



Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

This document is provided by the BRYCS Clearinghouse.

Somali Bantu Report

By
Pindie Stephen

Cultural Orientation Africa Project
IOM Nairobi

April 2002

IOM International Organization for Migration

Copyright © 2002 International Organization for Migration. Reprinted with permission of the publisher, International Organization for Migration.



BRYCS is a joint project of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS)

888.572.6500

info@brycs.org

www.brycs.org



Somali Bantu Report

*Cultural Orientation Africa Project
IOM Nairobi, April 2002*



Cover Caption:
*Somali Bantu children,
Dadaab Refugee Camp.*

Photographs by Sasha Chanoff

Graphic design by Tessa Neylan

Contents

Foreword 1 - 2

- *Bantu 2*
- *Cushite 2*
- *Linguistic Explanation 2*
- *Tribe 2*
- *Clan 2*

Map 3

Introduction 4

A Distinct Population of Refugees 5 - 6

Life in Somalia 7 - 9

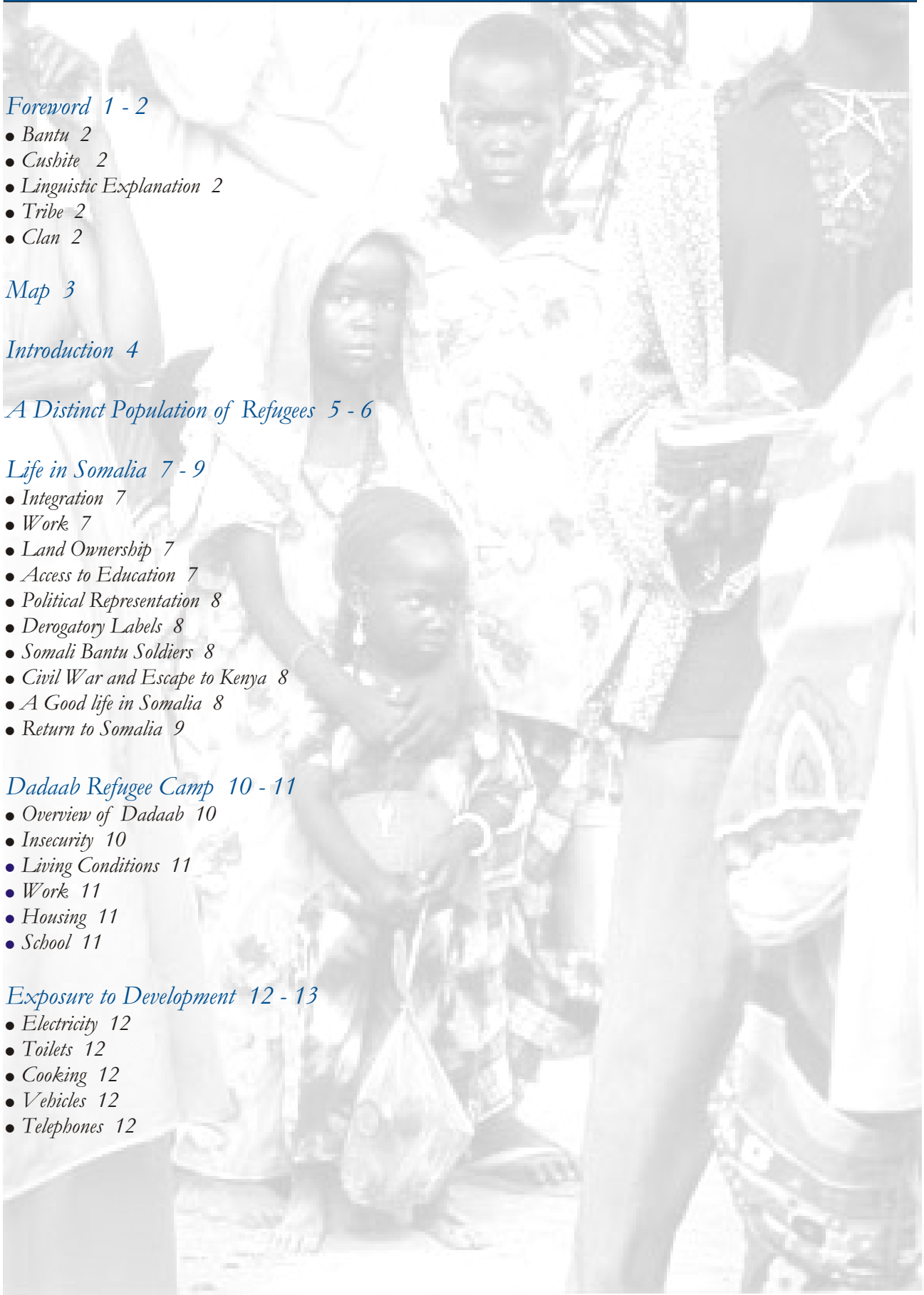
- *Integration 7*
- *Work 7*
- *Land Ownership 7*
- *Access to Education 7*
- *Political Representation 8*
- *Derogatory Labels 8*
- *Somali Bantu Soldiers 8*
- *Civil War and Escape to Kenya 8*
- *A Good life in Somalia 8*
- *Return to Somalia 9*

Dadaab Refugee Camp 10 - 11

- *Overview of Dadaab 10*
- *Insecurity 10*
- *Living Conditions 11*
- *Work 11*
- *Housing 11*
- *School 11*

Exposure to Development 12 - 13

- *Electricity 12*
- *Toilets 12*
- *Cooking 12*
- *Vehicles 12*
- *Telephones 12*



Somali Bantu Characteristics 14 - 16

- Tribes 14
- Languages 14
- English Skills and Literacy 14
- Religion and Beliefs 14
- Family and Case Composition 14
- Societal Structure 14
- Gender Dynamics 15
- Marriage 15
- Birth Rate 16
- Child-rearing Practices 16
- Family Unity 16

Physical and Mental Health 17 - 18

- Medical Practices 17
- Psychosocial Profile 17
- Psychological Trauma 18

General Observations 19 - 20

- Documentation 19
- Clothing 19
- Ornamentation and Decoration 19
- Hygiene 19
- Poverty 20

Interview Observations 21 - 23

- Lack of Exposure to Resettlement 21
- Answering Questions 21
- Family Relationships 22
- Time and Dates 22
- Age 22
- Partial list of Terminology used by Somali Bantus 23

Somali Bantu Story Family # 1 24

Somali Bantu Story Family # 2 25

Acknowledgements 26

Bibliography 27



Foreword

A complex picture of the Somali Bantus emerged as research on this report progressed. The Somali Bantus in Dadaab provide, to a certain extent, a narrative that plays into the framework of resettlement. This is natural and even expected of all refugees who may have the opportunity to resettle. Through many interviews and discussions with Dadaab's Somali Bantus a collective story of persecution surfaces that is compelling.

Initially brought to Somalia as slaves, Somali Bantus have seldom owned the land on which they live and have had little access to education; they have lacked government representation, have been marginalized from society and have been perennially treated as outsiders. Discriminated against on all levels, Somali Bantus were especially mistreated during the civil war.

Their interpretation of events is not untrue. However, a broader, more nuanced picture emerges as one speaks to different members of the group. Many individuals, including Somali and Somali Bantu officials with UNDP Somalia, a Somali Bantu former employee of UNHCR Somalia and UNICEF Somalia, numerous UNHCR officials and a Ph.D historian contributed information, opinions and perspective to this report. The second broader illustration of Somali Bantus that takes shape is quite divergent from the story of Dadaab's refugees.

Somalia's first Bantu people arrived as migratory agriculturalists thousands of years ago from South and Central Africa and settled in farmable rainfall and river regions. Other Bantus were brought in through the widespread slave trade in the 1800s and as a workforce for the Italian and British colonial powers. Somali Bantus have had some government representation both before and during Siad Barre's reign (1969-1991), as well as in the current Somali administration. A number were,

and are, distinguished members of society who have contributed on religious, social, political and artistic levels. They own land and have had access to education. Discrimination has existed to varying degrees, yet some Somali Bantus consider themselves as being the original inhabitants of Somalia alongside coastal Somalis.

Somali Bantus are clearly made up of many different peoples with diverse histories and differing levels of integration into Somali society. Their collective history is elaborate and multi-faceted. What stands clear in every narrative is the fact that during Somalia's civil war, Somali Bantus were particularly at risk and persecuted by warring clans due to their lack of affiliation with other Somali people and consequent lack of protection.

Dadaab's Somali Bantus, commonly known as Mushungulis, are considered to have been among the most persecuted. The word *Mushunguli* comes from the Somali Bantu Zigua tribe's word for person - *Muzigula*. In Somalia the distinction *Mushunguli* connotes someone from two places, worker or even, at its most pejorative, slave. These Mushungulis are a distinct subset of the greater Somali Bantu population; they do have a particular common history that is not representative of all Somali Bantus. It is this group that has been designated for consideration under the US Refugee Resettlement Program (USRP).

Bantu

The term Bantu refers to both a linguistic and an ethnic group. Research indicates that Bantu people originated from an area in central Africa that now encompasses parts of eastern Nigeria, Cameroon and the Congo basin. Bantu people began migrating to western, eastern and southern Africa thousands of years ago. Well over 100 million people across Africa are Bantu. There are approximately 400 different Bantu languages spoken throughout Africa. Historically, Bantu people are agriculturalists. Bantu people are often physically distinct by their kinky hair, flat nose, full lips and stout bodies. These physical generalizations are widespread, but not necessarily universal.

Cushite

The term *Cushite* refers to both a linguistic and an ethnic group. Cushitic people are found in parts of North-East Africa. Cushitic people come from a mixing of African populations with Middle Eastern and Asian people, which occurred in various ways many thousands of years ago. Cushitic languages include Somali and other languages of Somalia and Ethiopia. Cushitic languages are part of a larger Afro-Asiatic language group - Hamitic (the term Hamitic also refers to a language group and a people and is sometimes used interchangeably with Cushitic, although Hamite is a broader classification, identifying people across northern Africa).

Historically, Cushitic people are pastoralists. Cushitic people are physically distinct by their soft hair, long or slender nose, light skin and features that are normally slighter than a Bantu's. These physical generalizations are widespread, but not universal. For the purposes of this document the noun *Cushite* and adjective *Cushitic* refer to people with distinguishable and typical Somali features.

Linguistic Note

In Somalia the words “tribe” and “clan” (described below) are complicated signifiers,

which are sometimes used interchangeably or confused to a certain extent. Somalia is commonly described as made up of numerous clans and sub-clans. In many other East African countries “tribe” is more commonly used to describe distinct groups of people. Somali Bantus in Dadaab originate from one of six tribes found in Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique. In this document Somali Bantus will be described in terms of tribe and other Somali people in terms of clan.

Tribe

A tribe is a division of people sharing a common ancestry, culture, language and name. The Somali Bantus in Dadaab are made up of six Bantu tribes - Zigua, Zalamo, Magindo, Yao, Makua, and Manyasa. Many other people in Somalia claim that they belong to a certain clan rather than a tribe.

Clan

Clan is a division of a tribe tracing descent to a common ancestor. In Somalia clan is often used as a distinction for a group of people (rather than tribe). Many people consider Darod and Irir as two of the main clans, with numerous clans and sub-clans (Hawiye, Issaq and others) extending from these two head clans.

Introduction

Mushungulis are made up of various East African Bantu tribes that have lived in Somalia for up to 200 years. Originally brought to Somalia as slaves, these Somali Bantus were either freed or staged uprisings and eventually gained independence (Lehman, 1993). They settled into farming regions along the Juba and Shabelle rivers of southern Somalia.

When the civil war broke out in Somalia at the end of 1991, Somali Bantus throughout Somalia did not have any clan affiliation and thus no means of protection. Thousands of Somali Bantus fled to Kenya, through the border town of Liboi, and found refuge in camps situated around Dadaab town, where they joined scores of thousands of other Somali refugees.

As early as 1993 some Somali Bantus, primarily those from urban areas in which they had integrated, started repatriating to Somalia (Lehman, 1993). Less integrated than urban Somali Bantus, the Mushunguli farmers from the lower and middle Juba regions in southern Somalia have not repatriated, nor do they consider repatriation an option for a variety of reasons.

In the mid 1990s UNHCR explored resettling these refugees to Tanzania and Mozambique, which are, along with Malawi, the ancestral homes of Dadaab's Somali Bantus. In 1997 many factors, including internal emergencies in Mozambique and the sheer numbers of refugees already in Tanzania, forced these countries to decline UNHCR's resettlement overtures.

The refugee camps of Dadaab have remained particularly inhospitable places for Somali Bantus, who are a minority group within a Somali majority. In 1999, the US Department of State/Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration designated the Mushungulis, who volunteered for resettlement in Mozambique, eligibility for Priority Two refugee processing. UNHCR carried out a Dadaab Somali Bantu

verification exercise in November and December 2001 based on Mozambique resettlement lists created in 1997.

Eight IOM cultural orientation (CO) staff assisted UNHCR with the Dadaab Somali Bantu verification. UNHCR identified over 11,000 individuals for Priority Two referral through the Mozambique lists. IOM staff played a central role in the process.

This report is based on experiences and observations made during the verification as well as on supplementary research. The IOM CO Africa Programme produced this document in order to sensitize people to the needs, cultural habits, living conditions and background of Somali Bantus in Dadaab. Information contained in this report is not definitive. However, it is hoped that the proceeding information may be of use in the Somali Bantu resettlement process.

“Somali Bantus are one of the most distinctly different people who inhabit Somalia.”

A Distinct Population of Refugees

The majority of Somali Bantus in Dadaab come from the rural areas of the middle and lower Juba regions in southern Somalia, and has little if any exposure to modern development. Approximately 95 per cent claim to be from the rural districts and towns situated along the Juba River, including Jamaame, Jilib, Bu'alle, Sakow and Kamsuma (see map). There are some families from nearby urban areas such as Kismayo.

Somali Bantus are one of the most distinctly different people who inhabit Somalia, a country made up of various tribes and clans, each with diverse and unique characteristics. They do share a common religion (Islam) with other Somali people as well as a common language and nationality. And these are important similarities. However, there are significant differences between Somali Bantus and other Somalis, and these differences are highlighted even more sharply within the Mushunguli population.

These Somali Bantus have lived in Somalia for up to 200 years; yet they have never integrated in meaningful ways with other Somali people. Although the Mushungulis do possess some cultural traits common to other rural Somali populations, they have also maintained many distinct cultural traditions, including music, dance and community lifestyles.

They are agriculturalists, as opposed to most other Somalis who are traditionally nomadic herders. As larger towns and cities developed in Somalia, some Mushungulis moved into urban manual labour jobs, whereas many other Somalis moved into self-started business professions. These urban

Somali Bantus do have more exposure to modern development, although most of the verified Somali Bantus come from rural backgrounds.

Since significant Somali resettlement started from Kenya's Utanga camp in 1993, the United States Refugee Program (USRP) has resettled approximately 40,000 Somalis (DOS BPRM Statistics, 1993-2001) making this group one of the largest resettled African refugee populations (estimates indicate that there are at least 150,000 Somalis in the US).

In recent years resettling Somalis have been primarily family reunification cases joining relatives that live in often well-established, supportive Somali communities. In the decade of USRP Somali arrivals, the resettlement world has built a knowledge base, as well as formulated opinions, about the strengths, characteristics and resettlement challenges of Somali refugees.

Barawa, Benadiri and other resettled Somali people are distinct in their own ways.



Family of ten during verification interview.



A typical scene in Dadaab. Refugees gather under trees to socialize and to escape from the heat of the day, which often reaches 100°F.

Despite the distinctions, most resettled Somalis do share commonalities, perhaps the most significant of which is that they often have support systems, avenues into the job market through friends and relatives and other types of community-based assistance available to them. In addition, most arriving Somalis come from urban locations in East Africa, where stateside extended family and friends have supported them. Dadaab's Mushungulis have little, if any, existing US community support. In fact, they do not fit the common Somali case profile in any way.

As Somali Bantus start arriving in the US, Voluntary Agencies and affiliates will begin resettling a population of Somalis that does not have the connections or characteristics that resettlement staff commonly associate with Somali people. Somali Bantus differ physically from Cushitic Somalis; those in Dadaab have little exposure to schooling, and are for the most part unexposed to modern living from electricity to running water to telephones.

Even after five years of US residency, some refugees live below the poverty level. Among the factors that contribute to refugees remaining in such substandard conditions include low literacy and English levels, large families with many children, little or no US-established

community support and a previous lack of exposure to technology and urban life. With few exceptions, the Mushungulis possesses all these characteristics.

From a resettlement perspective, Somali Bantus need to be considered and analysed as a unique refugee population. Somali Bantu-specific resettlement strategies should be planned and implemented in order to enable this unique refugee group to achieve self-sufficiency and local integration. This may include additional planning for the reception and placement of the Somali Bantu refugees in order to identify the particular needs of this group and prepare appropriate resettlement plans at the national and local level well in advance of the first arrivals.

“Somali Bantu-specific resettlement strategies should be planned and implemented in order to enable this unique refugee group to achieve self-sufficiency and local integration.”

Life in Somalia

Integration

In the hierarchy of tribes and clans that dominate the Somali social and political landscape, Somali Bantus are at the bottom. However, Somali Bantus have not been uniquely discriminated against in Somalia. Smaller Somali “caste-groups” such as the Tomal, Midgan and Yibir have also been marginalized from mainstream Somali life (Amnesty International, 1995) and are normally prevented from intermarrying with other clans.

Intermarriage, while rare, does exist between Somalis and Somali Bantus although a Somali may be ostracized from his or her community for such a marriage. Despite little intermarriage, Somali Bantus have lived alongside other Somalis in Mogadishu, Kismayo and various urban centres, to which some Somali Bantus moved for work opportunities.



Family sitting outside self-constructed hut, Dagabaley camp

Due to their history of slavery and their cultural and linguistic links to their ancestral tribes, the Mushungulis have remained largely separate. Other Somali Bantus claim that Mushungulis have not even integrated extensively with the larger Somali Bantu population. The civil war did cause Mushungulis to integrate more with other Somali Bantus, as these people from the Juba River region fled not only to Kenya, but also to various parts of Somalia, where other

Somali Bantus took them in. But before 1991 Mushungulis remained, to a high degree, apart from all other Somali people, both Bantu and Cushitic.

Work

Somali Bantus have worked in Somalia’s manual labour jobs. The majority of Dadaab’s Somali Bantus are farmers. There are some from urban areas and these individuals worked in unskilled positions, including construction, fishing, driving, mechanics, cooking, cleaning and other jobs. Mostly unschooled, Somali Bantu men have traditionally only had access to such manual labour jobs. Somali Bantus in urban areas have gained reputations as skilled mechanics, technicians, welders and manual workers.

Land Ownership

Many Somali Bantus did own the land on which they lived. However, Dadaab’s Mushunguli refugees often said that discrimination, lack of economic means and connections to ruling clans prevented many Mushungulis from purchasing land. Even when they did own land, most Somali Bantus have been able to still only maintain a subsistence lifestyle, as they have not had the production means to increase their wealth. Some Somali Bantus said that they always remained at a distinct disadvantage to Somali landowners who often received government subsidies or bank loans due to the right “connections”.

Access to Education

Living in the rural areas of Somalia, Somali Bantus had little access to education and often not enough money to pay school-related costs. This is perhaps one of the main reasons Somali Bantus only work in manual labour jobs. Some Somali Bantus say that they were denied access to education through discrimination tactics implemented at local administration levels. Whether this was the case, or whether education

Was simply unrealistic due to the rural locations and economic realities of Somali Bantu communities, the fact remains that very few of Dadaab's refugees are educated, perhaps 5 per cent (if that many). Other factors that may have limited education within this group could be the early age of marriage and an agricultural lifestyle, with its need for farming hands and consequent de-emphasis on education. Many of the Mushunguli adults say they started working on the farm at an early age and never attended a day of school in their lives.

Political Representation

Somali Bantus had very little political representation in Somalia's government, although approximately 14 per cent of the Somali population was Somali Bantu (Atlapedia, 2002). There are examples of politically active Somali Bantus, but the lack of status and connections to ruling clans limited any significant political representation. Dadaab's Somali Bantu elders assert that Siad Barre's government restricted their economic advancement through discriminatory regulations that kept them in subsistence living conditions. With limited access to education and other opportunities, many Somali Bantus have remained marginalized members of Somali society without means of advancement.

Derogatory Labels

Somali Bantus differ physically from Cushitic Somalis in obvious ways. Derogatory labels have been attached to Somali Bantus that highlight their differences to indigenous Somalis. One such derogatory term is *oji*, which translates literally to "today", and implies "new comer". The word has been taken from the Italian *oggi* and adopted into the Somali language. *Gosha* is sometimes used as a derogatory description, which translates literally into forest inhabitant. *Gosha* and *Mushunguli* are both terms that identify this specific group of Somali Bantus, although *Gosha* and *Mushunguli* are also sometimes used to refer to all of Somalia's Bantus. *Jareer*, meaning kinky hair, and *adoon*, meaning slave,

are other pejorative terms associated with Somali Bantus.

Somali Bantu Soldiers

Somali Bantus have provided Somalia with valuable manpower, including manual labourers (that helped to support the southern Somali economy) and soldiers. Siad Barre's regime conscripted Somali Bantus (and other Somalis) into the army in the early 1980s and sent them to the front lines of Somali's military activity in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, where war had started in 1977. The large number of Somali Bantus who fought in the Ogaden War led to its second known name among some Somalis: the *Oji* War. The displacement to areas of Somalia previously devoid of Somali Bantus led to some local Somali women bearing Bantu soldiers' children. These children, along with other war orphans, were often referred to as "Siad Barre's children", due to the Cushite/Bantu mix.

Civil War and Escape to Kenya

"When elephants fight it is the grass that suffers." This African proverb has been commonly applied to the situation of Somali Bantus during the civil war. They did not have allegiances with other Somali clans and thus did not have any means of protection. Warring factions looted farms and raped and killed many Somali Bantus, especially those in the lower and middle Juba regions. They recount these atrocities and explain how they fled on foot, often for five to 15 days, before reaching safe haven in Kenya. Others sold any goods they owned to pay for transport to Kenya. Most Somali Bantus passed through the Kenyan border town of Liboi before arriving in Dadaab.

A Good Life in Somalia

Some Somali Bantus said that they led good lives in Somalia. They had supportive communities, adequate food, housing and everything that was needed. "In Somalia we had our fruits, our bananas, our farms... we had a comfortable life," expressed one older woman in a declaration that seemed to be somewhat

representative of the group. Warring clans did destroy whole Somali Bantu communities and took over farms in a fashion that would preclude the return of Somali Bantus from Kenya. However, many Somali Bantus did live adequately and contentedly in Somalia, despite the pervasive discrimination they encountered there.

Urban Somali Bantus were not outwardly shunned or violently discriminated against. Somali Bantus simply did not play a large role in Somali society dynamics. In the urban centres Bantus were perhaps more ignored or taken for granted by other Somalis, who did not go out of their way to discriminate, but rather accepted Somali Bantus as neighbours and manual workers. The majority of Dadaab's Somali Bantus lived in the rural areas of southern Somali farming regions, leading a farmer's life, with all the habitual difficulties and positive qualities accompanying such a life.

Return to Somalia

There are many thousands of Bantus still living in Somalia, although whole communities fled during the civil war. When asked if they would return to Somalia, most Somali Bantus in Dadaab said they would not. Warring clans have taken over the land on which they lived and farmed. Many also responded that they suffered from discrimination in Somalia and would not choose to go back, even if the country stabilized.

“Among Dadaab’s refugees, Somali Bantus have endured a disproportionately high amount of discrimination and bandit attacks.”



Family standing outside a hut. A newborn sleeps inside.

Dadaab Refugee Camp

Overview of Dadaab

Set in an arid landscape of Kenya's north-eastern province, the small town of Dadaab (inhabited by ethnic Somalis who are Kenya citizens) is situated approximately 60 miles from the Somali border. Collectively known as Dadaab, three refugee camps, Dagahaley, Hagadera and Ifo, have been established in this area. According to UNHCR Dadaab, there are an estimated 134,258 refugees within the three camps (UNHCR Dadaab, 2002), the large majority of whom are Somalis of various clans. Somali Bantus, Ethiopians, Sudanese, Ugandans and Eritreans are the minority refugee populations in Dadaab.

The main offices of UNHCR and implementing partners, Care and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), are situated in a barbed wired, walled and guarded compound, located approximately 4 miles from Ifo camp, 5.5 miles from Hagadera and 9 miles from Dagahaley. During the heavy rains, typically in April and December, the sand and dirt roads often become impassable and the habitually arid landscape turns green.

Insecurity

The Dadaab area is highly insecure, with *shifto* (bandits) roaming the flat plains. Armed escorts are used for all transports from the NGO compound to the camps. No aid workers are allowed out of the compound after 6:00 pm. Refugees also stay within their compounds and houses after dark due to the prevalent insecurity. A UNHCR report characterizes the security situation as "plagued by inter-clan clashes, cattle rustling and banditry" (UNHCR Global Report, 2000).

One night during the verification process bandits shot a man, and gunfire was heard in the camp a number of times. All refugees in Dadaab have constructed live thorn and tree walls around their living blocks to reduce the risk of bandit attacks.

The most egregious of the human rights abuses inflicted on Dadaab's refugees is sexual violence against women. Since Dadaab's inception the high incidence of rape directed at women collecting firewood has been a devastating problem. Women often have to walk up to three miles into the arid bush in search of adequate firewood and are put at great risk of attack. If a rape becomes known, the woman is often ostracized from her community.

In 1998 a US-funded firewood programme was implemented to reduce the risk women and other refugees undergo daily. UNHCR Dadaab officials feel that the reduction in rape and violence over the last few years is partially due to the firewood programme, although violence is still fairly common. In 1999 a violent crime was reported approximately every one to two days in Dadaab. In 2000 the reported rate dropped to every two to three days (UNHCR Dadaab, 2002).



Living blocks are surrounded by thorn-branch and tree walls. Due to the high level of insecurity, refugees do not venture outside their blocks at night.

Living conditions

Arriving primarily in 1992, Somali Bantus have always remained a minority refugee group in Dadaab. Among Dadaab's refugees, Somali Bantus have endured a disproportionately high amount of discrimination and bandit attacks (Lehman, 1993).

Some Somali Bantus have also managed to do well in Dadaab using their farming and construction skills, although the poverty level at which many Somali Bantus live (not different than many other non-Somali Bantu refugees in Dadaab) is striking.



House mudding. Soil, sand, water and manure are used to construct homes.

Work

Somali Bantus are self-described as a hardworking people used to farming the land and taking on any kind of manual labour job available. In Dadaab many Somali Bantu men are engaged in farming, heavy labour and construction projects in the camps. Somali Bantus actively search for odd jobs in Dadaab and throughout Kenya when possible.

A handful of Somali Bantus have found positions with Dadaab-based NGOs. Somali refugees often hire Somali Bantus to build houses and carry out other kinds of menial labour. Some men were said to be holding jobs as cooks, house helpers, security guards and construction workers in nearby and distant Kenyan towns such as Garissa, Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu.

Housing

Somali Bantu farming and building skills are evident throughout the camps. They have constructed stylized mud and manure houses and compounds in which they live. They use sand, water, mud and cow manure to produce smooth, well-formed walls that harden to virtual concrete strength. Various colours of mud are employed to decorate inner and outer house walls. Somali Bantu houses in Dadaab are built in much the same way as their houses were in Somalia.

School

Male Somali Bantu children go to school in Dadaab. Depending on the age, some boys are in primary and others in secondary school.

Education for girls is not a high priority for parents. Many girls do not go to school, although some attend on an irregular basis. Few girls have completed primary school and very few, if any, secondary school.



Sleeping and clothing area. The hard mud bed is covered with a traditional Bantu hand-woven mat.

Exposure to Development

Somali Bantus from rural areas have little if any exposure to modern development. This is significantly different from urban Somali Bantus who have lived in Mogadishu, Kismayo and other developed cities.

Electricity

Rural Somali Bantus are not accustomed to living with electricity, either in Dadaab or in Somalia. There is no electricity within refugee huts in Dadaab. Somali Bantu houses and living areas are lighted with lanterns and fire. They lived in a similar fashion in Somalia.

Toilets

Many Somali Bantus have never used or seen flush-toilets or indoor bathrooms and plumbing. Pit latrines are used in Dadaab and similar toilet facilities existed in Somalia.



Compound with open cooking area.

Cooking

Cooking is done with charcoal and firewood. Very few may be familiar with cooking on kerosene stoves. They have no experience with ovens or electric stoves.

Vehicles

Most Somali Bantus have ridden in vehicles, and urban Somali Bantus may even be skilled drivers and mechanics. However, rural Somali Bantus, especially older individuals, may have very little or no exposure to vehicles. Many of Dadaab's Somali Bantus have never been exposed to the type of traffic common to any city, or even have crossed a paved street.

Telephones

Telephones were rare in Somalia, and for the most part non-existent in rural farming areas. During verification, many Somali Bantus talked about trying to call family members who had travelled to other parts of Kenya in search of work. Some Somali Bantus may have limited experience using a telephone.



Kitchen area.



Pounding and grinding corn rations in preparation for the family meal.



Fetching water. All refugees collect water from communal taps, which can be located hundreds of yards outside living blocks.



Pit latrine.



Mealtime. Children eat corn out of a common pot.

Somali Bantu Characteristics

Tribes

Dadaab's Somali Bantus are comprised of six main tribes: Zigua, Zalamo, Magindo, Yao (all of whom claim Tanzania as their ancestral home), Makua and Manyasa, (historically from Mozambique and Malawi) (Lehman, 1993).

Languages

Maymay: 50 to 70 per cent of these Somali Bantus speak Maymay (also called AfMay - the language May), which is a Somali dialect indigenous to the people of the southern Somali Bay and Bakool regions.

Somalis who have never heard Maymay might not understand this dialect at first. Some of the Somali translators assisting with the UNHCR verification exercise needed three or four days before thoroughly understanding Maymay. Around 70 to 80 per cent of those who speak Maymay can also communicate in the Somali language. Thus approximately 15 per cent of the total population speaks only Maymay.

Somali: 30 to 50 per cent speak Somali. Others understand Somali but prefer to speak Maymay.

Kizigua: 10 to 20 per cent speak Kizigua. Somali Bantus of the Zigua tribe still speak their native language, Kizigua, which is a dialect form of Swahili from their ancestral homes. Most of the Kizigua speakers also speak Somali. A small percentage of older Ziguas only speak Kizigua. The Swahili and Kizigua languages are similar and can most often be mutually understood.

English Skills and Literacy

In general, this population has a very low literacy rate and English proficiency level. Almost none of the women speak English. Approximately 5 per cent of the men can speak varying degrees of English. The large majority of adults are pre-literate - they have never attended any school and cannot read or write in

their native language. The male children attend school in Dadaab and can speak English to varying degrees. Most of the girls are not in school, although some attend school irregularly. English literacy and language classes are pressing needs for this community, especially among the adults.

Religion and Beliefs

Somali Bantus are predominantly Muslim. There is a small minority that converted to Christianity subsequent to their arrival in Kenya. There is at least one Somali Bantu constructed church in Dadaab. Despite the predominance of Islam, most of these Somali Bantus also maintain animistic traditional beliefs, including the practice of magic, curses and possession dances (Jenkins, 1996).

Family and Case Composition

Ninety-nine per cent of Somali Bantu cases are families that either appear as one case, or a number of cross-referenced cases. A typical family consists of parents with four to eight children, normally with a number of very young children or infants. There are some young adults above 18 who are not married, but these individuals consider themselves part of a family unit. In fact, for Somali Bantus a nuclear family consists of parents, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts and other relatives.

Societal Structure

Somali Bantus live throughout Dagahaley, Hagadera and Ifo camps in blocks within sections, for example, block "A", section "A", Ifo camp. A natural inter-dependence has formed among Somali Bantus within their block communities, which has been strengthened over the years by their minority status and the prevalent insecurity. There is some inter-camp movement due to marriage and family reconfiguration. Thus not all cross-referenced families live within the same blocks or sections.

There are Somali Bantu leaders for each block and section. Typically, a chairman is selected who acts as a broader camp representative for his or her block and section. In 2001 Somali Bantus held their first democratic elections for block and section representatives, in which, for the first time, some female representatives were chosen. Elders, or community leaders, make decisions that affect the community.

During the verification an elder's committee from the three camps worked with UNHCR to assist in any way needed. There were no women present within this committee.

Gender Dynamics

It was observed during the verification exercise that while the men and even young boys are quite vocal, the women were, for the most part, reserved and quiet. They often deferred to the males in the family. In some cases boys as young as 11 and 12 would answer questions for, and overrule, their mothers. This seems to be a male-dominated society in which women will, in the cases noted, defer to men and even the boys.

These observations took place within the context of verification interviews and may not be the most accurate depiction of gender dynamics within this group.

The fact that women were elected as community representatives in the recent Dadaab Somali Bantu elections indicates progress towards recognizing women as spokespersons and leaders.

Marriage

The average marriage age among Somali Bantu women varies, but is probably between 16 and 18 years of age. Somali Bantu community elders placed the average marriage age at 16 years for women. However, both older and younger marriage ages are common. One verifier noted an 18-year-old woman with four children. Other verifiers noted marriages between very young teenagers, 13, 14 and 15 years old, although this seemed out of the ordinary. It was not uncommon for women to have divorced and remarried, sometimes several times, and to have had children with each husband.



Mother with seven boys. The father and oldest daughter are missing from the picture.

Birth Rate

There is a notably high birth rate within this population. Most married women were either breast-feeding or pregnant. The concept of family planning does not exist.

Within the first five days of verification three women went into labour on site. One gave birth in a small open-air hut structure in the waiting area, while MSF brought the other two to the Hagadera hospital. Somali Bantus usually give birth at home.

Child-rearing Practices

There are a number of unaccompanied women with children among this group. Many Somali Bantus said that the men prefer to be out searching for work, either in Dadaab or in other parts of Kenya, as opposed to remaining idle in the camp. Some women spoke of how their husbands had recently left, while others said they hadn't seen their husband for years. Women take on the child-rearing responsibilities.

“A typical family consists of parents with four to eight children, normally with a number of very young children or infants.”

Traditionally women with babies under 40 days old stay indoors. If a woman needs to exit the house with an infant under 40 days old, she will often carry some kind of metallic object (which could be a weapon, nail or any other object) in order to ward off evil. This is a custom traditionally practiced by many rural people in Somalia, although those who have lived in urban centers often have moved away from such traditional beliefs.

Family Unity

Kinship and family are of paramount importance to Somali Bantus. In one case, a woman arrived

at the verification interview with her 25-year-old daughter, who had only recently come to Dadaab. It was explained to the woman that the daughter was not financially dependent and thus not eligible for US resettlement. Although she was informed that she could send for her daughter, the mother refused to proceed with the verification, stating that she would not go without her daughter.

In another case a first-born brother brought his younger adult brother to the interview. The younger brother had recently arrived from Somalia. When it was explained that the younger brother was not financially dependant on the older brother and thus not eligible for resettlement, the older brother asked whether his brother could go in his place.

These are only two of many interviews that exemplified the strong sense of family unity within this group. Some Somali Bantus were willing to forfeit their slots or give up their possibility of US resettlement if this was in the family's best interest.



Hour-old baby born at verification site.

“Somali Bantu community elders placed the average marriage age at 16 years for women.”

Physical and Mental Health

Medical Practices

Most Somali Bantus are rural agriculturalists, living the same kind of lifestyle that their ancestors lived. Many traditional practices, which have been phased out among urban African populations, remain common in this Somali Bantu society. This is a highly superstitious group.

One current traditional custom is the burning of holes into babies' heads. Applying a heated blunt nail or other heated metal object to a baby's head is not unusual. The belief is that the burns will reduce the swelling of an infant's head in cases where the head is unnaturally large. A number of babies and young children could be seen with these burn-scars, which are normally found in groups of three.

Some individuals had cup-sized burn marks on their bodies. In order to ease muscle cramps or sickness, glass cups (when available) are heated up and applied to body areas, after which small cuts are made around the burn. This practice of "cupping" is common throughout Somalia among many populations.

A variety of curative plants are used to relieve fever, headache, nausea and most other ailments. When possible, Somali Bantus in Dadaab grow plants to treat common illnesses.



Baby with burn marks in forehead.

Female circumcision is widely practiced among Somali Bantus.

Psychosocial Profile

During the verification exercise interviewers noted that many Somali Bantus appeared withdrawn, even in the presence of Somali interpreters. Margaret Munene, a psychologist and verifier with UNHCR who contributed to this report, explained that such behaviour often indicates a low sense of self-esteem. This may be a result of the Mushunguli social status and treatment in Somalia, which in many ways has not changed over generations. The stigma of slavery still exists to this day.

“Living in the midst of a Somali majority and often working for Somali refugees, Somali Bantus have not had the opportunity to be liberated from their perceived inferior social status.”

A group of elders explained that even in Dadaab, Somali Bantus do not share the same social rights as the Somali majority. If there is ever a dispute between Somalis and Somali Bantus, the Somali Bantus must always defer to the decision and opinion of the Somalis, as the Somali Bantus fear reprisal.

Mushungulis in Somalia have remained marginalized, with highly limited economic opportunities and social mobility. In Dadaab, living in the midst of a Somali majority and often working for other Somali refugees, Somali Bantus have not had the opportunity to be liberated from their perceived inferior social status. Margaret Munene explained, “Somali Bantus have escaped their oppressors in

Somalia only to live among them in Kenya. In Dadaab they still have no psychological freedom to be themselves.”

Somali Bantus often appeared passive and submissive; they gave the impression of not knowing how to advocate for their own rights. This behaviour stood in notable contrast to many other refugee populations who aggressively advocate for their own rights and needs.

“Somali Bantus often appeared passive and submissive; they gave the impression of not knowing how to advocate for their own rights.”

Psychological Trauma

Without any clan affiliation or protection, Somali Bantus were subjected to violent attacks, rapes and killings during the Somali civil war. These refugees recounted how mothers, wives and children were raped, how farms were looted and how family and friends were killed.

The civil war inflicted significant trauma on this group. A few of the interviewed Somali Bantus exhibited obvious trauma-related problems, including hopelessness and depression. As with other refugees suffering from post-traumatic stress, nightmares and flashbacks may be common among this group.

Refugee child mortality rates appeared to be high in Dadaab. On the verification lists (taken from the 1997 Mozambique registration), verifiers had to frequently change family compositions due to the death of a child.

In addition, the common and unpredictable violence that characterizes Dadaab - gunfire, rape and killing - creates an environment of instability and anxiety that may have significant traumatic effects on all Dadaab refugees. Such living conditions are traumatizing and contribute to increased psychological problems for refugees who have fled war and violence.

There may be numerous rape victims within this population, as rape was a common act of aggression during the Somali civil war and has also been prevalent in Dadaab for many years. A number of adults claimed that mothers, wives and daughters were raped during the civil war.

General Observations

Documentation

Most Somali Bantu parents carried little, used plastic bags containing all the important family documentation issued in Dadaab. These plastic bags were produced when verifiers asked parents to show birth certificates and vaccinations cards for children. Some documents were “eaten by rats” or “lost in the rains”, but many families do have birth notifications and vaccination cards from Dadaab’s hospitals for at least some of their children.

Clothing

Somali Bantu women dress in traditional *diraa*, loose-fitting, wrap-around clothing. Their clothes are colourful and stand out among Dadaab’s refugees. Children are often dressed in such colourful clothes.

Ornamentation and Decoration

Somali Bantus take pride in decoration, ornamentation and aesthetic beauty. Women and young children often wear jewelry, even if it

is makeshift. Many young girls have thread through their ears, preserving the ear piercing until more appropriate earrings can be found. Women, children and even young babies are commonly ornamented with beads, necklaces, bracelets (often just plastic) and other decorations.



Young children often wear necklaces, bracelets and earrings, even if only plastic or string. Some children have a “dhor” hairstyle, common among people from rural areas of Somalia.

Houses are sometimes decorated with different colours of mud. Both inside and outside Somali Bantu houses one can often note flower-shaped designs, painted for aesthetic purposes. Even Somali Bantu-owned bicycles have decorative ornaments attached in various ways.

Hygiene

Dadaab is located in an arid region of North-East Kenya and there is no running water. Somali Bantus use pit latrines in the camps, similar to those used in Somalia.

During the verification exercise, the UNHCR team leader held an orientation with the Somali Bantu elders to ensure that children used the provided latrines at the interview site. It was observed that within family compounds young children often did not use latrines either. This group has never used or seen disposable or cloth diapers.



Finishing a meal.

Food preparation, bathing and general cleanliness standards are below the hygiene norms in America, due to the difficult conditions in the refugee camp. Because there is no running water, refugees use containers to collect water from different bore hole spigots around the camp.

Due to the lack of garbage removal in Dadaab many refugees are not accustomed to depositing trash in garbage receptacles.

Spitting is a common habit among both men and women.

Poverty

Many Somali Bantus do not own more than one pair of clothes. Most of the children go barefoot. The adults often have a pair of flip-flops, although not in all cases. Many children are dressed in ragged, oversized shirts, which are the only clothes they own. Somali Bantus are dependant on World Food Programme rations, although some men are able to earn money with which they sometimes buy additional food, clothing or household items. This standard of poverty applies to many other refugees in Dadaab as well.



Food distribution centre.



Outside the food distribution centre.



Collecting food rations.

Interview Observations

Lack of Exposure to Resettlement

Refugees who have been exposed to the possibility of resettlement may tailor their narratives to fit a certain “claim of persecution” story, which could at times diverge from the truth. Somali Bantus have little if any exposure to resettlement beyond the Mozambique resettlement effort. Individuals who have worked with refugees throughout Africa noted that these Somali Bantus exhibited considerable naiveté regarding resettlement.

A number of them did not even know why they had been summoned to the verification. UNHCR staff often remarked how the Somali Bantus’ honest responses and innocence regarding resettlement was “refreshing”. Verifiers were struck time and again by the straightforward way in which many individuals admitted that family members appearing on the verification lists either had died, travelled away from Dadaab, or even, in a few cases, returned to Somalia to visit sick relatives. Many verifiers noted that this level of openness is rarely seen among other resettlement populations.

Answering Questions

Somali Bantus in Dadaab are not accustomed to being interviewed and answering question in a linear, sequential way. Often seemingly simple questions such as “How old are you?” “When did you come here?” or “How old is your baby?” would be met by inadequate responses. Only after long conversations with many follow-up questions could the appropriate information be determined.

Trying to obtain basic information could be frustrating for individuals not familiar with these Somali Bantus. Additionally, it might be easy to assume, from the lack of appropriate responses to simple questions, that the interviewee is stalling for time or being dishonest. This is not the case. Simply put, most of these Somali Bantus have no exposure to interviews and are unaccustomed to responding to questions in a manner that results in proper documentation. For example, when asked where they entered Kenya, many Somali Bantus responded, “at “the tall metal”, indicating metal telephone towers in the border town of Liboi.



Family of six inside a hut.

Family Relationships

In a number of cases adults are taking care of nephews and nieces whose parents are deceased or not in the camp. These adults often declared that their nieces and nephews were daughters and sons. When a verifier would ask why a certain daughter or son had a different last name, the parents would finally explain (often after insisting that the child was a son or daughter) that the individual was actually a niece or nephew. These initial answers regarding relationships were not given with deceitful intent, but rather because many Somali Bantu parents apparently did not distinguish between their own children and their nieces and nephews for whom they were caring.

Time and Dates

Somali Bantus often use weather markers or particular events as time or date signifiers. Floods, fires and disease outbreaks are often recalled to try and convey a specific time or date in the past. Some referred to the “big rains” (El Nino 1997-1998) to indicate a child’s birth, or to a cholera outbreak to indicate when a significant event took place. *Daraad* (literally meaning “before yesterday”) is often used to indicate any time in the close or distant past. When asked about one’s arrival date in Dadaab a common response was “when everyone else arrived”, or “when everyone fled Somalia”.

Age

Many women are not able to give their ages or the accurate age of their children. Most men, however, could give their ages correctly. A typical verification conversation regarding age would proceed as follows: Verifier: “How old are you?” Woman: “I’m 30 years old.” Verifier: “Are you 30 years old now, or were you 30 during the Mozambique registration in 1997?” Woman: “They told me I was 30 then.” Verifier: “How old are you now?” Woman: “I don’t know. You can give me an age.”

Another typical scenario had to do with the confusion that arose surrounding questions of birthplace and age of children. Verifier:

“Where was this child born?” Mother: “In Jamaame, Somalia.” Verifier: “How old is the child?” Mother: “Six years old.” Verifier: “And when did you come to Dadaab?” Mother: “At the time when everyone came here (indicates 1992).” Verifier: “How can your child be born in Somalia when you say she is only six and yet you came to Dadaab nine years ago? Your child must have been born here if she is only six.” Such conversations would proceed for another ten minutes before an adequate resolution could be reached. Many Somali Bantus do not place any importance on age or years.



Mother with newborn baby. Traditional handmade Somali Bantu mats hang by the wall.

Partial List of Terminology Used by Somali Bantus

Birta dheer: Literally means “the tall metal”. Used as a location indicator. Refers to the tall metal telephone transmission structure in the border town of Liboi. Common verifier question: “Where did you enter Kenya?” Response: “*Birta Dheer*.” Note: Liboi was a UNHCR registration point for Somalis entering Kenya.

Biyo Badan: Literally means “a lot of water”. Used as a time indicator. Refers to the El-Nino rains in 1997-1998. Common verifier question: “When was this child born?” Response: “*Biyo Badan*.”

Daraad: Literally means “the day before yesterday”. Used as a time indicator. Refers to any time in the near or distant past. Common verifier question: “When did you come to Kenya?” Response: “*Daraad*.”

Sacaad Hirki: Literally means “tying a watch to the wrist”. Used as a time indicator. Refers to a UNHCR revalidation exercise in 1997 when wristbands were given out. Common verifier question: “When did this family member die?” Response: “*Sacaad Hirgi*.”

Mardow: Literally means “recently”. Used as a time indicator. Refers to any time from one hour earlier to a few years ago. Common verifier question: “When did this individual leave the camp?” Response: “*Mardow*.”

Daa cunki: Literally means “cholera outbreak”. Used as a time indicator. Refers to previous cholera outbreaks in certain areas of eastern Kenya and southern Somalia that span the time Somali Bantus have resided in Kenya. Common verifier Question: “When did this individual arrive in Dadaab?” Response: “*Daa cunki*.”

Tirokoob: Literally means “counting”. Used as a time indicator. Refers to any previous UNHCR headcounts. Common verifier question: “When did you get married?”

Response: “*Tirakoobki hore* (the previous headcount).”

Guuroow Madege: Literally means “movement without settling”. Used often to indicate an individual who does not have a ration card. Refers to someone moving from one place to another. Common verifier question: “Why doesn’t this individual have a ration card?” Response: “He was a *Guuroow Madege*.” Note: *Guuroow Madege* can refer to any one of a number of small-scale repatriation, or Kenya-wide inter-camp movements.

Boonadha: This is a coined term referring to the stamp on the ration card indicating a newborn baby, or a document from UNHCR indicating an individual who has been added to the ration card. Common verifier question: “Is this baby on the ration card?” Response: “*Boonadha*.” Note: *Boonadha* is also used just as *Sacaad Hirgi* (tying a watch to the wrist). Some Somali Bantus used *Boonadha* to referred to the stamp on a ration card, while others used *Boonadha* to refer to the year when wristbands were employed in a headcount.

Bahaane: literally means “hungry person”. Used to indicate someone who is not registered in Dadaab and thus does not have a ration card. Common verifier question: “Where is his ration card?” Response: “*Wa bahaane* (he is not registered).”

Waanaga go’ay: Literally means “separated”. Used to indicate someone who has an individual ration card or has started a new family and thus has a new ration. Common verifier question: “Why does he have a different ration card?” Response: “*Waanaga go’ay*.”

Family # 1

Arbai and Mberwa are from Sakow, near the Juba River. They were farmers in Somalia. They have eight children, ages one, two, four, seven, ten, 13, 18 and 20. The oldest son is from a different mother who passed away. Mberwa was eight years old when he started helping his father with farm work. Arbai and Mberwa never went to school in Somalia and neither speaks any English. The children attend school in Dadaab and one of the older boys speaks English.

In 1991 warring clans came to their village and raped and killed many people and looted the farms. The Mberwa family fled on foot for five days through the Somali bush to Kenya. During the journey a hyena killed the youngest child. The surviving family members arrived in Dadaab in 1992 and settled into Dagahaley camp, in section D block B.

Mberwa searches for work daily. He is often hired by Somalis to build houses and sometimes he finds construction work with Dadaab-based NGOs.

Arbai takes care of her children. On occasion she walks to the Dagahaley market area to socialize. In Somalia Arbai visited Kismayo, the third most developed city in Somalia, a few times. This is the most exposure she has ever had to a big city.

Mberwa has also visited Kismayo on a number of occasions. He would not return to Somalia even if he could. He says Somali Bantus had no rights in Somalia and were denied access to all but farming and other manual labour jobs.

When not in school the older boys, twenty, eighteen and ten, usually go to the market and social area of Dagahaley camp.

The 13-year-old daughter is responsible for all the house chores. She cooks, cleans, fetches water, helps to care for the children and attends school sporadically. She was three years old

when the family arrived in Dadaab. She, like her brothers and sisters, is more accustomed to life in Dadaab than anywhere else in the world.

Names have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.

Family # 2

Mohamed and his wife Hadijo have four children aged ten, five, one, and seven days old (as of December 2001). Another child was born in 1995 in Dagahaley and died in 1997.

Mohamed was a farmer in Jilib. He started working with his father on the farm at a young age, and as an adult cultivated maize (corn) near the Juba River. He lived alongside other family members, including his three brothers and a sister. Farming in Jilib was difficult and harvests depended on the seasonal rains. He and his family lived in small huts made of mud, stick and grass, similar to their home in Dadaab. Mohamed said that almost no Somali Bantus from Jilib went to school. Neither he nor his wife Hadijo has ever spent even one day in a classroom.

In 1991 armed men came to Jilib and raped and killed people and looted the farms. Mohamed and his family fled to Kenya. His mother was killed. His sister accompanied him and his family on the 15-day walk to Kenya. He has not seen his brothers since he fled. Mohamed had a friend write a letter that was then sent to his brothers, but he has not received any reply.

Mohamed and Hadijo live in Dagahaley camp. In 1998 Mohamed and his family moved into a bigger compound that he built. The new compound has a sleeping hut and a social hut, an outdoor kitchen area and small garden.

During the day Hadijo cares for the children and sometimes goes to the market. She also weaves traditional Bantu mats, as do most of her women friends. Hadijo says that if all Somali Bantus went back to Somalia she would join them. She will go wherever her community goes. She has heard that America is a place where there is money and where people can have a better life than in Dadaab.

Mohamed looks for construction work in the Somali community and with NGOs. Somalis

often hire him to build houses or compounds. Mohamed and Hadijo grow plants in their compound for medicinal purposes and also to supplement their rations. One of the medicinal plant names is *solbokogini*, which translates loosely into “fight with the Jinni”. The plants, prepared in different ways, are used to treat numerous ailments and sicknesses. Their four children do not know any other life outside of Dadaab.

Names have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.

Acknowledgements

This report could not have been completed to such a broad degree without the invaluable assistance of many individuals. A special thanks goes to Farah Omar Mohamed (former employee with UNICEF Somali and UNHCR Somalia), Ali Haji (UNDP Somalia), Isse Sheikh Abdi (UNDP Somalia), Margaret Munene (UNHCR Branch Office, Nairobi), Andrew Hopkins (UNHCR Branch Office, Nairobi), Mohamed "Bill" Hirsi (UNHCR translator), Kenny Muli Nganga (UNHCR Branch Office, Nairobi), Peter Karanja (UNHCR Branch Office, Nairobi), the UNHCR Dadaab Somali Bantu verification team and Dr. Julian Bauer, Ph.D historian.

Bibliography

Amnesty International

1995 *Somalia, Building Human Rights in the Disintegrated State.*

Atlademia

<http://www.latimerclark.com>

Jenkins, O.B.

1996 *Prayer Profile: The Gosha of East Africa*, <http://www.bethany.com>.

Lehman, D.J.

1993 *Resettlement of the Mushunguli, Somali Refugees of Southeast African Origin*, UNHCR Dadaab, Kenya.

UNHCR

2000 *Global Report Kenya*, <http://www.unhcr.ch>.

UNHCR

2002 *Sub-Office Dadaab Report*, February.

US Department of State, Bureau of Population

2001 *Refugee and Migration, Refugee Admissions Statistics, 1993-2001.*