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*Mary Jo Arnoldi*

## **Performance, Style, and the Assertion of Identity in Malian Puppet Drama**

Malian puppet theatre is engaging, celebratory and exciting. It originated and remains concentrated in the Segu region and many communities still regard it as one of their most vibrant performance genres. Puppetry is public entertainment and villagers state that the primary purpose of the performance is to unify the quarter or village through a celebration of the participants' shared heritage. In the drama, actors draw together visual and verbal expressive forms that act as emblems in the process of constructing a group identity.

In the ethnographic literature, the Segu region is often defined as a Bamana region, although groups of people now living in Segu identify themselves as Bamana, Bozo, Maraka, Somono, Fula, Minyanka, Bobo, and Moor. Of the ethnic groups living in Segu, the Bozo, Bamana, Somono, and Maraka all play the puppets, while the remaining groups are often featured as characters in their neighbors' theatres. Segu's rural communities are often polyethnic or if composed of a single ethnic group have longstanding networks of interaction with other ethnic groups. The complexities and changes that have occurred through time are coupled to aspects of identity that draw upon modes of livelihood, caste, and divisions by age and gender within each group.

Historically, Segu is a region in which large political states have played a major role for centuries. Peoples' notion of their history or histories encompasses the political history of past and present states as well as the local history of the village and the history of cultural forms and social institutions within the village. In this diverse environment, group identity is continually asserted against the background of these histories.

Within any village, ethnic identity plays a more or less significant role depending on the context. Friendships exist across groups and across

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quarters, and in most informal contexts, ethnic identity is generally ignored. However, in such formal contexts as political meetings, the reciting of epics by bards and joking in everyday life, the assertion of specific group identities is important.

In puppet theatre, group identity becomes particularly significant. A we/them, insider/outsider paradigm is clearly drawn. During the event, members of the audience, who may be from any number of ethnic groups, either share the identity of the actors or distinguish themselves from the troupe through their interpretation of the dramatic event and its constituent forms.

In 1978 I settled into the village of Kiranko in the Segu region of Mali, knowing only that puppet theatre was regularly performed there.<sup>1</sup> Happily, I discovered that Kiranko has three active puppet troupes, Bamana, Bozo, and Somono. The ethnic pluralism of the village provided an opportunity to study how, through performance, each of the three groups used expressive forms to define itself against the backdrop of a shared regional and village experience.

Kiranko, located on the right bank of the Niger river about forty kilometers north of the regional capital of Segu, is a village of some antiquity. Today, it has a resident population of upwards of 5,000 people and is divided into five quarters. The Bamana, who are farmers, live in one quarter and there are also three quarters of fishermen who identify themselves as either Bozo or Somono. The fifth quarter houses recent immigrants to the village as well as the overflow from families who reside in the older quarters. The nexus of social relations for these latter families, however, remains firmly embedded in the original quarters.

Kiranko's historical and ethnic identity and even its physical placement have undergone change in the past centuries. The contemporary village of Kiranko is a physical amalgamation of two villages, one a fishing village and one a farming village. The fishing village is predominately Somono, although there is a Bozo quarter in which both Bozo and Somono reside. The farming village was once identified with the Maraka, but since the hegemony of the Segu Bamana state in the eighteenth century, it has been redefined as a Bamana village.

Somono village historians claim that sometime before the rise of the Bamana state a fishing village was founded on the present site of Kiranko by the Cero, who were Somono from Segu city. The Somono settled alongside the group of semi-nomadic fishermen, who were already camped at the site. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Somono aligned themselves with the Segu state. They provided transport across the river for the military and also fished for the state. At an early

date they embraced Islam and today part of their identity in the village is tied to this Islamic heritage.

According to Segu traditions, in the eighteenth century, just prior to the formation of the Segu state under Biton Kulibali, Kiranko was under the authority of the Buware, who are variously described as Maraka and Bamana. It was during Biton's reign that Kiranko was subjugated. According to the Epic of Da Monzon, there followed a period of village rebellion against the state, and during the reign of Ngolo Jara, the village was again brought under the Bamana state's control. Since that period, it has continued to play an important role in state history and the village has produced a state ruler, Kiranko Ben Jara (c. 1841–1849), son of Monzon Jara.<sup>2</sup> The Bamana, now living in Kiranko, heavily invest their identity in Kiranko's role in the history of the Segu state.

The Bozo living in Kiranko do not identify with the original Bozo families camped at the site, but claim descent from families who were forced to migrate from Ja under the Segu state policy of forced resettlement of fishermen during the reign of Da Monzon Jara, who ruled circa 1810 to 1827 (Monteil 1924:96). Today they express their migration history in the name of their quarter, Jakakin, the people from Ja. Kiranko Bozo recognize the Somono claim to authority over the fishing village and today descendants of the Somono Cero family still retain the title of *jitigi* (owners of the water). However, the Bamana claim ascendancy over all the fishermen through their descent from the ruling Jara dynasty of the Segu Empire. They exercise authority over the fishermen in village affairs through the office of *dugutigi* (village chief), which is held by a Bamana. The pluralism of Kiranko and the changes the village has undergone, rather than being unique, are consistent with similar patterns of change that can be documented for many villages in the Segu region at large.

Each of Kiranko's three puppet troupes is organized according to both ethnic and resident patterns within the village. Although Bamana, Bozo, and Somono in the village and throughout the Segu region share a number of historical and social experiences and today all speak a common language, Bamanakan, they maintain distinct group identities. It is in the context of puppet theatre that the shared and idiosyncratic identities of these groups are enacted in the public arena.

Puppet theatre is performed under the auspices of the village youth associations, the *kamalen ton*, which include young men from the ages of fourteen to about thirty-five and young women from the ages of fourteen until their marriages. The Bamana, Bozo, and Somono each have a youth association and membership is based both on relative age

and quarter residency. All of the youth associations are organized around similar principles. Each performs public works projects and members participate in either communal agricultural or fishing harvests. Today, puppet drama is the primary entertainment activity associated with the *kamalen ton*.

The Bamana youth association, however, invokes a distinction between itself and the two fishermen's associations by emphasizing their historical identity in the Segu Empire. This historical identity is encapsulated in the retention of Segu court titles for the Bamana ton's senior officers. The leader of the Bamana youth association is addressed as the *faama*, the title of the ruler of the Segu state. The Somono and Bozo leaders are addressed as *tontigi* (owner of the youth association), a term that demonstrates affinities to a village rather than a state identity. The distinction the Bamana make in retaining court titles is based on their historical claim to political ascendancy over neighboring ethnic groups, an assertion that refers not only to the eighteenth-century conquest of the village but also to contemporary political relationships among groups in Kiranko. In farming communities throughout the region, Kiranko has been redefined as an important Bamana village with a Bamana village chief, even though the non-Bamana residents clearly outnumber the Bamana inhabitants.

In the Segu region, the puppet theatre can be played twice annually within the larger context of calendrical celebrations associated with the agricultural and fishing cycles of the region. One performance in October coincides with the *fonio* harvest and the first fishing harvest. A second festival in late May or early June takes place directly prior to the rainy season, which is the planting season for the agriculturalists and which signals the rise of the rivers and the recommencement of fishing activities for Bozo and Somono groups. Between 1978 and 1980 in Kiranko, the Bamana troupe performed the theatre twice annually at the first harvest and just prior to planting. The Somono performances occurred only at the first harvest and the Bozo performance was directly prior to the rainy season. The different timing seems to have developed only in the last twenty-five years, but it is now used by the community to define each group's theatre and to distinguish one quarter's performances from the others.

The term each group uses for the drama also plays a role in drawing distinctions among farmer's and fishermen's theatre. In Kiranko, fishermen call puppetry *dobbo* (the secrets come forth), while the farmers call it *sogobo* (the animals come forth). Both terms are Bamana, the common language of the village. Like the timing of the drama, a troupe's choice of

term serves to set up ethnic boundaries and contributes to the distinctions constructed within the performance event.

Although any single performance is unique at its most specific level of interpretation, all three troupes' performances have a similar structure, which organizes the regional definition of theatre as a Segu genre. A certain excitement pervades the village for weeks prior to the event, as young men gather to prepare the masquerades and puppets, to repair the drums, and generally to organize the event. The performances usually begin in the late afternoon, but by mid-afternoon young children begin to gather on the village square in anticipation of the theatre. Around 4:00 p.m., a representative of the youth association playing a side-blown horn moves through the quarter and signals the audience to gather for the performance. Groups of men and women slowly begin to gather, jostle for seats, and greet friends, amidst a general air of anticipation. The performance begins around 4:30 p.m., with dances by members of the youth association who are accompanied by the singers and drummers.

The first segment features circle dances, in which both men and women in the association participate. The second segment consists of acrobatic dance competitions among the males within the association. Suddenly Gon, the baboon masquerade, darts into the ring and the puppet masquerade begins. The performance continues unbroken until dusk, when people return home for dinner, but it resumes at around 8:00 p.m. and continues until late into the night, sometimes lasting until dawn.

The puppet drama is organized into a series of discrete puppet sequences, which are punctuated by short intervals of song and dance. Each sequence is a mimed dance presentation of a specific character. These masquerades are generally voiceless and are accompanied by the singing and drumming. As the character enters the dance arena, it moves in a counterclockwise direction around the circle, stopping at fixed intervals along the way. It always stops in front of the elders, who are seated together as honored guests, and in front of the singer and her chorus and may also stop at several other points in the circuit. During these short intervals, the full animation of the puppet is realized. For example, Mali Kono, the Great Bird of Mali, periodically stops, flaps its wings, moves its head up and down as if to fish, twirls and bobs its head in an acrobatic display. This activity brings the audience to its feet and individuals rush into the dance arena to praise the performers. Sigi, the bush buffalo, lumbers around the circle, then comes to a halt and settles to the ground, while the smaller puppets, which emerge from its back, begin to dance and bob wildly. After several minutes, Sigi stands up and

continues around the circle swaying from left to right, imitating the sedate movements of the buffalo. When the puppet completes its circuit, it exits accompanied by young men in the association who sing its praises. This general performance pattern is repeated for each puppet character, although troupes vary the length of the character's performances and their order of appearance from year to year.

This shared performance structure is an expression of the shared history of the genre. All groups recognize that puppetry originated with the fishermen and that its performance originally spread through their riverine networks. The Bamana in Kiranko state emphatically that, although the Somono and Bozo performed the drama in the village during the period of the Segu state, the Bamana quarter only adopted puppetry following the defeat of Segu, first by El Hadj Oumar (ca. 1860) and then by the French (ca. 1890). During the period of Segu's hegemony, the Bamana claim that their primary form of entertainment was the *kele-ko nyenanje* (the warrior's dance). Kiranko was an important garrison village for state troops during the nineteenth century. Only after the defeat of Segu, when the Bamana ton (once defined as a military organization) was reconstituted as a cooperative farming association did the quarter adopt puppetry as an entertainment form. The list of former heads of the association indicates that the ton as presently constituted was mobilized around 1896. The first promoter of the drama in the Bamana quarter died in 1922, which probably dates the earliest Bamana performances to the first decade of this century.<sup>3</sup>

Puppets give the Segu theatre an immediate and unique visual identity and distinguish it from other youth dramas performed in adjacent regions. The majority of the sculptures are puppets, although grass and cloth masquerades and a number of wooden masks are considered integral to the genre. The large rod puppets are the most ubiquitous. They are fashioned to represent the heads of various animals and they range in size from under two feet up to six feet. The puppet head appears out of the front end of a costumed construction, which serves as the body of the animal. The puppeteer is hidden beneath the costumed stage and operates the head from below.

Humans, animals, and spirits are also represented by a set of miniaturized rod and rod-and-string puppets, which range in size from under a foot up to several feet. They appear out of the back of the costumed stage and are operated from below by a series of rods or rod-and-string pulleys. A third type of puppet is a sculpture of the head and torso of a human being or spirit. These puppets range in size from one to four feet and are mounted on a costumed armature, which the puppeteers carry on their shoulders. The puppet's arms are carved separately and are manipulated by the dancer hidden underneath the costume.

All three groups in Kiranko use the complete range of puppet types and all three troupes share the same taxonomy of form. The term *sogo* (the animal) is used for all masquerades played in the theatre, whether or not they are masks or puppets. The same term is also applied to all dramatic personae whether a representation of animal, human or spirit. The puppets are further categorized as either *sogoba* (the big animal) or *sogoden* (the child of the animal). *Sogoba* refers both to the large rod puppet heads and to the complete masquerade construction. The *sogoden* are the miniaturized rod puppets that emerge from the back of the larger animals.

All of the puppets and masks are carved in a similar style, which is variously called Bamana, Maraka or Bozo in art historical literature. The convergence of sculptural styles within the Segu region is not surprising, since smiths not only carve for their own ethnic groups but for neighboring groups as well. The shared style echoes the participants own perceptions of the contributions that farming groups made to the development of this regional theatre. Although the fishermen are acknowledged as the originators of the drama, it was smiths attached to farming communities in Saro, in the eastern portion of the present day Segu region, who are credited with the invention of many of the carved wooden puppets played today. In the context of the history of puppet theatre, Saro is always referred to as the *sogo jamani* (the country of the puppets). Within Kiranko itself, the Bamana quarter's first wooden puppets are said to have been commissioned from an itinerant smith from Saro. Other puppets have been carved by smiths from Saro or smiths who were apprenticed in Saro, and, in the contemporary period, also by smiths residing in Kiranko.

I would argue, then, that the sculptural style of the carved wooden puppets and masks used in puppet theatre, like the structure of the theatre, is an expression of regional identity rather than a particular ethnic identity. Thus sculptural style has no indexical value in determining the ethnicity of the users. Participants only define an individual puppet as Bozo, Somono, Maraka or Bamana by virtue of its inclusion in a particular performance event, where its appearance is inexorably tied to a group's performance style. It is the performance style that participants use to draw distinctions among Kiranko's three theatres. Performance style includes a set of characters defined as exclusive to a particular quarter's theatre in conjunction with a group's style of drumming, song and dance.

The different characters that constitute a troupe's repertoire play a critical role in the participants' definition of the theatre. Bamana, Bozo, and Somono have lived alongside one another for centuries and have developed a common field of discourse. These shared idioms are drawn



from a common experience of the environment, from shared ideologies, and common political and social experiences. That they should choose to perform a number of the same dramatic characters, therefore, is inevitable. Yet, in performance they also assert their uniqueness against the background of a common regional experience. Actors construct dramatic personae by drawing from the particulars of their group experience and these differences are often embedded in their choice of characters. Thus, even though farmers and fishermen share the idiom of a bush-village distinction, the particular characters they use to represent these spheres reflect different definitions of what constitutes the bush and the village. The Bamana define the area of uncultivated land as the bush. For the Somono and Bozo, the rivers are the primary arena of the bush. Certain major bush characters, which the Bamana troupe perform, are notably absent from the fishermen's repertoire. The reverse is also true. In Kiranko the Bamana perform bush animals that are important in their experience and that serve as important metaphors for the group. These include the lion, bush buffalo, the hyena, the elephant and a range of antelope species. Somono and Bozo choose the bush animals important and meaningful in their world view, including the crocodile, the manatee, the hippopotamus, and certain water birds.

Correspondences do exist across groups in the interpretation of these characters. The hippopotamus is described by the Bozo as a water elephant and the interpretation the community gives to both the elephant and the hippopotamus in the theatre is similar. In the 1979 performances, both the Bamana and the Bozo troupes included sequences focused on hunting. In the Bamana performance, the hunter was pitted against the lion; in the Bozo theatre, a hunter stalked a hippopotamus. Both scenarios dramatized man's relationship to the world of the animals and to the world of the bush. Each also praised the hunter triumphant as a man of action and a hero. Being a hero is an important aspect of male identity among both groups. Bamana and Bozo also share the belief that a hunter's prowess stems less from physical ability than from his ability to control powerful forces released at the death of an animal. An emphasis on the hunter's manipulation of occult forces was evident in how both troupes played the hunting scene. The particular choice of lion and hippopotamus by each troupe spoke to different spheres of experience and influence in the bush and reconfirmed a troupe's definition of its patrimony. Yet, the common idiom of their experience allowed for a shared interpretation of these hunting scenes, one that cuts across ethnic boundaries.

The Somono troupe and the Bamana troupe also retained characters or sequences that they judged to be exclusive to their group. The Somono troupe singled out the character of a large water bird, which they call their *Do mansa* (king of puppets). Even though they share with their neighbors similar metaphors about birds, the appearance of this character in the Somono drama has taken on an additional meaning because it has become the emblem of the Somono theatre in Kiranko. In a similar manner, the Bamana troupe performed two sequences, one concerning the Ntomo, young boy's initiation society, and one about Komo, a Bamana men's initiation association. In the first sequence, the dancer wore the face mask associated with Ntomo and the actors mimed a scene from an initiation camp. However, during the Komo sequence, the society's mask was not performed.<sup>4</sup> Rather, young men dressed in costumes that they interpreted as elder's clothing danced in a procession headed by an actor leading a tethered goat, one of the sacrificial animals associated with Komo rites. Neither of these Bamana initiation associations is still active in Kiranko today, but the inclusion of these sequences in the puppet drama is a conscious recognition of their importance to Bamana identity in Kiranko. These initiation associations are seen as essential elements of Bamana patrimony and serve to distinguish Bamana from their neighbors.

In a similar manner, when the Bamana troupe performed puppets that related to the life of the village, they asserted their identity through the use of puppets representing farmers hoeing and women winnowing and pounding grain. Alongside puppets that speak to a farmer's village experience, they juxtaposed ones that represent fishermen's activities. Thus, they affirm one aspect of their own village identity, while simultaneously contrasting it to that of their neighbors. Underlying this theatrical display of occupation as critical to group identity in the village is an implicit recognition of the tensions between farmers and fishermen in the world of everyday experience.

Bamana claim that farming is the most noble of activities. Bozo and Somono assert that fishing is the first activity of mankind. In his ethnography of the Bozo, Ligiers published a Bozo adage that illustrates the tension encapsulated in the ideology of occupation: "If you see a Bozo bending over in a field, don't believe that he is farming, he is only vomiting" (Ligiers 1964: II, xi). I once naively praised a young Bamana girl's fishing abilities following the harvest of the smelt-like fish, which run annually in the Niger river. She stopped, swung around and bristled, "I am not a Bozo." This tension, which exists between fishermen and

farmers and is embedded in their attitudes towards occupations, rarely finds direct expression in the Kiranko theatre. Explicit satire in puppet drama is generally reserved for categories of strangers, itinerant charlatan marabouts, Fulani herdsmen, Europeans, and Malians who have invested their identity in the modern sector.

Puppetry does provide an important public context within which each group can claim a share in Segu's political history. Troupes make their claims through a small set of puppet characters, which may refer to specific personages or to historical epochs. Bamana regularly perform horsemen, who are identified as Fula and refer to the nineteenth-century wars between the Segu and Masina states. They also perform Bilisi, a genie who appears in the epic of Da Monzon Jara (Kesteloot and Ba 1972). Bilisi ravaged Segu before being defeated by the culture hero BaKary Jan, who finally freed Segu from Bilisi's insatiable demands. The Bozo in Kiranko perform a snake, which is called "the snake of Wagadu," a direct reference to the medieval empire of Ghana. Through this character the Bozo assert their claim to descent from Ghana, a state which preceded the Malian and Segu empires. Thus, the snake reinforces their claim to rights as the original owners of the land. The process of making historical claims through the vehicle of drama is identical to that which takes place in myth. In the puppet drama, groups make use of different characters in order to assert their identity against a common historical background. It provides a legitimized public arena for each group to put forward the validity of its claims over those made by its neighbors.

Even though most troupes retain at least one character that preserves a separate historical identity, they also share a number of characters that speak to their common colonial and post-colonial experiences. Most troupes in Segu perform one puppet representing a colonial official. In Kiranko Bamana performance, the character of the mounted colonial officer appears out of the back of Sigi, the bush buffalo. The bush buffalo is a metaphor for history, group solidarity, and the continuity of tradition. Thus, the inclusion of colonial officers in the Sigi performance reads as a reference to an aspect of village history shared by every segment of the audience. The Bamana also perform the character Mali Kono, Great Bird of Mali, which they interpret as a reference to the independent republic. Many troupes in the area incorporate similar references to the contemporary state in the use of Mali flags as part of puppet costumes, and in Kiranko all three troupes use tricolor Malian banners to demarcate the performance arena.

Drumming, dance, and song always accompany the appearance of the puppets and are considered integral to the definition of the drama. In

judgments rendered about the performance, a basic unity must be achieved among these verbal and kinesthetic forms in order for the performance to be judged successful. Each of the three ethnic groups has a particular style of singing, drumming and dancing, which allows the audience to clearly distinguish among the various theatres.

In discussing these expressive forms, people generally invoke ethnic markers as part of their definition. For example, they say this is a Bamana dance or a Bozo drum rhythm or a Somono song. During any performance the audience brings to the theatre a knowledge of its own group's performance style from the vantage point of praxis. Throughout the community, as soon as a child can walk, informal instruction in dancing, singing, and music begins in the compound and is directed by a child's older siblings or by the child's mother. Several weeks prior to the public performance of the puppets, older children often stage their own abbreviated versions of the drama in the streets. Through these various types of play activities, young boys and girls learn to perform in the style associated with their ethnic group. Moreover, all groups recognize their neighbors' performance styles from past attendance at their puppet theatres.

The drum rhythms are called *dunun kan* (drum talk) or *dunun sen* (drum steps). Each of the puppet characters has a specific rhythm associated with it. Farmers use one set of drums and drum rhythms; the fishermen, another. The Bamana use three drum types: the *kunanfa* or *dunun ba*, which is a large kettle drum, several *bongolo*, medium-sized cylindrical drums, and a *ganga*, a smaller handheld drum. The fishermen use the *sokolon* drums, which are similar in size and construction to the *bongolo* drums used by the farmers. Both the type of drum and the style of drumming (the *dunun fo cogo*, the way the drum is played) contribute to the ethnic identity of the performance.

The puppet songs are an important verbal component of the drama and like the drumming they contribute to the communication of ethnic identity in performance. The puppets themselves are generally voiceless and the songs become the medium of verbal communication between the puppet and the audience. Each puppet character has a specific song attached to it, and in all of these songs, the name of the character must always be clearly indicated in order to remove any element of ambiguity about its theatrical identity. Publicly declaiming the puppet's name is instrumental, for it is intended as a praise song that will move the dancer to action. All three groups share a common belief in the power of words to move people to action. A Bamana proverb states, "*Nyama be kuma la*" ("The energy of action is in speech") (Bird 1974:ix). Thus, the praise

component of the puppet songs works in much the same way that a bard's recitation of clan/lineage's histories is intended to challenge and move its members to action.

In Kiranko, the puppet songs of all three troupes are sung in Bamana, the *lingua franca* of the village, and the songs are sung by a female lead singer and female chorus. One important exception sets the Bozo performances apart from the other two troupes and lends the praise songs a clear genealogical function. The Bozo troupe maintains a set of characters, generally important river game, that belong to particular lineages in the quarter. Dancing these puppets is restricted to descendants of the lineage and the songs accompanying these puppets are sung exclusively by semi-professional male, not female, singers. In the 1979 performance, a male bard from a neighboring fishing village was invited to sing for the lineage puppets. The Bozo female lead singer and chorus performed only for those puppets that the quarter deemed the property of the association as a whole. This corpus of puppet songs tells of the lineage's heroic hunters and of the lineage's past great dancers of the puppets.

The style of singing varies from one group to another and the Bamana described their song style as having a faster tempo than the fishermen's style. They said the Bamana songs were crisper and more succinct. The tempo of each group's songs finds its logical correlate in the tempo of the drumming and in the style of dancing. Even if the farmers and fishermen share puppet characters, they will play different drum rhythms, sing different songs and do different dances during their performance. For example, in Kiranko, all of the troupes play a set of characters that are glossed as the most traditional in the village. They are Nama, Falakani, and Bala. The Bamana state that they originally borrowed these characters from the Somono theatre and they still construct the masquerades in the same manner as do their neighbors. However, they have substituted Bamana drum rhythms, songs and dances for their performance, which redefines the characters as Bamana for the farmers. The redefinition of the ethnic identity of dramatic personae through performance style is not peculiar to the Kiranko theatres and is a common practice throughout the region. Thus, Bozo drum rhythms do not accompany Bamana dances nor are Somono songs performed with Bamana rhythms. If, however, as is the case in a neighboring village, a Bozo drum rhythm is played during a Bamana performance it is accompanied by a Bozo dance and the audience is immediately cognizant of this exceptional circumstance. Thus, the inclusion of a Bozo sequence by a farming troupe is viewed as deliberate and signals a set of messages about local relationships between the two groups.

Puppet theatre is a carefully orchestrated and complex art form. The shared structure of the drama, the common body of sculpture, and the inclusion of many of the same *dramatis personae* speak to people's common regional experiences. Yet, despite these points of convergence, each ethnic group also carefully chooses different performance styles and different themes to set its performance apart. Competition among troupes is always intense, and in such an ethnically diverse community as Kiranko, actors create a distinctive group identity in contrast to the identity that emerges in their neighbors' performances. Yet regional and ethnic identity is only a small part of what is being communicated within the drama. In the performance, the actors concern themselves with much more than merely enacting group identity. Actors create an illusory world in which dramatic forms in orchestration elicit a full range of sensory responses that build one upon the other throughout the hours of the event. The individual and collective patterns of responses are the affective and inchoate aspects of performances and are the means through which people constitute the experience of the event to make it satisfying, satiating and fun. Puppet characters are broadly sketched and their performance is intricately assembled. Within a dramatic frame, which each group defines as their own ethnic performance, actors offer up to their audience a wide range of interpretations about the ambiguities of everyday experience, which they not only think about but which they also feel.

*Smithsonian Institution*  
*Washington, D.C.*

#### NOTES

1. Research on puppet theatre was conducted in Mali from 1978 to 1980 with generous support from Fulbright-Hayes and Social Science Research Council/American Council for Learned Societies fellowships and in 1987 with support from the Smithsonian Institution.
2. See Tauxier (1930:263); and Konare and Ba (1983:231), whose recent historical overview identifies Kiranko Ben Jara as the son of Monzon Jara and brother of Da Monzon Jara and lists his reign as 1843–1849.
3. Interviews in 1987 in Kiranko elicited the names of past leaders of the ton and the number of years they held the office. It appears from the reconstruction that the ton was reconstituted around 1896.
4. The Komo mask itself is considered a power object, a *boli*, and is never performed in youth theatre. For a thorough discussion of the Komo masks, see

McNaughton (1979:23-42). J. Brink discusses the Bamana definitions of ritual and theatre in his study of *kote-tlon* youth theatre in the Beledugu region in Mali (1980:95). The same definitions are operative in communities in the Segu region and emerge in discussions of puppet theatre as a play genre rather than a ritual form.

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