

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

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Somalia: The Reer Hamar and/or Benadiri, 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 Reer Hamar [also spelled Rer Hamar] is a minority group in Somalia (ACCORD Dec. 2009, 17; Mohamoud Feb. 2012, 10). According to Minority Rights Group International (MRG), *rer hamar* means "the 'clan' of Hamar" [also spelled Xamar], otherwise known as Mogadishu (Oct. 2010, 11). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a UK-based independent researcher who lived in Somalia for 25 years and completed her doctoral thesis on the Reer Hamar/Benadiri people stated that the Reer Hamar "belong to the lineage groups that are associated with stone-town Mogadishu, the oldest part of the city ... which was historically known as Hamar" (21 Nov. 2012). MRG explains that the Reer Hamar are part of a group of minorities that originates from "mercantile urban communities" established by migrants from the Arabian Peninsula who settled along the southern coast of Somalia and built stone towns for defence and trade (Oct. 2010, 8, 11).

Some sources indicate that Reer Hamar are also known as Benadiri [also spelled Benadiiri, Banadiri, Benadir] (UK 23 Oct. 2012, para. 3.9.3; UN 24 Feb. 2009, para. 53; Academic 19 Nov. 2012). Others suggest that the Reer Hamar are a sub-group of the Benadiri (Mohamoud Feb. 2012, 10; ACCORD Dec. 2009, 17; MRG Oct. 2010, 11). According to the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo), the term Benadiri has only been used to refer to people since 1991, before which it was strictly a geographic term (Norway 17 Dec. 2009, 2)

To explain the variation in terminology, the independent researcher, in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate on 21 November 2012, provided the information in the following paragraph.

The geographic region of Benaadir encompasses the southern coast of Somalia, from around Warsheikh, north of Mogadishu, to Kismayu, near the Kenyan border, and the people originating from this region call themselves Banaadiri ("the people of the ports"). In some contexts, Benaadiri and Reer Hamar may be used interchangeably. For example, a member of the Reer Hamar may refer to himself or herself as Benaadiri. Additionally, because the Benaadiri lineages (referred to in asylum literature as "sub-clans") that are represented in Hamar are also found in other Benaadir towns and villages, the term Reer Hamar is often also loosely used by others to refer to Benadiri groups in general.

Sources indicate that the Benadiri do not constitute a "clan" because they do not claim to have a common ancestor (Norway 17 Dec. 2009, 2; MRG Oct. 2010, 34, note 43). Rather, as Landinfo explains, they are "a group or category of clans, including sub-clans, of light skin ... and of partly Arab descent" (Norway 17 Dec. 2009, 2). 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 Reer Hamar are mainly of Arabic

descent but are "not exactly a homogenous ethnic group" (ACCORD Dec. 2009, 17). The independent researcher emphasized that, in more recent times, Somalis who are not ethnically part of the Benadiri may call themselves or be considered Benadiri or Reer Hamar because they live in the general area of the Benadir coast (21 Nov. 2012).

According to the ACCORD report on the Joakim Gundel lecture, minority groups in Somalia "are not counted and their languages and cultures are neither accepted nor respected" (Dec. 2009, 14). They 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 Sub-groups, Languages, and Occupations

MRG writes that the Reer Hamar are divided into a large number of different subgroups (Oct. 2010, 11). According to the ACCORD report, there are at least two main Reer Hamar lineages, known as the "'Gibil Cad'" and the "'Gibil Madow'" (Dec. 2009, 17). Landinfo writes that, according to information gathered in interviews with Reer Hamar sources, there are four major Reer Hamar "clans," known as the Moorshe, the Iskashato, the DhabarWeyne and the Bandawow, in addition to "many other smaller groups" (Norway 17 Dec. 2009, 2). Landinfo also notes that the Ashraf of Mogadishu belong to the Reer Hamar, but the Ashraf of Bay region do not (*ibid.*, 3). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to MRG, the Reer Hamar speak their own dialect of Somali, known as Af-Hamar (Oct. 2010, 11). The ACCORD report states that the Reer Hamar are a linguistic and cultural minority (Dec. 2009, 17). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the UK Border Agency, the Reer Hamar are "an urban and educated people" who generally engage in commercial occupations, such as banking, business, medicine, and engineering (23 Oct. 2012, para. 3.9.3). The independent researcher wrote that the Benadiri are people of an "urban and trading way of life" and that "[l]iving on the shoreline, participating in the Indian Ocean trade, and living in towns, their socio-economic life has developed in ways different from that of their fellow [nomadic pastoralist (SOMRAF 2010)] Somalis of the interior" (Independent Researcher 21 Nov. 2012). According to the Somali Minority Rights and Aid Forum (SOMRAF), a Nairobi-based not-for-profit human rights, aid and development NGO working in Somalia and other countries (MRG Oct. 2010, ii), non-pastoralist groups are generally considered "inferior or minority groups" in Somalia (SOMRAF 2010).

2. Location of Reer Hamar/Benadiri in Somalia

Sources indicate that the Reer Hamar originally lived in the historic districts of Mogadishu, including Hamar [HamarWeyne], Shangani [Shangaan, Shingani] (ACCORD Dec. 2009, 17; Academic 19 Nov. 2012; UK 23 Oct. 2012, para. 3.9.3) and Bondere (*ibid.*). 2012 sources indicate that they are living in all districts of the city (*ibid.*; Academic 19 Nov. 2012).

According to the independent researcher, there were small communities of Benadiri people in the southern interior of Somalia, including in Afgooye, Baidoa, Jowhar, Beledweyne, and others, due to a history of trade between coastal and inland communities (21 Nov. 2012). There were also some Benadiri in urban centres further north, although the "core" Benadiri communities remained on the coast (Independent Researcher 21 Nov. 2012).

The UK Border Agency, citing Jane's July 2010 country risk assessment on Somalia, indicates that, in the aftermath of state collapse, most Benadiri fled the country (UK 17 Jan. 2012, para. 19.67). MRG similarly reports that most Benadiri fled to Kenya as refugees (Oct. 2010, 12). Landinfo reports that, during its fact-finding missions to Nairobi in 2008 and 2009, both its international and Somali sources could not provide specific up-to-date information about the situation of the Benadiri, including information on the number of Reer Hamar living in Mogadishu (Norway 17 Dec. 2009, 1). According to the independent researcher, however, those who remained in Somalia returned to their historical homes in the stone-town communities of the coast (21 Nov. 2012). Similarly, MRG states that a few thousand Benadiri remained in Mogadishu, Brava and Merca, where they continue to operate businesses (Oct. 2010, 12).

3. Affiliated Clans and Risks Faced

Sources indicate that, although the Benadiri enjoyed a "privileged status" prior to the civil war, they were subsequently targeted by other groups who took their businesses and properties (MRG Oct. 2010, 12; UK 17 Jan. 2012, para. 19.67). They reportedly suffered "large-scale organized violence" (Mohamoud Feb. 2012, 11) and "warlord militia attacks" (MRG Oct. 2010, 12). Benadiri girls and women were reportedly targeted for rape (*ibid.*; Mohamoud Feb. 2012, 11; UK 23 Oct. 2012, para. 3.9.3) and forced marriage (*ibid.*). According to various sources, the Benadiri were unarmed and unable to protect themselves (UK 17 Jan. 2012, para. 19.67; MRG Oct. 2010, 12).

According to the independent researcher, the Reer Hamar/Benadiri

are not affiliated with other groups, although for historical reasons (long history of trading links, and resultant settlement further inland ... this has led over the centuries to some intermarriage, cultural exchange, and in some instances of feelings of affinity or mutual understanding

Before the civil war, business and social relations existed between the Benaadiris and other Somali groups, especially with some of the sub-clans of the Hawiye and Digil clans But such associations did not constitute political alliances, and afford any form of protection when civil war broke out. (21 Nov. 2012)

Similarly, Jane's country risk assessment for Somalia states that the Benadiri were "easy prey" during the civil war because they were not allied with any faction and had no links to Somali lineages (UK 17 Jan. 2012, para. 19.67).

Some sources indicate that the risk of Benadiris being targeted for persecution [by majority clan members] has decreased significantly since the early years of the civil war (ACCORD Dec. 2009, 17; Independent Researcher 21 Nov. 2012). The ACCORD report suggests that the ability of Reer Hamar households to establish relations with strong clans such as the Hawiye Abgal and the Habr Gedir through intermarriage has allowed them to obtain some level of protection (Dec. 2009, 18). Similarly, Landinfo indicates that, up until 2006, Reer Hamar communities married off their daughters to militia members (Norway 17 Dec. 2009, 2). Sources also report that the Reer Hamar hire militia members for armed protection (*ibid.*; MRG Oct. 2010, 12; see also ACCORD Dec. 2009, 18). However, the independent researcher explains that,

[i]n the context of the civil war, for the Benaadir 'protection' has meant forced payment of bribes and being subjected to extortion by majority clans' armed and lawless militias, as a means of raising illegal revenue - and is more accurately akin to 'protection rackets'. In the absence of a functioning government and with no recourse to law, only the political and fighting strength of a person's clan can offer safety or protection against human rights abuses: it is axiomatic, therefore, that a person must be from a dominant clan to be able to access this kind of protection. (21 Nov. 2012)

In addition, the ACCORD report suggests that the Reer Hamar participate in the political process and have a certain amount of power (Dec. 2009, 17). In contrast, the independent researcher states they remain a political and economic minority and that their representation in governments since 1990 has been and continues to be "token" (21 Nov. 2012).

MRG notes that gender-based violence against women in general is prevalent throughout the country, although it can have a more severe impact on minority women (Oct. 2010, 19). MRG also indicates that minority women who are internally displaced are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence (*ibid.*, 19), an assessment that is corroborated by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UN 5 May 2010, 35). Additionally, MRG researchers visiting camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Bosasso [northeastern Somalia] in 2009 reported "a disturbing and persistent pattern of rape of minority women [including Benadiri women], perpetrated by majority men and sometimes by members of the Puntland police, army, or security service" (MRG Oct. 2010, 20).

MRG reports that the Benadiri have been targeted by "radical Islamists" for religious persecution (*ibid.*, 13). However, in a 2011 report, Landinfo noted that many members of Al-Shabaab belong to "marginalised minority groups and politically/militarily weak clans" (Norway 21 July 2011, 2). Landinfo suggests that Al-Shabaab may appeal to minorities because they do not require clan affiliation to earn social status or protection (*ibid.*).

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: The Somali Minority Rights and Aid Forum was unable to provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: AllAfrica; Amnesty International; Barawa.com; Dalsan Radio; Dulmane.com; ecoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; Hiirann.com; Human Rights Watch; Internal Displacement Monitoring Center; Refugees International; Sabahi; Somali NGO Consortium; *Somalia Report*; United Nations – Human Rights Council, Refworld, UN Development Programme; United States Department of State; Voice of America.

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