

Response

Somalia: Reer Hamar

Topics/questions:

- How is the security situation for Reer Hamar at the moment? Can they protect themselves, and can they rely on some sort of clan protection?
- Which groups fall under the broad term *Benadiri*? (Reer Hamar and subgroups such as Bandhabow, Reer Merka, Ashraaf (are all Ashraaf considered Benadiri?), Shangani, etc.)
- Which geographical area is Benadir exactly? Mogadishu-Marka only, or all the way to Kismayo?
- Where is the dialect Reer Hamar spoken? Only in the traditionally Reer Hamar districts in Mogadishu, or in other districts as well? What about areas outside Mogadishu?

Security situation

During fact finding missions to Nairobi in June 2008 and March 2009, Landinfo discussed the security and human rights situation related to minorities, i.e. Bantu, Midgan-groups and Benadiris, with both international and Somali sources. None of them had specific updated information concerning Benadiris, and there is for instance no credible information on the number of Reer Hamar living in Mogadishu today.

The lack of updated information is due to the absence of international human rights observers on the ground in South and Central Somalia, and to the fact that local Somali human rights organizations do not have a specific focus on minorities. Somali NGOs are clan-based and clan loyalties are strong. Some well-informed observers who cooperate with local Somali NGOs informed Landinfo in 2007 that minorities' rights are not at the top of the agenda, neither for Somali politicians nor for Somali human rights defenders. These views were shared by other well-informed sources in Nairobi in June 2008 and March 2009.

The lack of specific information could also be explained in another way: minorities, including both Benadiris and other Somalis, face more or less the same security-related problems, cf. that the ongoing fighting between the TFG forces and the insurgents mostly takes place in residential areas. Civilians are killed by grenades or roadside bombs, regardless of their clan

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background or ethnic affiliation. There is no information indicating that members of the Reer Hamar community are being specifically targeted. Assassinations and politically motivated killings target journalists, TFG members and key personnel belonging to the police and security forces.

Many members of the remaining Reer Hamar community have probably adapted to the shifting security environment through the past decade, either by buying protection from the various militias and local warlords that controlled the neighbourhoods of Mogadishu¹ or by marrying off their daughters to militia members; the so called *black cat arrangement*. These kind of arrangements were common until the Union of Islamic Courts took control of Mogadishu in 2006.² Then the situation for the inhabitants of Mogadishu, including the Reer Hamar community, improved, mainly because crime was reduced (interviews in Nairobi, March 2007).

Which groups do fall under the broad term *Benadiri*?

The term *Benadiri* has only been used about people since 1991. Before that it was strictly a geographical term referring to the southern Somali coast.

According to Reese (2008), the Benadiris belong to a number of largely urban lineages from Mogadishu, Marka and Barawe (Brava). Some of these lineages claim foreign origins (Yemen, Persia, Spain, etc.), while the Moorshe for instance regard themselves as an offshot of the Ajuran, a pastoral group believed to have ruled the southern interior during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to current oral traditions, five of the eight Bandawow sub-lineages also have pastoral origins (Reese 2008). So the Benadiri do actually not constitute a clan at all – that is, they do not all claim to be descendants from the same ancestor. They are a group or category of clans, including sub-clans, of light skin (so called *gibilcad* in Somali), and of partly Arab descent. They are allied with and indentified with other sub-clans.

According to different Reer Hamar sources (interviews in Nairobi 2002-2007, interviews in Oslo august 2005) there are four major Reer Hamar clans (Somali: *afarta reer xamar*). These are the Moorshe, Iskashato, DhabarWeyne and the Bandawow. In addition to these, there are many other smaller groups. Different sources mention different numbers of groups etc.,

¹ According to representatives from the Shansiye, “every door” paid 3 000 somali shilling in protection money on a daily basis (interview in Nairobi, September 2005).

² According to representatives from Shansiye interviewed by Landinfo in Nairobi in September 2005, the so-called dark-skinned Benadiris, i.e. Moorshe, Bandawow and Dhabarweyne, were protected by their Somali neighbours because they were dark-skinned (and presumed to be more native Somali), while most of the light-skinned Benadiris had fled at the beginning of the civil war (1991-1992). Furthermore, the majority of the dark-skinned Reer Hamar stayed until the mid 1990s, when many of them left the country. These representatives claimed at the time that very few Reer Hamar still lived in Mogadishu, and a representative from the human rights organisation DIJHRO told Landinfo in September 2005 that members of the minority communities that used to live in Shangani had left during the civil war.

Several both Somali and international sources Landinfo met with during the fact finding mission in 2005, as well as during later missions, stated that members of these groups were not targeted because of their ethnic origin. One well-informed Somali source stated in 2005 that one of the deputy mayors of Mogadishu at that time was Reer Hamar. Other sources have later explained that the so-called *black cat arrangements* are no longer a necessity since the previous oppressors no longer are in control in Hamar Weyne.

implying that some groups might actually be subgroups of other groups. The Ashraf in Bay region, however, are not classified as Benadiris since they are part of the Rahanweyne clan (Ashraf Sarman), while the Ashraf of Mogadishu do belong to the Reer Hamar. According to representatives from Reer Hamar groups consulted by the joint British, Danish and Dutch fact-finding mission to Nairobi in 2000, the Ashraf are divided into the following groups:

- Hussein: Reer Sharif Maqbuul, Sharif Ahmed, Sharif Ba-Alawi.
- Hassan: Mohamed Sharif, Sharif Ali, Sharif Ahmed, Ashraf Sarman.

According to another account, five major Ashraf lineages were found in Somalia at the end of the nineteenth century (Reese 1996). The Ahmad, Jamal al-Leyl and Bah Alawi, claiming descent from Husayn, formed the majority living in the coastal towns. The much smaller Umar and Abdullah lineages, progeny of Hasan, lived as farmers and herders in the interior. However, these lists must not be taken as definitive. There are other groups such as the Ashraf Hassan al-Ahdali of Marka (Virginia Luling, e-mail communication 20 October 2006).

The Geledi and the Beledi could, according to the British anthropologist and researcher Virginia Luling, also be considered as Benadiris because they consist of subclans which are conventionally described as light-skinned (*gibilcad*), with members generally noticeably lighter in complexion than their neighbours. (This is a conventional classification, however, and not all the members of these subclans are equally light-skinned). These subgroups trace their descent to the Arabian peninsula (e-mail communication 25 April 2005). Not all Geledi are *gibilcad* – they include dark-skinned subclans as well. Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas supports this, and has stated that the Reer Hamar community itself recognises the Geledi and the Beledi as Benadiri (interview, 16 March 2005).³

Some of the lineages in Mogadishu can also be found in Marka and Barawe, where these and other lineages are collectively known as Reer Marka and Reer Barawe.

Which geographical area is Benadir exactly? Mogadishu-Marka only, or all the way to Kismayo?

The Benadir region as the term is used today only includes Mogadishu and its surroundings, but traditionally the term referred to the Benadir coast which included Mogadishu, Marka and Barawe.

³ There is some confusion among scholars as to whether the Geledi should be classified as Benadiri or belonging to the Digil clan-family. In fact, both are true. The Digil, which is one of the two big southern agricultural clan-families, consists of many federated small groups, rather than being strictly all of one descent like the clans of the northern/pastoral tradition, the Hawiye, Darod and Isaq clan-families. The other large southern clan-family is the Rahanweyn (Mirifle). They also have a mixed or federal structure (the Geledi are also sometimes classified as Rahanweyn). The essential point here is that in the northern/pastoral tradition a person cannot belong to two different clans, unless one of them is a subdivision of the other. The same individual cannot be both Darod and Hawiye. Among the Digil and Rahanweyn (Mirifle) on the other hand, it is, according to Lewis (1994) and other sources, perfectly possible to belong to two clans or clan-families at once, because a group from one has been adopted into the other or has federated with it. Many people in these southern clans have a dual identity in this way (e-mail V. Luling, 25 April 2005).

Where is the dialect Reer Hamar spoken? Only in the traditionally Reer Hamar districts in Mogadishu, or in other districts as well? What about areas outside Mogadishu?

No linguistic work has been done in Somalia since the 1980s, and Marcello Lamberti's study *Die Somali-Dialekte* (1986) is one of the very few existing comparative studies of the various Somali dialects. According to this study, as well as other Somali sources, including Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas, leader of the United Somali Benadiir Council in London (interview in London, 16 March 2005), the Hamar-dialect is still spoken by Reer Hamar members in Hamar Weyne. Dr Abbas also stated that Reer Hamar living outside Hamar Weyne, particularly the older generation, have kept their dialect. Dr Abbas, who (at the time) cooperated with British authorities in order to identify Benadiri asylum seekers, did, however, not exclude non-Hamar speaking applicants from being Reer Hamar since obviously not all actually speak the dialect.

Dr. Martin Orwin, lecturer in Somali and Amharic at University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), has underlined (personal communication 16 November 2006) another important aspect: Other Somalis growing up and living in the same neighbourhood as the Reer Hamar probably also know and speak the Hamar dialect. Moreover, in most countries speakers of one dialect or language naturally come into direct or indirect contact with those of neighbouring (or culturally) dominant languages or dialects through business and trade relations, daily life or intermarriages. Whatever the degree or nature of contact between neighbouring peoples, it is generally sufficient to lead to some kind of linguistic interinfluencing, affecting not only the ethnic Somalis living in the Reer Hamar neighbourhood, but also the Reer Hamar within Hamar Weyne and in other parts of the city.

A response consists of answers to specific questions presented to Landinfo by case workers within the Norwegian immigration authorities. Responses are not intended to provide exhaustive reviews of a topic or theme, but should answer the specific questions posed and include relevant background information.

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