Fig. 6: Senior dancer prepared to act as a guardian of space already holding a whip in her hand; Kati 1995 (R. Polak).

and music will briefly come to a halt, and the situation will break up by everyone taking his or her place again amongst much laughter. Yet the occurrence of this kind of total participation in an imploding situation is a rare exception. As a rule, the situation remains fairly stable for long hours, despite the heated and exalted interaction. According to Goffman (1963: 210), the (con-)fusion of teams and regions is avoided, not least due to the work of guardians who have the special job of keeping order. At celebrations in Mali, when disorder is in the air because of people pressing in, someone will pull a branch off the nearest tree and drive the inward-pushing crowd back in line by whipping the foremost members' legs, or rather by a threatening gesture which dramatically indicates that he or she is very much prepared to do so (Fig. 6). The role of this "guardian of space" can be played by a supporting member of the drum ensemble or the singers' party, but can also be spontaneously taken on by any participant experienced in celebrating.

5 Professional Production of Audience

There is no one who observes everyone's taking their turn dancing with more involvement than the drummers. For hours they monitor the participants' (spontaneous) performances with great persistence, concentration, and respect. The drummers are open persons: They can be approached and engaged at will, at any time, without exploiting their accessibility or injuring their personal integrity. They never show impatience or ridicule anyone's contribution to joint performance, but rather grant attention, time, and space, and install as performer each individual aspirant. In cases of conflict, they try to serve all parties: When two ladies come in at the same time for a personal drum/dance engagement and one has to stay back, a good lead drummer will initially go to meet the first one, but will then immediately turn to the second and invite her to take her turn. On several occasions I was fortunate enough to witness the following scene, which I always found touching since, to me, it embodied the grace of participatory performance in general: In the course of a series of engagements with young athletic dancers, the tempo rose so high as to consequently exclude some older (or otherwise less athletic) women still waiting at the "sidelines," somewhere in between the circle of the audience and the central region, from further performance. The lead drummer then used a moment's pause in the sequence of youngsters rushing up in order to immediately turn to the older ladies, take up the same rhythm but at a slower pace again, namely at exactly the tempo at which they had tried to enter the ring before, and thus grant them their turns before a singer could start a new song.

The skills of showing involvement, accessibility, and respect (in addition to, of course, experience in celebration culture and musical skills) characterize particularly fine celebration drummers. Their personal engagement always appears immediate, without distance. They turn to the dancers through their posture and line-up, the orientation of their instruments, and their playing. Yet, while dancer and lead drummer directly interact with each other, their encounters often do not take place literally face-to-face: Dancers sometimes close their eyes, look to the ground or into the air (see Fig. 3). Quite in contrast, drummers do watch the persons they are playing to openly and constantly. While mediating the joint performance to the broader audience, from the dancers' point of view the drummers embody and provide audience.