Manding (Dioula)

Profile

The northern Manding or Mandé grouping, also called Dioula, is the country's second largest cultural cluster. Dioula is a contextually defined term, meaning itinerant trader, but 'Dioula' has come to be applied to all Muslim merchants from the north and from other Sahelian countries, of whatever ethnic or cultural background, including Malinké and Bambara. The true Dioula - those for whom this is primarily a cultural rather than an occupational designation - are from the region of Kong, once an important trans-Saharan trading centre but then devastated in the early 1890s by drought and the interruption of trade caused by the capture of the cities of Djenne, Mopti and Bandiagara in Soudan by the French. This grouping is mostly Muslim and is located in both northwest and southern Côte d'Ivoire.

Historical context

According to tradition, the Manding are the descendants of the people who founded the Mali Empire and began to move from the north to southern Côte d'Ivoire in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The Dioula, had commercial networks in pre-colonial times that stretched from Senegal to Nigeria and from Timbuktu to northern Côte d'Ivoire. With colonization these expanded into the new towns of the coastal areas. The Malinké in the north under the leadership of Somori Ture fought the French until his capture in 1898. In the colonial and post-colonial periods, the Manding were among the northern groups excluded from power. In the early 1990s, the ruling PDCI party raised the spectre of religious extremism and conflict if Muslims were granted a share of power. The economic decline that began in the 1980s and continued in the 1990s heightened ethnic tensions, and the commercial predominance of the Dioula provoked envy.

Upon seizing power in 1995, Robert Guéï introduced the notion of ‘Ivoirité', ostensibly to exclude non-Ivoirians from the political process. This appeared aimed at continuing the exclusion of the Dioula politician and presidential candidate Alassane Ouattara, whose parents were not Ivoirian, according to his opponents. In practice this substantially sharpened public sentiment among the majority against northerners, including all Manding, regardless of the length of individual or family tenure in Côte d'Ivoire.

When the country fractured in 2002, Dioula clearly came down on the side of the northern rebels, first in the MPCI, and later in the New Forces.

Current issues

Despite the tenuous north-south peace process, northern peoples including Manding, who live in the south, remain prone to violence from the government and pro-Gbagbo militant groups.