A closer examination of the bogolan that crowds the shelves of stalls, shops, and boutiques of Bamako’s tourist centers reveals the complexity behind the cloth’s apparent simplicity. Here, artists experiment with techniques and styles aimed at efficiently meeting the demands of their market, often pushing the limits of authenticity in their efforts to speed production while preserving the cloth’s handmade character.

The bogolan sold in tourist markets is made of cloth locally woven on narrow single-heddle looms, the distinctly West African technology touched on in Chapter 2. This strip-woven cloth is immediately recognizable, the seams created where the narrow strips are sewn together and the rough surface of the hand-spun cotton setting it apart from the industrially produced textiles to which most visitors to Mali are accustomed. Thus, even without the addition of bogolan’s distinctive colors and patterns, the cotton cloth is set apart as “authentic,” thereby appealing to tourists. For this reason, most of the cloth sold in tourist art venues is strip woven, despite the ready availability of inexpensive cotton percale and other industrial cottons. In an adaptation to the exigencies of the tourist art market, the narrow strips of cotton cloth are today frequently sewn together using a sewing machine rather than by hand. This modification is but one among many, each a strategic effort to meet tourists’ demands. In reviewing the two broad categories of innovation in the tourist art market—the reproductive and mimetic—we find bogolan has been skillfully adapted to both.

CREATING AUTHENTICITY
Reproductive Bogolan
Most of the bogolan crowded onto shelves and piled in storehouses in Mali is made of cotton strips sewn together to create wrap-sized cloths, dyed in hues of yellow, brown, black, and white and decorated with abstract patterns. This cloth, reproductive bogolan, is designed to resemble “authentic” bogolanfini yet remain clearly distinguishable from the labor-intensive, densely symbolic patterns that characterize the rural “traditional” cloth.

Among the most visible and recognizable traits of tourist market bogolan are the earth tone dyes, whose colors are particularly distinctive where the cloth is displayed among the vibrant blues of indigo-dyed textiles and the rainbow of brilliantly colored strip-woven blankets, batiks, and tie-dyed cloths whose colors
are produced by synthetic, chemical pigments. Merchants in the markets provide information about the different colors and styles of bogolan, as each element is associated with specific places of production. For example, cloth from the city of San and the surrounding region are distinguished by their stark, deep black color and their highly contrasting bleached white designs (Figure 5). Bogolan from the Dogon villages of the Bandiagara region and surrounding areas is often yellow (Plate 5). These regional variations are, however, becoming increasingly blurred.

The patterns that adorn reproductive bogolan differ dramatically from bogolanfini’s designs, yet an aura of authenticity is created through the retention of salient aspects of the techniques and patterns that mark “authenticity.” Tourist market bogolan is characterized by simplified patterns, often applied without a great deal of attention to detail; fuzzy edges and splatters of mud are common (Figure 6). The bogolanfini motifs that carry specific meanings appear rarely if at all. In the words of one young man who produces bogolan for the tourist market and for the local clothing market, “You don’t find traditional-style bogolan in Bamako’s markets.” Often, a single motif, such as crosses or zigzag lines, covers the entire cloth (Figure 5; Plate 5). Such repetition occurs rarely in bogolanfini, where combinations of several motifs are used to create a coherent message. Although it does not carry references to specific historical events or proverbs as does bogolanfini, this bogolan’s colors and patterns simply and directly declare its relationship to its rural counterpart, and thus shares in its authenticity. Tourist market bogolan need only be an inexact reproduction, close enough to associate itself with the cloth that is its inspiration.

Susan Stewart’s discussion of souvenirs elucidates the repetitive, often minimal patterns that adorn reproductive bogolan. In order to meet the desires of consumers, tourist art, like other souvenirs, “retains its signifying capacity only in a generalized sense, losing its specific referent and eventually pointing to an abstracted otherness.” Paula Ben-Amos’s characterization of tourist art as a “reduction in [the] semantic
level" of the traditional art forms on which it is based is apt here as well.⁴ Using a linguistic metaphor, Ben-Amos discusses tourist art as the artistic equivalent to pidgin languages, developed in situations of contact between culturally distinct groups. Like pidgin languages, tourist art permits communication—in this case, communication of information about authentic culture—between two groups, though a great deal of subtlety is sacrificed. Thus, the minimally articulated designs communicate in a "generalized sense," relaying the essential information that the bogolan cloth offered for sale is an authentic, Malian art form.

In the case of bogolan produced for the tourist market, the pidgin language metaphor—with tourist art's reduction in semantic level—becomes quite literal, because the cloth, as stated above, is made without the symbolic motifs that adorn the bogolanfini, thus ceasing to communicate to "bogolanfini-literate" observers. Looking at examples of the mass-produced bogolan for which San is known, artist Nakunte Diarra declared, "They [pagnes from San] are ... nonsense."⁵ Significantly, however, this stylistic (and semantic) shift is deliberate and strategic, not the result of any lack of sophistication.

Just as bogolan's patterns have been strategically modified for the tourist market, so too have the techniques by which it is produced. Rather than the painstaking process by which the traditional cloth is made, one finds a variety of innovations. Frequently, mud is used to paint patterns directly onto the cloth, rather than to fill in the negative space around the designs. Thus, the brown or red of the n'gallama-dyed cotton serves as the ground, and the traces of the mud produce a pattern without the time-consuming outlining process that distinguishes the traditional cloth. In 1970, Pascal James Imperato and Marli Shamir noted the use of this technique in the Mopti and Djenne regions, northeast of Bamako.⁶ This reversal—creating patterns out of

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Figure 6. Bogolan made using stencils and showing blotchy, blurred patterns. Bogolan pigments on strip-woven cotton. 48" x 70" (123 x 177 cm). Private collection. Photograph by Steve Tatum.

Much of the bogolan made for sale in Bamako's tourist markets is speedily produced, creating blotches of mud and blurred designs. In this example, stencils have been used to create patterns in both the dark brown or black of mud and the maroon of n'bebu bark. Such cloth, while it does not conform to the clean, crisp lines of bogolanfini, preserves the colors and abstract patterns on which it is based.
Stencils, made from plastic, cardboard, and other materials, speed the process of bogolan production. The Groupe Bogolan Kasobane has created a workshop in which apprentices apply patterns to robes (boubous), scarves, pillows, curtains, and other products using stencils designed by group members.

positive instead of negative space—is now widespread, used in Bamako as well as San, Dogon country, the Beledougou region, and other bogolan-producing areas. Most of the artists in Bamako who have adapted bogolan techniques to the museum and gallery trade also use the pigments to create patterns and images in positive space, though to very different effect.7 In the tourist art market, the goals of technical innovations are speed and efficiency.

Moving still further from bogolanfishi techniques, the makers of tourist market bogolan were, in the 1990s and early 20000, using stencils with increasing frequency. The use of stencils in the production of bogolan is not a recent phenomenon, however; Patrick McNaughton saw stenciled cloth in San in 1978, and Barbara Frank documented metal stencils in Kolokani in 1983.8 According to textile merchants and artists in Bamako today, the technique has been widely used only since around 1991–92, inspired by the flourishing bogolan market.9

The stenciled bogolan sold in Bamako’s tourist markets preserves the essential ele-
ments of authenticity; it is made of locally woven cotton, prepared with n’gallama, and painted with the same type of mud that is used in the creation of non-stenciled cloth. The stencils cut from a variety of materials, including cardboard, recycled tires, and discarded plastic, are placed on the cloth, and mud is applied using a brush or sponge (Figure 7). Stenciled cloth is readily distinguishable from that painted by hand, in part because designs are often replicated with little variety, resulting in a monotonous cloth (Plate 5). Exceptions to this rule can be found, for some artists in this market have created innovative stencils and stenciling techniques. Stenciled patterns are often geometric and bear little or no resemblance to the motifs that characterize bogolanfini.

By simplifying the application of mud, producers of bogolan for the tourist market greatly reduce the amount of time required to create the cloth, enabling them to send cloth to the market in greater volume. According to one artist who produces and sells both stenciled and hand-drawn bogolan, it is possible to produce six or seven stenciled pagnes in the time it takes to make one without stencils. Stenciling also permits the use of assistants or apprentices at nearly every step of the production process, because the skills required to apply mud to stencils are minimal. Apprentices can be instructed to place particular patterns on a cloth, requiring little or no supervision from the artist or entrepreneur marketing the cloth. The stencil design is the most demanding step in the creative process.

Despite their distance from bogolanfini’s labor-intensive production and deeply symbolic motifs, both the reproductive bogolan with designs drawn directly onto the cloth and that with stenciled designs retain all of the basic elements by which bogolanfini is defined: The color, the locally produced dyes and cotton cloth, the geometric motifs (even if modified), and the contextual information supplied by merchants all preserve the cloth’s identity as bogolan and, by extension, as authentic. For the tourists and others who purchase it, this speedily produced form of reproductive bogolan represents the rural, traditional Malian culture they seek.

Mimetic Bogolan

Along with bogolan adorned with motifs that approximate bogolanfini’s abstract, symbolic patterns, consumers may choose among cloths that feature depictions of Malian people, places, and activities—a weaver at work, villagers sitting around a meal, farmers hoeing, women pounding millet, to name but a few typical subjects. These scenes are painted in the mineral and vegetal pigments of bogolan though they do not incorporate geometric designs (Figure 8). Other themes include exotic wildlife, such as zebras and elephants, the famous mosque in Djenne, and idealized Malian women.
This version of tourist market bogolan functions much as postcards do, depicting the sights a tourist might hope to see during a visit to Mali’s “exotic” locales. In fact, mimetic bogolan has literally been made into postcards.\textsuperscript{14} Mimetic bogolan does not incorporate depictions of Bamako’s office buildings, people dressed in T-shirts and business suits, or taxicabs plying city streets. Such images do not represent the “authenticity” that tourists seek. The depictions of Malian culture presented by mimetic bogolan are not inaccurate—these images do not depict a “counterfeit” Mali for the benefit of tourists—but they do present a carefully edited version of reality. Such editing makes obvious those aspects of Malian culture generally considered to be “authentic,” and “traditional.” As Ruth Phillips notes, the use of such emblematic, or in a more negative reading, stereotypical, imagery enables mimetic bogolan to more efficiently communicate with its consumers: “The success of tourist art iconography derives from its employment of stereotypes precisely because such images can signify across cultural boundaries. They incorporate elements of objective ‘truth’ . . . while leaving out much else that would have painted a more complex and nuanced picture.”\textsuperscript{15}

Like reproductive bogolan, mimetic versions of the cloth preserve selected aspects of the rural bogolanfini that is its inspiration. The use of n’gallama and other bogolanfini pigments, and by extension the colors typical of the traditional cloth, link this bogolan to its rural roots. In a step away from bogolanfini, the makers of mimetic bogolan occasionally paint on industrially produced cotton cloth rather than on strip-woven cloth. The village scenes and figures often incorporate greater detail than the hand-painted or stenciled geometric patterns of reproductive bogolan, so the smooth surface of industrial cotton aides in efficiently producing the images. The makers of mimetic bogolan also increase their production through the use of stencils.

Among the most intriguing examples of mimetic bogolan are the many cloths sold in the tourist art market that themselves depict tourist art—a “doubling” of the strategies used to attract consumers. Most prominent in this category are cloths adorned with schematic depictions of ci waraw, Dogon dancers, and other motifs common in the tourist market (Figure 9). These cloths conflate popular genres of Malian tourist art from several media. Dogon masked dancers, a genre of performance popular with tourists, and wooden ci waraw sculptures are both associated with “traditional” Mali. According to several salespeople, in 1992–93 the cloth stenciled with Dogon dancers sold well, while the ci waraw cloth was of interest to a limited audience.\textsuperscript{16}

The designers of these stencils aim to capitalize not only on the popularity of bogolan, but also on the popularity of other tourist arts, creating a sort of “super authenticity.” Although all of the elements of these hybrid cloths are based in preexisting traditions—the wooden antelopes, the masked dances, and the bogolan technique—when they are combined an entirely non-tradi-
tional product results. Yet, these super-authentic cloths conform perfectly to the logic of the tourist market: Surely if Dogon masked dances are popular, and if bogolan is popular, then bogolan decorated with Dogon dancers will be doubly popular. Through mimetic bogolan, the two are combined.

**CASE STUDIES**

**The Atelier Jamana: Décor and Art**

The artists of the Atelier Jamana (in English, “Country Workshop”) are among Bamako's most prolific makers of bogolan paintings, stenciled cloth, and clothing. Since 1990 Boureima Diakité, Rokiatou Sow, Hama Guro, and Aly Dolo have been using stencils to create clothing and pagnes, the term group members use to refer to the wrap-sized cloth made for decorative purposes.¹⁷

The Atelier Jamana artists do not look to traditional bogolanfini for formal inspiration; their patterns bear little resemblance to bogolanfini’s motifs. Guro told me that inspiration for his stencil designs come from a variety of sources, because the group’s goal is not to re-create in an abbreviated form an already extant style of cloth. One of Guro’s stencil motifs was, for example, inspired by the shape of an ant he watched crawling across the floor of the workshop.¹⁸ The motifs carry no larger symbolic valences; they are first and foremost decorative. As Diakité explained, bogolanfini motifs would likely fail to communicate to contemporary audiences; judgments about the cloth are likely to be purely aesthetic: “In the city, if you use traditional motifs, nobody can understand; they buy it [the cloth] if it’s pretty.”¹⁹ For the members of the Atelier Jamana, stenciled pagnes are explicitly decorative. In the words of Guro, “It is décor [decorative]. It isn’t art.”²⁰ Diakité used different terms to express the same dichotomy: “It isn’t art. It’s artisanal.”²¹

The group's postcards and greeting cards are perhaps the epitome of its “artisanal” production. These are made using rows of identical stencils applied to industrial cotton cloth (see Figure 14). Each stenciled image, measuring approximately four by five inches (10 x 12.5 cm), is cut from the cloth and pasted onto a piece of white paper. At one point, the group received a commission for two thousand cards from Bamako's leading postcard merchant, whose stalls included a prominently placed display in front of the downtown post office. At the same time, they were working on a large bogolan card to be presented to the president's wife, Adam Bâ Konaré.²²

Quite separate from these explicitly commercial portions of their oeuvre are the group’s *tableaux*, or paintings, that are intended not as “décor” but as vehicles for personal expression, presented as aesthetic and social statements.²³ The diverse aspects of the group's work provide insight into the difference between fine art and tourist art, for they participate in both markets successfully. This distinction is apparent at numerous levels, from the production of cloth to its marketing.²⁴

Pagnes are made quickly and are reproducible in large numbers. In the Atelier Jamana workspace, it is not unusual to find up to a dozen pagnes in varied states of completion hanging from clotheslines, draped over tables, or lying on the ground. Using stencils, group members can produce dozens of cloths in a day. Guro, after ini-
tially making one pagne by hand a week, began using stencils. He could then produce one cloth in an hour, making the pursuit much more profitable. In 1992–93, the Atelier Jamana was charging approximately 10,000 CFA per pagne, or about twelve dollars.

Paintings may take months to create, usually requiring several sketches as the group members negotiate the final form. The amount of time is, the artists hope, rewarded by the sale of paintings for upwards of three hundred dollars and by the recognition exhibitions bring them. Because the paintings are often large and densely painted, much time is expended in the application of several layers of mud, the number of layers varying with the intensity of the desired color. That the paintings are signed reflects the degree to which they are personal statements; the group’s pagnes are essentially anonymous.

“Décor” and “tableaux” continue to be separated as they enter the marketplace. Pagnes are sold at the Christmas bazaars held at the Canadian embassy and the Centre Culturel Français (see Map 3), at other art fairs, and at hotel shops. The group’s paintings are sold only in galleries and by commission, a more rarified realm of marketing that sets this version of bogolan apart from the world of ordinary commerce. The Atelier Jamana offers an instructive example of the categorization of contemporary bogolan; even when made by the same artists, distinct types of bogolan live very different “lives” from their creation to their entry into the marketplace.

Oumar Almani: Stencils as Brand Identiﬁers

Oumar Almani, a young man producing bogolan for the tourist market, has taken the commercialization of bogolan one step closer to the consumer readiness of modern mass production. He uses stencils to create labels, just as mass-produced clothing bears the label of its designer. Almani’s bogolan cloth is stenciled on both sides, its faces adorned with stenciled patterns, the reverse sides stenciled with his name, the name of his workshop (BogoLafi, named for the neighborhood in which he lives and works—Lafiabougou), and his address. In the mid-1990s, his was the only cloth to be found in the tourist market that had incorporated this innovative use of stencils.

In 1992–93, Oumar Almani was a student at the Institut National des Arts, where he attended bogolan classes taught by members of the Groupe Bogolan Kasobane, who have also made use of stencils to label pillows and curtains sold in their gallery and at craft bazaars. Almani’s stencils serve more as brand markers than as resources for consumers to locate them, although each piece of bogolan Almani produces does bear the information a consumer needs should they wish to obtain more of his cloth. The labels can also serve as evidence of their owner’s experience in Bamako, like a T-shirt imprinted with the name of a tourist resort, supplementing the stories and photographs travelers bring home with them.

Alou Traoré: Stencil Techniques Elaborated

In 1992, when he was in his mid-thirties, Alou Traoré began producing bogolan for sale to tourists in Bamako. His business has since increased and broadened to include relationships with Malian entrepreneurs, providing him with a small but relatively reli-
able source of income. Like the Atelier Jamana, Traoré’s work crosses boundaries; he creates work aimed at the tourist trade as well as clothing for sale to local consumers.  

Traoré’s distinctive use of stencils sets his work apart from the rest of the bogolan made for sale to tourists. Traoré initially sought to sell his work in boutiques and shops, but he had difficulty finding a venue. He then presented his work to a variety of merchants, all of whom agreed that his stenciled pagnes and boubous, the West African robe worn by men and women, were expertly made and attractive. They found, however, that his labor-intensive technique made his production capacity too low and his costs too high. Traoré, therefore, chose to sell his cloth from a stall in the Marché Medine (Plate 6), a large market that marks the eastern edge of Bamako and caters primarily to local consumers rather than tourists (see Map 2); he relies on word of mouth to attract tourists to the market. By 1997, he had begun to sell his work at a street-side bogolan shop opened by Sidicki Traoré, a painter.  

He had also begun to receive commissions from Malian and non-Malian entrepreneurs, producing bogolan for clothing designers and decorators.

Traoré’s bogolan is made with carefully designed stencils cut from sheets of clear plastic that are often used in combination to create multihued motifs. Like the Atelier Jamana’s stencils, Traoré’s motifs are not based on traditional bogolanfini patterns. Traoré does not cite particular sources of inspiration but, like the Atelier Jamana artists, he draws inspiration from every aspect of his environment. Some of the motifs are clearly recognizable, such as ci wara figures and cowrie shells; others resemble motifs from factory-printed textiles, which figure prominently in Bamako’s visual landscape and would naturally provide a wealth of motifs for Traoré’s work. One cloth Traoré created is adorned with a series of arabesques based on a motif from a French clothing catalogue. This cloth was part of a commission from a Cameroonian clothing designer resident in Bamako who had contracted Traoré to do a good deal of work.

For “traditional” artists like Nakunte Diarra, Alou Traoré’s appropriation of motifs associated with Western textiles constitutes a movement away from the sources of bogolanfini’s designs. Still, her work has much in common with the textiles Traoré creates, demonstrating the potential for sophisticated implementation of recent adaptations such as stencils. Though Traoré’s technique and the motifs that adorn his cloth are only indirectly related to Diarra’s bogolanfini, both employ complex, time-consuming techniques and work with local mineral and vegetal dyes. That is, despite the vast stylistic differences between the cloth produced by the two artists, both are working within a distinctly Malian tradition, working largely on commission for clients both local and non-local, responding to the demands of their markets, and making innovative cloth in response to those demands.

Traoré is assisted by his wife and several young men in a workshop setting, with each member of the group participating in the gathering of materials and the application of ngallama, mud, and other vegetal pigments. Traoré, however, closely supervises every stage of the process. Although stencils are usually associated with speedy production, in Traoré’s case the efficiency usually associated with the stencils is lost. He must carefully design the stencils to create interlocking patterns, and he works
slowly with the intricate designs. To produce multicolored patterns, Traoré uses several "layers" of stencils, applying different vegetal and mineral dyes with each set of patterns. The resulting cloth is readily distinguishable from the hastily produced stenciled pieces that constitute the bulk of tourist market bogolan.

**PRODUCTION**

**Shifts in Gender and Geography**

In the above overview of producers of bogolan for the tourist market, only one female artist is mentioned—Rokia Toure Sow of the Atelier Jamana—which is an accurate reflection of the dearth of female participants in Mali's tourist art markets. In 1997 among the more than one hundred stall owners and artists in Bamako's Artisanat, only one woman, the owner of a sculpture stall, was directly involved in sales and management. By 1999 another woman had rented space, to sell bogolan, in the newly expanded Artisanat, though the difficulties in attempting to enter a male-dominated domain are daunting. The sale of bogolan in Bamako is the exclusive domain of men, who manage the shops and stalls and work as "runners" leading potential customers into shops in hopes of earning commissions if a purchase is made.

More surprising than male dominance over bogolan's sale is the near complete male monopolization of the cloth's production in Bamako, a dramatic shift from the patterns of rural bogolanfani production. The transformation of bogolan production from a female to a male art form is not limited to the tourist art market; the same shift is evident in bogolan production for the fine art and fashion realms. This dramatic twist in bogolan's biography may be traced to economic as well as broadly social factors.

One factor that surely has played a role in this "masculinization" of bogolan production is the changing economic situation of Bamako's students. Until the mid- to late 1980s, students received scholarships for their living expenses, and most expected to find employment in the ranks of the government's large bureaucracy after graduation. This situation changed as structural adjustment programs (referred to in Mali by the euphemism *désengagement de l'État*) led to increasing cutbacks in government spending. The 1991 coup d'État that overthrew Moussa Traoré was, in fact, spearheaded by students whose frustration and anger led them into the streets to stage protests against the government.

Despite the change in government and the country's transition toward democracy, many students still found themselves in difficult economic circumstances. Many recent graduates could not find employment, and though the government made efforts to restore scholarships, occasional student strikes continued to punctuate the school year well into the 1990s, indicating that discontent remained strong. Other Malians lost their jobs as a result of the reduction in government spending. In their search for alternate funds, some young men began producing bogolan for sale in the tourist market and elsewhere. Many of these young bogolan producers are, not surprisingly, current or former students at the Institut National des Arts, where they learned the technique. Here, too, women are in the minority.

According to custom, bogolanfani is the domain of women who observed their
mothers and grandmothers at work, slowly acquiring the skills and knowledge of the iconography necessary to make the cloth themselves. Imperato and Shamir stress the intergenerational learning process in their discussion of the cloth: "The patterns used by artists have been handed down from previous generations and painstakingly learned through years of apprenticeship." In villages where bogolanfini is made for local use, its production is the domain of elderly women who no longer work in the fields, such as Nakunte Diarra, and young women who find time for the activity during the dry season.

In Bamako, where mercantile and bureaucratic professions dominate, the opportunity to learn bogolanfini techniques and intricate symbolism through apprenticeships is limited at best. In rural settings, training in bogolanfini production is incorporated into domestic life, as young women learn from old with both remaining in the home to care for children and their husbands. In the city young children spend their days in school rather than at home, where they might observe older female relatives at work (in addition, many of these older relatives still live in villages, where young people visit them and occasionally stay with them for vacations). The extended apprenticeships by which bogolanfini skills are customarily acquired are, in short, impractical or impossible for Bamako residents to undertake.

The traditional, long apprenticeship of young girls to old women has been replaced in urban settings by brief, informal training sessions, often for the benefit of young men for whom bogolan represents the chance to earn money in the tourist market. Indeed, women in urban centers like Bamako have little opportunity to pursue training for entrepreneurial purposes outside the home. Although exceptions do exist, such as the two female-owned tourist art boutiques in Bamako's Artisanat, women in Bamako face overwhelmingly difficult barriers to entry into entrepreneurial activities beyond the socially sanctioned female domain of small-scale trading in cloth and food sales in markets and on street corners (in which male wholesalers earn huge profits). Lalla Tangara Touré, one of the female boutique owners, is struggling to find success as a bogolan merchant. With each step she faced difficulties, though she declares herself unusually fortunate in having a husband who is willing to allow her to pursue a business career. Negotiating the bureaucracy through which merchants receive business licenses, apply for loans and grants, and obtain shop rentals is particularly difficult, because many fonctionaires (bureaucrats) object in principle to women in business.

The urban shift in the gender of bogolan producers has affected the rural women who make bogolanfini by creating new audiences for their expertise. Nakunte Diarra is one of the well-known bogolanfini producers who has come to serve as an informal instructor, teaching young men from Bamako who serve as her apprentices for days, weeks, or months. She is surprised at their desire to learn the technique, apparently bemused by the sudden male interest in what had for so long been a women's pursuit. Although she enjoys teaching these young men, Diarra feels that bogolanfini is women's work; young men may see in it a temporary source of income, but they will eventually find other work. One of the young men currently working with Diarra is her son, Binde Traoré, the only one of her children (including her daugh-
ters) interested in pursuing bogolan production. He has met with some success selling his cloth in Bamako, largely through Western researchers familiar with his mother's reputation and through Peace Corps contacts (Plate 7).

Other instances exist of gender shifts in artistic production that followed a similar path, with men taking up a skill as products gain popularity beyond local markets and they perceive a potential source of income. Richard Roberts describes the economic and political vicissitudes that transformed gender relations in the nineteenth-century textile industry of the Maraka, an ethnic group in the Bamana region.42 As in bogolan's shifting fortunes, the expanding demand for Maraka indigo cloth—the work of women and a source of self-sufficiency in polygamous families—was a catalyst for change. The demand was spurred by regional political shifts involving the late-eighteenth-century establishment of the Segu Bambara state and the decades of stability that followed, providing larger markets through increased trade networks. Efforts to accelerate the production of indigo cloth led to the growing use of slaves, replacing the labor contributions of female family members. Their increased leisure time permitted wealthy families to seclude their female members in accordance with local interpretations of Muslim law, a sign of status that exacted a high price for women, who were prohibited from direct involvement in the commercial trading of the cloth. Their husbands and fathers took over management of production and traveled to market the cloth.

Peter Wollen notes a similar phenomenon in another part of the world where tourist art provides an important source of income for many residents. In his discussion of Australian Aboriginal acrylic "dreaming" paintings, Wollen observes that "originally, this painting was done by women, who still make up seventy percent of the Yuendumu artists. When the men saw that the women were able to buy a four-wheel drive truck with the funds that they had accumulated from painting, they joined in too."43 In a European example of this phenomenon, Jane Schneider and Annette Weiner document the shift of female-to-male dominance in the seventeenth-and eighteenth-century linen industry as the cloth gained commodity status in increasingly wider markets.44

Thus, in many cultures the world over where men have greater contact with non-local markets, artistic production shifts from women to men as products become lucrative on a non-local level. The nearly complete transfer from female to male producers in Mali's contemporary bogolan market exemplifies this phenomenon. The dramatic shifts in style and format—including new forms of abstraction and figuration, new products, and new production techniques—may well have been facilitated by bogolan's transformation from a female- to a male-dominated art form.

Just as the identities of bogolan producers changed when the cloth reached the tourist market, so too did the locales of the cloth's manufacture, reflecting the new shape of the market. As increasing amounts of bogolan began to be produced for sale to tourists, production shifted to the urban areas frequented by tourists (Plate 8). Still, the merchants who sell the cloth preserve a sense of authenticity, for they provide consumers with information on the cloth's village-based production even when they purchase cloth made in Bamako.
Plate 1. (above) Bogolanfini wrap with geometric patterns, artist and date unknown. Bogolan pigments on strip-woven cotton. Approx. 60" x 35" (152 x 89 cm). Collection of the University of Iowa Museum of Art, purchased with funds from Robert F. and Delores DeWilde Bina. Photograph by Steve Tatum.

The sharpness of lines, with clean edges separating the dark ground from the white motifs, is one mark of an accomplished bogolanfini artist. As a wrap, bogolanfini is worn around the waist and usually extends to midcalf.


Nakunte Diarra works seated on the ground with cloth she is painting draped over a calabash bowl on her lap. She is working on the hunter's tunic in Plate 3.

Peet's has adopted bogolan-like patterns as its signature style, accurately noting the origins of the motifs on its products.


Two worlds of bogolan intersect in Bamako. A hunter wearing camouflage-style bogolan, one of the cloth's distinctly rural uses, stands behind a non-Malian wearing a bogolan boubou (left foreground) in a contemporary style.
Different colors and styles are associated with specific places of production. Within these varied bogolan "style areas," some regions have reputations for producing finer cloth than others. Increasingly, however, the correlations between style and geographic location of production are becoming a thing of the past. As bogolan has become more lucrative, a great many residents of Bamako have begun to produce the cloth. Often, students who come to Bamako to study earn money making and selling cloth in the style of their home region. This is also a frequent occurrence among young people from small towns who move to Bamako seeking employment.45

As noted earlier, the Beledougou region, north of Bamako, is particularly well-known for the production of bogolanfini.46 Kolokani, the home of Nakunte Diarra, is located in the Beledougou. Because of its reputation as a historical center for bogolanfini production, Kolokani is often cited as the source of cloth in the tourist market regardless of whether it was actually produced there. For example, on discovering in the Grand Marché a piece of cloth that particularly resembled classic bogolanfini in its designs and its application of dyes, I was told not only that the cloth had been made in Kolokani, but I was also given the name of the woman who had made it, a certain Nyeleni. Further investigation revealed that Nyeleni resided in Bamako, where she made bogolan for the tourist market with the assistance of various family members.47 Despite changes in production patterns as bogolanfini is modified to suit the tourist art market, some artists and merchants attempt to preserve the stylistic traits and contextual information necessary to maintain the cloth's association with "authentic" Mali.

**SUSTAINING SUPPLY, SATISFYING DEMAND**

In contrast to the village setting in which women make cloth for the limited, seasonal demands of Bamana families, merchants in Bamako's tourist markets must maintain a constant stock of the cloth if they are to meet the demands of tourists. Brehima Konaté's shop in the Grand Marché dominates the tourist trade in bogolan. Situated behind rows of women offering factory cloth, batik, and tie-dye for sale, Konaté's shop offers one measure of the increased bogolan trade. The many rooms of his shop, which increased in size between 1993 and 1997 and grew still larger by 2000, epitomize the contemporary boom in bogolan production; every inch of space is covered with cloth either hanging, stacked, or rolled, and from inside the vestibule cloth spills out onto the walkway. The piles of cloth, which change constantly as items are purchased and new stock arrives, draw in potential consumers. As Bennetta Jules-Rosette notes in her study of tourist arts in several African countries, "Production of a surplus of items for informal 'advertising' purposes is an adaptation of Western marketing to the African setting."48

Konaté began selling bogolan in 1985. In 1992–93, he was the Grand Marché's primary bogolan supplier, selling in great volume directly to tourists as well as to the smaller merchants located throughout the market (that is, he sold both wholesale and retail). By 1997, Konaté had strengthened his position, with a network of small shops throughout the downtown area under his direct control and an ever-increasing number of clients for his wholesale and retail business. Although he sells a variety of tex-
tiles, including korhogo cloth from Côte d’Ivoire, a variety of batiks and indigo cloths, and woolen blankets associated with the Fulani of northern Mali, bogolan constitutes the bulk of his business. Konaté is also a key source for bogolan exported to other African countries, Europe, and the United States. Bogolan’s transformation for Bamako’s tourist art market set the stage for its diverse adaptations to North American markets. Export has become a major impetus for production. Although exact figures are impossible to obtain, merchants occasionally earn large commissions from exporters, who ship the cloth abroad in huge bales.49

In order to command the volume of cloth necessary to meet growing domestic and foreign demand, Konaté works with the producers of bogolan, supplying them with rolls of cotton strip-woven cloth, up to several hundred meters at a time. In his store Konaté has several young assistants who work measuring large piles of strip cloth for distribution. The cloth is woven in Bamako or in surrounding villages and towns and brought to the Grand Marché in immense bales either by a representative of the weavers or by one of Konaté’s employees.50 In Bamako, the sight of weavers alone or in groups seated at their strip looms is a common one. Some weave patterned fabrics to be assembled and sold as pagnes, but many of the weavers make unpatterned, undyed cotton cloth to be sold in strips, which is then sewed into cloths and dyed.

Commissioned by wholesalers like Konaté or by the middlemen and middlewomen51 with whom he contracts, weavers produce finimougu, plain strip cloth, on consignment. They are assured a market for their work, and Konaté is assured a ready source for cloth to meet the demands for bogolan production. Once measured and divided into smaller parcels, Konaté sends the white strip cloth out to villages or, increasingly, to bogolan producers in Bamako, San, and, occasionally, elsewhere, where groups—often entire families—produce bogolan pagnes. The finished cloth is sent back to Konaté’s shop in Bamako, where he pays only for the labor.52 He usually receives the bogolan approximately fifteen days after sending out the strip cloth, enabling him to react to shifting demand for the cloth in a timely manner. The speed of cloth production, however, may vary depending on the cloth's region of origin.

Throughout this system of production, control rests with Konaté, the urban merchant, rather than with the weavers and the dyers who create the cloth. He stands between the cloth’s producers, separating the weavers from the dyers. The two sets of producers cannot eliminate his role by working together directly, for few producers have access to the capital necessary to create their own production system.53 Simultaneously, he stands between the producers and the merchants who will eventually market the cloth. This type of commerce, distinguished by the middleman’s control over production as well as distribution, is in economic terms a “putting-out” system. Ronald Waterbury’s work on embroidered Mexican blouses and dresses, sold as “folk” garments in American and European boutiques, elucidates the characteristics of the system: “In a putting-out system, merchant-entrepreneurs mobilize labor to produce commodities without incurring much risk, and with a minimal investment in fixed capital.”54 Both of the prerequisites for the perpetuation of putting-out systems are clearly evident in Mali’s bogolan trade: “One necessary condition for their [putting-
out systems] survival or rebirth is sufficient consumer demand for handmade or quasi-handmade goods. Another is the presence of a population compelled by economic circumstances to sell its work cheaply. As long as tourism in Mali continues to provide Konaté with consumers fascinated by bogolan’s handmade appeal and its religious and spiritual associations, he will continue to find weavers and dyers willing to work for minimal compensation.

Much of Konaté’s stock is produced in San, where bogolan production has become an important industry. In discussions of modern bogolan, San is used to exemplify commercialization; production is concentrated there to a greater degree than elsewhere in Mali. For Malians and foreigners who view bogolan as an aspect of “traditional” culture to be preserved, San represents an extreme that threatens to transform the cloth into little more than an economic product, completely separated from its original contexts. In 1977, two Malian employees of the Ministry of Culture submitted a report on bogolan stating, “In San, where bogolan has become a popular art, members of all generations joyfully devote themselves to this art form that here runs the risk of becoming purely commercial.” Imperato and Shamir also single out San as a source of bogolan in bulk and note, “The Bamana of San and Bla [a nearby town] enjoy a reputation for being skilled in making it [bogolan], but the quality of the work is poor compared to that of the artists from the Beledougou.”

For Nakunte Diarra, San is representative of all swiftly produced, non-traditional bogolan production: “Ours [the cloth of Kolokani] are ancient designs, they have meaning... In San, people make [the] designs that they want.” More accurately, they make the designs the consumers in urban markets want. Diarra’s views are not as distant as one might expect from the merchants in the tourist markets, who may highlight a cloth’s origins in the Beledougou region or, more specifically, in Kolokani. Both recognize the importance of place as part of the identity of a piece of bogolan. San has come to stand not only for speedy production, but also for the use of inferior techniques, and the participation of non-traditional artists (that is, “members of all generations”). Kolokani represents (for its residents and for outsiders) the epitome of traditional bogolanfani, made in the labor-intensive manner that has been passed on for generations and is the exclusive domain of adult women.

The efficiency with which bogolan is produced in San is evident in the speed and volume in which the cloth reaches the market. Wali Mariko’s experience is typical. Mariko is one of the many cloth retailers in the tourist-oriented, interior section of the Grand Marché, selling his wares from a stall typical of the market in size and layout. He purchases his stock of bogolan and other Malian textiles from Brehima Konaté. Mariko started selling bogolan in 1989, when he broadened the bead-selling business he inherited from his father to include textiles. His textile sales have increased every year since, with the amount of cloth from San growing more quickly than that from other regions.

Discussing the relative qualities of cloth from varied sources, Mariko characterizes the bogolan from Kolokani as “very difficult” to produce, but the cloth from San is “very easy.” He can order and sell in a week five hundred pagnes from San. The cloth from Kolokani, however, is much more difficult to acquire; he can only get two or
three pagnes a week, but all of which he easily sells. Kolokani's bogolan is made by women in several families who create cloth in their spare time to earn extra money and who have not modified their laborious method of working. Clearly, the bogolan production for which San is renowned and, in some circles, notorious, represents the height of Malians' mobilization to meet the non-Malian demand for the cloth. By streamlining the production process, dyeing the cloth in stark, black-and-white designs, entrepreneurs can manage systems by which hundred of pagnes can be produced on short notice. The sophistication of this system indicates the degree to which tourist market bogolan has become an industry, providing work and a living (though too often a meager one) for Malians in both urban and rural areas.

The bogolan produced for the tourist art market clearly represents a strategic response to increased demand for the cloth from consumers whose location (in highly urban areas), expectations (to purchase the cloth on demand rather than on commission), and aesthetic preferences (not based on bogolanfini's symbolic motifs and painstaking manufacture) differ broadly from the rural, local demands in the Bledou and other bogolanfini-producing regions. Skillfully assessing the new markets for the cloth, producers and merchants have created mimetic and reproductive bogolan, adapted stencils and labels to speed production and merchandising, and instituted geographically diverse production and marketing systems. Perhaps most importantly, despite all of these changes, modifications, and innovations, the bogolan produced for sale to tourists has managed to carefully maintain its ties to that all-important tool for success in the market: tradition. The cloth remains handwoven (with few exceptions), its distinctive colors are retained, and the stories of its rural origins remain paramount. In the fine art and fashion bogolan markets, the subjects of the chapters that follow, the notion of bogolan as "traditional" remains central, though the concept has distinctly different connotations in each context.
A great distance—stylistic, technical, and conceptual—separates tourist art bogolan from the bogolan of art galleries and museums. In some respects, however, the two realms of bogolan production share similar intentions and face similar resistance from international markets. Both are founded in the popularization of a local textile, both permit substantial divergence from the “traditional” forms of that textile, and both are based in and dependent upon the urban markets of Bamako. Both have also faced accusations of inauthenticity, though for very different reasons. The quotation with which this chapter opens, though it refers to contemporary Indian art, applies equally to the art of Africa today: “Too Western.” “Too African.” Throughout the world, contemporary artists from regions associated with “traditional” culture face paradoxical expectations from the international art market, while at the same time they often encounter a lack of local support.

Varied adaptations of bogolan are displayed and sold in venues quite distinct, conceptually as well as physically, from the Grand Marché and other tourist centers. This bogolan is not folded and stacked in market stalls, but stretched and hung on the walls of museums and galleries. It is not produced in great numbers using labor-saving techniques; on the contrary, each piece of this bogolan is unique, carefully designed to serve as an autonomous aesthetic statement rather than as a souvenir. The majority of artists who produce this bogolan are professionally trained, and they aim to compete in the same markets as professional Western artists, to vie for exposure in the same museums and galleries.

This manifestation of the bogolan revival, “fine art bogolan,” is a relatively recent phenomenon, its place in Mali’s art markets still ambiguous. The newness of this aspect of bogolan’s revival has permitted direct observation of the development of the cloth’s role in the fine art trade, rather than the documenting of an already integrated market. Artists’ oeuvres and their success, or lack thereof, in the slowly growing market for fine art in Bamako reveal a great deal both concerning perceptions of fine art in urban Mali and perceptions of contemporary African art in Europe and North America.1

Although each of the participants in the fine art bogolan movement works in a distinctive style, commonalities among the artists do permit broad generalizations concerning the parameters of the movement. All share the same basic format, using bogolan’s characteristic vegetal and mineral pigments to paint on factory-made or strip-woven cloth. The size of the paintings varies widely; some are stretched and