

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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