

## Swahilis

### Profile

Benadiri, Amarani and Bajuni are Swahili speakers. Benadiri are an urban people, culturally closer to the Swahili of East Africa than to the Cushitic culture of Somalis. They live in Mogadishu, Merca and Baraawe (Brava).

### Historical context

Benadiri descend from a mixture of coastal Somalis and Arab and Persian migrant settlers who dominated the southern coast until the seventeenth century. Amarani also live in Baraawe (Brava), Merca and Mogadishu. In Amarani oral tradition their ancestors are believed to have come from southern Arabia and some may have left Arabia during the expansion of Islam. Merchants and sailors, they speak a Swahili dialect. In the port of Baraawe (Brava) they are also known as Bravanese. Bajuni are a non-Somali ethnic group living on Bajuni Island, off the coast at Kismayo. They are fishers and sailors and speak a Swahili dialect. Bajuni are descended from an intermarriage of Arab and Persians with the local population.

Living in the cities, Benadiris had the misfortune of being located in zones hotly contested by the USC and Somali Patriotic Front, and various in-fighting among splinter factions of these, during the post-1991 civil war. Benadiri were also singled out for rape and abuse by Aideed's troops and for looting by the Darood militias. Like other coastal peoples, they were forced to flee. Some tried to return from refugee camps in the late 90s, but as with the Banjuni, found that their property had been seized by Somalis. As Benadiri and Banjuni are considered lower-status than Somalis, there was no prospect of compensation.

### Current issues

The far-South coast of Somalia has traditionally been seen as a focus for Islamic fundamentalism, especially in the Ras Kamboni area. This area – also home to the Banjuni fishers – came under attack from US air power during the efforts to oust the Islamists at the end of 2006.