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STUDIES

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FARDA ASADOV

Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire (formerly known in English as the Ivory Coast) was created as a French colony in 1893 and has been an independent republic since 1960.

1. GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHY

In common with other West African states bordering the Gulf of Guinea, its territory has an ecological frontier between predominantly dry savanna in the north and mostly tropical rainforest in the south. Islam was first introduced in the north during the ninth/fifteenth century. At the dawn of the twentieth century, most

Muslims were still living in the north, as a minority amongst diverse “animist” groups. Under French rule, the savanna area was first attached to the colony of the French Sudan (present-day Mali) and then was transferred in 1899 to the Côte d'Ivoire colony, hitherto oriented towards the coast; long-lasting north-south migration ensued. Since about the 1950s, the majority of the Muslim population has been established in the more developed south. Commonly held notions of a north-south religious divide are thus simplistic and misleading in the present day. In 2014, according to imprecise but indicative government census data, Muslims constituted 42 percent of a total resident population of 22.6 million, while Christians made up 34 percent; 24.2 percent of the resident population consisted of foreign nationals, mostly from Sudano-Sahelian countries; of these, 72 percent were Muslim. Although both monotheisms have expanded greatly since independence, traditional religions remain influential, practised discreetly even by some Muslims and Christians.

2. EARLY HISTORY OF ISLAM IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Islam's presence in Côte d'Ivoire dates to the disintegration of the ancient empire of Mali, or Mande, in the ninth/fifteenth and tenth/sixteenth centuries. The end of the empire sent traders, warriors, and cultivators eastwards; some were Muslims seeking new agricultural lands and sources of kola, a local stimulative nut. A north-south route was also opened in this period: Muslims called Jula, adept at long-distance trade, created stopping places from Jenne on the great bend of the Niger, south through the gold-rich zones, and into present-day Ghana.

In northeastern Côte d'Ivoire, the main towns were Kong and Buna in the ninth/fifteenth and tenth-/sixteenth centuries and Boron and Bonduku in the eleventh/seventeenth. The Saghanogho lineage built large mosques (Kong, 1200/1785–6; Buna, 1210/1795–6; Bonduku, 1212/1797–8), around which developed a strong *imām*-centred institution. At the end of the nineteenth century, the conquests of Samori Toure (d. 1900), a warlord from Guinea, caused the ruin of the cities of Kong (which had, meanwhile, become a political and religious centre) and Buna. Surviving scholars scattered and subsequently influenced the rise of the cities of Korhogo and Mankono (southwest of Korhogo), which developed into a centre for teaching.

In the northwest, traditions celebrate pioneers, most prominently the Twelve Pilgrims from the Niger Bend, who spread throughout the region around the eleventh/seventeenth century upon their return from Mecca, and the Baghayogho, whose ancestral graves mark their routes. A triangle of towns, Samatiguila, Tieme, and Odienne, later became a base for a southwards advance.

The Diaby, Sylla, Toure, and Savane families predominated in the northwest, the Timite in Bonduku, the Cisse in Buna and elsewhere, and the Fofana in Mankono. These names, many of Soninke origin, emphasise the role played by the diaspora of the Soninke, a Mande group, in the propagation of Islam. The old mosques of northern Côte d'Ivoire, such as that of Kawara village, are built of dried-clay bricks (*banco*) in their own characteristic style.

Some manuscript libraries had tens of volumes of classic Arab-Islamic texts. A widespread work, in addition to the Qur'ān itself, was the *Dalā'il al-khayrāt*

wa-shawāriq al-anwār fī dhikr al-salāt 'alā al-nabī al-mukhtār, written in honour of the Prophet by the Moroccan Ṣūfī Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 870/1465–6). Teachers (*kar-amoko*, from *qara'a*, “recite, read” in Arabic and *mogho*, “man” in Mande languages) used Arabic characters to transcribe Jula, the local Mande vernacular.

All these scholars claimed to be disciples of al-Hājj Salīm Suwari (fl. ninth/fifteenth century) who advocated peaceful cooperation with the animist powers, such as the Senufo, and condemned excesses in *jihād*. The main Islamic brotherhoods were the Qādiriyya, the region's oldest, and the Tijāniyya. Both were elite scholarly networks with no mass affiliation (the Qādiriyya is a widespread Ṣūfī order of which 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī, d. 561/1166, a Ḥanbalī scholar active in Baghdad, became, after his death, the namesake and patron; the Tijāniyya was founded in Tlemcen in Algeria in 1195/1781 by the *shaykh* and religious scholar Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tijānī, d. 1815, and became influential in large parts of North and West Africa and, later, to a lesser extent, in Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia).

3. MODERN DEVELOPMENTS

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Islam was nowhere a majority religion in the north; Muslims lived in urbanised enclaves with animist Senufo and other groups and communicated along networks of trading trails. At that time, the forest and coastal expanses of southern Côte d'Ivoire were peopled by numerous Akan and Kru groups who practised traditional religions that were later significantly Christianised.

Although passable, the forest long remained hazardous for isolated Jula Muslim traders. French colonial rule

unintentionally facilitated the expansion of Islam southwards by establishing security, new lines of communication, new market towns and port cities, and commercial and employment opportunities. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* (colonial conscripts, mostly Muslim) and Senegalese clerks also came by sea to serve the colonial state. Many settled locally, bringing Muslim clerics. Yacuba Sylla, a Hamawi—a disciple of Shaykh Ḥamāllāh (d. 1943), founder of the Hamawiyya, the “eleven beads,” a splinter group of the mainstream Tijāniyya, the “twelve beads”, from Nioro, in the French Sudan—was one of a few Muslim activists whom the French banished to the Ivorian forest. He settled in Gagnoa, in Bete country, forming his own politically and economically influential endogamous Muslim community (no one is Hamawi unless born Hamawi, and endogamic marriages are preferred; the community remains small and little visible).

Further contributing to Islam's southward expansion from the late 1920s was the development of the coffee, cocoa, and timber-plantation economy. Appreciated as robust and docile peasants, many Senufo from the north and, later, Moose from Haute-Volta (Upper Volta, partly integrated into Côte d'Ivoire from 1932 to 1947 and now Burkina Faso) were dispatched to the economically “useful” south as labourers. Facing alien environments, many Senufo, Moose, and other migrants drew closer to the northern Jula and settled in their *julabugus* (Jula—and, by extension, all-inclusive Muslim—neighbourhoods in southern towns). Many converted to Islam and contributed to the Islamisation of Senufo, Moosi, and other societies in their homelands. Until the 1970s, few members of southern ethnic groups converted to Islam (except for women who married into Jula families), a

fact that reinforced southerners' perception of Islam as a religion of strangers.

Movement, mixing, and social change brought about an inchoate Muslim religious culture, less tied to specific local traditions and more “generic” in outlook. Its intellectual centre gradually moved from the savanna to the expanding towns of the south. In the 1950s, Bouaké, located on the savanna-forest frontier and on the Abidjan-Ouagadougou railway (completed in 1954), emerged as the centre of a minority scripturalist, anti-Šūfī community, commonly called Wahhābī by its adversaries. It was led by young reformists (several of them from Guinea), who had learned new ideas at al-Azhar University in Cairo and in Mecca. They founded an influential network of *madrasas* (reformed Islamic schools).

After independence, the lead was gradually taken by Abidjan, the country's prime university centre, economic hub, and political seat (even after the capital was transferred to Yamoussoukro in 1984). The first Ivorian reformist association, established in 1957, was the Abidjan branch of the Dakar-based Union Culturelle Musulmane (UCM). In 1976, after more than a decade of withdrawal occasioned by President Félix Houphouët Boigny's authoritarian rule (prime minister 1959–60, president 1960–93), the minority “Wahhābī” (Ahl al-Sunna) community launched its nationwide Association des Musulmans Orthodoxes de Côte d'Ivoire (AMOCI) in Abidjan, fuelling tensions anew with local “traditionalist” Muslims, who generally practised Mālikī-cum-customary traditions. The association receded after a severe leadership crisis in 1981.

A major transformation occurred in the 1970s and 80s, when a new Muslim elite group emerged from the encounter

of Western-trained, Francophone, middle/upper-class Muslim youth with three reform-minded preachers trained in the Arab world: Shaykh Tidjane Ba (d. 2001), Mohamed Lamine Kaba (b. 1942), and Aboubacar Fofana (b. 1943). These elites were mostly urban, and Abidjan was their epicentre, but their audience soon expanded nationwide, thanks to itinerant proselytisation and a popular television programme launched in 1977. This group strove to give an Islamic response to the changing needs and aspirations of Ivorian Muslim society, to reconcile Islam and Ivorian-style modernity. As a young Muslim student put it, Islam then became less a religion of “old Jula traders” and more one of “young educated executives.” Concerned with the fragmentation and divisions of local Muslim communities and their marginality in the Ivorian state, this elite group initiated a gradual process of communal restructuring at the national level, culminating in the creation of the Conseil Supérieur des Imams (COSIM, 1991) and the Conseil National Islamique (CNI, 1993). In their early years, the COSIM and CNI attracted widespread enthusiasm and support from the Muslim population at large. The COSIM developed into a church-like superstructure for Islam at the national level, evoking the (supposedly) consensual voice of public Islam in Côte d’Ivoire, in the way the episcopal conference speaks publicly in the name of Ivorian Catholics.

The Ivorian Islamic landscape remains diverse. In the mid-1990s, a new “Wahhābī” (Ahl al-Sunna) leadership relaunched the group’s activities under the twin umbrella of the renamed Association des Musulmans Sunnites de Côte d’Ivoire (AMSCI) and the new Conseil Supérieur des Imams Sunnites (CODIS). Although not antagonistic towards the COSIM and

CNI, this umbrella group speaks with its own voice and has gained a grassroots momentum. From 2000, a Šūfī reawakening, both Tījānī and Qādīrī, brought new *shaykhs* to public prominence. They have competing circles of disciples and organise celebrations of the *mawlid* (Muḥammad’s birthday) throughout the country. Côte d’Ivoire is also home to Africa’s largest Lebanese community, mostly Shī‘ī. Lebanese Shī‘a cater mostly for the needs of their own communities. A handful of African Shī‘ī *imāms* created their own Conseil Supérieur Ahlul Beit de Côte d’Ivoire in 2016.

Ivorian Muslims generally favour a civic Islam, but Muslims’ relations with the Ivorian state have been tumultuous since Houphouët’s death in 1993. His successors elaborated a pro-southerner policy called *ivoirité* (lit., Ivorianness, the policy of “Ivorians first”), discriminating pell-mell against Jula, Muslims, and foreigners. Brutal anti-Muslim violence erupted in the south after the 2000 elections that brought the born-again Laurent Gbagbo (b. 1945, president 2000–11) to power, then after a partially unsuccessful coup d’état on 19 September 2002 that brought northern mutineers to power in the north (under the leadership of a Catholic Senufo), and again after the 2010 vote, when Gbagbo refused to accept the election of his rival Alassane Ouattara (b. 1942). When mosques were attacked and *imāms* killed in the south, the COSIM issued media statements warning Muslims against retaliatory violence in the name of Islam. After Gbagbo was arrested and later transferred to the International Criminal Court (charged with crimes against humanity), Alassane Ouattara was installed as president in May 2011. It was the first time in Côte d’Ivoire’s history that the country’s president was nominally Muslim (his wife is a

French Catholic). Ouattara's regime follows Houphouët's religion-friendly vision of *laïcité* (secular governance) and grants subsidies to all religious groups, including born-again churches. On 13 March 2016, jihadists killed nineteen people on a beach at Grand-Bassam. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for the attack, which COSIM and all other Muslim associations condemned.

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