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1.4.1. Low Status Occupational Minorities

Members of the low status occupational groups are collectively referred to as Gaboye. This is an umbrella-term for smaller minority groups dispersed across the Somali Peninsula (from eastern Ethiopia to northern, central and southern Somalia to northern Kenya). Groups belonging to the Gaboye collective are: Madhiban, Muse Deriye, Tumal, Yibir/Anas, Hawle, Wardheere, Yahar, Galgale, Asowe, and Hawrarsame.405 In the literature, there is disagreement, however, about which groups belong under this umbrella. Vitturini, who has done research in north-western Somalia (Somaliland) insists that only Madhiban and Muse Deriye are Gaboye. He does not count Yibir, Tumal and others as Gaboye.406 Bahja-Ekman, who wrote her PhD at the University College London on Gaboye, counts also Yibir and Tumal as Gaboye.407 Yet, Kemal Dahir Ashour, an intellectual and long-term minority rights expert insists that across Somalia, many more groups belong to this collective. Their defining characteristic is that they were traditionally craftsmen or hunters.408 In southern Somalia, Gaboye are also involved in farming.409 It is also possible that some Gaboye groups were among those pre-Islamic and pre-ethnic Somali groups that inhabited the Horn of Africa before nomadic groups belonging to the (proto) Somali stratum settled there and were then subjugated by the latter.410

Muse Deriye, Hawle and Wardheere mostly reside in eastern Ethiopia (and many fled to Somalia after the Ogaden war 1977-78). Tumal, Madhiban, Yibir live throughout Somalia.411 Members of these groups are discriminated by other Somalis. Their access to education and the job market is limited.412 Members of Somali majority groups usually do not intermarry with them.413 This leads to seclusion of Gaboye. Some also speak their own dialect, that, however, is linguistically a version of Af-Mahaa, the standard Somali.414 Gaboye have problems with access to health care and educations, especially in rural settings.415 While it is difficult to know exact numbers, due to the absence of detailed demographic studies (and are national census data in Somalia since 1975),416 the Minority Empowerment and Development Agency (MEDA) recently found that ‘Gaboye people number approximately 100,000 to 200,000, spread across various regions of Somalia, including urban centers and rural areas of South Central Somalia.’417 Here one has to note that numbers in the context of Somalia, where no general survey has been conducted since the mid-1980s and where never clan-identity was taken into account in demographic studies have to be taken with caution.418

Madhiban. Madhiban were previously known as Midgan. The latter is a derogative term. It is used as curse-word in Somali.419 Madhiban are traditionally barbers, tanners/leather workers including shoemakers, artisans and service providers.420 Particularly women of Madhiban also engage in traditional medicine and traditional practices (such as FGM) and spiritual services. The latter carries considerable stigma in the increasingly rigid Sunni Islamic Somali society.421

Muse Deriye. They reside mostly in north-western Somalia (Somaliland) and in the Somali Region of Ethiopia. They traditionally work as barbers; women can also work as traditional healers and sometimes also perform FGM.

Tumal. Tumal reside across Somalia. Traditionally they worked as blacksmiths. More recently they often worked as mechanics in garages. Yet, the most lucrative of their businesses are often taken over by members of majority clans.422

Yibir. Yibir are known for their work as traditional healers and spiritual mediums, sometimes also considered 'sorcerers'.423 They are a very small community living predominantly in rural areas across Somalia.424

Hawle. Hawle live mainly in the Somali region of Ethiopia. Only very few live in Somalia.425

Wardheere. Wardheere live mostly in the Somali region of Ethiopia. Only very few live in Somalia.426

Yahar. Yahar live mostly in south-central Somalia, in the regions of Galgudud, Hiran and Middle Shabelle.427

Galgale. Galgale live mainly in north-eastern Somalia (Puntland) and in the south.428

Asowe. Asowe live mostly in the Somali region of Ethiopia. Only very few live in Somalia.429

Hawrasame. Hawrasame live in the Somali region of Ethiopia, in north-eastern Somalia (Puntland) and in the south.430

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  Kemal Dahir Ashour, Telephone interview, 10 March 2025

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