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Tradition and Commodity: The Transition of Baule and Senufo Artistry in Côte d' Ivoire
Nancy Johnson
College Scholar Senior Thesis

“Variation does not mean evolution. If an artist varies his mode of expression, this only means that he has changed his manner of thinking, and in changing, it might be for the better or it might be for the worst”.

Pablo Picasso, 1923

The conventional study of African art often perpetuates the anonymity of the artist. Objects are analyzed and identified by their role in visualizing various aspects of traditional belief systems. As a result, collectors of African art desire objects based on historical value and traditional utilization rather than through the recognizable skills and attributes of specific artists. Collectors and historians alike pursue the idea of authenticity, and agree that “authentic” objects are created especially for traditional purposes.

An object of traditional importance will of course be the product of a man or woman who has been identified within a society as a skilled artist, capable of producing forms that will possess, “visual power and ritual efficacy”(Kasfir 2000:104). Therefore, when local artists depart from the original realm of production, does their work become “inauthentic”? African art that is produced solely for foreign consumption is often labeled as tourist art. These objects are seen as belittling to their original purpose, sold simply to appease foreign tastes. This type of production is, “seen as demeaning to artists in the traditional societies, who are seduced into a type of whoredom. . .”(Jules-Rosette 1984: vii). True, this new object holds less of a traditional importance, but it could be argued that the artist is merely responding to a different audience. Therefore, are artists who produce for local consumption as well as for the foreign market compromising their original objective, or simply making an artistic transition? I would like to argue that the traditional artist has the ability to maintain both roles.

In the West African country of Côte d'Ivoire, both the Baule and Senufo peoples have experienced this artistic combination of tradition and commodity. With the creation of Baule sculptural figures and the painting of Senufo textiles for tradition and trade, the artists and the objects themselves now reflect their own societies as well as the desires of the modern world. The following work will trace this artistic transition by exploring how both the object and the artist maintain this new duality.

Baule Statuary Art

The Baule people of Côte d'Ivoire have a very interactive connection with the spiritual realm, and lives are often shaped based on individual relationships with spiritual beings. This interactive spiritual communication is supported by the role of the diviner, who acts as a mediator between the two realms. The diviner is often visited in times of misfortune and illness, similar to the role of a priest or clergyperson. Yet, in Baule society there is another important member who aids in the communication between the physical and the spiritual. The artist, in Baule society, is often sought after for his skills in representing the spiritual realm. His creations transfigure the spiritual into the physical world, and give the Baule an object that provides for a more tangible interaction with the invisible realm.

The best example of such an object is the spirit spouse. When one experiences difficulty with sexual relationships in Baule society, it is often attributed to the jealous nature of one's spiritual mate, a being that resides only in the invisible realm, but whose actions can sometimes cause serious relationship difficulties in the physical world. Once a diviner has identified this problem, it is necessary to have a carving commissioned that

represents the mate from the spiritual world. These sculptures are known in the Baule language as *blolo bla* for female forms and *blolo bian* for male figures. Once carved, the spirit becomes tangible and is thus easier to recognize and praise. Therefore, once given proper acknowledgement and respect, the spirit will hopefully have no more justification for causing misfortune in human relationships. These figures play an integral role, not only as a representation of the spirit realm, but also as objects that contribute to the self-identity of their owners. By having a spirit spouse, a Baule man or woman can become more aware of their role as an earthly spouse, as well as their own personal history, independence, and self-interaction with the spirit and physical realm.

However, the Baule traditional artist does not function solely as a spiritual mediator. With the introduction of foreign trade, the Baule artist began to produce a product marketed beyond the traditional environment. As the economic realm of tourism increased, the object and artist changed, transforming into reflections of a new culture that identified and emphasized different ideas concerning material wealth and status. Thus, the artist, initially concerned with the ideas of production for spiritual communication, began to transform the spirit spouse into an object that catered to a more commercial appeal. Yet, the original purpose surrounding the production of the spirit spouse is still maintained and protected by the traditional artist as well as his community. The artist now has a dual sense of self, as both a carver commissioned for the representation of the spirit world, and as a creator for the new economic realm of tourism. In the following, I hope to discuss the role of self-identity in the traditional Baule use of the *blolo bla/bian*, and how that underlying purpose continues within the realm of foreign consumption. Finally, I would also like to

determine how the traditional artist adapts his abilities to serve his own community as well as the modern economic desires of the foreign market.

Traditional Function of the Baule Spirit Spouse

Misfortune is commonly seen as a divine message indicating the need for a possible lifestyle alteration. For some, misfortune could also indicate that the spiritual realm is issuing a warning to individual followers, specifying a need for more loyalty, praise, and respect. For the Baule, misfortune symbolizes a combination of the two. In her essay "People of Wood: Baule Figure Sculpture", Susan Vogel quotes Victor Turner as stating that, "the level of conscious explanation usually consists of basic dogma which tends to stress the harmonious and positive aspects of experience. The negative aspects, often too threatening to express outright, are only stated metaphorically"(Vogel 1973: 23 citing Turner 1967: 33). In Baule society, a negative occurrence in one's life is not simply a matter of bad luck, but a sign that he or she needs to be more open to the spiritual dimension.

When misfortune arises in a Baule community, it is often difficult to pinpoint the exact instigating spirit. However, if the particular problem arises in the area of sexual matters, the difficulty is most likely with one's spirit spouse. The Baule believe that before birth into the physical realm, every person had a spouse in the spirit world. These beings are fickle and easily provoked to jealousy. The source of their jealousy is usually one's spouse in the physical world. Because a typical Baule cannot communicate directly with the spirit, a diviner is called upon to question the invisible realm and determine the problem. If the spirit spouse is positively identified as the source of misfortune, the most

likely prescription given by a diviner is to have a sculpture made in the image of one's otherworldly mate or *blolo bla/bian*. In representing these beings within the medium of wood, the carver only chooses forms that represent the most physically appealing attributes. Thus, traditional *blolo bla/bian* figures, (see fig.1 and fig. 2) with their rounded and elongated forms, scarification marks on the chest and face, and elaborate hairstyles, emphasize the suggestion that, "Statuary form derives from an idealization of human form, and in turn sculptured ideals affect the appreciation of human beauty..."(Ravenhill 1996:11). Therefore, the carving of these ideals by the local artist provides a representation that gives tangible form to these otherwise invisible, yet extremely manipulative beings¹.

The Spirit Spouse as a Tool for Self-Identity

Thomas Moore states that, "The intimacy in sex is never only physical. In a sexual relationship we may discover who we are in ways otherwise unavailable to us, and at the same time we allow our partner to see and know that individual. As we unveil our bodies, we also disclose our persons"(Moore 1994:28-29). Although Moore is speaking strictly of earthly physical relationships, by individually interacting with their spirit spouse, Baule are able to better understand their own identity as well as the continuing roles and demands of an earthly relationship. The *blolo bla/bian* requires that its earthly mate spend at least one night alone with it, while also offering devotion and sacrifices throughout one's lifetime. Hopefully, as a reward for faithfulness, the spirit spouse will allow earthly relationships to prosper.

¹ For more general information concerning the Baule Spirit Spouse, see Vogel 1997, 1973 and Ravenhill 1996, 1994.

Yet this is more than just physical devotion, in that the *blolo bla/bian* also acts as a psychological tool, giving its earthly mates a chance to independently develop themselves through a spiritual source. Looking beyond simple devotions and gifts, one can see the underlying importance of these figures. They do not simply compel the spirit to ease their troubles, but they also provide an outlet for the Baule people to express and better understand their own self-identity. For example, because females maintain male spirit spouses or *blolo bian* and males possess female statues or *blolo bla*, Susan Vogel suggests that these images represent alternate realities of one's actual self. She states that, "Spirit Spouses seem to suggest the disorienting idea that humans might harbor in themselves elements of the other sex. The figures both express and remedy this contradiction by externalizing and isolating the male side of a woman and the female side of a man"(Vogel 1997:267). Therefore, these sculptures provide an outlet for a Baule man or woman to interact with the opposite gender, exploring themselves and their ideas about male/female relationships.

A woman with a *blolo bian* interacts with her spirit mate without actual physical consummation. She must communicate through private devotion and spend one night alone with the *blolo bian* each week. Although that night is supposedly spent dreaming about sexual encounters with one's spirit mate, it's also a night spent with one's self while developing and communicating with a gender "alter ego". This development furthers self-identity and also facilitates communication with the earthly spouse. Because the earthly spouse and spirit spouse are rivals, the owner acts as an intermediary and communicates between the two in order to please both. Thus, the spirit spouse figure is not only a manifestation of the diviner's instructions and an artist's creation for eliminating their

clients' relationship misfortune, but it is also a tool for recognizing an alternate, independent self.

Introduction of the Spirit Spouse into the World of Foreign Trade

When French colonialists began to show interest in these Baule figures, the *blolo bla/bian* was transformed into a commodity, a piece for Europeans to collect and trade. And, although it was not used as a spirit spouse by European travelers, it still remained a piece of art that demonstrated the owners' self-identity. Philip Ravenhill suggests that the majority of early consumers were French expatriates who were well paid and ready to bring evidence of their travels back from this new environment (Ravenhill 1996:70). Just as the spirit world is invisible to the Baule, for most Europeans at this time, Africa was an imaginary world, and these figures served as the only tangible items to represent this otherwise invisible land. For the European consumer, these figures represented their own identity as "worldly" travelers and adventure seekers who wanted to bring back physical evidence of their explorations.

Ravenhill suggests that the most popular statue purchased by early expatriates, the *colon* figure, deviated from the traditional *blolo bla/bian*. The *colon* figure is an African, clothed in western styles including pith helmets and army uniforms. For Ravenhill, this represented a western disillusion of a, "benign colonialism, almost an inevitable event in world history..."(Ravenhill 1996:73-74). Therefore in the continued sense of self-identity, the western buyers of these items chose them because they represented an ideology of benevolent "civilization", a trademark that reinforced their own beliefs and presupposed positive influence within the region. The traditional Baule used the *blolo bla/bian* as a tool

for interacting with the spiritual realm and resolving conflict in earthly relationships, just as colonialists used the *colon* as tangible evidence of their role in the creation of a newly “civilized” Africa.

The Modern Influence over the Traditional

As more and more Europeans moved into West Africa, they brought with them ideas of increased material wealth and class hierarchy. In return, the *blolo bla/bian* migrated into a new aesthetic and commercial realm. The Baule still recognized the importance of having a spirit spouse, however they began to request that the figures be ornamented with western accoutrements such as modern clothing, watches, and handbags. These next figures (see fig.3 and fig. 4) represent a *blolo bian* as a modern businessman complete with suit and tie, and the *blolo bla* figure on the right is representative of a modern female with accessories such as a necklace, watch, and handbag. With the introduction of western wealth, the Baule ideal image transformed into a more streamlined human form, each with its own western wealth paraphernalia. Yet, the spirit spouse remained a representation of the invisible world, and an individual connection with the spiritual.

The Transformation of the Artist

Through all of this, the Baule artist has remained in the shadow, possibly because it is not as easy to recognize his identity or involvement with these figures. I would like to suggest that in both cases it is not the desire of the consumer that changes, but that of the artist. The traditional Baule may adopt aesthetic ideas about Western wealth, yet he still

remains faithful in the spiritual use of his *blolo bla*. On the other hand, a French colonialist seeks to “civilize” a new and barbaric land, all the while using his *colon* figure to represent his experience, identity, and influence over this new world. The traditional artist, responding to this outlet, encounters a new freedom in expression through less traditional commissions. And, like his ties to the spiritual realm in his own society, he is now tied to the realm of economics.

This dualism in artistic identity is possible because the artist has remained faithful to the underlying concept of his creation. He provides a product to meet the individual needs of each party, and in return receives not only payment, but also dual rewards. In traditional society, he is respected as a man who has received the power of artistic skill from the spirits. He acts as a mediator, in that he creates some of the only tangible elements of an otherwise invisible world. Regarding the foreign market, the Baule traditional artist is allowed more artistic freedom in his creations, always looking for the next popular item. One Baule artist explains that, “For me, *colon* statuary is first of all a sculpture that allows us to go further in our work. We can introduce modern products, and apply ourselves to transforming them in order to create our own nuances, our patinas, and conceive other more modern sculptures, even if they are not exactly *colon* figures” (Ravenhill 1996: 75). Thus, the traditional Baule sculptor has developed two identities as he fluctuates between traditional spiritual loyalty and the alluring freedom of the foreign consumer market.

The *blolo bla/bian* or *colon* figure is amazing in its ability to maintain the underlying function of identity. It fluctuates as a mediator for traditional sexual relationships by providing a vehicle for communication and self-identity, yet it also

responds to a more material urge, which also provides for self-identity through the tangible representation of a transformed “civilized” ideal. Yet, it is the artist who maintains this force. His work as a creator serves to strengthen the spiritual bonds of a Baule community while also providing artistic justification for the European commitment toward a more “civilized” environment.

Senufo Painted Textiles

Sculpture is by far the most popular collectible exported from West Africa. Almost all African art collectors, and many tourists, can identify a Dan passport mask or a Baule statuary figure. African artists and craftspeople have identified the popularity of sculpted figures within the international art market, and strive to create a plethora of items to draw the consumers’ attention. Yet other collectors, as well as tourists, bypass these figures and demonstrate a greater interest in textile creations. African artists produce an array of textiles, including batik prints and colorful strip woven designs. Like most African art, these pieces have made the transition from a traditional cultural environment, and into the global market. Designs and processes have been manipulated in order to attract foreign consumers, and traditional artists have often found themselves catering to foreign trade as well as continuing to serve their own community’s traditional needs.

The Senufo village of Fakaha, located in the northern region of Côte d’Ivoire, has developed a foreign industry with a painted textile known as Korhogo Cloth. Korhogo cloth, named for its close vicinity to the city of Korhogo, has become a popular secret for many art collectors. Hand-woven cotton strips are sewn together by the local Dyula people, and then transported to Fakaha where Senufo artists transform this woven canvas into

beautifully painted designs. Traditionally, these artists painted on cloth that was to be used by the Poro, or men's secret society. Now, however, these artists have responded to foreign interest as well as traditional Poro commissions. The following will investigate not only the production of the cloth itself, but also how local artists differentiate between unique and traditional designs, as well as mass produced cloths intended for a global market.

Senufo Poro Society

In order to understand the traditional uses of Senufo painted textiles, one must first gain a basic understanding of the structure and ideals behind the Poro society. The basic structure and function of the Senufo Poro society is comparable to our Western system of formal academic education. In our system, young people progress through initial, and often awkward stages of development, but ultimately acquire an enhanced understanding of specific skills, and are able to make specialized contributions within society. The Senufo require young men to go through a similar process of development within the Poro society. There are different initiation processes for men and women, with Poro being solely a male endeavor that seeks to prepare Senufo boys for future leadership within the community.

The Senufo do not necessarily see this as a gender bias, but rather as a specialized role that men must play within the community. Women do not fill this role, simply because their specializations and skills are needed elsewhere. Women are leaders within the Sandogo, or divination practice. They serve as mediators to the spiritual realm and work with men in order to create a harmonious balance between the physical and spiritual worlds. Women, therefore, are not prohibited from Poro membership because they are inferior, but simply because they are powerful forces in another realm of society, and are

necessary in the construction of a stable relationship between the visible and the invisible. Anita Glaze notes that the, “leadership of both institutions [Sandogo and Poro] working in dynamic harmony is responsible for the continuous interaction with the supernatural universe that is essential to Senufo village security and prosperity” (Glaze 1981:92). With that understanding in mind, the following will focus solely on the men’s Poro society and how it serves as a canvas for the discussion of painted textiles.

Senufo Poro is an initiation process that is divided into various grades, and extends over a period of twenty-one years. Boys start the process at the age of six. Instructors are both village elders and older boys who have progressed to the next grade and can provide immediate knowledge and empathy for those in the younger stages of development. The first stage of Poro is known as the children’s Poro, or Kamuru. This introductory stage begins around age six and lasts until the early teen years. Next, Plawo, or junior grade includes a two-month seclusion, where young men practice survival tactics, followed by a public celebration of success. Tyologo, or senior grade gives final definition to male leadership roles within Senufo society and is followed by the Kafwo, or graduation (Glaze 1981:143-148). Each of these stages or “grades” has its own set of lessons, duties, and celebrations. One of the most important aspects of Poro is its secrecy. As initiates progress from grade to grade, they begin to inherit the secrets of the community. Technically, these secrets are known to no one outside of the Poro society, and are to be kept in order for the community to function in a balanced manner. Some forms of imagery and language are Poro secrets, and therefore are to be kept from women and lower initiates. This aspect of secrecy within Poro is facilitated by the work of artists, who visualize this secret language.

The Role of Painted Textiles within Poro

Secrets are one of the privileges in Poro society because they serve the purpose of uniting Senufo men and empowering them with confidential knowledge. The images that surround those secrets are often kept from younger initiates until they reach a stage of sufficient maturity and readiness. The cornerstone of this process is usually manifested in the form of a masquerade. Some masks can only be seen by senior Poro members within the village, and are forbidden to women. However, other masks are used for public displays, even if their meaning is not completely known by every member of the crowd. But, a wooden mask is not the only element of artistic secrecy. Beyond the sculpted headpiece, the costume worn by the mask is of equal importance. Masquerade performers employ not only masks, but textile creations as well. Each costume is unique, and conveys specific messages concerning both the wearer and the performance. Painted textiles are one such form of this illustration, and are created to be unique to the wearer.

Senufo artists use strip-woven cotton, a product of the neighboring Dyula peoples, as a canvas for their work. The first of the two-step process involves creating a dye made from a mixture of local plant leaves and corn. This yellow-green dye is then applied freehand with a dull metal knife. Next, a mixture of fermented mud is applied exactly over the previous design. A chemical reaction occurs as the iron in the mud reacts with the plant mixture. As a result, the design becomes darker, bolder, and relatively permanent

(Hackman 1998:8). Therefore, because of this painstaking process, each of these creations is not only unique, but a product of patient skill and attention to detail²

Creating these traditional costumes causes the artist to function as a mediator between the Poro society and the community, by appeasing the wearer with displays of secrecy and power, and giving the viewer a creative visual display in order to enhance the masquerade experience. The designs on each costume are one of a kind, but maintain the use of a standard set of mythological characters and geometric figures. It is the sequence and arrangement of these figures that contribute to its individuality and secrecy (see fig.5). This uniqueness serves in maintaining these secrets by acting as a symbol of power. For instance, some more typical Senufo representations of power are horns, teeth, and leaves from the sacred grove. These images are frequently depicted on painted cloths. Some of the lesser-known images include the wild boar, which is known for its mindless and destructive force, a force that contradicts the teachings of the Poro and is used as a negative example (Glaze 1981: 137). By harnessing these images and controlling them through the movement of a masquerade, the wearer becomes an ultimate symbol of authority. Yet, there is a mystery in the arrangement of these symbols and designs, therefore the wearer also experiences a type of empowerment, one that could not exist had he not kept the secrets of the Poro. The costume itself confirms the ideals of Poro society, which are the maintenance and formation of male leadership. These ceremonial textiles envelop the audience with mystery, while empowering the wearer with a sense of authority and superior knowledge. The paradoxical themes of individuality along with the

² The Bogolan cloth of Mali also incorporates a similar technique. However, Bogolan cloths, before the designs have been painted, are immersed within a dye bath made from local plant leaves and corn. After the cloth has dried, it is painted with fermented mud. Later the mud is washed away, revealing the design. Also, women create Bogolan cloth, whereas males are the artists within Senufo society. (Rovine 2000: 2-4).

conformity to male leadership are somehow perfectly balanced through the use of these painted fabrics.

The Artists' Role within Traditional Society

When producing a Poro painted textile, the traditional artist becomes a designer who is given various forms with which to transform his cloth into a completely unique creation. Beyond creating costumes for the Poro, traditional artists also cater to other members of the Senufo community. Textile painters also create unique clothing for elite members of the Dozobele, or hunter's association (Glaze 1981: 172). These garments are known as *filia*, and once again cater to the uniqueness of the wearer, visually displaying the owner's power and wealth. Like the costumes of a masquerade, these garments, usually consisting of drawstring pants and loose fitting cotton shirts, are filled with mythological *Poro* figures and geometric designs (see fig. 6). Once again, it is the job of the artist to ensure the garment's originality. Therefore, is the artist merely a designer whose only job is to rearrange familiar imagery in order to create unique patterns? It is true that his job is centered around artistic placement, yet it is more than simply placing patterns on a piece of fabric. The artist is in essence, visualizing power, and plays a large community role by producing a work that signifies a continuity of strength in male leadership. By producing these pieces, the artists are signifying their approval of *Poro* society, and the realm of community hierarchy. With their work, they are not only producing something that is unique to the wearer, but they are also providing visual confirmation to a system that promotes growth, knowledge, and future leadership within the traditional Senufo community.

Painted Textiles for Modern Consumption

Senoufo painted cloth could not remain a secret forever, and was eventually discovered in northern Côte d' Ivoire by European travelers and art collectors. However, the cloth has escaped becoming an over popularized tourist item because of its specialization and rather remote location. The process of creating these cloths is so specialized that it is not likely to be reproduced in a common tourist market by a non-Senoufo artist. Most of the outside sales and advertising that do exist is done through middlemen who transport the cloths to the Abidjan market, which caters to international collectors. In northern Côte d' Ivoire, Senoufo territory, these cloths are advertised locally through the Mount Korhogo Hotel. Each room at the Mount Korhogo is decorated with Senoufo painted cloths, and some are available for purchase through the hotel shop. However, if visitors want to see the complete range of production and speak with the artists themselves, they must travel a few miles from the city of Korhogo to the village of Fakaha, the center of production for what is now known as Korhogo cloth³

When tourists and art collectors began to show an interest in Senoufo painted textiles, the artists seized the opportunity to bring a larger income into their local economy. The artists themselves are not the only beneficiaries of foreign patronage. In fact, the Senoufo share this new form of income with the neighboring Dyula peoples. The cotton is grown by the Senoufo, and then sold to Dyula men and boys who weave it into coarse strips. This strip-woven cloth is then sold back to the Senoufo, who use it as a canvas for their artwork (Gilfoy 1987). Therefore, the creation of these textiles for foreign purchase was

seen as an economic opportunity for both the Senufo and the Dyula. Thus, this new form of painted textiles was nicknamed Korhogo cloth, borrowing from the name of the nearest city. However, the name is not the only alteration. The cloth itself has transformed from unique creations involving mythological symbols of secrecy and power, to repeated generalizations of these same images for modern consumption.

Traditionally, artists followed the warp of the cloth, using it as a, “rough grid for the design” (Lamb 1975: 65, see fig. 7). Korhogo cloth strays from this technique, rarely following the naturally woven grid design, and producing characters that are typically larger and more recurring. Interestingly enough, this Korhogo cloth style was actually suggested by the Swiss art collector, Emil Storrer. When Storrer first visited the village of Fakaha, he befriended the primary textile painter at that time, Gbomko Silue. He found the cloth to be both beautiful and skillful in its creation, but he later suggested that the artist make his images larger, and rearrange them in a manner that disregards the previous “strip grid” formations (Gardi 1969: 237, see fig 8). The artists applied Storrer’s suggestions, and tourists responded. Thus, Korhogo cloth was born from a combination of traditional skill and European stylistic preferences⁴.

The Artists’ Transformation for a Foreign Audience

Knowing that the artists within the traditional Senufo community serve as illustrators of power and prestige, how does one confront the question of using this skill to

³ I would like to make the distinction between my use of the term Korhogo cloth and Senufo painted textiles. Korhogo cloth is a term that is used for cloths that are marketed towards tourists. Senufo painted textiles refer to those cloths painted for use within Poro society.

⁴ Recently, Senufo artists have been producing Korhogo cloth with characters that appear to be in more of a narrative format. The artists are also beginning to incorporate a wider variety of colors, hoping to attract a larger foreign audience. If this type of cloth sells well, it will most likely replace the original forms suggested by Storrer.

mass-produce Korhogo cloth for the foreign art market? These traditional artists find justification in foreign ignorance as well as stylistic alteration. In July of two thousand one, I visited a Senufo village in northern Côte d' Ivoire in order to study a phenomenal seven-storied meeting area, constructed from huge tree trunks and layers of timber. This site was specifically designed as a place for all male elders to meet and discuss village concerns. Although women were traditionally forbidden, our entire group was allowed into the structure and invited to stay for a short lecture. When asked why we were allowed to enter, the elders simply responded that we were not Senufo, and therefore did not understand the rules and rituals of Senufo society. They also added that we were admitted because we were students, a term that seemed to have no gender implications. This anecdote relates back to the idea of producing sacred techniques and images for public consumption. Senufo artists realize that no foreigner will ever participate within the Poro society, and therefore never fully understand the various meanings behind each image. Also, Korhogo cloth, unlike Poro creations, is not meant to be worn; it is displayed in the form of a wall hanging, suitable for foreign tastes and decoration.

Uniqueness is yet another factor that contributes to the justification of Korhogo cloth. Unlike Poro textiles, Korhogo cloth themes and designs are often repeated when they become popular with tourists. When an item sells well, it is produced continuously with the hope of an increased overall income. Artists no longer strive to create individualized pieces of cloth that cater to specific Poro functions and elite members of Senufo society. Thus, the justification and production lies in the ability of the artist to distinguish between traditional utilization and foreign decoration. It is not a matter of exploiting traditional secrets through repetitious imagery because the figures hold no

meaning for those who remain outside of the Poro community. Thus, Poro cloth remains a traditional element of community hierarchy and performance, while Korhogo cloth simply employs generic figures for consumers who will never enter into the traditions of this type of community balance.

This concept of balance is one that can also be applied to the work of Senufo artists. If one looks closely at the foundations of the Poro, it is easy to understand how an artist can continuously transform his work as well as his mentality concerning various types of production. In both cases, he is contributing to a type of balance that extends from traditional leadership roles to new forms of income and distribution. He is able to perceive and understand the wants and desires of two audiences, successfully manipulating his craft and transforming his ideas. He is not sacrificing his role as a creator of unique Poro costumes when he supplies a Korhogo wall hanging for a European tourist; rather, he becomes a master of two identities. The Senufo textile painter is an apt pupil of the Poro ideals concerning balance. He has effectively balanced himself as a powerful communication tool within his own environment, and as a craftsman who has the ability to cater to outside interest. Thus, an artistic pathway is paved that combines secrecy with power, and commercialization without the abandonment of community ideals.

The Balance of Baule and Senufo Artistry

Both the Baule and the Senufo traditional artists have proven that they have the ability to respond to dual audiences, maintaining traditional ideals as well as integrating their work into the new realm of economic trade. The transition is not difficult to comprehend when you incorporate the idea of balance. Both Baule and Senufo artists

respond to this concept, and create objects that respond to both traditional needs and consumer desires.

Traditionally, Baule carvers produce idealized images, representing beings from the spiritual realm. By creating these beautiful, ideal forms, the artists is creating a tangible representation of the invisible, allowing the owner to better understand the balance between physical and spiritual relationships. In the same manner, *colon* figures also create a balance between the real and the invisible. These figures are just as idealized as traditional *blolo bla/bian* in that they represent an idyllic version of colonization. *Colon* figures glorify the idea of colonization, giving the owner tangible evidence of his presupposed ideas concerning civilization. This balance of old and new serves in confirming the owner's own ideas concerning his contribution to this new environment, just as the traditional figures serve in redefining the owner's ideas about his or her contributions to sexual relationships.

Senfo artists also recognize this idea of balance with the production of painted cloths for the Poro society, as well as the production and distribution of Korhogo cloth. Poro cloths signal the artists' contribution to a system that promotes the balance and continuation of male leadership within the community. Similarly, Korhogo cloth revolves around an economic balance. Foreign consumers create a new economy not just for the artists themselves, but also for the neighboring Dyula weavers. It allows for both artists and weavers alike to become full-time craftsmen, continually producing new items for foreign consumption. However, it is also a balance of foreign ignorance and cultural tradition. Just as secrecy is crucial in the maintenance of Poro painted textiles, ignorance is crucial in order to justify the creation of Korhogo cloth. Secrecy and ignorance are

balanced by taking figures and producing them in various styles, each responding to the different needs of each audience. Traditional costumes consist of unique variations of these symbols, and the creation of secret distinctions. However, Senufo artists balance the secrecy with foreign ignorance, justifying the creation of decorative pieces and repetitious imagery for an audience that is unaware of Poro significance.

Therefore, balance initiates the capability of these artists to successfully transition their creations for both traditional and modern consumption. Senufo and Baule artists create dual roles for themselves, allowing the creation of traditional visualizations to coexist with modern creations for economic trade.

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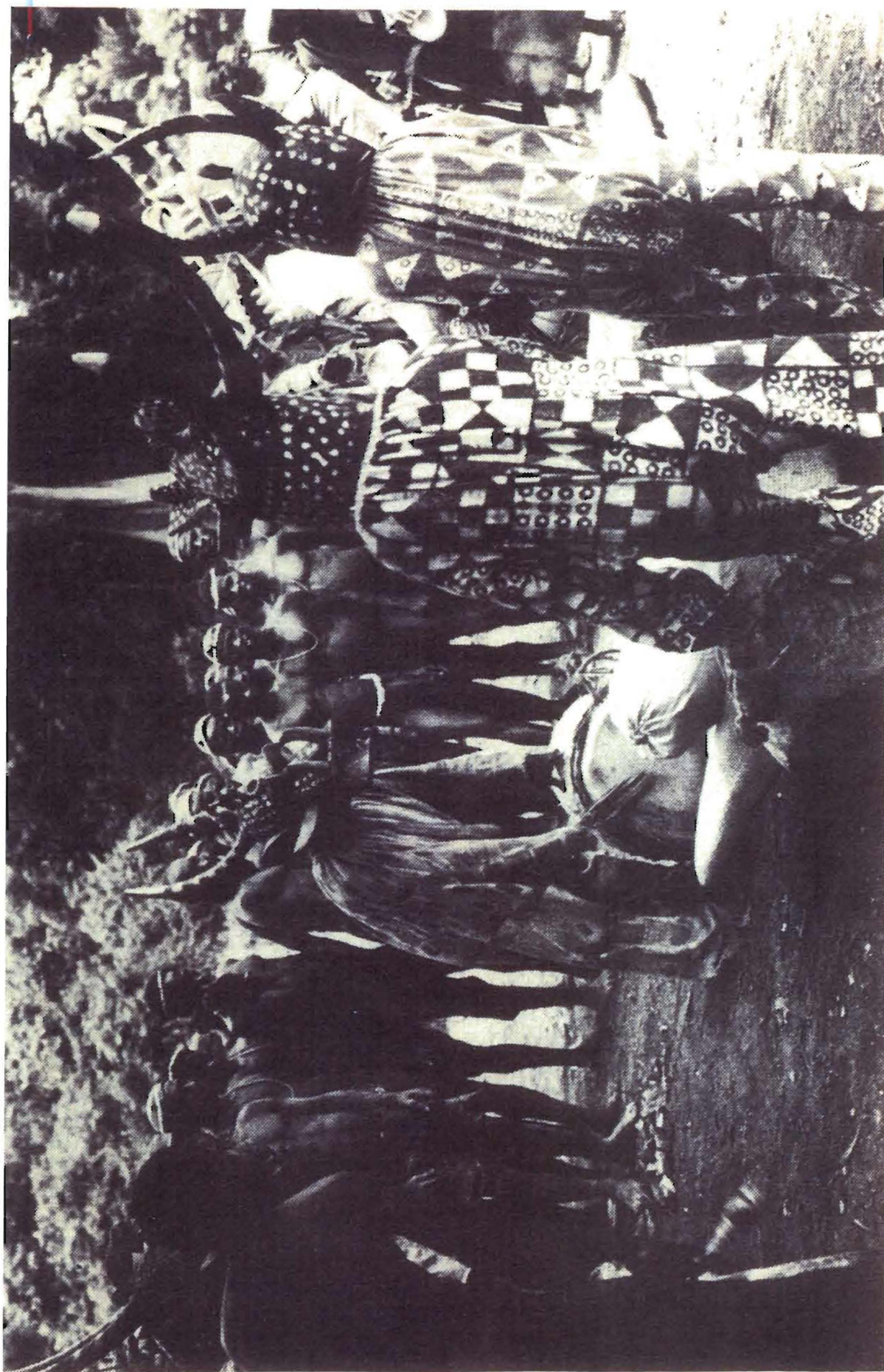


Plate 89 *Kpomyungo* masquerades and *tyolobele* Senior initi-





