

The Belbali of Algeria

Korandje is spoken by about 3000 people called Belbalis from the villages of Kwara, Ifrenyu and Yami in the oasis of Tabelbala in southwestern Algeria. Significant numbers are also in the town of Tindouf.

The Belbalis themselves are ethnically heterogeneous maintaining strong social distinctions between black slaves coming from West Africa and white Berbers or Arabs from the North.

At present, the Korandje language is endangered. All Belbali men and most women speak the local form of Arabic which is so different from standard Arabic as to be mutually unintelligible. Most of these speakers claim to speak only Arabic to their young children. In the Ifrenyu village the council in 1970 resolved to give up Korandje in hopes of improving their children's educational chances by making sure they learned Arabic from the start. The people of Kwara village followed suit in 1980. Nonetheless, Kwara's children have continued to learn Korandje from older teenagers. Belbalis only form a slight majority in the oasis; more than a third of the inhabitants come from elsewhere, mainly Arab ex-nomads settled over the past century. Some of the older generation of immigrants learned Kwarandzyey, but this is unheard of among younger ones, who consider it difficult and pointless.

The isolation and poverty of Tabelbala oasis plus the widespread perception that dark skin correlates with servile ancestry and lack of strong tribal connections, all contribute to a very low prospect of survival of the Korandje language.

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Primary Religion:

Islamic

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

0

Churches:

0

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

0

Population (date):

3,000

