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Mali: A religion or cult called "Komo," including the ethnic groups that practise it, the age and conditions for membership, the initiation rituals, and the risks incurred by members who decide to withdraw from it (January 2004)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Various corroborating sources indicated that Komo is a secret initiation society of the Bambara (Bamana) ethnic group (*Religiologiques* Spring 1993; Ghent University 2 June 2000; Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art 1995; Dieterlen and Cissé 1972). However, according to an overview of a book entitled *Les fondements de la société d'initiation du Komo*,

[translation]

Komo is a socio-religious institution (initiation) of the Malinke and Bambara, as well as of their Kagoro relatives. It has been adopted by the Fulani of Wassoulou, Manding, Fouladougou and Birgo, and exists among the Kokoroko ethnic group of Bougouni. Komo is also practised by the Minianka and Senoufo ethnic groups of San, Koutiala and Sikasso (ibid.).

An article published on the Website of the Ghent University in Belgium noted that, [translation] "among the Bambara, Komo is divided into seven classes, and a young boy begins his initiation at age 7 and becomes a Grand Master only at age 56" (2 June 2000). Another article on initiations indicated that the Bambara initiation process

[translation]

is divided into stages that begin in a man's early childhood and ends with his maturity: Ndomo, before circumcision (marking the path from childhood to knowledge); Komo, after circumcision (introduction to knowledge); Nama (knowledge of social issues); Kono (psychological knowledge); Tyiwara (knowledge of the cosmos); and Kore (attaining divinity, which is the ultimate basis of the human being) (*Encyclopaedia Universalis* 1999).

Among the Bambara, circumcision is performed at the age of five or six (Dembele 1997).

Reached by telephone in Bamako on 12 January 2004, the president of the Malian Human Rights Association (Association malienne des droits de l'homme, AMDH), affiliated with the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), said that his organization had never heard of incidents in which members of Komo society had been mistreated. He also said that, because it is a secret society, Komo is not practised in large cities but rather in more remote areas, where it is possible to remain anonymous (AMDH 12 Jan. 2004). The AMDH president explained that only Komo members know about the rituals performed in initiations (ibid.).

In the seventh paragraph of his paper entitled "L'anthropologie en question : altérité ou différence?", which was presented on 5 April 2000 at a conference held at the Université de tous les savoirs, Jean Bazin, former director of the Centre d'anthropologie des mondes contemporains at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris (Laval University 26 Sept. 1995), described a Komo society ceremony that he had attended. This description may be of some interest and is attached to this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References

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Attachment

Université de tous les savoirs. 5 April 2000. Jean Bazin. "L'anthropologie en question : altérité ou différence?"
<http://www.telerama.fr/edito/etc/savoirs/deuxieme_15/txtbazin.asp?fr=1> [Accessed 12 Jan. 2004], pp. 1-10.

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