are sub-divided into Wa Hamari (Biida and Haatimi), Walakata (Shangamaas or Tunni), Ma Shariifu, and Ooji (15 Nov. 2012). Each sub-division is further divided into smaller sub-groups (Academic 15 Nov. 2012). The Bravanese continue to engage in their traditional occupations, which include their primary industry, trade, as well as leather-tanning, shoemaking, fishing, weaving and tailoring, and making Bravanese hats and sweets (ibid. 19 Nov. 2012). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Location of Bravanese in Somalia

In 15 November 2012 correspondence, the academic provided the information in the following two paragraphs about the historical and contemporary locations of the Bravanese people.

Bravanese people originated from Brava but also lived in other places, notably in the cities of Mogadishu, Merca, and Kismayo. Traditionally, they would converge on Brava for the month of Ramadan and the days of Eid to spend time with family. Bravanese children who were born outside of Brava would be sent to Brava for school and religious education to learn their language and culture from an early age; however, this practice ended with the beginning of the civil war in the 1990s.

When the civil war began, the Bravanese fled other cities and returned to Brava to seek safety. However, Brava became a "battle zone" between the warring factions of the Darrod clan in Kismayo and the Hawiye clan in Mogadishu, and the city changed hands several times. Many Bravanese subsequently fled to other countries, particularly Kenya, although an unknown number remained "trapped" in Mogadishu, Kismayo, and other locations. Currently, the majority of Bravanese in Somalia are located in Brava. Some are located in Mogadishu and a "handful" are in Kismayo and Merca.

The UK Border Agency reports that, prior to the civil war, the Benadiri in Mogadishu lived in the Hamar Weyne, Shingani and Bondere districts, but indicated in the 23 October 2012 Operational Guidance Note on Somalia that they live in all districts of the city (para. 3.9.3). According to MRG, most Benadiri fled to Kenya, although a few thousand remain in Mogadishu, Brava and Merca, where they continue to operate businesses (Oct. 2010, 12).

3. Affiliated Clans and Risks Faced

According to the academic, the Bravanese have never been and are not currently affiliated with or under the protection of other clans or groups of any political, religious, or tribal affiliation (15 Nov. 2012). The academic also provided the following information about risks faced by the Bravanese:

Traditionally, Bravanese had no problems with any Somali tribes. They lived peacefully with all Somalis regardless of their regions or political affiliation. However, this started to change in the mid 70s when [the regime of former president Siad Barré] resettled thousands of nomads from middle and northern regions [of Somalia] in and around Brava district. When civil war started, the settlers and their fellow tribesmen caused all sorts of problems to the native Bravanese. The Bravanese never took [up arms] to fight them [and] never formed any group or faction to fight. To date the Bravanese have not taken sides in the civil war. This was at [the] price of being treated as enemy to each side [that] occupied Brava. (15 Nov. 2012)

In partial corroboration, MRG writes that, during the post-1991 civil wars, the Benadiri, many of whom were wealthy merchants, did not form an armed militia for protection and lost their "privileged status" (Oct. 2010, 12). Those who remained in the country reportedly paid clan militias or "privately employed gunmen" for armed protection (MRG Oct. 2010, 12). In a telephone interview with a UK-based researcher, former prime minister of Somalia Abdirazak Haji Hussen stated that the Bravanese people are among the groups that "in particular have suffered large scale violence and discrimination, expropriation of their assets, and other serious human rights violations in the hands of Somali clans in the recent civil wars" (Mohamoud Feb. 2012,

47).

According to the academic, "during the whole civil war in Somalia, Brava has never been in the hands of Bravanese, but [rather] Hawiye factions, Darood factions, [and currently] Al-Shabab" (15 Nov. 2012). Other sources also spoke of Al-Shabaab still in control of Brava, as of August 2012 (Sabahi 27 Aug. 2012), and as of October 2012 (Dalsan Radio 23 Oct. 2012).

MRG reports that Benadiris, particularly Bravanese, are targeted by Al-Shabaab because of their "customary faith-related practices" (Oct. 2010, 23). That organization indicates that, in March and April 2009, Al-Shabaab "executed a number of cultural attacks" in Brava, destroying Bravanese tombs, closing mosques, stopping prayers, and detaining Sheikhs (MRG May 2011).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful: Somali Minority Rights and Aid Forum and the Somali Bravanese Welfare Association in Barnet, UK.

Internet sites, including: AllAfrica; AMISOM Daily Media Monitoring; Amnesty International; Barawa.com; Dulmane.com; ecoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; Hiiraan.com; Human Rights Watch; Refugees International; Somalia NGO Consortium; *Somalia Report*; United Nations – Human Rights Council, Refworld; United States Department of State; Voice of America.

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