February 25, 2007, Kankalaba, Burkina Faso. Lively music by popular Malian musician Molobaly Keita blared through speakers perched in a mango tree in the center of the rural, Senufo-speaking town. Midmorning, my research associate Ouattara Dahaba and I watched local community members assemble in the open, dusty area around the tree. We awaited visits from members of Sesakinoufo, a Versailles, France-based association dedicated to helping children in western Burkina Faso, and from three masqueraders belonging to the dozo ton (sg., dozo tonw, pl. in Mande Jula, the lingua franca) or hunters’ association of the neighboring town Noumoussoba (Fig. 1).

The amplified music stopped shortly after 11 am. Musicians from the area prepared their instruments, including a rasp, flute, rattles, and a harp lute known as ngoni. A hunter fired a single gunshot to signal the performance’s start. Accompanied by a Noumoussoba hunter, a masquerader emerged from the wooded area at the bottom of a knoll just beyond the performance area. Called lodeni, or “little mask,” the masquerader wore a face covering and loose bodysuit made from dark brown, locally produced cotton cloth. Porcupine quills burst from the brow of the performer’s face covering, leather and cowries trace the eyes and nose, and an oval of white leather marks the mouth. Before climbing the gentle incline to the performance area, the masquerader-hunter pair stopped and crouched before continuing. They stopped and crouched a second time as they reached the top of the incline (Fig. 2). The pair approached the musicians, then stopped and crouched again to greet the band and show their respect for the musicians’ skill.

Two additional masqueraders—dajè (“roan antelope”) and lè (“warthog”)—followed the little mask out of the wooded area (cf. Bailleul 1981:131, Arnoldi 1995:53). The roan antelope and warthog masqueraders wore loose bodysuits like the little mask. However, instead of a cloth face covering, they wore wooden headdresses carved to resemble heads of a roan antelope and warthog, respectively. Hunters accompanied the two masqueraders, and each masquerader-hunter pair crouched several times before entering the performance area.

The masquerade unfolded in open space beneath the mango tree and among the crowd, as performers looked for opportunities to entertain or honor people in the audience. The little mask and hunter accompanying the masquerader often mingled with the audience, stopping to sit with twin babies and the woman with them, inspect a motorbike in need of repair, or beg for money (Fig. 3). The roan antelope and warthog masqueraders greeted certain people in the crowd, but they interacted less directly with the audience throughout the performance (Figs. 4–5). The masqueraders wearing wooden helmet masks instead took turns dancing to the musicians’ rhythms within the clearing, demonstrating their fast footwork or abilities to twirl without spilling a headdress. Once, the warthog masquerader dropped to the ground and imitated a warthog digging for food. The trio of masqueraders and hunters accompanying them repeatedly crouched to the ground in front of certain people in the audience to show humility, assert goodwill, or recognize especially prominent people in the crowd.

Hunters’ masquerades in western Burkina Faso are multisensory performances that amuse crowds and strengthen hunters’ relations with the public. Hunters’ associations sponsor events to greet important community members, welcome foreign visitors, campaign for prominent politicians, honor deceased colleagues, or acknowledge hunters’ renewed commitments to each other and a local dozo ton. The number and type of performances a single hunters’ association may stage in any year varies according to invi-
tations or requests to perform it receives, its inclination to perform within a given context, or resources available to support its bringing out the masks it owns. An association further considers specific circumstances or wishes of patrons when tailoring a daytime or nighttime performance.

Hunters typically sponsor masquerades between February and May, when late dry-season temperatures are warm enough for audiences to stay outside and before the fatigue and heavy precipitation associated with the rainy season have begun. There is no steadfast rule, however, and a masquerade may take place anytime during the year. The pace and choreography of each masquerade is shaped by the reason for a particular performance as well as its location, staging, and duration. Performers’ energy levels or hunters’ perceptions of audience’s reactions to the event also are factors that influence the masquerade.

Speeches from Kankalaba’s authorities thanking the visitors from Versailles for their donations to the town’s school distinguished the February 2007 performance and impacted the event’s program. Performers emerged from the wooded area just as vans carrying the French donors drove into the town. After dancing for about an hour, performers retreated to the wooded area. Shortly before the speeches ended, the masqueraders quietly emerged from the wooded area. They greeted the musicians and waited at the edge of the crowd so that they would be ready to start dancing as soon as the oration ended.

In an interview after the Kankalaba performance, Coulibaly Missa, a well-known hunter from Noumoussoba and the performance’s director, explained that he had deliberately managed the timing of transitions. He implied that he had wished to maintain the French donors’ enthusiasm for the event while respecting local performance practices. Coulibaly ensured masqueraders had sufficient time to greet musicians prior to dancing, honoring...
He remembers his father explaining that a hunter who wanted young Ouattara and his siblings to avoid hunters' gatherings. 

Cisate Ouattara Dahaba recalled that his father admonished the people from attending hunters' gatherings. My research associates hunters sought to alleviate fear that generated from their abilities to manage strong energies and take life, a fear that deterred people from attending hunters' gatherings. My research associate Ouattara Dahaba recalled that his father admonished the young Ouattara and his siblings to avoid hunters' gatherings. He remembers his father explaining that a hunter who wanted to flaunt his skill among his peers could transform a human bystander into an animal to capture and kill. Ouattara understood that his father wanted to protect his children from such a fate.

In formal interviews and casual conversations, people in western Burkina Faso repeatedly distinguished activities of today's dozow from activities of earlier hunters. They said hunters' activities have shifted in recent decades. Elder dozow and non-dozow alike recalled that young hunters previously dedicated years to apprenticing with master hunters, learning to observe dangerous animals and navigate the wilderness alone or in small groups. Hunters of the past also developed skills to help non-hunters by distributing meat, securing communities from threats of wild animals, or using their knowledge of divination, plants, and other locally available resources to help heal people's illnesses and afflictions.

Hunters' success also depended on their abilities to manage nyama (in the Mande Jula language) or nyambre (in the Senufo Sícitè language), an invisible energy that people told me exists in an animal and is released when the animal is killed. Failure to counter an animal's nyama was understood to result in disfigurement, disease, or other misfortune for either the hunter responsible for taking an animal's life or for a member of his family. This definition arose consistently during interviews, but the complex term refers to more than the energy released only when an animal is killed. Many scholars and other writers have explored the term's meanings; the linguist Charles Bird compellingly defines nyama as "energy of action" (Camara and Bird 1974:vii–ix).

The impression that hunters of the past developed exceptional knowledge and managed dangerous energies was reinforced by the way that they reportedly returned to town after killing an animal known to release potent nyama. As a successful hunter and his companions approached a town with their game, they whistled to announce their return. Women and children recognized the sounds as instructions to take shelter in order to avoid injury as the nyama-laden animal entered town.

Widespread perception of hunters as individuals who worked in uninhabited spaces, transformed humans into animals, and managed vital energies rendered hunters nearly indistinguishable from sorcerers—individuals who manipulate materials and energies to achieve ends that may heal or cause harm. Similar to other specialists known for their guarded knowledge, hunters cultivated skills to help individuals and communities, but they also could use their skills to cause harm. Therefore, wariness of
hunters’ abilities prevented crowds from gathering when earlier generations of hunters performed.

Coulibaly Laty Honoré, a blacksmith who lived in Noumoussoba before moving to the town of Baguéra, facilitated Noumoussoba hunters’ mid-1980s acquisition of their first masks with his hunter friend Traoré Laty. In a 2007 interview, the men recalled that fear of hunters’ weapons and sounds of gunfire scared people, deterring attendance at hunters’ gatherings. Perceptions changed when hunters introduced masquerades. According to Coulibaly Laty Honoré and Traoré Laty, even though hunters still shoot their guns and arouse fear during masquerades, the masqueraders grab and hold people’s attention.

**FROM HUNTERS OF ANIMALS INTO HUNTERS OF THIEVES**

As hunters’ roles in their communities evolved at the end of the twentieth century, hunters invested in masquerades to engage local, national, transnational, and international audiences. Increasing game depletion and growing security concerns in the 1980s and 1990s prompted hunters to transform their skills and work primarily as hunters of a growing number of thieves rather than hunters of diminishing numbers of game (cf. Hellweg 2001, 2009, 2011; Bassett 2003, 2005). Noumoussoba hunters were among the first hunters in western Burkina Faso to invest in masks when, in the mid-1980s, they acquired and brought to their town the little mask and roan antelope mask. Hunters’ masquerades flourished as hunters continued to form town-based dozo tonw and develop their own masquerades.

According to elders, hunters, and other people who were in their thirties by 2005, dozow in Burkina Faso today differ from their predecessors. People explained that Burkinabe dozow have become more formally organized, expanded their activities, adopted new forms of dress, and sponsored masquerades. They also collaborate with dozow across national borders. Burkina Faso’s state-run newspaper Sidwaya and people in Burkina Faso’s western provinces generally credited hunter Coulibaly Tiéfing with leading the transformation of western Burkinabe hunters in the 1980s and 1990s (see Sidwaya 2002; cf. Hagberg 2004, 2006, 2007). In forging a stronger, more cohesive organization in the 1980s, Coulibaly Tiéfing worked with other hunters and Burkinabe politician and international diplomat Traoré Mélégué.

Documents dating to the 1980s and 1990s in Coulibaly Tiéfing’s personal archive, held in 2007 by his since-deceased son, indicate that the elder Coulibaly and his colleagues sought to create a government-recognized umbrella association named Benkadi. In his analyses of hunters’ associations in Côte d’Ivoire, anthropologist Joseph Hellweg translates benkadi as “agreement is sweet.” Hellweg also notes that hunters’ associations in Mali and Côte d’Ivoire have referred to themselves as Benkadi (Hellweg 2001). By using this name, Burkinabe hunters highlighted their commitment to solidarity within and beyond Burkina Faso.

Despite Coulibaly Tiéfing’s and Traoré Mélégué’s efforts to form a single, nationwide network of hunters’ associations, the Burkinabe government never officially recognized the umbrella organization. Coulibaly’s authority over Burkinabe hunters and unwavering solidarity also did not prove absolute (Hagberg 2004, 2007). Different and at times competing claims to authority among dozo tonw and within a single dozo ton emerged by the mid-1990s and continue today.

Documents in Coulibaly’s personal archive also demonstrate that members of the Burkinabe Benkadi launched campaigns to promote sound hunting practices and compliance with state permit, anti-poaching, and reporting laws. The documents also show that, from the time the organization was founded, Benkadi members pursued activities in addition to hunting animals. Benkadi’s statues and bylaws of the mid-1980s specify that the organization intended to protect property, especially the cows that herders were accused of stealing from farmers. Hunters also conducted arms censuses and participated in campaigns for environmental conservation, at times under the auspices of such international organizations as the World Bank (World Bank 1995; cf. Hagberg 1998:226–31, 2004).

Meanwhile, similar movements were underway elsewhere in West Africa. Burkinabe hunters declared their intent to work with “les associations sœurs” or sister organizations to recover stolen livestock (L’Association Benkadi de Dakoro n.d. b, Article 3). Hunters’ associations across the region continued to evolve and respond to growing security concerns. By the time armed conflict...
erupted within Côte d’Ivoire on September 19, 2002, dozo regularly traversed geopolitical borders and assisted their counterparts in northern Côte d’Ivoire in activities other than recovering stolen livestock. Within the politically charged context of Côte d’Ivoire, hunters’ efforts to safeguard their communities and interests may have become violent. In 2011, United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire and Amnesty International identified dozo as perpetrators of human rights violations including massacres in Ivorian towns and cities (IRIN 2011; Amnesty International 2011a, 2011b; UNOCI 2011; cf. Hellweg 2009).

Efforts of Burkinabe dozo to redefine their objectives occurred within this broader regional context, and the organizations’ membership has expanded. Incoming dozo members no longer are required to dedicate years to apprenticing with master hunters. They do not necessarily learn how to identify, track, or kill game and may never learn how to manage the nyama of powerful animals. Indeed, some of today’s hunters do not even carry or possess guns. Newer dozo members consider for membership interested men who pledge to maintain upstanding morals, pay required fees, and have undergone an initiation at hunters’ privileged meeting place, an altar known as dankun.

Burkinabe hunters now depend on public support to accomplish their objectives, so they have increased efforts to command respect and foster goodwill. When authorities in the multilingual town of Sokouraba called upon the town’s dozo to guard its state-sponsored pharmacy following a February 2006 break-in, the town’s dozo was entrusted with protecting one of the town’s most valuable assets. Nearby, in Kangala, community members and town authorities temporarily condoned dozo enforcement of an ordinance prohibiting bicycle and motorcycle riding through crowded market paths during the summer of 2007? Such watchful efforts of town-based dozo members and town authorities temporarily condoned dozo enforcement of an ordinance prohibiting bicycle and motorcycle riding through crowded market paths during the summer of 2007.


Masquerades, sponsored by some but not all town-based dozo in western Burkina Faso, have contributed to hunters’ associations’ ability to generate enthusiasm for their work while also reinforcing dozo identities as hunters of dangerous animals. By investing in arts that evoke “traditional” identities—even if “invented” (Hobsbawm 1983), “refabulated” (Roberts and Roberts 2003:41), or “reimagined” (Jansen 2008a:252, 264)—and insisting on their image as hunters of animals, Burkinabe hunters reinforce perceptions of hunters as specialists who work beyond town and city borders to harness diverse sources of power, including nyama. As anthropologist Mariane Ferme has observed in the case of militias that identify as kamajô, a term that means “hunter” in the Mende language, asserting a hunterly identity has a “rich historical and cultural resonance in the popular imagination” (Ferme 2001:27; see also Camara 2008, Jansen 2008b). Similarly, Burkinabe hunters may at times align themselves with history and practices commonly associated with “traditional” dozo rooted in a Mande cultural past centered in an area spanning the borders of present-day Mali and Guinea (cf. Cissé 1964, 1994, Cashion 1984).

SHAPING AND UNDERSTANDING HUNTERLY IDENTITIES IN WESTERN BURKINA FASO

Dozo today are often recognized by distinctive shirts created from local cotton dyed in a bath of vegetal materials. At times, hunters add horns, claws, leather, mirrors, and other materials to their shirts. The shirts and visual references to them appear today across West Africa and abroad (Fig. 6). A hunter’s tunic and hat are listed as primary materials for The Costume of Messengers (2010), a work created by the Malian artists’ cooperative Groupe Bogolan Kasobane and featured in the 2010–2011 exhibition “The Global Africa Project” organized by New York’s Museum of Art and Design. With respect to a more overtly political context, anthropologist Bruce Whitehouse (2012a, b) suggests on his blog and in a recent article that Captain Amadou Sanogo, the man who wrested power from the former Malian president Amadou Toumani Touré on March 22, 2012, started to wear a hunter’s shirt underneath his uniform the day after he assumed power (see also Cavendish 2012).

Use of distinctive accumulative shirts to assert hunterly identities may have gained strength in Burkina Faso in recent decades. Art historian Patrick McNaughton noted in 1982 that the shirts were becoming less common among Mande hunters in Mali (1982b:56). Whereas hunters in Mali may have worn the shirts in...
the past, construction and wearing of the shirts appear to have spread across western Burkina Faso more recently. Several people observed that Burkinabe hunters adopted the accumulative shirts with the foundation of more formal dozo tonw and thus only in recent decades.8

Western Burkinabe hunters’ adoption of the shirts may reflect one way that dozo accoutrements, knowledge, songs, and stories circulate as people travel. Images, knowledge, and stories of dozo also proliferate by word of mouth, radio, television, and now mobile phone. Wireless technologies and an explosion in mobile phone ownership in step with the construction of mobile phone antennas in the area’s rural towns have made rapid transfer of images and sounds possible in the format of mp4 files. When I was in the rural town of Sokouraba in January 2012, I sat with my research associate Ouattara Dahaba and watched an episode of N Tion Kele, a television comedy produced in Mali, on the small screen of his mobile phone. Ouattara had transferred the episode from another person’s phone to his own using Bluetooth technology. The episode featured dozo, their efforts to capture a formidable creature, and the woman who ultimately outsmarted the dozo.

Burkinabe hunters and their audiences create a framework for understanding Burkinabe hunters based on the objects, words, images, knowledge, or actions of hunters from elsewhere in the region. The exact sources may matter less to hunters and their audiences than the identities they promote. Burkinabe dozo look to their counterparts but do not simply recreate those identities. For example, dozo I interviewed in Burkina Faso did not discuss hunters’ history in terms of the legendary epic hunter-warrior hero Sunjata who established the Mali Empire in the thirteenth century. They often appeared not to recognize the hero’s name, striking to me given Sunjata’s prominence in literature on Mande hunters and history. My research associate Ouattara Dahaba told me he had only learned about the epic hero Sunjata when he studied history in school. What is significant is not that the dozo I interviewed did not seem to know of the hero, but they did not attach their history to Sunjata, whether a deliberate choice or not. In fact, rather than refer to Sunjata or insist on a history that is centuries old, western Burkinabe hunters I interviewed emphasized Coulibaly Tiéfing’s role in creating Benkadi and spreading dozo tonw across western Burkina Faso.

In light of their newer goals under Coulibaly Tiéfing’s leadership, Burkinabe hunters have increasingly relied on broad support to navigate complex cultural and political realities. They also have designed masquerades that reinforce a hunterly identity while engaging diverse audiences in an attempt to allay fears of hunters’ abilities to maneuver through uninhabited areas, kill dangerous animals, and manage dangerous energies. Responding to fears that may have prevented the public from attending hunters’ gatherings, Burkinabe hunters have leveraged masquerade—an art they knew had a record of attracting local audiences and international attention—to appeal to their audiences. They have invested in the art to promote their roles as skilled groups of ever-watchful guardians wielding specialized knowledge and working for the public good.

**A HISTORY OF PERFORMING THE HUNT AND HUNTERS’ MASQUERADES IN THE THREE-CORNER REGION**

Western Burkinabe dozo appear to draw on a long history of referencing the hunt in performances. For example, as early as the mid-twentieth century, performances of hunters in present-day Mali celebrated their pursuits of game. Both the 1930 account of Mamby Sidibé, then an instructor at the École Primaire Supérieure in Bamako, and the 1964 account of Youssouf Cissé, an ethnographer, describe events during which hunters in regions of present-day Mali imitated the act of closing in on game in the wilderness (Sidibé 1930:58–59, Cissé 1964:214–16). Ethnographer Ziedonis Ligers’s 1964 publication on Boso communities of central Mali similarly refers to post-hunt masquerade reenactments of capturing game to praise hunters and entertain townspeople (Ligers 1964, I:134–35; cf. Arnoldi 1995:19–20). In the 1980s, Malian photographer Malick Sidibé photographed a parade of hunters wearing animal...
skins in Sidibé’s natal town of Soloba during a fête to honor Sidibé’s long-deceased father (cf. Sidibé and Ollier 2011:89). Details of the written accounts and photographs vary, but they suggest that hunters across the region may have sought to reenact tracking game in different ways throughout the twentieth century.

Masquerade practices beyond western Burkina Faso may have also informed development of western Burkinabe hunters’ art. In central Mali, wild animals and hunters are among the oldest and most prominent characters in masquerades known among other terms as *sogo bò*, a phrase art historian Mary Jo Arnoldi translates as “the animal comes forth or is revealed” (Arnoldi 1995:25, 2000). Masquerades made entirely from cloth and identified as *cebelinke* in Bamana-speaking communities of Mali as well as various cloth *poro* initiation masks in Senufo-speaking communities of northern Côte d’Ivoire formally resemble the little mask with its somewhat triangular head covering and circular eye holes.9

Masquerades similar to western Burkinabe hunters’ appear elsewhere in the “three-corner region,” an area art historian Anita Glaze identifies by the convergence of the borders of Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and Mali.10 At the Fifteenth Triennial Symposium on African Art and in a recent article in this journal, art historian and anthropologist Till Förster (2011, 2012) presented images of hunters’ masqueraders in the streets of Korhogo, Côte d’Ivoire during an August 7, 2010 celebration honoring fifty years of independence. Art historian Barbara Frank photographed hunters’ masqueraders in the Folona region of Mali in the early 1990s and again during a funerary ceremony in 2011.11 Wider circulation of animal masquerades across the region bears further consideration, especially in light of the Burkinabe assertion that the art proliferated mainly under the leadership of Coulibaly Tiéfing.

**CLAIMS OF INVENTION**

Despite accounts of other hunters’ masquerades across the three-corner region, western Burkinabe hunters at times identified themselves or people they knew as the first creator or inventor of hunters’ masks. Coulibaly N’gartina, a blacksmith-sculptor, hunter, and performer in the western Burkinabe town of Massasso, said that when he was younger he had spent time in northern Côte d’Ivoire, where Janus-faced masks sponsored by healers’ associations caught his attention.

Upon his return to Burkina Faso, Coulibaly N’gartina attended hunters’ meetings and started to wonder why hunters did not have their own masks. He observed that hunters honored the most senior hunter by placing a dried animal head from a carcass on the ground near him. Coulibaly recalled asking himself why healers and not hunters performed masks, especially given that healers adorned their masks with porcupine quills and feathers they likely obtained from hunters (Fig. 7). He concluded that hunters’ organizations needed their own masks. Coulibaly told me he approached his colleagues in the nearby town of Niankoro, and informed the hunters that they needed to learn new dances, and promised to make masks once the hunters improved their dance.

Coulibaly Tiéba offered a different account of the invention of hunters’ masks. He said that his father, Coulibaly Tiéfing, leader of the Burkinabe Benkadi, decided to make masks for hunters after realizing that other associations in the area had their own masquerades. Coulibaly Tiéba added that nobody else had carved hunters’ masks before Coulibaly Tiéfing started to make them.

Other hunters I interviewed referred to present-day Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, or Mali as sources for the Burkinabe masquerades. The idea that hunters could or should perform with masks may well have occurred independently to more than one person in more than one place around the same time. Nevertheless, it appears that hunters’ masquerades and their proliferation across western Burkina Faso are described as recent developments not tied to a previous history. Additionally, attributions of first authorship may reflect wishes to enhance the reputation of an individual or the person who supplied the name. Competing claims of first authorship also suggest an interest in the origination of new ideas and enthusiasm for inserting oneself or one’s family members into
the history I told people I was preparing to write.

**POWERFUL DEFENSES AND RESTRICTED KNOWLEDGE IN THE MASQUERADES OF HUNTERS’ ASSOCIATIONS, KOMO, AND KONO**

When hunters in Noumoussoba obtained their first masks in the 1980s, they and their local audiences were already familiar with masquerades of the *komo* and *kono* power associations documented in the three-corner region since at least the nineteenth century (for example, see Gallieni 1885:324–34; Binger 1892:78–81; Tauxier 1927:273–302; Dieterlen 1951; Zahan 1960, 1974, 1980; Dieterlen and Cissé 1972; McNaughton 1979, 1988, 2001; Diamitani 1999, 2008; Aden [Akare] 2003; Colleyn 2009). Coulibaly Laty Honoré, the blacksmith who helped his hunter colleagues in Noumoussoba acquire their first masks, said the Noumousso hunters knew how to handle their newly acquired masks because they had previously handled *komo* and *kono* masks.

Initial comparisons suggest that *komo* and *kono* masquerades differ significantly from hunters’ masquerades. *Komo* and *kono* masquerades usually take place at night, whereas hunters perform in both daytime and nighttime. Most women and children are prohibited from viewing *komo* and *kono* performances and hide from them, an observation repeated in accounts of the two associations from the nineteenth century to the present day (for example, see Gallieni 1885:328; Henry 1910:25, 151; Tauxier 1927:279; Travélé 1929:138; McNaughton 1988:130; Dieterlen and Cissé 1972; McNaughton 1979, 1988, 2001; Diamitani 1999, 2008; Aden [Akare] 2003; Colleyn 2009). When I asked him to compare *komo* and *kono* to hunters’ game women were not allowed to see, the now-deceased *kono* leader Traoré Moukani-tien suggested that the *nyama* of *komo* and *kono* surpasses that of the hunters’ game. By contrast to *komo* and *kono* masquerades and their own hunting practices, hunters encourage the largest possible audience at their masquerades, a sign of a successful performance (cf. Colleyn 2009:37). Men, women, and children may watch hunters’ daytime or nighttime masquerades.

Mask forms associated with hunters’ associations differ significantly from mask forms associated with *komo* and *kono*. Composite forms characterize *komo* and *kono* helmet masks and make ambiguous references to wild animals. Pointy horns of antelope and other animals, sharp porcupine quills, thick encrustations of indeterminate matter, and other organic and inorganic materials cover wooden surfaces of *komo* or *kono* helmet masks. In contrast, wooden helmet masks of hunters’ associations make seemingly straightforward visual references to specific animal species. Bright pigments, often industrially produced, cover the wooden surfaces of hunters’ masks. Hunters design their masks in the forms of animals hunters prize as game, thereby reinforcing their identity as hunters of game.

Closer comparison of hunters’ masquerades with *komo* and *kono* masquerades reveals important similarities among the three associations’ arts. The organizations draw on similar animal imagery, if in different ways. Hunters and non-hunters share stories about animals that often highlight an animal’s ability to outwit a pursuer through cunning or transformation, an animal’s potent *nyama*, or a particular type of animal’s lethal defenses. Western Burkina faso hunters prize dangerous animals, including antelope, warthogs, and porcupines. The animals’ pointed horns, sharp tusks, or piercing quills are featured in hunters’ arts as well as those arts of *komo* and *kono*. Long antelope horns extend from the top of the Noumoussoba hunters’ roan antelope mask, and porcupine quills burst from the brows of the little mask. Incorporation of animals’ defenses in the associations’ masquerades reflects the associations’ abilities to command and control vital energies in order to protect their members and constituents (cf. Roberts 1995:31).

*Dazow* as well as *komo* and *kono* members depend on collegial relationships to expand their knowledge and address complex problems. At the same time, their activities may bring leaders into conflict with one another within and between associations. Consequently, power association leaders always remain alert and equipped to challenge opponents, including close collaborators who may suddenly become competitors. Power association leaders also exercise caution in case relationships quickly and
unexpectedly sour. They learn to manipulate powerful materials and energies incorporated into materials-dense assemblages, so they may also render those materials and energies ineffective if needed (cf. McNaughton 1982a, Kedzierska-Manzon 2008).

Cooperation and contests among power association leaders inspire intense artistic production. Competition abounds even among members of the same power association who share secret or restricted knowledge, a point that stands in contrast to the limited competition within secret societies that Georg Simmel (1906) describes in his generative study on secrecy and its unifying effect within secret societies. In light of the competition within and among the organizations, power association leaders create arts that advertise their knowledge and skill without revealing everything that they know.

Komo and kono leaders pack potent and difficult-to-obtain organic and inorganic materials into masks and other assemblages. They incorporate materials into their masks that people cannot see but know might be there in order to protect themselves and trusted others who perform with the masks. Concealed aspects of power association masks emphasize mask makers’ and mask owners’ specialized knowledge without revealing the exact contents of that knowledge (Nooter 1993). Only foolhardy people would work with untreated or unknown objects.

Secret and unseen preparations are crucial to the preparation and performance of hunters’ masks. During the February 25, 2007 performance in Kankalaba, the little mask masquerader stood with whips tightly clenched in each fist. The roan antelope masquerader also performed with closed fists (Fig. 8). Performance director Coulibaly Missa insisted that the masqueraders must keep their fists clenched, though he declined to reveal their reasons. When I asked him if the performers held something in their hands that we cannot see, he said it was possible.

The Noumoussoba roan antelope masquerader performed in Kankalaba with a small leather pouch hanging from the back of his full-body cotton suit (Fig. 8). The pouch suggested a tail but also resembled leather pouches hanging from hunters’ shirts. Audiences may not and are not intended to be able to identify the specific materials performers hold or the contents of performers’ leather pouches. In fact, potent materials may deliberately be hidden from view. Closed fists, leather pouches, and other secret elements of hunters’ masquerades make evident the guarded and protected knowledge of the Noumoussoba hunters owning the masks and, more specifically, the people who variously create and perform with the masks. Secrecy built into hunters’ masks is consistent with strategies of construction and display of komo and kono masks, an art already familiar to local audiences when Burkinabe hunters began developing their own masquerades.

Seemingly out of respect for komo and kono and their leaders, hunters in their performances also occasionally make other overt references to those associations’ arts. For example, musicians accompanying the Noumoussoba masqueraders began to play music associated with komo and kono power associations of western Burkina Faso during the performance in Kankalaba. Each of the three masqueraders from Noumoussoba danced to the music. Later during the performance, Traoré Drissa, a famous kono association leader and younger brother to the national politician and international diplomat Traoré Mélégué, entered the performance space and started to dance.

Hunters’ masquerades refer to and incorporate aspects of other masquerades in the region. By drawing on visual strategies common to power association masquerades already established in the area, western Burkinabe dozow created an art reflecting hunters’ specialized knowledge and skill in a familiar manner. At the same time, dozow masquerades distinguish dozo tonw by highlighting a dozo identity grounded in observing, tracking, and killing dangerous animals.
DIGGING FOR FOOD

When the masquerade performance in Kankalaba resumed after the speeches, the roan antelope and warthog masqueraders took turns dancing in front of seated local dignitaries and donors from Versailles. Other men, women, and children stood in a circle around the dusty performance space to watch the masqueraders dance. Toward the end of the performance, its director Coulibaly Missa signaled with his flywhisk to the roan antelope masquerader indicating it was the warthog masquerader’s turn to perform.

At the edge of the performance space, the two performers crouched next to each other in mutual respect. The warthog masquerader crouched again in front of several prominent colleagues and dignitaries before commencing his dance. Coulibaly eventually approached the performer, who ended the dance and exited the performance space. The warthog masquerader reappeared in the performance space and proceeded to drop to the ground. The masquerader began to crawl, lowering his head as he moved (Fig. 9). He appeared to mimic the behavior of a warthog digging for food. Minutes later, the three masqueraders retreated to the wooded area and fired their guns, announcing the performance’s end.

Hunters assess the forms of helmet masks in terms of their correspondence to heads of animals observed in the wild, a criterion noted for other animal masquerades in the region (cf. Arnoldi 2000:63–64). Coulibaly Ngartina, the blacksmith-sculptor and hunter from Massasso, excitedly described going to several markets in search of an imported bag he had previously seen decorated with photographs of four different animal species: a lion, two giraffes, an elephant, and a cheetah (Fig. 10). Coulibaly explained that he wanted the images so he could consult them when carving and painting a lion mask head. He said that he had already seen a lion in the wilderness, but he reasoned the bag’s image would help him render the animal’s likeness in form and color.

Older hunters who claim to have experience hunting wild animals often evaluate the perceived likeness of the wooden helmet mask form to the form of an animal head. When talking about the warthog helmet mask that he had carved for the Noumoussoba hunters, Coulibaly Ngartina recalled he had received a piece of wood for the commission that was insufficiently wide for the type of animal he was asked to carve. He was unable to create the warthog’s tusks, prominent among the animal’s features, to the standard that he would have wished. Rather than extending outward, he explained, the tusks hug the helmet mask’s face too tightly (Fig. 5). Despite the artist’s displeasure, the Noumoussoba hunters accepted the warthog helmet mask Coulibaly carved, and they perform with it.

Audiences do not necessarily consider the masked performer a manifestation of the animal itself (cf. Cole 1985). For example, Coulibaly Missa explained that a masked performer differs from an animal and compared the masquerader to a photo, an image of an animal but not the animal itself. He also employed the term “jā,” a Mande Jula word that carries many meanings including “likeness,” “twin,” “double,” “shadow,” or “soul,” further indicating an understanding of a masquerader as a likeness of an animal but not the actual animal or its physical manifestation from another realm (for example, see Henry 1910:41–43, Bailleul 1981:79, Colleyne 1988:183).

Some hunters and artists suggest that hunters’ wooden helmet masks should closely resemble the animals they depict. Coulibaly Ngartina maintained that colors used to paint hunters’ wooden helmet masks should match colors of animals they depict. Other artists and hunters do not appear to share Coulibaly’s opinion, and they create and maintain helmet masks adorned with bright colors as well as letters and numbers (Fig. 11). Coulibaly Ngartina seemed to disapprove of the application of letters and numbers to hunters’ masks, asking me if real animals have letters on them. For some people in the area’s rural, farming communities, designing helmet masks with bright colors, letters, or numbers may signal an association’s cosmopolitan

![Hunters’ masqueraders from unidentified hunters’ associations. The masqueraders wear wooden helmet masks decorated with bright pigments. Letters spelling “Issouf Ouattara” and numbers showing the date “2003” appear on one of the wooden helmet masks. Some hunters disapprove of such innovation on hunters’ wooden helmet masks because the hunters prefer helmet masks painted with colors considered closer to the colors of the wild animals they hunt in the wild. Photograph in the personal photographic archives of Ouattara Issa, Niankorodougou, Province of Léraba, Burkina Faso. Photographer unknown, date unknown.](image-url)
sophistication and access to resources or education considered costly in rural communities, including bright industrial paints and alpha-numeric literacy.

According to Coulibaly Ngartina, younger hunters no longer observe animals in the wilderness. He made the plausible claim that he had seen and even killed specimens of all the wild animal species he carves, and he demonstrated nostalgia for an earlier life. Coulibaly's stories about hunting exploits and animals he has confronted seemed intended to corroborate his explicit sentiment that artists and hunters lacking extensive experience in the wilderness create infelicitous helmet masks. Despite Coulibaly's preferences, other artists' innovations in creating helmet masks do not seem adversely to affect audience attendance. Bright colors and incorporation of text into a helmet mask may, in fact, reflect hunters' associations' redefined goals with respect to demonstrating their sophistication and attracting audiences.

**EXTINGUISHING FIRES, BEGGING FOR MONEY, AND INTERACTING WITH THE CROWD**

Differences between hunters' masks with wooden heads and those with cloth heads extend beyond the materials used to make them. Local audiences evaluate hunters' wooden helmet masks in terms of specific, identifiable animal species, but hunters' cloth masks elude ready classification. In performances I witnessed between October 2005 and July 2007, masqueraders wearing wooden helmet masks typically danced in clearings and engaged with the public rarely, if at all. In contrast, masqueraders wearing masks with cloth face coverings interfaced between the public and the performers, who were representatives of sponsoring hunters' associations.

According to hunters I interviewed and consistent with performances I witnessed, a single cloth masquerader like the little mask makes the first entrance of all masked dancers into the performance space. He—all the hunters' masqueraders I saw and heard people discuss were male—surveys the area to ensure that danger does not lurk nearby. Peering through eyeholes in the cloth face covering, the performer scouts for obstacles including rivals who might hurl *korti*, invisible missiles cast with intent to harm.14 Once the cloth masquerader deems that the area presents no risks, his companions enter the performance space from a sheltered location.

During the event, the cloth masquerader monitors the performance space and keeps eager audiences from crowding the other masqueraders. He holds branches as whips and chases away encroachers. During an April 2007 performance in the town of Kangala, the cloth masquerader of the town's *dozo ton* jumped in front of an approaching motorcycle. He insisted that the driver stop and let the masqueraders and other hunters in the association pass. Shortly afterward, the same performer extinguished a fire he thought was smoldering too close to a straw roof.

There may be other types of danger for the cloth masqueraders to monitor. Spectators who stand with crossed arms or other positions considered threatening arouse a performer's suspicion of a possible invisible attack on the performer. Cloth masqueraders remain watchful of potentially threatening postures, and with the assistance of unmasked hunter colleagues, they urge transgressors to change positions. By safeguarding the performance area before other masqueraders emerge and throughout the event, the cloth masquerader becomes the most important and potentially threatening performer.

The cloth masquerader also constantly amuses and entertains. A man from Kangala who wore the cloth mask in performance and who asked for anonymity when I interviewed him described how he looked for ways to animate a performance and make people in the audience laugh. He offered an example framed in the context of our interview, which he noted lacked the liveliness of a performance. He spied my water bottle and explained that, if he were performing in a masquerade, he would grab my bottle stop and let the masqueraders and other hunters in the association pass. Shortly afterward, the same performer extinguished a fire he thought was smoldering too close to a straw roof.

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nies honoring the deceased master hunter from Sokouraba, Traoré Kakoni, on May 30, 2007 (Fig. 13). Deft performers assess potential and actual audience reactions. For example, during the May 30, 2007 event honoring the deceased Traoré Kakoni, the roan antelope and buffalo masqueraders left the central performance space and mingled with the crowd (Fig. 14). Reminiscent of performances of cloth masqueraders I witnessed on other occasions, the Kangala buffalo and roan antelope masqueraders greeted audience members and looked for ways to entertain. In one instance, the buffalo performer asked for money from a man with a bicycle. The Kangala hunters later complained that the rhythm of the hunter-musicians from Sokouraba did not suit the Kangala masqueraders. They tried to dance, but they could not work with the music. In order to maintain the audience’s interest, they left the hunters dancing in the center of the performance space and interacted with their most important constituents: the public.

CONCLUSION

Sidwaya, Burkina Faso’s state-run newspaper, celebrated Coulibaly Tiéfing, identified as the hunters’ “chef supreme,” in a January 10, 2002 obituary. The newspaper lauded Coulibaly for having successfully reconciled traditional values with demands of a continually changing world. Sidwaya cited initiations and annual fêtes Coulibaly hosted as evidence of the hunter’s commitment to “traditional values,” on the one hand, and his leadership of an association committed to security and environmental stewardship as a reflection of his ability to navigate the “exigencies of an ever-changing world,” on the other. The tradition/changing-world duality the newspaper asserts seems to parallel hunters’ interest in animal masquerade, an art that refers to hunters’ status as hunters of game while also allowing hunters to generate public support.

More than a decade after Coulibaly Tiéfing’s death, western Burkinabe hunters may not always cooperate with each other as the name “Benkadi” implies. Hunters vie for authority, and some appear to have distanced themselves from a commitment to unwavering solidarity. In fact, during January 2012 interviews, Traoré Zanga, an elder hunter in the small town of Karfexi, no longer insisted on referring to hunters’ associations in Burkina Faso by “Benkadi” as he once had. Nevertheless, hunters’ associations in western Burkina Faso continue to thrive in small towns and urban centers as hunters’ activities have spread. Some hunters, like those in Noumousoba, have sought new masks in recent years. In Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso’s second largest city, Sanou André, President of the Fédération des Chasseurs Traditionnels Dozos de l’Ouest du Burkina, leads hunters across western Burkina Faso. During a January 2012 interview, Sanou noted that hunters in Bobo-Dioulasso also invest in masks, indicating that the art’s appeal continues to spread. In western Burkina Faso, hunters’ masquerades
draw large audiences and promote hunters as so-called traditional specialists who have transformed their knowledge of animals and the hunt to respond to demands of an ever-changing world and protect the public.

Notes
The description and discussion presented here draw from formal interviews and informal conversations with more than 160 people during a total of twenty-one months of fieldwork in Burkina Faso conducted in August 2004, between October 2005 and July 2007, and in January 2012. Several awards supported my research and writing, including a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship, an Itilsson Fellowship from the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art, a Chester Dale Art History Fellowship from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a PSC-CUNY 42 Award, jointly funded by the Professional Staff Congress and the City University of New York, the CUNY Faculty Fellowship Publication Program, and a Visiting Research Fellowship at the Sainsbury Research Unit at the University of East Anglia. I presented early versions of this argument at the Johns Hopkins University Africa Seminar in Baltimore, Maryland, in May 2007, and at the Seventh International Conference on Mande Studies in Lisbon, Portugal, in June 2008. I thank people in Burkina Faso, England, France, Mali, Portugal, and the United States who generously provided time, insights, or suggestions in the preparation of this text. Unfortunately their names are too numerous to list here.

1 Coulibaly, Ouattara, and Traoré are three of the most ubiquitous family names across western Burkina Faso, and given names typically follow family names in speech and in writing. The many Coulibaïs, Ouattarâs, and Traoréâs to whom I refer here may or may not be closely related to each other by blood.

2 The list of people who provided this observation includes Coulibaly Missa, Coulibaly N’gârîna, Coulibaly Tieba, Ouattara Tainigüé, Ouattara Zambé, Traoré Aly, Traoré Moukanitian, Traoré Seydou, and Traoré Zanga.


4 For example, Traoré Aly, Traoré Moukanitian, Traoré Tîbîlé, and Traoré Zangâ separately described how women and children used to hide when hunters carried certain types of game into a town.

5 For example, see Ministère de l’environnement et du tourisme 1986; L’Association Benkadi de Dakoro n.d. a, n.d. b; Benkadi Association Provinciale des Chasseurs de la Comôé n.d. Benkadi Association des Chasseurs de la Comôé n.d. Two of the undated documents in Coulibaly’s archive include L’Association Benkadi de Dakoro n.d. a, n.d. b, the Sankaraist motto, “La Patrie ou la mort, nous vâmurcrons!” to suggest that they date no earlier than the presidency of Thomas Sankara, who served as Burkina Faso’s head of state between August 4, 1983 and October 15, 1987.


7 When I returned to Kangala in January 2012, hunters reported that they had discontinued the practive of monitoring the town’s market due to a misunderstanding with a newly elected town official.

8 Ouattara Insa and Traoré Nampé separately made this observation. In January 2012, Coulibaly Missa explained that younger hunters recently have started to wear accumulative shirts once reserved for older hunters.

9 For example, see Glaze 1978:67, Fig. 13. The possibility of correspondence between kobélnké and the little mask emerged through conversations with Sarah Brett-Smith, Barbara Frank, and Kassim Koné during the Seventh International Conference on Mande Studies in Lisbon, Portugal in late June 2008.

10 Personal communication, June 2, 2009

11 Personal communication, September 29, 2008, April 11, 2011

12 For more information regarding the materiality of kono and kono masks and studies of their material dense surfaces, see McNaughton 1979, 1988; Colleyn 2001; Imperato 2009; Colleyn 2009; Colleyn and Levy 2009; Gagliardi 2010; Ohern 2011.

13 In Z.S. Strother’s graduate seminar on masquerade at UCLA during the Spring 2005 term, Strother examined the transformation hypothesis and explored the possibility that masks might not always transform.

14 Coulibaly Missa, Traoré Aly, and the Kangala performer of the little mask who asked for anonymity similarly characterized the little mask masquerader’s performance in this way.

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